

Mahvash K.M.

QUENCHLESS

The streets cook in the yeasty sun
The concrete melting in little mirages
In the corner of my eye, I see
The vegetation sizzle on the sidewalks
The tops are over-done, burnt
The undersides stick to the earth
In a grotesque masquerade
Of some now forgotten vital bond
Roots and soil cling together
Like dogged carcasses to the bone
The street dogs lie half dead
Parched tongues loll out now and then
A sluggish scrape against the grit
And they escape
Back into the desert caverns of their mouths
I pick my way along the street
Shimmer-sharpened by the heat
I feel it reach
Hellish fingers through my soles
Heat-divining for my soul
I hurry on but Hades' torrid lick
Is already on my swollen lips
His hoary sizzle has found its mark
My tar-seared feet slow to a crawl
My essence drips out in burns
Upon oil-scorched temples and brows
Down my thighs and my neck
I cannot move another step

I sit on a steaming bench
To drench the rest of me
In the quenchless, wrenching sun.

THE BOUGAINVILLEA

O Beauteous one
This is for you
For all the times that you have bloomed
When all around have burrowed deep
Into the coolness of earth's breast
Hiding away, biding their time
Until gentler, lighter climes
Bestir them in their loamy beds
But you, O Intrepid one
You have always overcome
You have worn your gem-like garb
In ways that made me catch my breath
Racing, chasing to my heart
Wondering if you'd shimmer on
Or if your time here too was done
But you wore your jeweled crown
Glittering in the scorching sun
I looked at you, O Enchanting one
As you cavorted with the breeze
Those molten gusts upon my skin
I gulped in then, the oxygen
That sat timorously in the air
But I was pulled
By the oasis that surrounded you
Perfect, paradisiacal
Unsundered by the elements
There you danced so full of joy
I came to you pulled by the spell
Of your vividness, O Alluring one
You swayed your head
Spangled whorls overspread
Across the fretwork of your boughs
Mesmerized I reached out
Into your magic latticed web
You pricked me then, O Bewitching one
Your thorns were invisible, hidden
I knew then that your glittering grace

Your wild gumption to face the sun
Aren't just in the softness of your blooms
But in the armor that you've chiseled from
The tempests - stormy and searing
I looked at the ruby that had sprung
On my fingertip that you had stung
It dazzled on my glistening skin
Its precious seams filling my lungs
My essence and throb, O Wondrous one
I found that day in the scorching sun.

(G)OLDEN (S)WINGS

I see the swing again
Not the same but very like
The one I used to fly upon
A lifetime ago, I'm caught
In a clutch of rememberings
It was my first day of school
I was the quiet one, reticent
So shy the teacher would be inclined
To ask another little girl
To take me under her fledgling wings
A few minutes before
The 11 o'clock bell would ring
All kinds of dreadful things
Would clasp my little heart
It would hammer in its cage
As time closed upon the break
Even as I rushed towards her desk
Don't forget! please don't forget!
To pick a friend for me today!

I'd come back home tired out
My little head would pound and pound
I couldn't understand it then
But I would go out and reach
For the sturdy ropes of the swing
As it rocked gently to and fro
Waiting to hold me in
Its reassuring cradling
I'd swing and swing and swing up high
Chase out all the daytime angst
With every forward rush
With every surge up to the sky
I'd breathe in anew and fortify
Until my sore heart soared again
I couldn't understand it then
This self-soothing, this consoling

Life went on, it's ebb and flow
I duly shifted to my swing
That I always found along the way
Into its vital comforting
The whoosh of the wind a lullaby
A hypnotic whisper in my ears
To let my troubles fall away
To just fly and fly and fly up high
As I kicked off into the liquid sky

When you went away
I stopped looking for my swing
That hollowness, that grief
Those are things the lulling breeze
Could not fill and cannot ease
Their echoes ring, as they wring
At heartstrings that pull them in
I will not let them fall away
Steeped, replete with memories
I now carry all of these
Tenderly, eternally
Unwilling to set them free
Upon a beclouding and numbing breeze.

AUTUMN SKIES OF BLUE

Do you remember that autumn day
The day you came upon me in the park?
I stood in the shadows of the banyan tree
Preparing for a final flight of the heart
You swept along so light and so true
'Hello' you said 'this October sky is so blue!'

I was taken aback, I was agitated
I stood there awkward, uncertainly
You didn't walk on, you stood there rooted
Like an interfering angel on a samaritan spree
I didn't want to hear what you had to say
I wished you'd sprout wings and just fly away

So I looked through you, hoping that you'd go on
But you just ambled around my space
The one I had for hours thought upon
Where I'd finally leave this wretched place
This life, this strife, this gnawing misery
This heart that keened so relentlessly

But you stayed and then you held my hand
All this while I had not said a word to you
You had looked into the depths of my soul
And you knew ... my friend, you just knew!
I remember the withered grass you sat with me on
The sun was hidden, but your own light shone

We sat and we sat, you by my side
An angel, a friend, a beautiful stranger
You parried with such elegant ease
My monsters of desperation and danger
Your warmth enveloped my aching heart
That day you pulled me out of my abysmal dark

Now here you lie in a white satin bed
Shrouded in the scents of final farewells

I touch your hand, it lies cold and inert
Your eyes are closed, your breath is still
I couldn't save you dear friend, from final cessations
But then you always were the angel in our equation.