

KIRUN KAPUR

For the Survivors

Begin with a seed. Begin with the father and the mother, your first Adam and Eve. Begin with what falls from the tree: you can live on bruised and sweet. Begin with a monsoon breeze, begin with a flood, begin with miles of silk and mud and the wings of cranes and the stilt-like legs of a house with no one left inside, with a young wife burying her sons and books riding the tide until they're caught and their philosophies dried out on laundry lines. Begin with a pen, begin with a cage. Begin with the memory of what they said while you tried to turn your face away. Begin with bargains, with stains, the names of towns built over towns built over graves, begin with your life burned down. With the god who hasn't been seen since the burning bush and the goddess who steps into the flames like a housewife into a dress, or a fairy tale of hair so long that love climbed up—begin by putting your mouth to the mouth of your dreams. Begin with tendons, teeth. Begin with what never goes away: a highway pricked by gravel and stars, low beams on wind and trucks and emptiness. Begin. It starts with being, ends like a ringing bell: Begin. Begin. Ring your self.

Notes

Light: It is estimated that somewhere between 75,000 and 100,000 women were abducted during Partition. In September of 1947, both the Indian and Pakistani governments agreed to attempt to “recover” abducted persons and reunite them with their original families. India’s official *Abducted Persons (Restoration and Recovery) Act* was signed in 1949. Some scholars estimate that ten percent of abducted women were located through this program. The program, however, was fraught with problems. Forced marriages, sexual violence and the resulting birth of children confounded both laws and loyalties. In some cases, the women’s original families would not accept them back. In other cases, women didn’t want to return to their original families, but their wishes were not taken into account and many were forcibly repatriated.