

Mangoes

Naveed Alam

Not madness, but the scent of ripe yellow mangoes
leads me back to the City of Unkempt Orchards.

In the market of Farewell Handkerchiefs
I run into Words. I try to avoid them.
Yes, it makes me bitter to see Words
sipping teas as content haberdashers.

Once we were inseparable, Words and I.
But this is before the Guardians of Tongue
revised our dictionaries by deleting 99 nouns.
My name made it to the list along with mangoes.

The ones stripped of their names vanished
while Words learned to put on the uniforms and
chew on the slogans stuffed into their mouths.
I painted my face white, escaped, became
a stranger in the City of Bitter Apples.

I'm noticed, encircled. I sneer at the tears
swelling in their hashish reddened eyes.
Words try to embrace. I push them away.
Bastards remind me of my painted face
by holding up the dream mirrors. As if
I was a relative returning from a long journey
they kiss my hand, their lips stained
with pomegranates. Go figure, pomegranates
in the season of ripe mangoes...

Words weep, order tea, reminisce,
joke about our adolescent siestas
under the fresh mango blossoms
when we'd translate the moan
of dirty magazines, swallows, windmills.
Silent, dry eyed I gaze at the mangoes
rotting in the cordoned orchards.