

Gowri K. is a Tamil American writer, performing artist, teacher, and lawyer. Her advocacy has addressed animal welfare, environmental protection, the rights of prisoners and the criminally accused in the U.S., and justice and accountability in Sri Lanka. Gowri is a fellow of the Asian American literary organization Kundiman, poetry coordinator at the non-profit arts organization BloomBars, a poetry events host at Busboys and Poets, senior poetry editor at Jaggery, and associate editor of Beltway Poetry Quarterly.

aged: selected true stories

At birth, I was named after
The character my mother
Played in the production that
Lit my parents' romance.

A name for a
Hindu goddess
Meaning
"Fair-skinned."
As if it were
A brown woman's
Greatest destiny.

At five, I invented masturbation
While watching cartoons.
My mother, upon finding me,
Informed my father
I was
"Exercising."

At seven, while examining
Naked Barbie dolls with
Jodi from down the street,
I incited a makeout session.

It's possible I had
More game
Back then
Than now.

At twelve,
I saw red and
Wailed to my mother,
"It's starting!"
She used
"It's our culture"
To justify
Decorating me in a sari and
Calling in the uncles and aunties
To hearken
My bloody announcement.

At fourteen I thought
My mother was dead.
She went to Sri Lanka
For her father's funeral.
We didn't hear from her for two months.

I punched a hole in a wall.
She escaped the war and
Came home
Broken.

At sixteen, I pretended I knew
What sex involved.
I didn't.
Luckily, no one bothered to try it with me.

At twenty and twenty one,
I was arrested at protests.
Didn't fear a thing besides the food they
Served in jail.

At twenty-three, I moved to
Sri Lanka to speak for justice.
Was hired by my hero and
Within three months
Attended his funeral.
I walked past the suicide bomber
After he struck.
His disembodied head, leg, and arm
Obstructing my path.

Like you, I've survived
Earth Breaks.
Heart Quakes.
And here we are
Still Beating.