Dearest,

METTA SÁMA

Did I pray for you? No
Did I wait for you? No
Did I dream of you with my eyes wide open? Eternally

Dearest, what it's like to hold outside of the body the very body that never nestled inside the body. Lonely. It is lonely. As lonely as it must be to be you, held by the arms that never rested on the idea of you, to be comforted by the hands that never rubbed the belly that nurtured you. Lonely. It is lonely. As lonely as it must be to crack through your protective case only to find the chirping around you unfamiliar, frightening.

But dearest, did I dream of you with my eyes closed tight? Eternally

I am not one given over to praying but once I did sit in a crowded coffeeshop and watched a woman and her child pray over a cup of hot cacao and in that moment I thought of praying for such a moment with my own child but instead I wrote a poem of longing. Longing is lonely work. Exhausting, too. How you must see me daily when I look at you with labor-exhausted eyes. The exhaustion snuffing the light, making us dread home.

Some nights I want to curl up and disappear. Become nothing but the expanse of nothingness. Once, when we were both so ill I could hardly move, I walked outside with the dogs and stood in the middle of the parking lot, imagining what would happen if I just laid down and let the night air take me. I've seen that look in your eyes, too, little one, that look of longing to escape, longing for your other
Dearest,

mother, the one you call your real mother. This is the crisis, isn't it? The one that will define us forever.

Did I pray for you?

No. I'm not the praying type. But as a child your age, I dreamt of having another mother. I dreamt many things. Longing dreams. I dreamt I was an Italian warrior. I dreamt I was floating in a raft

in the middle of the ocean, a baby, too small for anyone to see.
I dreamt I was in a cotton field, a tiny child wielding a scythe, the sun searing my wounds, no mother to hide behind. Lonely dreams. I dreamt I lived on a burnished sidewalk, my clothes, falling from my form, not enough for some kind hand to see me, to take me in. I dreamt I was unalive, never here. Never here. Words were unfamiliar to me.

I dreamt I was someone else's daughter. The woman who was my mother was faceless, formless. She was the universe. I never slept through the nights. Wanting awakened me. Wanting something other. Some person who was me without being me. These nights are also sleepless.
I lie in bed waiting for the door to open, for you to drag yourself in, pillow in one hand, giant stuffy in another, awakened by the same dream: your mother has died. I have died and you come to me, scared, brave, protector, and I lie in bed and wonder, who is the mother. What is mother?
About the author

Metta Sáma is author of *Swing at your own risk* (Kelsey St. Press, 2019), *the year we turned Dragon* (Portable Press @ Yo-Yo Labs, 2016), and *After “Sleeping to Dream”/After After* (Nous-zot Press, 2014), among other titles.

Sáma directed both the Center for Women Writers (CWW) and the creative writing program and chaired the English Department at Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where she also taught. Sáma served on the advisory board of Black Radish Books and on the board of Cave Canem Foundation, Inc. She is the founder of Artists Against Police Brutality/Cultures of Violence and is a senior fellow at the Black Earth Institute.