

Escape To, From What?

ii

In the Sunshine

Bright morning,
full of sun, and I am laughing, because
I never burn. The sun likes me: on its brief
visits from Lahore to this land
of grey rain, peeping slyly from
behind radiant leaves, it recognises my face
from home and treats me with care. So my skin
is turning brown again. Hurrah
for ethnicity. I pull up my sleeve and encircle
a pale forearm with a tanned hand. Digestives
and custard creams — I am struck
at the difference the sun makes, at the differences
coexisting in one person, rising to the surface
like milk in tea. From fingertip
to elbow, brown to white,
a rainbow of graduated cultures.
I pull my sleeve down again.

*

I worry about my skin. A British winter,
though not as bad as I'd feared
*(so cold there, the rain all turns to snow,
but don't play with it or your fingers will drop off),*
has certainly leached it of what I had
assumed was its natural colour. Ghost arms now,
the brown sucked out like a straw. No longer
Pakistani, then? Is this how it will be:
my skin turning with the seasons, with
meticulous fairness — Pakistani in the summer,
Caucasian in winter? O God. And what about spring,
and autumn? This is how the trees must feel,
shrivelling and changing, flowers,
leaves, fruits, nothing. And again,
until they die. No. Pick one skin,
or the other. And then maybe I can decide.

Noreen Masud (H) Madras College