



Rebecca Vedavathy



On bathing

month one

she lies between stretched legs
the warmth she was born from
this time eager to escape it



communicating in wails
as i slowly
pour warm water over her,
coating her oiled skin with
gram flour
her little arms resist
we talk in a language
crying, cooing, clucking
it sounds a lot like tamizh
not the kind periyar spoke
our conversations began early on
now she responds in english

at five

splash! splosh! splush!
it feels like i am bathing with clothes on
she puts on soap by herself

i watch i play with the soap
bubbles she manages to rub on me
she has a mole on her back
i look away for a moment
she rubs her soapy hands into her
big fish eyes
there is crying, tickling, toddling
she waits for me to wrap her
in a towel, sometimes we pretend
the towel is a saree, we sing
amana kundi doriya chennapatnam poriya
she's aware of her body

at twelve



she stands in front of the bathroom
mirror, runs her fingers under her armpit
below her belly,

she finds a liquid mangrove flowing
from her thighs
muddy, it smells like
iron, crying, clutching, clenching
she leaves her underwear on the
bed for someone to find
it takes days for someone to tell
her she's not dying

at twenty-three

i am always running late, always have
to be someplace, every
other friend seems to have the temporal
luxury of a long hot bath, they come out sounding,
singing, smelling like coconut milk and shea butter i
come out soapy, leaving clumps of
hair in the drain, thinking about you:
your hands and I, we have
an unfinished conversation

at fifty-four

she takes the shortest bath
in she goes, clean she comes
that's that
she has perfected the art of
cleaning, cleansing, clarifying her body with no
excessive interest in it
she is open to answering questions



through the bathroom door

at ninety-two

a plastic chair holds her wrinkled body
the water is boiling hot, the steam
makes *me* sweat, her skin is a series
of paper folds, i gently
rub the soap under her fallen breasts,
her herniated belly spills
out she looks at me with dentured teeth
we don't talk
i pour three buckets of steaming
hot water onto her frail frame
there is the ritual of the powder

under her armpits and between her legs after
she is tired and falls asleep still
living, living, living

Aubade to the lost afternoon

After a meal of lentils and rice two bodies lie pleated in a duvet. She faces the open eyelid of the window, reading a book of poems. He is freshly shaven like a tongue of pineapple, sharp tickling her, lying on his side, one arm under her neck, another around her soft, fleshy belly. Their legs are folded at the knees — half open

book of Michael Ondaatje's poems.

There is a leafless tree above the window, below the balcony a powdery hillock of melting snow. The hands of the clock pay their second visit to half past four today. His breath is an even



metronome of sleep. In the poem, the lines — "my daughter burns the lake by reflecting her red shoes in it" — appear and she can feel a loss; burn is a word for the sun

running home in summer, hands covering eyes crying, after being too harsh. Malpractice of the feeling of guilt. She never had red shoes. He moves his arm away. Towards the red shoes. (T)here are red shoes on the banks of sleep. She can't reach them.

He will never know she writes while he sleeps in the bed of a dream he just had
where the girl with the red shoes
and peach salsa touched the
sleeve of the afternoon sky —
the curved lobe of his ear and
soon darkness fell upon
the evening chair.

Rebecca Vedavathy is a research scholar studying Francophone Literature in EFLU, Hyderabad. She won the Prakriti Poetry Contest, 2016. She longlisted in English Poetry for the Toto Funds the Arts Awards, 2017 and 2018. Her poetry has recently been published by Mascara Literary Review, Australia and Allegro Poetry Magazine, UK, Narrow Road Literary Magazine. She is currently a Shastri Indo-Canadian Research Fellow interning at the University of Quebec, Montreal.