

The Slow Way Home

Loretta Randall Sharp

She leaves the women in her husband's house
and makes a slow way home
to her own mother, to friends singing
as they bring sweet butter
for the first month, molasses
for the second, radish, the third.
Nine kinds of giftgiving
fill full the life cycle,
and then singing sisters
bracelet her bare arms,
 first a circle of healing *nīm*,
 then elephant hair to match her task
 and bangles of green glass
 because she is fragile and glad.

Taking to themselves a paste
of rice and clarified butter,
the hands of women rub
in slow circles the tight flesh
rising with what will yet be.

LORETTA RANDALL SHARP is currently at the Taipei American School. She has recently received a 1989-90 Creative Artist Award from the Michigan Council of the Arts to complete a manuscript of poems about women and goddesses of India.

At the midwife's nod, water
is heated, oil warmed,
and she is settled into a bed
rounded out from white sand.

But like Parvati, Devi, like all women
come home
she spreads her legs when the waters
will not be stayed, shapes sand new
each time the pains take hold.
Sinking to places she must go alone,
she rises, revived finally
by the high brine smell of blood,
by the infant held high, its cry
the cry of the mother birthing herself
again
and again.