

## Heirloom

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My mother knows a secret language.  
The women in her family spoke to each other in it.  
Often  
When a time-worn secret had to be rendered sacred,  
shrouded loftily in utterance.  
A guilty giggle handed down,  
closed fists on open palms exchanging stance.  
When anger revealed  
only to the ear - still ringing;  
An injury shared,  
it's wound wrapped around the cotton  
frayed off the edges of their uncouth sarees-  
the only times we *saw* winds blow.  
Sisters, Mothers, Daughters,  
rolling their tongues into shapes men never could untangle.  
My mother's mother had spoken that secret language.

My mother has tried teaching me the language.  
She sat me down and let me in on the secret.  
Her voice, my mother, cautioning;  
a jumped synapse in the mesh,  
toying only with a stray thread or two,  
practicing that look of surprise  
for when this unravels, as they do.  
On the other side of the glass,  
the grace-defying sarees left out to dry,

herald the Kalbaishakh-  
the hiss of the augury implicit in caution.  
My mother's words  
betting on defiance.  
Each day, Heirlooms are handed down.  
The rough edges, the pages that fray,  
the ocean drop of paisleys;  
I learn  
my mother's sleight of hand careful only to betray.  
Slowly,  
The seed my grandmother swallowed,  
grows into a tree in my belly.

