

Failure to Make Round Rotis

Failure to Make Round Rotis

*Poems on
rebellion, resilience
and relationships*

MEHAK GOYAL

 juggernaut

JUGGERNAUT BOOKS
C-I-128, First Floor, Sangam Vihar, Near Holi Chowk,
New Delhi 110080, India

First published by Juggernaut Books 2023

Copyright © Mehak Goyal 2023

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

P.-ISBN: 9789353451660

E.-ISBN: 9789353451684

The views and opinions expressed in this book are the author's own. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system in any form or by any means without the prior permission of the publishers.

Book designed by Meena Rajasekaran
Illustrations by Shikhar Gaur
Additional typesetting support by R. Ajith Kumar

Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd

For my family.

For those who feel the urge to overcompensate
for their failure to make round rotis.

‘The knowledge of cooking does not come pre-installed in a vagina.’

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

‘Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can
be thought.’

Audre Lorde

— Contents —

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Prologue: Ice Lolly Recipe | 1 |
| Medal of Participation | |
| Fly | 5 |
| Privilege | 6 |
| Report Card | 7 |
| Exam Boards | 8 |
| Reading | 9 |
| First Prize | 10 |
| Medal of Participation | 11 |
| How to Lose Gracefully | 12 |
| Relatives | 14 |
| Bully | 15 |
| Water Bottle | 19 |
| Friendship | 20 |
| The Fall | 21 |
| My Crowned Childhood | 22 |
| The Couch | 24 |
| Adulting | |
| My Façade | 29 |
| Result Card | 33 |
| Parent and Child | 34 |
| Adulting | 36 |
| Sirens | 37 |
| The Start-up | 38 |
| Lullaby | 44 |
| She | 45 |
| Opinions | 47 |
| A Letter to My Friends | 49 |
| Friends | 50 |
| A Gossip Column | 51 |
| Rich | 53 |

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| How to Be a Writer | 54 |
| To the Reader | 55 |
| The Bottle of Promises | |
| A Restaurant Monologue | 59 |
| The Bestseller | 61 |
| Swimming Pool | 62 |
| Garden | 63 |
| The Bottle of Promises | 64 |
| The Soulless Shoe | 65 |
| Obedience | 66 |
| The Transaction | 67 |
| Tornado | 68 |
| Memories | 69 |
| The Dress | 70 |
| Fleeting | 71 |
| The Park | 72 |
| Monday Blues | 73 |
| Lottery of Love | |
| Lost and _____ | 77 |
| First Date | 78 |
| Lottery of Love | 79 |
| Falling | 80 |
| Am I Enough? | 82 |
| The Adhesive | 83 |
| Uber | 84 |
| Reading | 86 |
| If It Weren't for You | 87 |
| Long Distance | 88 |
| Buffet | 90 |
| Shoes | 91 |
| Wallet of Happiness | |
| Meal Plan | 95 |
| Coin Toss | 96 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Guilt | 97 |
| Teeth | 98 |
| Loneliness I | 99 |
| Loneliness II | 100 |
| Safe | 101 |
| Blame | 102 |
| Massage | 103 |
| Scrunchy | 104 |
| The Wallet of Happiness – An Advertisement | 105 |
| Leaf of an Evergreen Tree | 107 |

How to Do Laundry

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Bloom | 111 |
| Daily | 112 |
| Seasons | 113 |
| The Cupboard | 114 |
| The Playlist | 115 |
| Overcome? | 116 |
| Perspective | 118 |
| How to Do Laundry | 120 |
| Ring! Ring! Ring! | 121 |
| Bolder | 122 |
| Therapist | 123 |
| Befriend the Darkness | 124 |
| How to Make Cutting Chai | 125 |
| Saturday Night for an Introvert | 126 |
| Love for an Introvert | 127 |
| A Toast to Introverts | 129 |
| My Room | 130 |

The Indian Matchmaker

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Death Knell | 135 |
| What Was Said When He Fell in Love | 136 |
| What Was Said When She Fell in Love | 137 |
| His Requirements for Bride | 138 |
| Her Requirements for Groom | 139 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Panditji | 140 |
| www.indianmatchmaker.com | 144 |
| The Indian Matchmaker | 146 |
| My Big Fat Indian Wedding | 151 |
| Kanyadan | 153 |
| Passport | 155 |
| Arranged Marriage | 157 |
| A Sunday Brunch | 159 |
| The Switch | 161 |
| Remembering Childhood | 162 |
| | |
| A Woman's Lexicon | |
| How to Make Round Rotis | 167 |
| Protect Her | 168 |
| A Woman's Lexicon | 170 |
| Catcall, Attack, Harass | 172 |
| Hair | 174 |
| Don't Detest, Loathe, Despise | 175 |
| Lust | 176 |
| The First Time, and Every Time After | 178 |
| Labels | 179 |
| PMS | 180 |
| Periods | 181 |
| Late | 183 |
| How to Write a Feminist Bestseller | 185 |
| The Anthem | 187 |
| Outlandish Aspirations | 188 |
| I Drive | 189 |
| Art | 191 |
| | |
| Epilogue: One Door Closed | 194 |
| | |
| <i>Notes</i> | 196 |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | 197 |
| <i>A Note on the Author</i> | 199 |

