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Freedom

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Freedom

The Facebook people came to Sri Lanka,
all the way to our little capital city.
They could not understand why we shut their site down,
that place which they called freedom,
that place from which a week ago
the Sinhalese radicals screamed for their followers
to burn Muslim houses to the ground.
My people, burning the homes of my people.
But the Facebook posts were in Sinhala, language of sixteen million,
and the west would not understand. This was the place of freedom,
the birthplace of #MeToo. How could it spawn anything else?

I thought of the screenshots they sent me from home,
the letters of my ancient language,
curling across the screen, spelling filth
which I could not translate into English.
Our stolen photographs, surrounded by insults, all up for auction,
our childhood gone with the click of a button.

But now people were dying, so they took the toys away.
Shut down the internet. Declared a curfew.

We are thankful that the dying stopped.
For the sake of our fathers and brothers, our beloved,
we are thankful that they reined in the freedom of speech,
we Sinhala and Muslim girls.
And yet.
When our souls were sold into darkness,
when we saw the blue-bordered screens and wanted to kill ourselves,
where were they, to say, "Enough?"

Lalini Shanela Ranaraja