

# Snake Oil, Snake Bite

By Dilruba Ahmed

They staunched the wound with a stone.  
They drew blue venom from his blood  
until there was none.

When his veins ran true his face remained  
lifeless and all the mothers of the village  
wept and pounded their chests until the sky  
had little choice  
but to grant their supplications. God made  
the boy breathe again.

God breathes life into us, it is said,  
only once. But this case was an exception.  
God drew back in a giant gust and blew life into the boy  
and like a stranded fish, he shuddered, oceanless.

It was true: the boy lived.  
He lived for a very long time. The toxins  
were an oil slick: contaminated, cleaned.  
But just as soon as the women  
kissed redness back into his cheeks  
the boy began to die again.  
He continued to die for the rest of his life.  
The dying took place slowly, sweetly.  
The dying took a very long time.

Source: *Poetry* (November 2013)