

## **I Never knew when I Arrived in this Country**

That my pillow might hold your scent  
As I tried to sleep, beginning to know  
you were with your first wife and son

That my dowry bought  
you and your parents  
a larger house in Richmond.

That if I believed you each time you warned  
you'd hurt me and our baby if I left,  
I would only feed the rakshas inside you.

That our elders' protests, our daughter's  
brimming eyes, and my shame  
might mean nothing to you

That I did not have to live  
with a man shouting,  
"I didn't choose to marry you!"

That the library and internet  
are such private places  
to find shelters and friends

That if I threatened to show your boss  
my bruises, it could stop you, mid-strike  
and I'd smell your thwarted breath

That I wouldn't be raped  
by a policeman or prostituted  
in a shelter, if I called for help.

That other women have seen  
the noose of Yama move behind  
their husbands' eyes, and survived

That I wouldn't have to take  
my three-year-old girl and leave  
our home --- instead, you would.

That if I did decide to leave and divorce,  
someone in this country  
would pay fairly for my work

That I could find one room with a stove  
and a fridge, and live with  
my daughter, on my own.

But I know now.

Shauna Singh Baldwin