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Kolam: the Art of Remembering

i

Every morning  
diligently  
as the koyals sing  
summer heat into  
translucence  
and branches  
wake up to  
chameli fragrance  
a village  
begins its day  
with women's kolam  
art  
of geometric shapes  
passed down  
from mother  
to daughter  
the heritage of labyrinths  
and mazes

Every morning  
diligently  
as the koyals sing  
mothers and daughters  
trace their journeys  
back  
to their source  
and strength

ii

I watch  
my mother's fingers  
enveloped  
in the giddiness  
of creativity  
in a game  
of memory  
Seventy some years  
falling away  
the pain of  
rheumatoid  
held at bay  
for now

she is a young girl

writing

her life

into meaning.

iii

Water washes away the dust

last night's sleep

remnants of regrets

pain lingering in the corner

spider webs and ant trails

And then she begins

bent like the arc of light

with rice flour

pinched

between thumb and fore finger

in quick loops and lines

an old pattern

begins to seep into the ground

a white shadow

of ancestral song

scripted on earth

like footsteps

of gods  
stepping  
through her threshold.

iv

I pull out paper  
after paper  
after paper  
and practice to trace  
the old art into  
the new art into  
my fingertips  
my nerves edged  
with the thrill  
of giving this blankness  
shape  
substance  
meaning  
while assiduously  
my brain forges  
a new encounter  
with my body  
and I am a dervish

dancing in whorls  
of my several selves  
becoming one

And on paper

after paper

after paper

a

lotus

blooms

v

She memorizes

the dots and grids

the curves

that scoop the universe

and bring it

to her feet

She remembers

destiny's shape in

plantain leaves

stitched together

while prayers

robbed her

of words

She forgets

to loop around

a dot

and life becomes

for a moment

a maze.