

## **I want my body back**

by Pritha Jain

Twenty-fourth July, two thousand and four.  
the first time my mother pushes me out of her safe haven, she makes  
the pretense of my existence, dirty red betrayal.  
eclipsed underneath a bitten moon,  
I am born a baby, healthy as a silenced wolf.

a quarter of a galaxy away, the universe threads itself into a string of pearls to herald my birth.  
dadi names me after a rarer sighting, instead.  
I am the flag-bearer of a lineage of shadows,  
but the weight of rewriting (my) history cradles the howling in my chest to sleep.

Rumi's freedom wafts off of the soil in the oasis city of Herat every time history sparks itself  
alive through its poets' tongues.  
when miles away, yet another girl is stripped bare of her femininity for a better shot at survival.  
a reminder, that my womanhood is a guise drenched in gasoline; the world a burning pyre.

the Afghan tradition of bacha posh 'allows' girls the freedom of the male experience by raising  
them as one.  
this knowledge, is my first lesson in female anatomy.  
the world carves prison bars out of our skins, as if the one crime we've been taught to commit  
against ourselves, isn't blasphemy.

we breathe our stomachs and beings in to fit into this shrinking space we do not feel entitled to,  
exist only between the crevices of our stolen homes,  
but we gut ourselves alive to make room for a universe fated to tear us apart,  
only to have ignorance, sew us back 'tighter' to make sex feel good for our 'better halves'.

we excavate our women like archaeological sites,  
rob them of their history,  
their time,  
their language,  
and piece their narratives back together in attempts as contemptuous as the husband stitch.

which is to say, this, is me, trying to keep the world,  
with its calloused hands,  
away,  
from tending to the wounds, it inflicted on my identity in the first place,  
as if I haven't been washing blood off of my own clothes every month since I was thirteen.

this is me asking for my body back.

I want my body back.

I want my body back from the bloodshed, the gunshot wounds, the warzone it's been made out to be.

I want my body back from the streets, the buses, the examination tables, the courtrooms, the legislation.

I want my body back from the dark.

I want my body back from the anger but most importantly, I just want my body back from the fear.