

**What am I to her
And she to me**

By Sukrita Paul

Seven moons away is when I met her
On a travel away from home

half my height
in size less than half
hollow eyes etched on craggy cheeks
the white leaping out of dark crevices
a dwarf clad in rags
wrapped in half a saree

alone amidst children of sizes all
men and women tired of it all
her wrinkles trembled as she said
we are "ghumantu" --
made criminals by history
brought together in this slum
to fend for ourselves with
these fingers that are limp

I hear, you are from Delhi
-the city of power-
get me shelter,
get me food, and clothes of course,
my blessings you will earn
Yours and mine, our ancestors
as you might know are the same,
above clan, caste and class

Each moonlit night
they connect me with you

Her body a site of shadows
of wounds suffered in the past
Her soul reflecting loud injuries
She a bundle of bones
knuckles and crooked joints
Twisting and turning she wriggles close
My fleshy hands reaching for money
in the chaos of my bag
To put on her craggy palms
extended for an embrace

what am I to her
and she to me
that we remain bound in that embrace

what has woven those threads between us,
do our ancestors awaken each full moon
to connect us
she calls me and I rise to walk tiptoe
on the rays of light
and become her.

Sukrita

MAYA RIDING ON TSUNAMI

The ocean's floor has
edges and
wrinkles on the face
grandmother earth
cracking in a flash

Shadows dancing
on the floor of the ocean

Nudging
the fluid mass

Below the perfect calm of
deep waters

Shadows slithering
and transforming
into primordial tongues
of fire in water

Ghosts of
Naked hunger
Rise into the skies
And the racing army
of dinosaurs
with frothy mouths

Strike the shores
in frenzy

Gulping
sands, brick and mortar,
husbands, daughters, wives, sons,
uncles and aunts,
Wrapping them all into the underworld

But not so for Maya
The miracle girl
Floating unscathed
on Noah's Ark,

The effortless survivor
with all her thirteen years
Resting on the floating door
separated from
her house,

Thrown far into the ocean
by killer waves

Maya biting her nails
Scratching her head
and dozing off,

Licking drops of
Coke from the abandoned can,
Amidst reptiles,

Maya clinging to the door
of innocence,

The door to survival,
In the face of tsunamis
Of the past and future, both.

..... Sukrita