

How Many Secrets?

I don't know her name, the Chandigarh girl,
who was raped by her uncle, and I don't know
that just because I, too, was once a ten-year-old girl

in braids that I have any right to speak of her—
but who will speak for her—she who had no right to her body,
or to know that what bumped up inside her

was not a kidney stone. If it is true we all begin
as female before testosterone washes through
the womb to make some of us male,

isn't she close to being the mother of us all?
At six months pregnant, denied an abortion
by the Indian court, denied to her parents, that is,

who have not told the girl she was pregnant,
who now has had the baby
cut from her as she lay in numbed

sleep—the baby girl unseen
by her or by her parents.
Why did she finally tell them about her uncle—

her stomach pains a month earlier?
What did she make of the heaviness of her breasts?
Now I see her stitched-up belly healing.

How she'll have to go on when her whole life
things have been done to her—for her.
Now I can see her married off

at fifteen, the stomach pains returning.
When the anesthesia of not-knowing
wears off, let her mouth unstitch itself

even if it means knowing she has survived
one cycle of suffering only to be borne
into another.