

## *Jaisalmer*

Sand. Fort. Town. My silent punctuation organizes a Rajasthani landscape distorted by umber heat that shimmies off the desert and intensifies the activity below our balcony.

Tools shape leather into bags. Bread glistens in frying oil. A dark parabola of betel juice evaporates before reaching the ground. I shade my eyes from the white flounces of a petticoat-clad tourist arguing with a jewelry vendor, who holds a silver necklace high in the air. My hand slides down my face, collecting gritty sweat. I flick it off my fingers.

I retreat to our carved-out-of-the-fort-wall hotel room. "You look hot," you say as you watch me curl up in a small patch of shade. "Let me wash your hair."

A tin cup grazes my cheek as icy water startles my scalp. My eyes close as your hand massages my part, your fingers twisting through my hair. When you kiss my forehead, I slide backwards to catch your lips.

We have no towel. Refreshed, I shake my head out the window, startling the cow below out of its sullen stupor.

*Nicotine and Other Shades of Brown*

Grandpa rolled his own—an inverted furrow brought to bloom by flame and wilted by water into a harvest of fingerprint stains, black like the coffee he drank when he took his three granddaughters to the café for show-off Cokes.

He ate chocolate cake in a bowl, covered with sugar, doused with milk. Frosting, Grandma always said, was wasted on him.

He only had nine toes. I tell the great-granddaughter he never met how we played ten little piggies, and I cheat-counted a shadow to make his foot whole.