

By Maurya Simon

What I want most is what I deeply fear:  
loss of self; yet here I stand, a “mehsaheb,”  
all decked out in wonder, and still a stranger  
amid the harvest, old gaffar at my side.

Here’s a pandit preaching in the flower stall:  
he turns funeral wreaths into wheels of rapture.  
I must shrug off my notion of knowing anything  
of substance about the world, about the spirit.

Sparrows dart between the columns like music.  
Huge pupae, bananas split their golden skins;  
flies moisten their hands in bands of dew.  
Lepers limp by on crutches, in slow motion.

Where is there order in the world? None,  
none, I think—no order, only spirals of power.  
The pyramids of onion, guava, melon—all defy  
my reason: they shine like galaxy-driven planets.

A balancing scale becomes a barge of plenty,  
a cornucopia endlessly filling up and emptying.  
The wages of sin are more sin: virtue’s wages,  
more virtue—and all such earnings, weightless.

I’ve forgotten my errand; I float now through  
myself like a howl through a phantom mouth—  
the world’s an illusory marketplace where I  
must bargain hardest for what I hope I’m worth.

Maurya Simon, “Russell Market” from *Poetry* 164 (July 1994). Used by permission of the author.

Source: Poetry (1994)