

Where to put it

by Natasha Warikoo

I poked holes in egg cartons and planted seeds this December. Calendula and sweet marjoram and poppy.

They are pressing their little heads through the soil now, coming up for air and sunshine.

I held them gingerly yesterday and pressed them into pots. So small and lovely.

But this. This thing is heavy. Heavy like the pear tree in the garden. She is so mighty. And the pears that fall are golden and fleshy come August. I poke at them with a stick and set them loose. With mouth opened wide with concentration, we play a game of catch, mother and daughter. A dance of destruction and creation. Hands braced for fruit and tenderness, I grab.

I make bruises where I grab.

I walked into a room to see a foot. It was sticking out from a blanket. Not a hospital blanket. Fuzzy. Printed. When we walked in, the foot shook. As we stood, it shook harder and harder, kicking as if tied to the bed. It was then I followed the foot to its origin. A Lump beneath the blanket.

Lump screamed.

Screamed rage. A sound like none I've heard. No snarl of a dog or shriek of grief could compare. There was no edge. No silver lining. No finality. This was rage. Rage, rage, rage. I shuddered as it passed through me.

I gathered the pears in a heap below the tree. I counted them and admired their shape. I took one and wiped the mud on my shirt. Sunk my teeth in just there. Left little track marks from my top teeth and giggled at them. It was a burst of sweetness and earth and I thought about my grandfather.

The sun was beating hard and heavy. It'd just been for a jog around the block and was standing, hands to knees, panting. I felt the coolness behind my ears and tilted my neck off its axis. Examined the pointillist texture of the pearskin. Took another bite and twisted it this way and that, the sun catching its breath in the sparkling wetness.

I sat down right there in the mud beside my pear heap and plot of flowers. Warming.

We left the room with Mother. Mother had tired eyes. Mother smelled like tobacco and had jeans and a pink jacket that looked soft and worn. Around her neck hung a cross. 22 years sober. Mother sat with us and her eye twitched as she told us the story of Lump.

Lump was not yet 16. The junctions of her bones were still soft for growing. She was a sweet girl. Loved her mommy. She'd gotten entangled with older men at 11. They would tell her how special she was. They would tell her how beautiful. Ask her for pictures. Rape her.

Her father was a sad man. A man with little demons batting their wings as they flew around his head in circles. He was a user. But at his core, all he wanted was love. He wanted love, and used whatever he had to

get it from his little girl. Used everything he had. Even grabbed a demon flying at his temples and thrust it at his daughter:

“Here! Have this with me! A little creature for us! We can take care of it together. I’ll give it to you. All you have to do is care with me. Love with me. Love me.”

Lump’s urine was positive for meth.

Finished and full, I looked at my heap-- happy to have this moment at least 8 times over. I stuffed them one by one in my backpack. I took the empty gallons of water and stuffed those in too. Picked my way between the plots, tipped my head at the tree, and listened to my feet slap the cement as I walked back home.

I left the backpack by the door and washed the dirt from my hands. My indigo dress I hung by the door, thinking of the color of Shiva’s throat as he swallowed the poisons of the world whole.

A few days passed. In blue jeans, I reached in the bag for a pear. I was met with wetness. I pulled my hand out quickly and peered in.

They’d become soft with rot. Blackened. The sugar in crystals. Brown chunks floating in mush.

I scooped it out glumly. Turned the bag inside out and stuffed it in the bathtub. Washed and washed the sweetness away.

Lump had been trafficked for sex. Lump had been raped multiple times. Lump had an STD and had been beaten half to death a year ago. Lump sometimes lived under a bridge. Lump would ask mother for things. Food and clothes. But Lump would not live with mother. Lump only had eyes for father. Mother knew Lump wouldn’t last much longer if father didn’t take his creature back. I knew Lump wouldn’t last much longer if father didn’t take his creature back.

Mother went for a cigarette to calm down after we talked. I hugged her. Her eyes were amber and I think she was looking into me. She was following the shudder that had passed inside, eager to have someone to share it with.

But where do I put it? The shudder. The evil. The evil that keeps eating my Lump. It loves her so dearly, but so does Mother and so do I. So where do I put it? This dark. This evil. This pain. Where do I put it so I don’t forget it? Where do I put it so it doesn’t rot? Where do I put it so it doesn’t live in my throat? That I don’t have to swallow it every time I speak? Where do I put it so I can cradle it, keep my thumbs from bruising it as it falls? Where do I put it so I don’t dream about it? Where do I put it so the sun hits it? Cast the mountain into greater relief as it rises.

I’ll put it in the pear I ate while warming. A transaction of heaviness and sweet. A small piece of a larger one. But not mine.