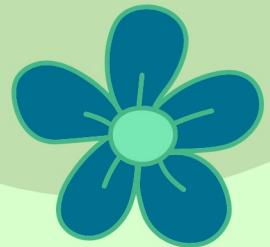


Wildflower Post

Newsletter



TODAY'S WRITER

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Aatira Shah is a junior at Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart in Houston, Texas. She has been passionate about creative writing since childhood, exploring poetry, short stories, and playwriting across genres. She has attended the Young Writers Workshop at Bard College at Simon's Rock, the Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop, and the *New York Times* Summer Academy.





The Moon Hates My Brown Bag

AATIRA SHAH

In the middle of Istanbul
pink delight attaches itself to my nose.
It is not sharp like lemon,
not thick like oil,
not heavy with salt.
It is something else.
Something I cannot name,
but my breath knows it well.
My lungs swell as if they have returned
to a place they forgot they missed.

It is not cold.
It is not hot.
The wind moves like a thought
trying not to be heard.
It brushes the sky with a fingertip,
slips between buildings,
spins through alleys,
dances in my sleeves.
The grass is green and low,
brushing my ankles with its tongue. I do
not walk with purpose here. I walk
because the ground allows me to.

With my left eye I watch cats.
Quiet ones.
They follow each other
as if moving together means
they will not disappear.
They make no sound.
But the silence they carry
feels like music I almost remember.
They do not look back.
They never need to.

I ride the train,
or the metro,
or the whatever-you-call-it
that carries people who do not ask why.

I sit.
The chair holds me to one side
and I lean with it.
A man with a tie and a briefcase
sits across from me
like an answer to a question
I have not yet thought to ask.
His eyes flick past the windows,
past the walls,
past me.

My nose twitches.
My ear bends in the breeze
from the tunnel's throat.
I do not live here.
I do not belong here.
My old house is a distant sound
that I can no longer hum.
I do not remember how I got here.
Boat? Plane? Train?
A walk that stretched too long?

My memory shrugs.
My eyes lie.
They show me comfort in unfamiliar things.
But I do not believe them anymore.

I carry a brown bag.
It clings to me like a shadow with teeth.
It groans when I lift it.
It glares when I sleep.
It coughs when pollen blooms
and always, always reminds me
that I am alone.
It hates me.
It has seen everything.
It knows too much.
Inside it, a thin navy book
barely breathes.
The word on its cover
spells out **P-A-S-S-P-O-R-T**
as if that explains anything.

I used to move with intention.
Now I drift like a leaf
someone forgot to sweep.
I brought a clip with me.
It is yellow.
Plastic.
A child's kind of thing.
When the sun rises,
I hold it high and let it catch the light.
The sun laughs.
Gently.
Not like the bag.
Not like the world.
The sun greets me
only when it wants to.
Then it sets.
And I am forgotten again.

Night arrives too easily.
It is the loneliest guest I know.
My forehead tightens into something
thick and dull and loud.
I try to sleep.
The brown bag watches from the floor,
mocking me
with every zipper and wrinkle.
I hate it.
But it is always with me.

I think about the Moon.
I have never seen the Moon, not truly.
I have seen its picture.
Its outline.
But not its soul.
I want to meet the Moon.
I want to ask if it, too, hates my brown bag.
Maybe the Moon will agree
that the bag should be left behind.

Last night I dreamed of the Moon.
It was not pale.
It was not cold.
It shimmered with strange heat,
glowing every other minute
like a candle remembering how to flicker.
The Moon spoke.
Its voice was not silver.
It was hoarse.
It was real.

The Moon hugged me.
Warmth poured from it
like water from a wound.
I was not ready.
No one has hugged me in a long time.
The Moon told me it bites.
It does not mean to,
but it does.
Often.
Its scar glowed like a warning
but I did not flinch.

The Moon asked if I would go.
It said we could travel.
We could move together
and forget the names of places.
We could laugh in orbit
and cry in rhythm.

But I am here.
In Istanbul.
Where the grass is green
and the wind is clever.
Where cats follow each other like a secret.
Where my brown bag refuses to die.
Would I leave this for the Moon? Would I
give up the trains,
the benches,
the quiet staring men?

The clip in my hand turns yellow again.
The sun does not wait.
It rises without asking.
The Moon, somewhere,
might still be listening.

The brown bag growls at my feet.
But I am not afraid.
I think I will go.
I think the Moon will call me soon.
And when it does,
I will answer.

Not with my name,
but with everything I never said.