

Russell Market

By Maurya Simon

What I want most is what I deeply fear:
loss of self; yet here I stand, a “memsahib,”
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.

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