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Saying The Words

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Saying The Words

I went to Walmart the week before Christmas
and Taylor Swift was in black on the cover of *Time*.
One of the women with her
looked like my grandmother.
I reached out on reflex, dropped a copy in the cart,
read it on the plane home.
Men surrounded me for a three-seat radius,
but maids and superstars and models were all saying the same thing.
Every time I read "He assaulted me" -
(touched me, tricked me, told me I wanted it) -
alarms flashed red in my peripheral vision.
I put the magazine in the seat pocket. The Indian man beside me
eyed it with suspicion. (Thirteen hour flight. Every time I slept
I clutched the belt buckle in my hand).
Home is dragonfly wings flashing through sunlight,
cool darkness under the trees at noon.
Bare feet on the mud path
behind the house. (Quiet).
This is a happy place. (It'll be easier for you if you kneel).
I give myself a shake, walk fast through the forest.
This is *my* kingdom.

...January. Rock Island. Snowstorms. A world away
from the void in my mind. (Worse things happen to other people every day).
Celebrities wear black. (Yes, yes, we are grieving).
Powerful men resign. But I am not Taylor Swift.
Lying in bed, the flash of the front-facing camera comes back.
Images ravage me. (The flickers are like paparazzi. Liar, liar, liar).
I am afraid of what I'll see
if I Google myself.

Something happened. Say the words. I am out of time
and something happened to me.
I talk to people about my best friend of five years.
I tell people I loved him.
I tell people I lost him.
I don't talk about the rest.
(Don't tell me later that I ruined you).
I wave no flags, I do not march,
but my time is near.
The long muddy pathway grows closer, shimmers.
The light burns iridescent. In my mind
a white Toyota arrives in the driveway. I stand tall.
Survivor. (Victim). Out of time.

Before I bear witness,
I must confront myself.
(The whole truth, and nothing but the truth).

Lalini Shanela Ranaraja