

the row of flowers

in the small clay pots that float on the ledge
projecting from the edge of the flat roof,
an arm stiff with concrete, a vernacular invention
the flowers lean and wink like coquettish novice bangladeshi girls and boys.
out of the palette in red white marigold purple claret on sage-brown stems
we claim the tiny pink and royal-blue flowers
with a streak of lilac soft in their midst.

we lounge close together on the scalding floor
with not enough space between our bodies
the loose *fatuas* and *kameezes*
that drape our drawn knees are erect tents,
from a distance our elbows stand
lopsided like bony caramel wafer sticks.

you point and say names like *golap*, *aporojita*,
neel, *hasna hena*, *shefali*, and *rojoni gandha*,
but i remember by colors
and how they looked and smelled
on your thin long fingers plucking and attaching
petals stems strands to your hair,
the dances they did in your dark chocolate curls,
and the excuses you made
as you fingered through the mass
and twirled.

the sky is pouched
with blue clouds and a glinting sun
i wish we looked cool
with cigarettes in our hands
and rings on our noses
but all we have is a pile of honey lozenges nearby.

the wind picks up
a rotund pollen
 stray
 to our noses
 uninvited
like an unfazed bee.
the two of us cover each other's
tongues
—my palm on her mouth
and hers on mine—
like lilypads naked in winter

our sneezes
escaping muffled
acchee!!! acchee!!! bless me!!!
spidering the air
 with pearly jewels,
 the bawdy jokes
 we yelled
 brisk
 as a new breeze.

i think i knew:
when you intertwined
each finger of mine with yours,
a honeycomb of desire
pulled me up
and swung our bodies
so hard over the railing
that we almost stood on the ledge
and i thought for sure we would
drop
to the shifting ground.
i had just finished talking
about the boys who made me shy.
now i proclaim without thinking,
Jaan, i'd choose you over them every time!