

Let me cut out your mother's tongue

ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

Let me cut out your mother's **tongue**
and lay it down beside you
like my mother did with mine,
putting me in an English school, as is the custom of those who
spent their youths running after trains and *kulfi-walas* in the
scorching sun and their nows chasing the sweat that never
seems to bid goodbye.
Maybe you will know then what it feels like
to stand in the kitchen that smells of fenugreek and cumin but
not being able to point that out to your father
who wants little more than to just hear a kind word from the
daughter who he thought would make him proud;
But you blame him too
for not giving you the words to tell him you are not his
daughter, you can never be his daughter
and you left kindness behind somewhere in the yellowed
pages and **smudged** ink of the book you call your own.
I have wanted to be let out into the afternoon traffic
but everyone wants to communicate with their god in a
language they neither speak nor understand and I am not able
to **trespass** those boundaries
to read *Agnibina* without cutting my jaw open on the pebbles
on the road.
I have to wait patiently, my feet tapping against the raw
cement on my grandfather's roof, to be
let in through words that neither the poet
nor my grandfather
would ever have approved of,
Because the feelings baked between those *benjonbornos* are
not mine yet,
and I am afraid they will cease to exist before they ever let me
call them mine.
You might have noticed that I write my mother's tongue in
italics
and my coloniser's in
bold

because my brain is made of hardened clay, the soft plasticine
long kneaded into something more brittle
than I would like to admit and I can't hold onto the harsh edges
of *nishthur* or the rounded simplicity of *omanobik*.
But please believe me when I say that I really wish I could and
not just so I can stop formulating my name in **foreign** syllables
but so I can put out the fire that has been burning between
myself and I for so long that all that remains of the char is a soft
roughness and the
sickeningly sweet aftertaste of my
Mother's tongue.

Zaima is barely a student these days. Send them your condolences
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TANGERINES and MARMALADES

SILWAT QUADER

I remember the sweet smell of tangerines that concentrated the already damp summer air of your dining room, dawdling in my memory – a not-so-distant memory but a memory still. I see the laced tablecloth decorated with embroidered patterns of little yellow flowers. Did you stitch it yourself? I can't remember. And the jars of marmalades kept sunbathing on the windowsill. I despised its smell. The little space that used to be mostly occupied with bright orange jars on the windowsill was my favourite spot in the whole house. From there I could see my beloved swing set under the Bougainvillea tree – always in full bloom – littered with a furious magenta.

I stared at the row of pre-peeled and packaged tangerines sealed tightly under plastic wrap. The soft buzz of the fluorescent light suddenly felt unbearable; too bright and too loud. I felt my stomach turn with a tragic mix of nostalgia and disgust. How do they always manage to take away the good things? Trapped in a mild fury I made my way towards the metro station with an empty grocery bag, unable to recall my grocery list.

It was a warm sunny day, the sort that fills one with hope. The soft sunshine lit the canopied walkway with specks of golden rays peeking through the leaves. I waited for my cherished walks to the grocery store particularly because of this arched canopy that shaded almost five hundred metres from the station to the store, where fallen flowers and twigs welcomed the pedestrians. Five hundred metres of tranquil. It reminded me of wanting to live a slow, quiet life when I was younger. Somewhere I could hear the quiet afternoon rustle of leaves and the waking song of the birds. All these are better off as theories, and foregone longing that sprouts in silent instances

and moments.

By the time I reached the station, it was well absorbed into the rush hour. Faces reflected rectangular white lights and weary lines from the day's fatigue and a yearning to go home. I stood with my empty grocery bag carefully clutching it over my shoulder with the grocery list safely tucked inside, feeling a little embarrassed of my untamed emotions. Even after all these years, I am still unable to contain them, like the little girl who would spend the day lying on the white-varnished swing provoked by the smell of freshly made marmalade. The little sky above the swing that peered through the magenta was always a shade of cyan. But I will forgive myself for my tardiness this time, I have been unkind to myself for too long.

I do not recall the last time I was home. Or maybe I do not want to remember. It was not an experience to be treasured but rather to be buried deep. It was the kind that needed time to erase the remains. Although I remember the fleeting moments of laughter and tangerines – of course, the sweet tangerines – I lie to myself whenever I say it is not a distant memory. In reality, it has been years, much longer than I can count. The doors of the train slid open, and I stepped inside. The cold air conditioning and the smell of sweat concentrated the air. Someone offered me their seat out of courtesy, not so much out of willingness. I gladly accepted and then watched the city blur in a palette of used colours – shades of grey, blue and pink and green. I closed my eyes. Ease of habit teleported me back in time to the warm scent of fruit and sun-dried pickles, where my little sky is always blue and the good things remain.

Silwat Quader is a victim of writer's block. Send her ideas at silwatquader@gmail.com