

The Ninth Month: Spent Waiting

'Inside me crouch two hungers'
and an ocean full of thirst.
My belly ripples
as an arm's imagined shape yawns
lazily.
Sore, my womb wants to empty itself
impatient of that long heaviness.
'Put him down for a while.'
Three hours of restlessness, nightless heat
The skies forgetting to burst...

Somewhere a Skylight Opens

Black birds scatter,
slide off the tresses
of a rain tree
sunset lit.
Something returns to my heart,
past rib-cage, blood and bone,
something I don't have a word for.
In the cupped hands of the ocean
lie many rivers.
Not a drop spills out the sides of the earth.
Something returns to my heart,
past rib-cage, blood and bone,
something I don't have a word for.
Somewhere a skylight opens.
On looking, I find this thing
for which I don't have a word.
It is a simple thing without frames.
A thing I want to sing of
even when the skylight only shows
black bits of night.

Arriving Shortly

When Amma came
to New York city,
she wore unfashionably cut
salwar kurtas,
mostly in beige,
so as to blend in,
her body
a puzzle that was missing a piece -
the many sarees
she had left behind:
that peacock blue
Kanjeevaram,
that nondescript nylon in which she had raised
and survived me,
the stiff chikan saree
that had once held her up at work.
When Amma came to
New York city,
an Indian friend
who swore by black
and leather,
remarked in a stage whisper,

"This is New York, you know -
not Madras.
Does she realize?"
Ten years later,
transiting through L.A airport
I find Amma
all over again
in the uncles and aunts
who shuffle past the Air India counter
in their uneasily worn, unisex Bata sneakers,
suddenly brown in a white space,
louder than ever in their linguistic unease
as they look for quarters and payphones.
I catch the edge of Amma's saree
sticking out
like a malnourished fox's tail
from underneath
some other woman's sweater
meant really for Madras' gentle Decembers.

Please recycle to a friend!

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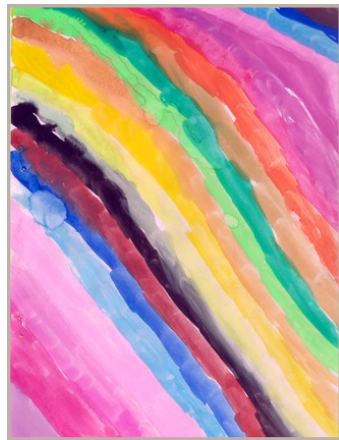
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Somewhere a Skylight



K. Srilata

Many Poems Nestle Inside Houses

Many poems nestle inside houses.
Like this woman with a sad, crumbling face
her soft saree mocking her every move
coming apart at leisure.
I think of how someone must have loved her
as a baby
caressed her baby toes, skin, hair.
They say:
She comes from a rich home
but married the wrong man
a dried up stick who cannot understand
the poem lingering on her face.
They say:
Hurt has made her barren
though actually she loves children.
They say:
She is a healer.
She even healed her mother-in-law's cancer.
They say:
She sleeps little.

Some nights she wanders through the run-down garden
looking for a peace that the day does not bring her.
They say:
She speaks to no one.
In fact, she stopped speaking years ago.

Sometimes the poem sitting in that crumbling old house
urges me to knock
at the door
and touch her face.
Each day every day
I pass the house.
I just pass by.