

Smell The Dew

The words sneak through my earphones and find familiarity in my brain. I pause and deconstruct each word until I'm left twiddling with the alphabets. Nostalgia develops in my heart and spreads to each part of me. I close my eyes and steal every sound wave composing that conversation. Comfort and belonging flows from their throats and out through their mouths. My mind wanders and within the infinite blackness of my eyelids, I picture a dirt road and kids running around in their shalwar kameez*. The wind smells like tea and soil.

My heart feels close to home. My mind changes the landscape and now I'm sitting with my legs criss-crossed within a familiar four walled room. The soft light blue carpet finds its roots along my bare feet and I can hear the fibres whispering, *I remember you*. The loud creak of door hinges and shuffling of shoes fills the air along with the scent of turmeric, garlic and cumin, making its way from the kitchen that sits at the corner of the house's courtyard. My grandparents sit on the edge of the bed and all my aunts and uncles sit on the other available sofas and chairs while the kids sit in the gaps and spaces between the mahogany furniture on the floor. Everyone's laughter vibrates in my chest and stories between the cousins and elders echo off the walls. My Nani Ammi* opens her cabinet and starts passing a box of sweets that stays stationary in every hand while each person picks out their favourite flavour.

Someone frame this moment, freeze and preserve it in resin for me, so that I can keep it on my bedside table, I wish.

I compile all these wishes and lock them up in a little box in my heart, hoping that the security and sincerity of the act will help them come true. Someone stands up and collects all the colourful foil wrappers, throwing them in the trash. My eyes catch glimpses of the scene, jumping from one person to another, trying to capture it all. Words fill the room and settle in our brain's as memories. I twiddle with the alphabets once again.

If I open my eyes, I pray, I hope that I find myself back home.

The light fills my eyes as soon as I open them. My wish makes its way to the little box within my heart, unheard yet again.

My laptop welcomes me and foreign sounds interrupt my daydream. I feel physical pain as if someone grabbed me by the neck and threw me back here. My senses come back to me then. I notice the time.

I have class in fifteen minutes.

I clear my throat and place my hands on the keyboard but somewhere in my mind, chai* is served and everyone helps themselves to sugar except my uncle. My cousins suddenly feel the urge to fly kites so they assemble the materials with which my uncle will make the flying craft. Once again, somewhere in my mind, thoughts of longing takes flight.

English words roam around the classrooms. I've heard these words all my life, and knew them from the moment I stepped into the confines of a school. Falling down the pages of my books, the letters constructed words but those words never rang in my ears with meaning. It felt like every conversation I had with people had a limit, a certain restriction beyond which I could not express myself. Stuck in my chest, I felt all the things that remain unintelligible to others. My ears and mouth may be deprived of the pleasure that is comprehension but I have learned that my eyes never get tired of the scenery.

I look outside the classroom, welcomed by a lingering cool breeze. Bright green decorates the leaves and the smell of fresh dew greets me. I take in the stillness that lives among the chaos of the leaves that dance around from the wind. *It's beautiful*, I think. A type of charm I've never encountered before. These sights relieve my shoulders of tension and for once I feel calm and at peace, emotions that make me feel at home.

The landscape changes from the tall trees to moonlit darkness in my head and once again, I am elsewhere. The lights blur and the rumble of tires and an engine shake me. Sat comfortably in the backseat of a car with my grandmother, I let the quietness save us from all the heartache. The drive toward the airport is a long one and I keep my eyes facing out the windows, away from all those I will be leaving. I become aware of the life packed in suitcases that lay in the boot of the car and the place that they will end up. I become aware of each turn and how it takes me closer to my destination. I became aware of my grandmother's shoulders flush against mine.

A sigh and then she says,
"Here in Pakistan everything smells of the soil, but there, you will smell the dew."
I nod in a trance, trying to soak up the soil that has a piece of my heart buried within it.

Come with me and show me the difference, come with me and tell me that the scent of soil is better, I think.

The car halts at the first checkpoint and my heart races, I realise that I've come close enough to the finish line that I have to start mesmerising all the 'lasts' now. I need to memorise the moon and the weather, the humidity in the air and the noise of the people around me. Just like I imagined, in silence the bags are placed on the trolleys and the locks on each of the zippers are checked. I wonder then if even the tires of the trolleys are under turmoil, if they sense the life that is departing upon them. I stare at everyone and my ears start to ring, as if in a silent movie. I capture the hugs and the smiles that have wetness on them from tears and then suddenly, in a swarm of people, I'm being taken inside. Inside and away from my home.

With a trolley in my hand, I move forward but with each thump of my heart, I want to turn around. I remember myself as a kid then, on my first day of school when I was told to never look back upon drop off, but this time no smile or excitement overcame me. I let go of my strength and turned my head around, trying to see past the glass gates. In the crowd of people that go blurry because of my tears, I see a person

who has also let go of her strength. I see my Nani Ammi, her hand clutched around her yellow dupatta*, her face crumbling with sadness, her mouth mumbling something I'm too far to hear. Tears streaking both our cheeks, I turn my head back around and keep the memory of her face close to my chest. I keep her sadness a secret.

I hold the rope that she weaved with her heartbreak, and let distance stretch it until the wheels hit the ground, and it snaps.

I felt the difference and the change, as if the wheels themselves had nerves that travelled all the way up to me. Outside the small windows of the aircraft, I saw Australia. Outside the confines of the airport, I met Australia for the first time. The light seeped through my eyelids as the realisation of yet another daydream mixed with my flashback.

I open my eyes to see a hubbub of students stuffing their devices into their bag.
Class is almost over.

Rather than feeling distressed like I had felt before, I keep the feeling of longing safely within me, keeping it tame. Thinking about the lives unfolding thousands of miles away, I work my way through the mass of students, trying to give an occasional nod to the ones I knew. The ones that are my friends.

I walked outside the gates and with the flowers of Prunus trees falling over me, in the fond remembrance of the soil, I smell the dew.

*Shalwar Kameez: Traditional Pakistani clothing

*Nani Ammi: Urdu term for 'grandmother'

*Chai: Urdu for 'tea'

*Dupatta: Long shawl-like scarf worn by women on their shoulders or heads.