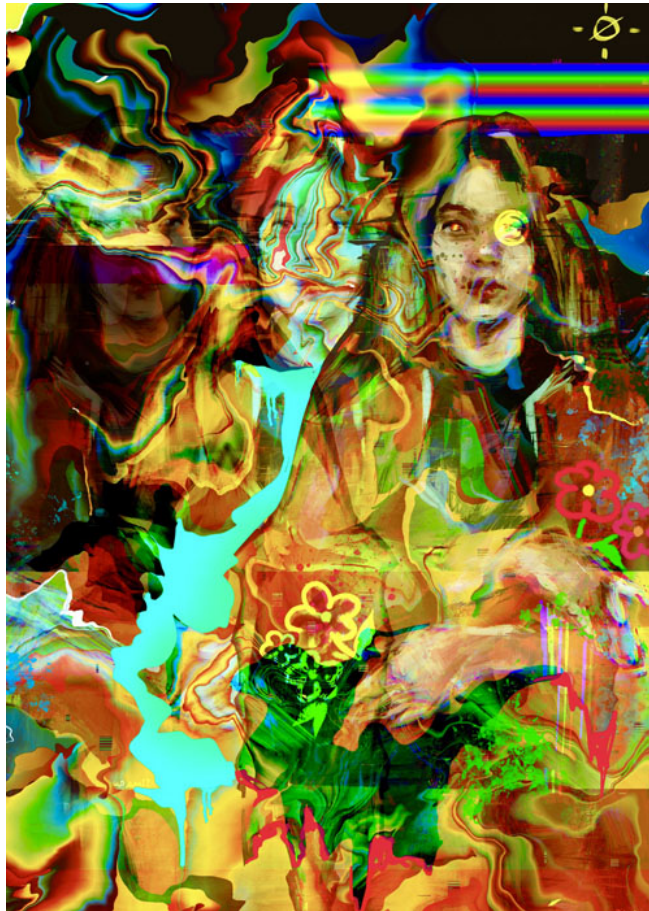


# The third child's love affair

by Pragma Dhiman



"Woman" by Anastasia Dzyba

I ate lizard eggs as a child and the wallpaper that turned cream  
like the ocean iced and rain water when it kissed my skin in last  
summer's yellow dress

I saved for an occasion no less than that of my  
seventeenth birthday  
handed down from my sister's cousin's friend  
because it's fun to play pretend,  
to donate, translate a lazy yawn,  
give away your trash to the third world country kid  
who never even knew the joy of a functioning tap.

Water here tastes like salt and the soil tastes like  
blood but

I still fell in love with the only place  
I can play house.

It's a shame, really, three rooms for  
a family of twelve and  
sleeping on the bedroom floor  
stuffing ears with cotton to ensure  
no rodents or cockroaches would make your brain  
their home.

Where else can I really go?

I live in a place where we use each other's  
names as insults,  
where kids from the south hate kids from the north  
where conversations are long  
but I just cannot keep these friendships alive  
because I keep falling in love  
with the idea of the isolation lie.

So I only cry at night when no one can see  
poor lonesome me, hungry for a love affair so deep  
it will turn knees weak, love pouring  
into my mouth, so when I speak  
the only words that shall ever leave  
will be no less than ancient, epic love poetry  
and this tongue belonging to a third world country

will despise, full of dignity, the faces that look at it  
with shameless, condescending pity.