FLASH NONFICTION

Barefoot

by Pranjali Kureel



"Footsteps" by Petra Fuks

Tint Journal, no. 16 (September 2026), www.tintjournal.com

Copyright © 2026 by Tint - ESL Literary Journal and Association.

Wandering through the foothills of the Himalayas the other day, I saw you. Not that I was looking for you here out of all the places, but then, there you were, standing tall, basking in your made-up glory, yet utterly alone. And just when I sat on the rock beside you, a familiar wind blew past my face, leaving behind some lingering memories. Memories of when, in a world full of people, I had the unfortunate luck to brush past *you*.

Locally, they call you *bicchu booti* that translates literally to 'scorpion herb'. In English though, you are a 'stinging nettle' that does not quite have the same ring to it because unlike those chhui-mui touch-me-nots that shyly fold into themselves when caressed even slightly, you *sting*. Aggressively. Like a scorpion.

I can't say what exactly it was that drew me to you like a moth; that, even though everything about you screamed bad news, all that I could see was that slight flicker of hope. At first, I was driven to head straight into it without a care in the world. But the very next, I was making a sane choice to diligently co-exist with it. All of it. To familiarize myself with the language of your being and grammar of your world, the carefully extracted taste, and painfully acquired ways… to feel your skin without possibly being stung. Of course, not in a way to study you — Chhi! That would place us floors apart, and I wanted nothing but for us to be together in this strange entanglement. To be partners in the *sukh-dukh* of everyday and co-passengers in the journey of time.

So began my quest to uncover your forbidden layers as my fingertips wandered through them. *At what point did you grow these needles to protect yourself?* and, God forbid, *What did you go through to have to do that? Do you sting out of spite or hidden somewhere is a longing to be embraced anyway?* They talk of your instincts to inflict pain but these marks left on the surface tell a different story. *Don't they?* My questions about you tell a lot about myself.

But don't we all grow up overpouring into the things we starved for all our lives?

They say love pervades the binaries of selfless and selfish, nature and nurture, of *you* and *me*. But those who say that it is beyond the good and the bad may not have known the scars I carry from loving you. And even though you are not there anymore, I still meet you in people and find you in places even when I am not looking. *Basking in your made-up glory, yet utterly alone.*

The deeper I delve into you, the more I return to myself, uncovering graves of what is buried and was alive once. You would be glad to know I have been watering them well, and yesterday as
I wandered around barefoot,

I was met with

Copyright © 2026 by Tint - ESL Literary Journal and Association.

grass under my steps.

Copyright © 2026 by Tint - ESL Literary Journal and Association.