

MEENA ALEXANDER

Desire (A poem Cycle)

1. Sweet Dark

Seeing you I could not shut my eyes.
It would be true to say
I did not get one hour of sleep.

Through the window, thickets of snow,
A placket of plane trees,
Someone else's tomb – whose I do not know.

The moon near full
Slips out of its petticoat,
Swims through window glass.

What's between us— fierce , moist, rumpled
Like these bedclothes,
Shimmering in body heat.

2. Dream Time

In a waking dream
I press my palm to the slope of your face,
Touch you where hair sprouts—

Blunt mouth hair—
Regardless.
I have grown to love you

Against my will.
I say this as if the will counted
In this sort of thing.

3. Sun Sign

The horoscope is exact
It says you and I will step
Down into darkness

Together—
This was based
On matching sun signs.

The spotted hawk drops
From the moon.
No one sees it.

4. Tunnel

A woman in the subway
In a fawn colored skirt
Grips a bright cello between her knees.

Scarlet, not the cello itself
Rather, its case.
The tunnel is something else.

We cannot know the tunnel
Except as aftermath.
Sempiternal rack, love's toil.

After the burning,
Strings of the cello reverberate.
So too your breath, a slight hiss, a quiver.

5. Damage

In my mind you stroke my shoulder bone
Through voile.
How can the body

Exist in the mind, like that –
You and I touching?
I used to dress

In voile petticoats
When I was a child, now a blouse
A summer's usage, merely.

Our bodies are filled with bone.
Surely you know that?
You see it with accidents

Of all sorts – some deliberate, others not,
The wounded one
Lying on the sidewalk

In between parked cars,
Flowering trees with umber petals,
Bones terribly displayed.

6. Desire

The painted body covering
The naked body
Belongs to the self on stage—

This is written in the *Natyashastra*.
Let the painted hand
Carry a fan

Scented with sandalwood
And attar.
Let the bare hand

Carry a phantom fan.
When the lover approaches
The lacquered fan

Will cool
The fleshly body.
And the fan

In the naked hand
Will set a ghostly self
On fire.

This excerpt is an Almost Island exclusive.