

The Market

I pause to rest the woven basket,
heavy with aubergines and sweet potatoes,
guava, melon, fragrant mangoes.
It makes my shoulders ache.
Nearby, my wife selects pearl buttons
from a tray, matches thread
to silken fabric, soft and peacock blue.

I wait, and glimpse across the crowded market
four girls in saris; they make a beaded necklace
of amethyst, of garnet, topaz, ruby,
strung between their guardian aunts,
black robed and sombre.
They pause to buy whole mace and ginger,
chilli, pungent cardamom.
The vendor twists each paper cone, exchanges
aromatic cinnamon for tarnished coins.

I watch; the youngest girl looks up and
hides a smile behind her slender fingertips,
looks away. The gesture is familiar.
I saw it on my wedding day, the same dark eyes
peering through the scarlet voile,
the painted nails and bangled arms,
the garlands of aster and marigold.
The air weighted with jasmine and sandalwood.

My wife drops buttons, threads, into the basket,
trickles English coins into a leather purse.
You look a million miles away, she says.
No, not that far. But many years ago.
For this is no Mumbai bazaar, but Huddersfield,
where beneath the teeming Yorkshire sky
I saw four girls in saris, a beaded necklace
strung between their guardian aunts.