

Passion

I.

After childbirth
the tenth month's passion:

a bloodiness
still shifting at her core
she crawls on the mud floor

past the empty rice sacks
blown large with dust,
rims distended like sails.

Her skin scrapes a tin bowl
with water from the stream,
a metal frame

bearing a god
whose black blue face
melts into darkness, as a gem might

tossed back
into its own
implacable element.

She waits,
she sets her sari to her teeth
and when the chattering begins

fierce, inhuman joy,
monkeys rattling the jamun tree,
bellies distended, washed with wind

she screams
and screams
a raw, ungoverned thing.

II.

There are beetles scabbling
in the open sacks,
chaff flies in the half light
a savage sound in her eyes
struck free

the human realms of do and don't
the seemingly precise, unalterable keys
dashed to a frenzy
and still the voice holds.

III.

One summer's day
I saw a heron
small and grey
blinded by an eagle's claw

it dashed its head
against the Coromandel rock.

The bleeding head
hung on
by a sinew or two
as the maimed bird
struck
and struck again

then turned to rise
an instant
on its sunlit wings.

It was carved in bronze
against the crawling foam

agony

the dead cannot know
in their unaltered kingdoms.

IV.

I am she
the woman after giving birth

life
to give life
torn and hovering

as bloodied fluids
baste the weakened flesh.

For her
there are no words,
no bronze, no summoning.

I am her sight
her hearing
and her tongue.

I am she
smeared with ash
from the black god's altar

I am
the sting of love
the blood hot flute
the face
carved in the window,
watching as the god set sail

across the waters
risen from the Cape,
Sri Krishna in a painted catamaran.

I am she
tongueless in rhapsody

the stars of glass

Meena Alexander

nailed to the Southern sky.

Ai ai

she cried.

They stuffed
her mouth with rags

and pulled her
from the wooden bed

and thrust her
to the broken floor.

I, I.