

The last toothless body fades to a period
as it falls to the centre of the earth
through the restless mouth of a volcano
coughing sienna and amber, all
continually disappears. Time pickling
human faces to ceramic, ash. When
forgiveness lifts the veil to the thing
you have now come to call 'a true grief'
you pray to return to the safe house
of anger. Distraction? Easy! Sister
once held out her hands — catching someone's child
swirling off the high table at dinner, out—
into an unknown darkness. Just the two
of us there, remembering our standard order

fifteen years ago, somnolent
breeze. clack&claver of childhood,
meals outdoors
with mother and father
in two different conversations. A time gone
In a moment, the flicker of an unfamiliar
tenderness settling on her face pink sun
reddening the contour of her hair, words
quick yet measured. routine cooing
toddler nearby now turning to a cry.
an undertow of the real & not
announcing itself: Divya, extending
her arms out to arrest a small body
in momentum. falling swifter
than senses fathom The crack
of a little skull about to interrupt the afternoon—
it doesn't.

A goddess a witch a messiah letting
a boy full of breath grow into a brooding,
old man. What women do History biology
evolution. civilisation who
we are is present in that first impulse.
All that spontaneity. entwining
us with friends. and lovers, making us
race to our deaths. All in the forward
jerk of a hand as it grabs. the gaze
of a child mid mischief, mid euphoria.

I learnt the word 'eviscerate' when you first glanced human viscera
A man dying, but not all dead, outside a hospital gate—
Christ bled on the wall

Convulsing arm hung off the stretcher, bell of a curio clock
from a past life, wet head bisected by nature's knife,
brains & bilge flowering

blood eclipsed a brown face, spittle as rope, a man halved & docked.
Contretemps at a construction site: "bloody disaster" words in your mind,
sloping down in crimson; doctors with a medical eye, weary

Doctor, saviour, what were he to say? Such lives matter little
they'd declared couples dead where he works, lodged
them as injuries by suicide, in autopsy reports

when they well knew: a village had conspired
to hang them off a tree.
What do you think this is? Freedom isn't free

Do you send a dwelling to the gallows, for the death of two?
Is being a good citizen being good and true?
Let the grief of a devastated conscience turn

to baptise them; as Christ, let them
suffer, distend, end.

Paz once heard his own blood singing in its prison.
I'm not like him. Exhume a heart, exhaling—
I smell like all of Asia. In the face
of rage, it's best to offer a drink of water
be well reasoned. Erase that old phrase
name it "sanguineous catastrophe"
not treason.

Night after night, dreams curve like dark trees
corralled into a file. Think of the vision
where you carried a dying Cossack
on your back, into the Indian sun, defiled him
to draw the winter out of his bones:

wanting to hold Dostoevsky, warm his blood, make him your own.
How many men will you love that are dead and gone?

Heaney lowering his net to pull your spirit, sputum. Surrender.
Keats' silken winds in the crook of your arm. Faiz flitting by,
a book on his breath. (Oh, Medha, for whom?) Seeing glimpses
of their faces in the faces of alien men,
for that, wanting to marry
all of them. Yet never telling
one about the other

Turn one, then another
into father, mother, brother.
...become the Other.

A man stood imploring me for blood—*Donation drive!*
glee in falsetto, woodpecker's rapping, pink afternoon
inundating the rooms, white hot floor blotted
out a lingering thought at the end
of my skull—

a house inside me, stood, sinking
a cow's tail brushing the flies
off my cadmium hours; I, hermit, receding
to a lull

Rakt, he intoned, strident. *Rakt daan*, to emphasize.
A donation. Really, he was just brewing, riven.
Can't donate a thing if one needs it
in the moment. Right then. *Someone always does*
need blood, I drew. Whoever thought
it venial to permit strange
men to knock on doors
in Delhi's infernal caboose, to call
upon one's conscience when they least
expect it? Put on a garment
hear the thud the drop
the brain on the ground, smell
the iron the blood unraveling.

