

HELEN MOORE

Monsoon June

After the Christian Aid advert depicting a South Asian woman up to her neck in water, with the caption — *Do us a favour will you? Write to your MP about that climate change bill!*

The water's encircling my neck, Kali –
a damp strangle like the hands of my brother,
when he's too drunk to know better.
And these rags I called a sari
are wings trailing in these fields-turned sea
that flap me up to rooftops, bridges
where we perch with our dry-lipped children, waiting.

Sometimes when darkness laps at our feet
and the Moon throws us silver shackles,
I lie awake, wishing your four arms would pincer me away,
prize my skull among the garlands
that chatter from your breasts
as you dance the charnel-grounds with Lord Shiva.

But I must be strong for all our little ones;
and so each day I wade with my hollow-bellied vessel –
like a girl trying to swim, her float so buoyant – praying
you'll speed my return, Kali, the long, long way from the pump,
the burden pressing on my head.

The stink I can accept, bloated corpses, flooding
sewage – but keep those scaly Muggers snoozing in their lairs
now their hunting grounds are everywhere.
And yes, I do seek protection, dear Durga,
though I've made no offerings – the usual ball of rice
and flowers – but we have nothing now,
and the plants are drowned.

Archana says the villages of Maharashtra come last
for handouts because the newsmen never visit –
they stay in Mumbai where sacred cows
are floating in the streets.

The holy men believe these are the heaviest rains
India's known in all her history –
in the city many houses have no light, telephone, or water

from the tap. And so perhaps we're lucky?
When rains sweep the world away,
we know how to live on the edge.