— Prologue —

Ice Lolly Recipe

Remove a frozen memory

Cover it with a clean cloth

Hammer it with hoarded rage and guilt

Fill a paper cup with the crushed fiasco

Insert a wooden stick of resilience

Place and press more numb fragments till they console each other

Remove the first draft from the cup carefully

Pour colourful metaphors until soaked

Sprinkle feminist masala for extra punch

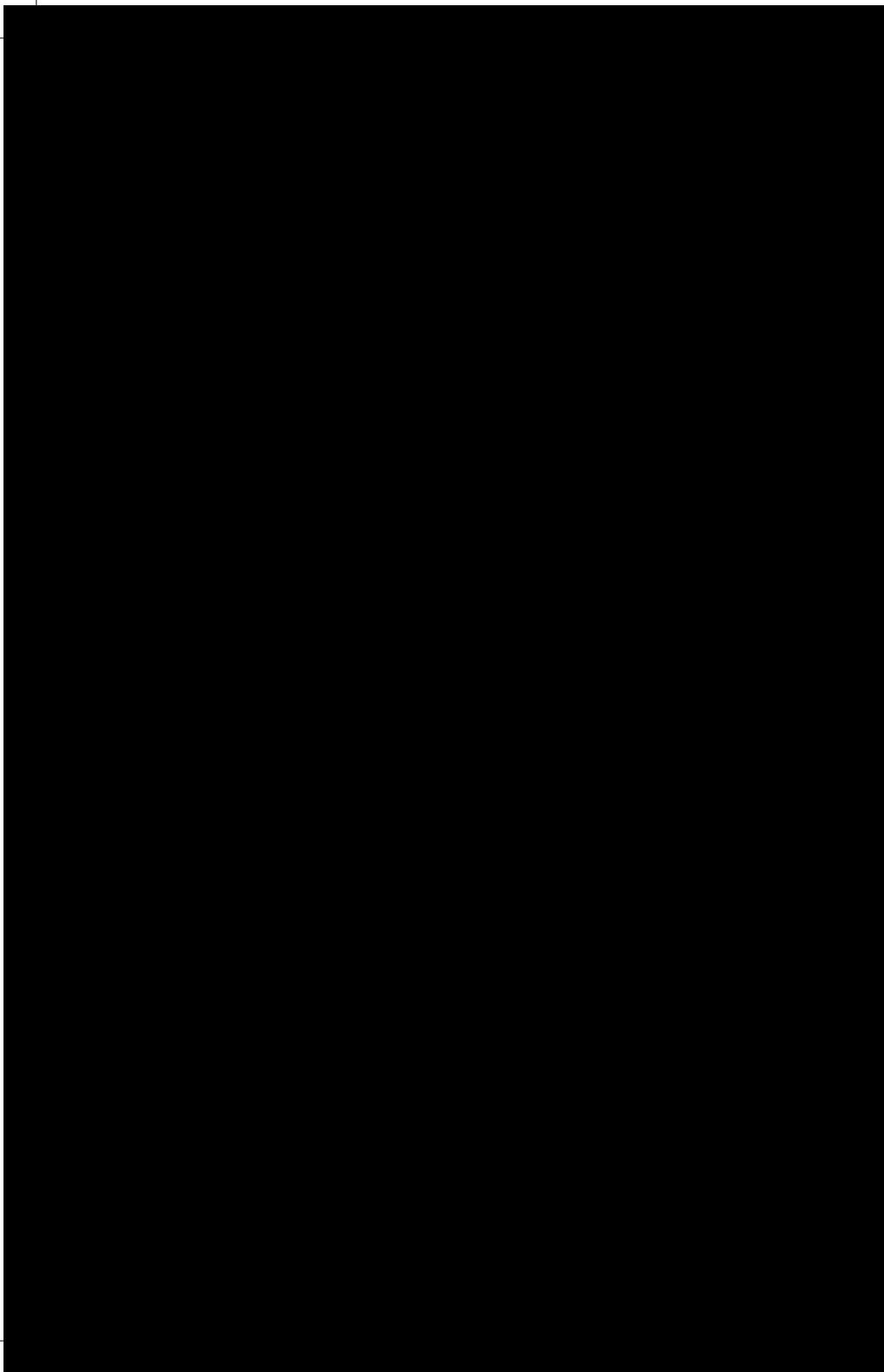
Slurp it loudly

Consume it cold

May it soothe your sweltering soul



Medal of Participation



Fly

The giant wings halt
opposite the transparent wall.
'Mummy, will THAT take us to nani?'
She nods.

