

Gratitude

TAHEREH POURSHAFIE

In memory of Oosta Nasir

My father threw bricks for a living.
He taught me how to use a hand trowel to finish the concrete,
water the wall of straw bale until it perfumed the air.

Early mornings, I stood by his side and tended his planted garden.
One day's lesson, recited in poetry, was about the small, crooked tree:
"درخت از کوچکی چون چوله برداشت بزرگ که میشود کی میشود راست".¹

When he said, "My father didn't send me to school,"
I made my own classroom and taught the trees in the house to blossom,
mulberry trees, grape trees, Buxus shrubs.

The wind was a hazard; it moved my students, the leaves.
They had to be disciplined for speaking. They had to learn the lessons
my father taught me, which I wrote on the house entrance door.

Summer holidays, I held his callused hand to work.
I wanted to help, to clean the desks, but he wanted me to fly.
Facing the Qiblah, I stood beside him and repeated the Namaz.

I mirrored his genuflections, memorized the Obligatory prayer,
before I was forced to fly from the fires to a far-off land
where it was safe to be educated.

I no longer pluck the grapes full of ants, boil the home
planted corns, hold the sheets under the berry trees as they shake.
I no longer speak with the monkey flowers, picnic beside the dark,

wet soil with a vibrant green plant. But I hear his voice.
My father wanted me to fly to a far-off land where I could be safe,
where I could be educated in all the worlds of God.

But I will fly back to him after the fruit of my own trees
has blossomed, blazed and fallen.

1 "How can a young sapling that is slanted, grow upright?"