

Shivanjani Lal

The story lost, before the story remembered



The shoreline as a place of separation and great longing

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A man hails the car my dad is driving on the way to Ba town.
He stops for him, and my maama climbs into the car and sits next to my aunt and mum. He needs a lift to FSC, it's on the way so we're happy to offer him a lift. He's a cane worker. It feels important to listen to him as he speaks to my mum. He's a living reminder of the girmit history and what he says resonates. He's scared about the future, and knows his children don't want to be cane workers. Why can't they have the better life we were promised? He knows that there might not be anyone after him to take care of the land he tends. Aise aise hai, he says, this is how it is: the future feels unknown. It is destiny. His voice shakes but he insists on wanting to share chai with my mum. She says no, telling him that this fleeting moment of meeting was enough.

Was it though?

We leave him at FSC.

Across the road I see a globe being held in two hands with a magnifying lens over Fiji. A sign underneath says Sugar for the World.

Sunshine hits my skin and we drive on.



I spent 50 weeks with no shoreline...

Only riverbanks.

The tide flowed and swelled and I learned a nadi.

350 days between a beginning and an arrival.



A nadi, a river

An echo; a mirror

A reminder, a memorial, a longing for home

On the wrong island, the wrong river

I sing out this prayer

No flowers, just stones, just bones



They had birds and fishes under their skin

Papery and translucent, as though they would disappear when they slept at night

Disappearing into their blood only to return in the morning

I used to trace the lines of initials and flowers

Wondering how they got etched onto my grandmothers' bodies

It was a comfort to see marks so lived in

I imagine dark nights and laughter ringing out as their marks were made

Imperfect and fragile

When I touched them I felt whole histories



