

The Season Between

Children, women and the land in the time of rain

The field is sown.

The roof is still branches.

The river has not yet decided.

Still, the children play.

The Season Between

In Mandla the rains arrive
the way a long-awaited guest arrives —
all at once, and staying.

The fields are sown
and must be left alone.
The plough leans on the wall.
The house waits for its roof.

This is the season between
the work of planting
and the work of harvest,
when the earth is doing
what no one can hurry.

So the village waits.
A woman stands at the fence
and looks back over her shoulder.
A mother ties her child
into a knot of cloth
and carries on.

But the children do not wait.
They cut branches into stilts
and walk above the grass.
They hang a rope from a tree
and swing into the white sky.
They stand at the edge of the hill
and watch the river
go somewhere without them.

I came with a camera
and stood where I was allowed.
They looked back at me
for their own reasons.

The river rose.
The rain kept its promise.
And for the length of a season
everything here was
on its way to becoming
something else.



01

A Roof She Carries

WOMAN UNDER THE BASKET

The basket is taller than she is.
She wears it like a roof.

It has rained on this village for weeks.
It has not reached her face.

She looks out from under the weave
and laughs at something
I have not yet understood.



02

The Waiting Field

WOMAN AT THE FENCE

Two posts. A woven fence.
A field that will not be ready
for some time.

She holds her shawl
the way you hold a question.

She turns once
to see who is watching.
It is me.
She lets me.



03

Two Gazes

MOTHER AND CHILD

The mother looks at me.
The child looks at me.

Two faces,
one knot of cloth
holding them together.

She does not smile.
She does not have to.
She decides how long I may stay.



04

Held Close

MOTHER BY THE POST

Now she laughs.
Someone to the side
has said something.

Her hands close at her chest
around the knot,
a small foot hanging free behind her.

The rafters are not yet a roof.
She is shelter enough.



05

A House Not Yet a House

FAMILY UNDER THE RAFTERS

The walls go up
one brick at a time.
The roof is still branches.

A boy stands in the frame of it
as if the door were already there.

Behind him, his mother,
a baby on her back,
a daughter at her side.

The house is not finished.
They are already home.



06

The Threshold

BOY AT THE DOORWAY

Slippers left in the mud.
Two posts. A white wall.
A dark door, open.

He leans against the house,
hands behind his back,
halfway in, halfway out.

He has not decided
whether I am a guest.



07

Face to Face

BOY WITH A STICK

He comes very close.
Wet hair, a stick in his hand,
a question he does not ask.

I lower the camera a little.
He does not step back.

For a moment
we are the same height.



08

Where the River Goes

CHILDREN ABOVE THE RIVER

Two uniforms, two bags,
two pairs of bare feet
on the wet grass.

Below them the river
bends and bends
toward somewhere they have heard of.

They stand here a long time.
No one calls them in.



09

Learning to Walk Tall

BOYS ON STILTS

Branches from the trees.
Footholds bound with rope.

They climb up
and the field falls away.

No one is teaching them.
They wobble, they correct,
they go on.

This is how a boy
grows a foot in an afternoon.



10

Taller Than the Road

STILT-WALKERS ON THE ROAD

They line up for me —
four boys, eight wooden legs.

Behind them, girls in white
walk home down the long road.

The boys grin.
They have made something
out of branches and string,
and they want it seen.



11

Toward the Leaves

THE TREE SWING

A swing on two ropes
from a branch I cannot see.

Two girls on it at once.
Below, a boy reaches up
to send them higher.

The others watch from the wall.
Everyone is looking up
into a white sky
full of rain that has not fallen.



12

Her Own Weather

G I R L O N T H E S W I N G

Puddles in the yard.
Leaves in the mud.
A rope knotted twice at the seat.

She swings and looks at me
as if she has been waiting
for someone to notice.

I notice.
She swings higher.



13

Resting Season

PLOUGH AGAINST THE WALL

The plough leans on the wall,
its blade still dark with earth.

In the rains it waits.

It has done its work.

It will do it again.

For now, the grass
grows up around its feet.



14

The River Rising

RIVER IN FLOOD

The river has come up
over the rocks,
brown and loud
and going everywhere at once.

On the high stone,
woven traps wait out the flood.

Everything here waits —
the field, the plough, the house,
the woman at the fence.

The river does not.

C O L O P H O N

Photographs by Sonal Vij.

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