

Meenakshi Jauhari

A Ghazal for Summer

Living in your eye, I am an invisible salt tear unshed in the wind,
A heavy-hearted cloud stooped on grey skies, floating in the wind.

When I lost my way through forests, rain and clouds were allies,
This, finding the road, makes me yearn for the sun basking in the wind.

She came one day and went away in a perfumed daze,
Now her fragrances drift and eddy on wings of the wind.

All my waiting was rewarded then, the years did not matter,
Do you count the steps to paradise, number straws in the wind.

I remember our days of youth, the exuberant music of life,
On this road to death, the song sinks to a whisper in the wind.

Morning passed, and leaning on my arm, evening passes too,
Bowed before divine will, bending knee before destiny's winds.

Build me a home in the mountains this summer, my love,
We'll walk the light-washed meadows in the grass winds.

Winter

The homeless stars silence their fires at the end of the night,
The mystery of a winter's night lights up at the end of the night.

I travelled a hundred miles, my shadow leading me on or trailing behind,
All at once it betrayed me, thieving half of me by the end of the night.

I longed for a sight of you in the *barzakh* of paused afternoons,
You faded away, and I learnt the pain of a moonless end of the night.

Life's spin wheel turns, and turns again, throwing shadows on cave walls,
A dream-voice cracks the mirror and my soul is lost, there's no end of the night.

I ask: what meaning has this life? What substance? What weight?
Open your eyes! these pebbles of light are veiled by the end of the night....

My world is crumbling, the sky is melting, and winter scorches my face,
Who knew that glimmered gaze would die—wherefore the end of the night?

Demon on the Loose

It begins slow, and small—a new experiment—
a lab rat is placed in a bell jar—observed carefully—

Will he live? Will he struggle to break free?
How long before he claims his new periphery?
How long before he yields to his truncated territory?

The bell jar then opens its mouth wide, and takes in
more rats,
other creatures,
and all the men—

A demon on the loose—a demon so huge
you can't pretend it doesn't live,
its jaws so wide, eventually, everyone will fit—
an entire country...
a full world...

and just like that one morning, as you open the
living room window to let in a new day,
a new world order is formed—
and the demon is all you can see and hear—

It doesn't happen in one day, or with a bang—

Your world changes slowly,
in rat-sized pieces,
and bell jar-sized 'law-full' fangs—

Grace

Could we bear the sight of God's smile?
Even if it were gentle...
Enclosed in the breath of the morning breeze
or the mysterious stirring a rose brings, in passing -
sun-fringed dark clouds on high, wild geese—

Could our ears discern music of the divine?
When threaded through faraway galaxies, and big
magical trees that sigh inexorable endings,
sing luminous melodies, as night
alights on their patient limbs—

Could we know the poetry of wild tropical storms?
Edging indoors through tight-lipped windows,
then banging loudly, or when terribly angry,
stamping their feet on the ground—

Would we know? Would we know?

Could we recognize and weep—
the felicity and grace...
the silent deep, last embers of day....

Would we instinctively know what
home on earth looks like
with its unmistakable divine trace....

Hope without Feathers

Look for a crack to let in a beam...
it's all you need to ride out...

A window that won't shut the last nano-inch,
the skeleton-feet of a locked door...

A slender sliver of golden or yellow or just a greyish dawn—
that slips in unnoticed, uninvited...

Let your eyes get bewitched with the particles dancing on the knife edge
Let your feet wake up, and follow your eyes

Get your broken hands to dance along...

Hope is that thing we thought had feathers...

I have seen it as a thin watery line
of un-dark that begins in a dark dark place,

and then grows
into an angel of light....

About the Poet

Meenakshi Jauhari has been writing poetry and short fiction for more than thirty years. During the last decade, she has focused on writing and translating poetry, specifically Indian contemporary poets like Amrita Pritam. Her poetry anthology *The Fish who Flew* was published in 2019 by Writers Workshop, Kolkata. Her short fiction has been featured in reputed literary journals such as *Indian Literature* (Sahitya Akademi), *TLM (The Little Magazine)*, *Out of Print* and *The Poetry Society (India) Journal*.

She was born in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, and spent her childhood in Jamshedpur, Bihar, where her father worked with the Tata Group. Having earned a degree in computer science from the Birla Institute of Technology, Ranchi, she worked in the IT sector until the turn of the millennium, when she moved to publishing and writing for radio. She is currently working on translating early Urdu literary works into English. She now lives in Gurgaon with her husband and son.