'Mummy, but there are
no eagles or brooms.
How will we fly
to the door?'

'I will provide the magical stairs
till you learn to fly, bulbul.'
She wraps me in her arms
and carries me to the plane.



Privilege

Jump. Stretch. Reach.
My fingertips graze the green skin
of the obstinate mango.
'Next time,' I taunt
before heading home.

I look at the tree from the
balcony of my house.

Another girl, dressed in a
turquoise frock, points
to my mango. The king lifts
his princess, her hands
pull what was mine.

Her loud laughter
is planted in my mind.

Report Card

A: Kiss on the cheek, hug, Baskin-Robbins

B: Pat on the head, do better

C: Lock in dark bathroom

D: Smack soft skin

E: Hurl slipper

F: Hostel



Exam Boards

'Ma'am, please.
Five more minutes, please.'
My tears blot the ink.

She pulls my answer sheet so
forcefully that her body
falls through the window.

She lands on her paws –
a ferocious black cat,
eyes red, racing towards me.

Her claws aim for my face.
6 a.m. My alarm rings.
I feel the crescent moon and

small star scratched
on my forehead.
I look in my mirror. C+.

I rush for my next exam.
A heavy iron watch cuffs
my wrist. 'Drop your pen



when asked. Would be a shame
to snap this delicate thing.'
She laughs. The bell rings. I write.

Reading

A mango's skin
peeled lightly, carefully.

An oil container
dehydrated of its contents.

A bag of wheat
dusted of its last grain.

All its words
poured, preserved
in my mind –

I hum my book –
my anthem,
until the next one.



First Prize

Late evening, I reach home
after tennis practice carrying
my trophy close to my chest.

Radha opens our door.
'Where are Mama and Papa?' I ask,
not finding their Toyota outside.

'They are having dinner with friends.
Come! You must be hungry. I made
your favourite – Rajma chawal.'

My trophy tucked like a teddy bear in my bed,
I force my eyes to stay open, but in vain.
Next morning, Radha makes halwa to celebrate

while my parents rush for their morning jog.
My school bus honks. I stare at my golden cup
one last time, its gleam not reaching my eyes.



Medal of Participation

I held my
medal of participation
after my five-hundred metre race
in my sweaty palms,
beaming with pride.

My parents cheered
for me loudly.
We would
eat ice cream
and celebrate.

It was a big day.



How to Lose Gracefully

'Out,' I call.

My opponent runs over to my side,
points with her racquet,
'No, the ball was in, see this mark.'

I am losing 5-3. Matchpoint.

'My side, my call. It was OUTSIDE the line.'
'Cheater,' she calls back.
Reflexively, I throw the ball at her.

The lie bounces from her racquet and brushes my face.
It hurts less than my incompetence.
She wins the next point. Match.

I raise my racquet to hit the ground.
My mother is looking at me. I pause midway.
Grabbing my tennis kit, I drag myself to the car.

'You will go back and shake hands.'
'NO.'
'Okay, we are not leaving then.'

Stomp. Stomp.

She doesn't love me at all.

Why is she taking her side?

Why is she making me do this?

This is worse than the horror that I just faced.

Stomp. Stomp.

'Hey, I forgot to shake hands.'

We do.

I turn back to run away.

She stops me. 'Listen, you really
played well today. It was a good match.'

I am smiling when I reach my car.

My mother stops at my favourite dessert shop.

'This victory calls for a chocolate bomb.

You earned it. I am so proud of you.'

Relatives

Clothes pile up in my closet.

Twin shirts arrive.

No more space.

I open my cupboard,
scan through it,
unable to find anything
cool and comforting
for a hot summer day.

Bully

I.

‘Your boots are ugly –
just like your face,’
she snaps.

I am drinking water next to the cooler.

My throat gulps.
My heart protests.
My lips part.

Blinks later, I hear laughter from her audience.



II.

A week elapses.
Their thunderous laughter
strikes intermittently.

Retorts refuse
to form phrases as
thoughts ghost my tongue.

My beautiful brown boots
stare at me, 'How could you
not stand up for us?'

I shut my closet—
hoping to wear
my confidence soon.



