



## Surviving

Poems by Nirupama Dutt

translated from Punjabi by the poet

### *Suicide*

*She will not think of committing  
suicide now for it is difficult to devise  
ways of dying and then  
survive even the poison carrying  
the guilt that the money saved for  
the wedding feast  
went into a stomach wash.*

*Instead, she will take out of  
her mother's box  
the seven saris saved over many years  
and the locket with her  
grandmother's picture,  
which somehow escaped the eyes of  
her drunken father,  
and go to another house.*

*In the box she will leave her past  
tied securely into a bundle.*

*And then in that other house  
she may be burnt for  
bringing less dowry*

*and the newspaper the next day  
will speak of the death of  
another young woman  
due to a stove burst.*

### *Papa*

*"Mama, when will Papa come?"*

*"He will come soon", she says  
and looks out of the window  
of her father's house to which  
she has returned, a stranger.*

*"Does papa love us?"*

*"Yes, he loves us a lot", she says  
glancing at the wedding band on her  
middle finger—  
even gold pales with time.*

*"Will Papa send us money?"*

*"Yes, pots of it," and she  
pushes back the yellowing strap  
peeping out of the neck of her  
frayed silk blouse—  
silk shines but does not last.*

*"Will Papa bring me toys?"*

*"Yes, a boxful of them", and  
she looks at her brother's son  
playing with the toy train  
forbidden to her daughter —  
toys are prone to break.*

*"When did Papa go?"*

*"Only two months ago."*

*She is happy that her  
daughter has not yet  
learnt to count— it is difficult to count  
days.*

*"Why does auntie give apples to  
Sonu and not me?"*

*"Your Papa will bring you apples"—  
and lies rest in the vermilion mark on  
her forehead—  
some marry only a dot of lies.*

*"When will we have  
our own house, Mama?"*

*"Your Papa will come and take us to  
our own house" she says and draws  
a house on her daughter's slate —  
it is easy enough to draw a house.  
"What will you do when your Papa  
comes?"*

*The little girl looks up, surprised—  
since when did her mother learn  
to ask questions!—  
and answers slowly :*

*"Mama, Papa will not come."*