

## Cow tries to save girl

back then, i had no swords to stop the wounds they made.

i swallowed words, ran to the river. buttermilk froth  
churned over stones inside me till the wounds  
formed wormholes to crawl through.

i now sit in this room, sift through grainy footage  
on YouTube. 32,000 views. two men stab their honor  
back into her, the spilling & staining  
blurs when the cow gores the men & the girl

runs away from my screen, her scream  
i try to follow its path through muscles  
& swollen bone joints, ligaments like rubber bands  
snap back into place, almost. i was chasing

damsel<sup>flies</sup>. he grabbed my arm—*there, you lost just a little bit  
of yourself*, they said. i climbed trees not to hide from cows  
or carts dragged through mud, that creaking sound, Baba wouldn't  
listen, *hide that ugly frothing* so i cried, then smiled

sang a song in rhythm with the clinking chain  
on the brown cow's throat & Jija said,  
*children forget like flies*—it was the electricity uncle  
by the transformer on the river bank

he caught a damselfly for me, tied a string  
to its belly, made it lift tiny stones twice the weight  
of its body, until one half flew away.  
its tube belly twitching in my palm

all that slime—*sindoor-box, don't spill & stain  
the family*. i swallowed it like buttermilk, sour burning  
the back of my throat, froth silent on lips, i held it in like hard liquor  
for twenty-eight years, always crawling back

through the wormhole in my pubic bone to the mud-bank  
where lightning struck the *peepal* tree twice, thrice, split  
the spine in half, dead weight i could not carry, cellular memory  
strewn on the river-bank, again

i had to honor him, with them. every *puja* day  
my smile frothed in shame—it made them.  
now this honor killing on my laptop screen  
another girl who ran

away from home. swords of father & brother.  
her bleeding belly caught on cctv.  
on this crowded market street, men watch  
with women, while a cow tries

to save her. i loop back to the start, watch it flow  
unstopped. they want me to stop, but how can i stop trying  
to stop

this froth spilling forward  
through time?

the cracking of bones, whipping  
ropes of muscles & the blood

of silence? this time  
I take a sword with me.