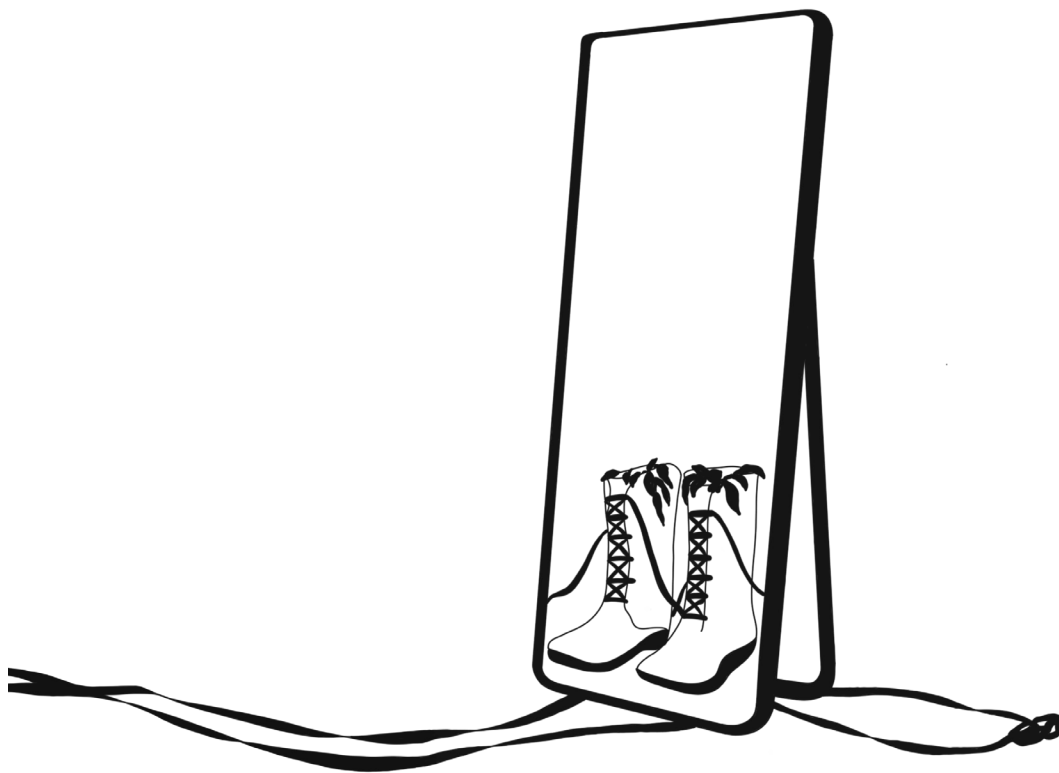
III.

'Your opinions don't matter to me.'

I rehearse in the mirror.

My body clenches,
unable to carry its weight.

My words shiver,
unable to carry their meaning.



IV.

The predator studies the
solitary butterfly from afar –
imagining her palms clasping it.

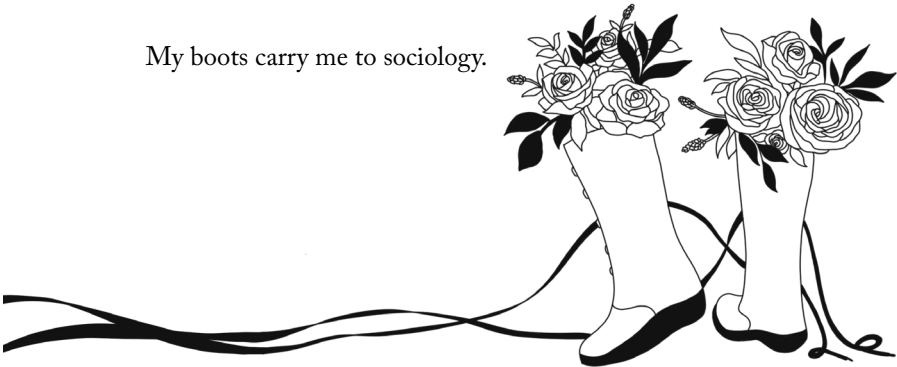
I am washing my hands.
A foot taps.
She comments on my

usefulness or lack thereof
as a human in society.
This time I smile and say,

‘That was really mean.
Does that make you feel
better about yourself?’

Her minions stare into silence.
The honed wings of the butterfly
cut the palms of the predator.

My boots carry me to sociology.



Water Bottle

Parched, they walk up to me –

sip, take notes,
slurp, suggestion,
gulp, gulp, favour.

I am left at the corner of the stairs,
forgotten and empty.

Friendship

The chocolate settled easily in
the palms of my peers
its shiny wrapper opened
like secret messages,
birthday invitations
and BFF wristbands,
stacked carefully later
in their backpacks.

Starving,
craving,
expecting
one M&M,
I found an unlimited
pack of Lindt bars.
Filling cavities,
not creating them.