

## Three for Summer

*Heaviness fell into things that had no weight.*

—Ovid

### 1. Neela Marya

Sometimes things turn small and hard.  
I like that, a pebble, I dug it out of the earth,  
lifted it up.

Hard white with streaks of blue inside.  
The blue shifted around, swirling

As clouds do in the monsoon sky  
Just before the rains start up and the air

Boils up, spills into indigo. Lord Krishna's color.  
Neela is blue in Malayalam.

Neela Marya I like to call myself.  
If any one calls, I will answer to that name.

I lift up the pebble, wipe the dirt off with my skirt.  
I cradle the stone in my skirt, stare at it.

My skirt is rose colored cotton. Fine cotton  
When the sun shines, you can see my legs.

My legs are solid flesh amma says  
So the sun can't shine through.

Amma makes me wear a petticoat.  
It bunches up when I climb the guava tree.

I tear it off with a guava branch.  
I say "Look amma, the tree did it!"

But she always gets me new petticoats.  
White muslin, trimmed with lace.

If I had Brussels lace I would trim your petticoats  
Amma says. I know she loves me so.

Once I came in torn and wet  
The white petticoat between my knees.

I wanted to cry Jesus Lord turn me hard and cold,  
A pebble with dirt on it

That way no one will see through me.  
As amma stared I felt my flesh melt

Into clouds, slow clouds in monsoon air  
Just before the sun burns through.

## 2. What Ayah Says

In dreams, the world is very small,  
A pebble streaked with jet

Flecks of carmine rush under its skin  
Held to the light it gleams as a jamun might

Ruby pocked with indigo.  
I splash my hands with well water

Run my thumb over the pebble  
Hold it up to the sunlight.

I set it on my tongue,  
Close my lips and swallow hard.

Ayah says that when children  
Swallow bits of bone,

Buttons, stones, they drop right out.  
I wonder if the pebble will.

In front of the house, far from the toilet hole  
is the well filled with black water.

Everything rises from the well and ends up in it  
Ayah says. Even girls I ask. Especially girls ayah says

Chewing hard on her clove. Ayah's back tooth hurts.  
She chews cloves to keep the hurt from spilling.

When children swallow things they shouldn't  
They turn into stones, she says

They tumble into the toilet hole.  
I squat on the toilet hole  
The night owl cries so bright  
It perches in the leaves of the jackfruit tree.

Jackfruit is as big as a baby's head.  
With spikes on it, and pock marks hot as lead

If a jackfruit drops on your head  
You will go to sleep ayah said.

### 3. Dark Door

A child went through a dark door into grandfather's library  
The door was cut in jackfruit wood,

Varnished the color of burnt leaf.  
Breath stops when I think of that door.

A child in a white dress walked in.  
Later a child walked out.

Her eyes were burnt holes for the sun to shine through.  
I do not like to say I.

She  
Not I.

Not I, Not I.  
What happened in grandfather's library makes me float.

No before, no after.  
No up, down, down, up.

Who will save her?  
Who will save Neela Marya?

She doesn't walk on water like Jesus or Gandhi,  
She floats on it, eyes shut, bones poking through.

Will fishing nets turn parachutes, sail homeward?  
Her dress was mussed up, wet.

Whose hand was on her thigh, wrist with hairs white  
As the cabbage butterfly?

I held onto the kitchen door  
Amma I cried, no sounds came out of my mouth

I want to kneel inside your red sari,  
Let the pleats swallow me.

Hand covered in a white towel you stirred the pot  
It swarmed with sliced guavas, figs, mango pulp,

You trickled in crushed almonds, rosewater.  
The towel over your phantom fist

Kept hot bubbles from hurting.  
Amma, amma, noke, Nyan a, Nyan a I cried,

Amma look its me , look I, amma, me  
But my lips were shut tight.

Later to keep me from floating  
I crouched by the wellside, picked a tiny pebble

Swallowed it. The pebble was the color  
Of bright mist at monsoon time.

But clouds above the guava tree  
Blew about so swift, it hurt to see

I made my eyes huge.

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