

Dark Water

My mother dog-paddles through words
searches for the end of a sentence.
She sinks in muddy waters,
she drops to the bottom of this gray pond --
hair streams like Ophelia's,
hands grasp seaweed,
her curved feet touch soft muck:
fish fly every which way.

I stand on shore and call out,
but I know she does not hear.
She reaches for words in the dark water,
but they float away.
Names bounce off her fingers, memories
fall onto empty shells.
She stops moving and waits, waits
at the bottom of the pond.

I want to give my mother pearls, water lilies,
daylight, bird song.
I want to hear my mother
speak my name.
I want to see my mother walk and smile.
I tell myself she is not lost, that I carry her
in my cells, the shape of my mouth,
but I do not have the words
to summon her back to me.

Wild Hearts

A young beaver coasts underwater,
skims silt and water plants.

Sleek fur undulates as he pushes
one webbed foot back, and then the other
bicycling through this dreamy waterscape.

I think about his rotund mass, freed from gravity,
the effortless glide beneath lonely waters
where minnows dart, and herons fish.

Above water, he digs, constructs his pond,
works through the night while a female floats
down the river, following his scent,
finding her home and her mate for life.

Tunnels worm through hidden depths.

Moonlight illuminates dark silhouettes
piling branches against stones.

Beavers fortify their lodge, deepen the pool,
create a world beckoning all wild hearts
to enter these black waters.

City of Widows -- Vrindavan, India

After my husband died, his family spat at me.

“What do we want with you? Another mouth to feed?

Get out!” My bones could not support me,

and I fell in the gutter, begged for food.

My Lord Krishna guided me here, to my sisters,

where I am wanted, loved, where we celebrate Holi,

the festival of colors, spring, new beginnings.

We toss iridescent powder, coat ourselves in paint,

and whirl in kaleidoscope colors, swaddled in love.

All is gone – my husband, my parents, my children,

yet Lord Krishna showers me with rose petals.

I dance until I fall to the floor.

Thank you, bones, for 80 years of dancing.

Thank you, skin, drenched in colors,

Thank you, hips that sway to music.

Thank you, voice, for laughter and love.

My husband’s mother said I killed him.

How careless of me to let him die!

I was worse than a stray dog,

Twenty years old -- a disgrace.

Now, sisters pull me to my feet,
embrace me, entice me – we dance,
link arms, and my voice is unleashed:
I sing to life that surprises us.
I sing to warm arms enfolding me
and the heart I feel as I lay
my head on my sister's chest.
Petals tickle my toes, pungent
marigolds mingle with
rose. My sari and skin
stained in purple hues, purple
as the heart beating beneath my ear,
purple as the pounding rhythm of joy.