

UDAYLEE

Sujata Bhatt, award winner

Only paper and wood are safe
from a menstruating woman's touch.
So they built this room
for us, next to the cow shed.
Here, we're permitted to write
letters, to read, and it gives a chance
for our kitchen-scarred fingers to heal.

Tonight, I can't leave the stars alone.
And when I can't sleep, I pace
in this small room, I pace
from my narrow rope-bed to the bookshelf
filled with dusty newspapers
held down with glossy brown cowries and a conch.
When I can't sleep, I hold
the conch shell to my ear
just to hear my blood rushing,
a song throbbing,
a slow drumming within my head, my hips.
This aching is my blood flowing against,
rushing against something—
knotted clumps of my blood,
so I remember fistfuls of torn seaweed
 rising with the foam,
rising. Then falling, falling up on the sand
strewn over newly laid turtle eggs.

