

The Cosmos and the Jewel

Scale

for Bhanu Kapil

The map reveals
so many stars:
two constellations
in the shape of bears,
a peacock - Pavo -
in the southern hemisphere,
the spaces between galaxies -
the emptiness,
the not-quite emptiness
it doesn't show -
the single
atom
H
in every cubic meter,
the atom
that is
not quite
still -
how cold it is
between the galaxies -
the snowdrops in the garden
the morning after frost.

Cosmic Poem

for Mina Gorji

I put my head beneath the tap and drink from it,
like a horse.

My grandfather, who spoke Urdu, Pashto, Punjabi
and English, had a horse. This, perhaps, is how he
learned those languages, from living among
others or traveling to be with them. At home, his
new bride curled and prospered in her satin
wrapper, a different jewel-toned sari for every
phase of the sun's path through the sky. "I insist,"
my grandfather said, "that you change your
clothes every two hours." But then was gone, a
set of watercolors, a chess set and a violin
strapped to his saddle.

In Los Angeles, before an audience that
contained a member of the cast of Grey's
Anatomy, who seemed so familiar when his poet
wife introduced him after the event, I read my
poem aloud, accompanied by cello, or vice versa.
There was a catered lunch. Another poet danced
in the aisles, dressed in a raw silk kurta, and I
admired his freedom, his ability to command a
high fee for his performance. I myself felt as if my
skin was coming off.

But that's all over now.

It's the last day

When you met a stranger, did you feel obliged to
offer them hospitality?

This question is meaningless now.

Poetry is about to become extinct in the galaxy.

Strangers will dominate the memory of clouds.

No, analogies are meaningless now.

I can't believe that the last poem I ever wrote on
this earth is a recollection of the muddy white
flanks of my grandfather's horse, which are
streaked with light pink, turquoise and emerald
green where the watercolors have leaked onto
the fur. Imagine that rainbow horse at the edge of
Lahore, snorting and stamping its hoof in the rain
as my grandfather stops for tea at a stall.

Are you returning to your home, grandfather, or
leaving it?

Did you vanish?

Mina Gorji & Bhanu Kapil