

Meet Your New Neighbor

When I moved here,
they looked at my face
and saw a history book
I didn't write.

They looked at my name
and traced borders with their mouths,
called it a country
I have never called home.

They looked at the "New Student" tag
and saw a blank space.

But I am not a blank space.
And I am not a history book.

I am a geographic glitch;
born in the fifty states,
still asked, "Where are you *really* from?"

I am a linguistic knot,
thinking in the slang of my hometown
while they listen for the echo
of my ancestors.

They want me to be a bridge,
stretched thin between two shores,
praised for holding,
blamed when I bend.

They want me to be a puzzle piece;
but I was carved from a different wood
than the board they handed me.
A different shade of wood.
A different tree.

I do not "fit"
because I was never meant
to be reduced to an edge.

I am not a shape.
I am a gradient.

The orange of a California sunset
bleeding into the deep saffron of a sari.
The roar of a stadium crowd
braided with the quiet hum of a prayer.
The scent of an Indian restaurant
blending with the one of the nearby city's pizzeria.

I carry both without tearing.
I belong without asking permission.

So to my new peers;
don't search for where I "belong"
on a map.

Look for me
in the seat beside you.
In the laughter we share.
In the future we are building.

I am not a visitor.
I am not an in-between.

I am the new neighbor
you just haven't met yet.

#USvsHate