**Death row served underground**

I push and I pull

this jammed lever

of the window to my soul

fingernails cracking under the pressure

as I try to pry apart

the narrow sill

until it gives

boughed by impatience

and one quick rush of wind is all I receive

before the cracking glass splinters the wood underneath

and its cataclysmic collapse brings down too

a wall held up by fury

where vision of vistas are lost to me

my own strength denies dreams dreamt with tepid courage

of witnessing more than a sunset on a horizon

of feeling heat on my cheeks from closer to sun surface

I fold my fingers back into my palms and settle for the wait

for another day to begin

as I confine my dreams to grey walls, white ceiling, and their weight

**Far from hearth**

Respite, I am looking for a respite,      a sweetness in my life though you are only wrapped in honey and hollow inside                    though you fill your hollow inside with the only chips of armor I have left and call it         necessity and leave me only a talisman to wear Talisman to rebate any love I have left to give       so any oncoming looker will mistake it as protection for me and not Them so that they are turned away       heeding broken wares        and I am left once again two headed thrice cursed beast in my heart and me in a gilded cage Respite, I am looking for a respite though I’ll settle for the only refuge you provide your ice clear lake where I submerge my body to drown my mind another day

**Can I sit on the edge of your universe?**

I’d like to watch, just for a moment

how your orbits unspool at their seams

given a tug in the right direction

pressure applied with velocity

I’d like to watch, just for a moment

to understand where I went wrong

I was unable to keep your starlight directed at me

Was it so unforgivable that I was shy to take form?

even after late winter nights when you’d infused

enough laughter in me to heat a midwestern city

I was blown glass melting back from opportunity

I suppose I know that it was unfair to expect infinite patience

I missed your counting of my strike one

two

three

for every face of moon you were left to witness lonely

My own gravity is all infancy and turbulence

in its growing of a sheared metal core

nothing for you to envy

nothing more than a small static shock of underfoot carpet carrying charge

nothing more than such routine nuisance to dismiss easily

I know too that the risk outweighs potential

I can just as easily become a black hole as a blooming galaxy

I understand that’s more weight than you can afford to carry

**Dear nani,**

The ashram in Ganeshpuri you love to visit was featured in the best-selling novel Eat, Pray, Love for its transformative properties.For me it is merely tranquil halls of blooming marigold and sandalwood scent carried on monsoon breeze. Childhood faith epitome. The marble pillars, cleansing sulfur springs, even the limestone floor that turns to blazing coal in afternoon heat – these are all part and package, one with the other – the balm of my dreams and burn in my feet. I wouldn’t have it differently. At least, not until I was eighteen. Until I was eighteen, it was all well worth the trouble. Never mind the long drive nor the winding forest. Never mind the risk of crashing down a tall mountain as rocks tumbled down from the weight of moisture between fissures, looking for an excuse to be free. I barely paid any mind to these. I barely understood the nature of danger. I basked in the adventure of it all, which was the only part that made sense to me. Eating pav vada by the roadside with mama’s youngest brother and catching rain on my mouth despite his twin’s reprimanding: this was peace and the secret to eternity. I’d found it even in the journey to the monastery. Now I am nearly twenty. I still yearn for the rose-tint to the memory of crushing boondi between my teeth. I miss my unbroken heart, and making a game of racing through scalding squares of tile with cousins. I’m afraid I’ll never quite feel as serenely invincible as I did looking up to a bronze cast Swami, as if all the world were indeed laid out for me. But I haven’t been to Ganeshpuri this summer. Or the two before that. I imagine the evergreen trees there continue to be un-poisoned by resentment from underbrush for keeping their typical leaves. Most days I can say the same for me. Shedding several layers of unnecessary suffering meant losing the support of your sympathy. Maybe without it’s cast my heart is learning to mend all by itself. It’s healing all wrong in the rightest of places. I’m trying to stock up on sandalwood incense and pure limestone pieces from college-town gift stores, and building my own hearth from scratch.

Now that I know not to rely on your   
 heat.

**Covid summer redux**

I have spent a summer drowning

alone and afraid of

myself        that comes out when all

         the world has turned away

the self that loves to dance with ghosts of people that have just

two, three, minutes ago become memories

and sing with dreams of what I’d mean to them if they’d chanced a glance as   they were leaving

the self that inhabits less and less of this body and forgets all notion of tangibility

(it's the onset of hysteria, a defence mechanism that keeps me tied down to my feet)

It’s as if I’m paper thin when I am not seen, left too long to become a brittle that breaks

a sharp that draws blood out of you as much as me.

So when winter brings a shock of harsh reality with all watching eyes again it's a welcome reprieve

crowded beside the damp sweat that comes from shivering too long

and smelling exhaust fumes that freeze

my glass window on the bus fogs up.

At least I breathe.