

Saheli Khastagir

Make space for love

That night she locked me out,
I stretched my arms between bars
asking the men on the streets to save me.
Those men, they find me now.

The hands that held my breasts were strangers' hands,
calloused and brown.
Their faces were different. The eyes, the same.

K carries her picture in his mobile phone
and brushes his legs against mine under the coffee table.
I am his summer vacation.

These hands are everywhere.
The hands, those eyes.
Never a shoulder. Never.
He gave me a shoulder.
He gave. He *offered*.
It was a shared room,
Not mine!

That year, I took needles and practiced geometry on my skin.
That night K, you sang the song that will haunt me still.
Remember K? Remember?
I downloaded your voice into my safety net.

She had me surrounded, my only source of nur-turance.
I was a suckling need.
When she pulled away, I thirsted in the dark.
Thirsted.
I held her when he made her weep.

When I was a child I learnt that love will either devour you, or throw you aside.
So I made my house in the middle land. Perfectly safe.
The interim. Always a secret.
Does your wife know how you touch me Sir?

I grew up behind my father's back.
On our last night K, last night before everything changed,
You told me you always loved me. You lied.

Saheli Khastagir finished a Masters' (in Psychology) this year, from Delhi University. An artist first and everything else later on most days, her art can be found at <http://sahelikhastagir.tumblr.com/>. Her poems have appeared in *Reading Hour*, *papercuts* (Desi Writer's Lounge), *Brevity Poetry Review* and elsewhere. She talks about her art and herself at <http://sahelik.blogspot.in/>.
