

Meena Alexander

Everything Strikes Loose

In the end
everything strikes loose

Look at my hands
that held you
as the pepper vines
hold to the mango tree
my child, my first child

What fuels the mind
I tell myself
is not grief,
not waste:
just a bird beak
scuffing up leaves
at the tree's base.

Yet see
the pepper vines slip,
roots clustering
colorless as air.

I plucked the first
fruits for you,
the sour stuff
you spat, the sweet
dribbled down your chin.

You were greedy then
"Amma!" you cried, pointing

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I could not see
if the blackness
at the pepper's core
had burnt you.

The glare
was in my eyes,
the flickering leaves,
the golden Pamba river.

Now the river trickles
through low hills,
it tastes of childhood

The boats fly no flags
the races are all done
and flat barges driven by men
bear cinnamon, cloves, dried pepper.