

Love colors zaffre the gnaw marks down Beauty's sides,

makes her glass case body gleam: youth firing
 through the tempered veins
 his bites dent but cannot break her
 his teeth incapable of releasing the molten spirits
 swimming in her ones of the women who made her
 to be this pliable
 to drain her he needs a spider's web of cracks

—

harbors that moment she holds the key to her own spine—
 the key that could disassemble her—
 with it he could flatten her
 hold that spine to the light
 read what's been etched into her
 if he could sever her thumb
 it could slide into his mouth
 leave an open palm with an idle key
 an open wound to wrap his tongue around
 one he could draw hard upon

—

He desires to shatter her palms
 desires to toss them to the ground
 desires to read the shards' constellation of fates
 desires to know if his is lost somewhere in her

—

if she *would* have him
 he wouldn't have
 decades missing
 gratitude joy meat coffee memory
 he's lived instead the life of an indigestible ache.
 his refuge is in the craters he's bit into his cheeks
 he waits for the blood to coagulate crusty
 but his mouth remains wet

—

 she feels his presence near herself warm
 some time before
 she'd traversed the spectrum of blue.

Man to Beauty

Because Beauty cannot bear a child,
Man brings a daughter home.

Beauty musters up all the blessings she can, brings them up from her toes
and exhales them onto the child's temples.

He will teach Devi to be independent; Beauty will teach her
to be lonely—beauties have no equals.

Goddess hips do not coax out children; the womb is meant to hold
incantations that have echoed from Himalaya into viscera.

The guile of lemon-and-musk perfume,
hair braided into bells, each thought a tilt of the head,
a new dance step.

Man sifts through Beauty

to find a prayer for himself,

and repeat it with every heart beat; a way for release from this
seven-layered life.

He can't bear Beauty in every manifestation
without prayer.

This must be why he places

his forehead where Beauty's body had lain just moments
ago. He kisses every inch of the sheets. There
are no apples and mishti to leave

at her altar. He clinches her each mehendi-
dyed toe. A plea to let go of his past.

Of all her names, another is Benevolence.

Devi

I cannot touch the holy books, a prayer rug, step to the altar, or, smell
the mangos left out on the rooftop to dry. The cleansed women will make
aachar, spice it with cinnamon sticks and whole cloves. But when
the gods know I am bleeding.

I may be left outside to sleep on a reed mat.
Though the temple may be mine, I will be plucked
and left to tarnish in the sun, an apple tumbling away,
pistachios crumbling out of dusty sweets.

When I was young, Beauty told me
I am not to pray during this time.
I become sacred. She taught me to take gram flour,
raw turmeric, and cow's milk cream. Take the mixture,
and apply it to my face. When the bathtub is left holud,
I will radiate beauty.
She ironed my best clothes. She massaged my scalp
and coated each strand with a concoction of
coconut, jasmine, and almond oils. She lathered my lashes
in castor, said, *You are
so special. You hold
all the world, in your palms, all the strength.
You are capable of anything. Even murder.*

Beauty to Devi

Yes, I already know this: to be engorged by flames isn't the sound of rage roaring in a subway station tunnel. It isn't the feeling of strokes up your achal. Sweat down your back. Or quicker heart beats. Nor stomps down the route to destination.

I know. It comes quiet. Gray.
Soft. In twinkles. So, so
beautiful. But then, so are you.

Burning consumes everything.

It is the act of sitting quietly and simpering.

The act of making sure there are no mascara clumps in the third coat.

Your almond eyes more divined.

Burning is commonplace itself. Even you, Devi, will feel its constant trail down your side. You will feel it nip and kiss under your clothes. Let the glow set you apart. The glamour gleaming in a scorched glaze. Hips will sway to exhibit the devoured skin. Charred eyes crackling shut, the throbbing of dreams that are pushed down the sink, the vents of the home collect secrets, tears tied and gagged and tickled: there wait the ashes of nerves and spirit.

The pleasure of it all ruminates in the kohl that's left behind. You and I, we will dance in a circle to our own snapping fingers, inking it around our new eyes, waiting to devour.

At the close, once again, you will look as I brush on my concealer. And again I will smudge the lip liner, hoping to give a soft line to my smile. You will have and smell my pearl necklace. You see, death lingers a remnant of perfume.

Glass house

cleaned.
 Front yard's glass
 trimmed. Smut
 wiped off
 the window's panes.
 Re-painted the door
 red, a gold knocker/
 peephole combination
 to look in on
 Beauty—made of glass—
 slipping off
 her bra strap,
 lilac underwear,
 those scratch marks
 moving along her mirrored
 spine,
 the smell of saffron stuck
 between rib grooves.
 The kitchen made
 of glass, too. Glass vases,
 tulips,
 the bamboo plant
 pebbled stagnant,
 spices vibrating
 through the glass.
 See?
 So much glass.
 See:
 a hammer smashed
 all the crystal cabinet knobs.
 See: the
 highway outside,
 there *was* the sky sign
 blinking to the glass house,
 an arrow blinking
 "Glass House," blinking.

—

Beauty shatters every hall.
 Pelts those bamboo pebbles,
 for years. Lets life
 float up

into
recessed lighting.
She leaves.
Stands at the foot
of a lemon tree planted
in the clear ground.
At the root,
recites,
*Signs, leave me
to myself.
Eye blink seconds will erode
the straight
razor edges
of memory.*