

KIRUN KAPUR

I Ask My Mother How It Happened

It's noon. She takes the blue box from the pantry shelf and sits a cookie on the table. Chips Ahoy. Brown circle decked with darker flecks of brown. I can smell the chocolate, imagine the taste, while outside black and yellow mynas fight in the plumeria tree. *Do you want it? Would you like a taste?* I'm about to reach for it when she smiles, studying me: *That's how it happens.* The sun pours in, the birds are taking their grievances from tree to tree and the sweet, dark smell intensifies. Her eyes are chocolaty, so I know it's safe to ask, *Because of cookies?* She laughs and what I want more than the whole box is to make her do it again. *Because of desire. It's all our wanting that makes the world so sad.* I rub my sandals on the chair leg, fidget in my seat. This seems important. I'm thinking Chips Ahoy taste too dry, anyway. She stands, moving to put the box away. *In the convent, we prayed that Christ would live in our hearts, driving all other desires away.* I study the arch of her narrow back as she tidies the cupboard. She's wearing a green dress that I know she doesn't like. *It's only a cookie,* I say, but I know how I'd feel if someone took what I want most away. *It's o.k. You can eat it,* she says. The lesson is over. The birds have gone. Only the sun is left slicing the room with its clean, bright sword. *Eat it,* she urges, but even hours later, when I creep downstairs to say goodnight, the sweetness sits untouched on the empty tabletop.