



Spirits

Poetry winner of the 2020 Writing in the Margins contest

by [Nikki Shaffeullah](#) Mar 1, 2021 2 min read Share  

*"I am bruising the way water does
after forty hours of rain
Awake under a pulling moon I stick
memos on the fridge: boil water, sweeten, stay."
—"Memos/The Thaw," Sasha Tate-Howarth*

Maybe trapped in the dark green glass
are hundreds of souls. Spirits of the great
great grandmothers, who, too, sought refuge
in polished bottles –
smooth while unbroken; sharp as fuck when smashed.
Maybe it is not simple, mortal intoxication, but
a haunting. The rivers mix: ghosts swim
from the drink to her blood.
She is swelling with their presence. I know because
I am bruising the way water does.

Deeper than oceans, channels twice removed
from their native basins. This blood is thicker
than the St. Lawrence, quicker
than the Demerara, sicker
than the Ganges. Like the kaniatarowanenneh
her name is buried treasure. To dig, she does not deign.
Bottles floated to the surface, in easy reach
on that kala pani crossing. In the land of many waters
plantation dirt could be softened. Still, it numbs the pain
after forty hours of rain.

She is bound
by their possession. She is a vessel
for fire. She is teeming, teeming with theirs, and hers.
I chisel at the bottom of my cup, making space for her
downward spills. I want to be held by our natural hierarchy.
But what is thirty years to centuries? Time spirals quick.
Which is the potion that makes a mother grand,
a grandmother great? We seek earth and air.
In the sun, a waxen puddle, where there was once a wick.
Awake under a pulling moon, I stick.

She is bound for greatness: that she finds, and claims
and makes for herself. She takes them dancing.
Reggae and calypso on a Sunday evening.
Rum and reds effuse incantations of their own,
carrying us somewhere closer to freedom.
She lets them rest. She lets them play.
I too could dance. On silent nights
I could bring cups to her kitchen.
And you have, in ours, for me, warm tea, every day.
Memos on the fridge: boil water, sweeten, stay.