Between a rock & –
By Purvi Shah

"But not only there; let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia!" – Martin Luther King Jr.

"Tourmaline is more resistant to weathering than the associated minerals of the pegmatite, and will stand above the weathered surface of the pegmatite." – Robert L. Atkins and Lisa G. Joyce, Geologic Guide to Stone Mountain Park

If you meet with the mountain, you may see three ghosts

of past atrocities (temporarily) – fossilized.

Even as King drummed hundreds
of thousands of feet
to enfranchisement, carvers birthed

Stonewall's face, anointing confederate trinity
alongside Lee & Davis. To remain safe

from rain – or to stretch
their vista to witness rebirth

of white

robes, those who anointed
in stone could nestle into horse's open mouth. Even so,

embedded
as promise, luster

of tourmaline,
lattice of blackness older than American

segregation. How do you destroy blackness

when it belongs to the land? Even if you came as a settler – and are adept

at destruction – this mountain birthed
itself first, in a time before our time. If,

in a time before this time, a poor but white man knocked

at our rural Georgia apartment door, demanding money
under false pretenses, and then you saw your father tremble

and your mother come forward but draw back,
and if your father were to say, we thought you would be too

young to remember, then you know
you too have the memory

of tourmaline, of presence

which stands tall even under surveillance of false gods. If you find

not a mountain but a plaza, you no longer
require the conditional. Now: see a rapture

of 70s bell bottoms and chiffon saris, our families
splayed across swaths of green, and know even

under the trophy of confederacy, you can collectively chisel
a course to democracy. Dreams

from the igneous are echoing: know we will
outlast your weathering. We will remember

our elders' wishes to forget in the custom of rivers –
rushing forward, whole & thirsty, embracing flows,

life-spawning. In the presence
of our oldest selves, communion

of rock & time, in the presence of life
ongoing, we commit to living

in the rock & the hard place, to knowing ourselves

as emergence,
as future memory,
as the resistance from which freedom thrums.

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