



The Bane of Womanhood

AFRIN HAQUE ARANYA

Oh woman, made from gold and fire.
 Chained into a dungeon
 of slaughtered dreams.

Woman, you've been claimed to marry
 the moment you had been born red and squealing, enveloped within a
 towel.

Woman, they asked, which man of such dishonour would take a woman so
 dark, light, emaciated and obese?

Woman, you're taught to smile
 But not laugh.

You're taught to whisper.
 And not shout.

Woman, of caramel skin, skin so raw, stretched into platinum. You're taught
 to walk when you learn to run.

Oh woman!

Whose dresses are sewn longer, threaded;
 into disappointments, jewelled in melancholy.
 Because, your body, you, too, they said, are made for fun.

Hide!

The men, they'll catch you,
 In your sleep, when you wake.

For all a woman is made for is to please a man.

So dream not too far,

But behind a kitchen door and in golden shackles.

Dream of children, because, woman, you were made to be a mother,
 When you wished not to be.

Woman,

They said, man and you are both shaped from mud, they said,
 But you, dirt!

While

Your brothers are taught

not to fight like a girl, so they blossomed into men who knew how to break
 legs when their wives stood straight on their own money toes. But oh
 woman, you thought you held her close!

You are everything I wish I was and everything I am and more, you are the
 beacon of afire love. Eternal grace. You are strength.

So woman, with songs of rebellion and poetry of ice. So woman,
 of purple scars and gasoline stench,

So woman, all the times you've helped me cope.

So woman, those chains are just as mine as they are yours;

Oh woman, my love,

You're my last hope. Oh woman, raise that voice of yours
 And my dear, let's escape.

The writer is a student of SFX Greenherald International School.

HEAVEN in the Sky

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

The lamp's frail light cut the darkness in
 yellow rays. And the cramped house
 with broken furniture spoke of poverty.

"What is wrong with Aiko?" Papa
 inquired.

"Typhoid," she blurted out as she ran
 a wet cloth over Aiko's scorching head.

"I am afraid that typhoid in preg-
 nancy is a massive threat to the mother
 and child," Yang added while glimpsing
 at Mika's innocent eyes.

"Is there any cure?" he inquired
 worriedly.

"Cross the border. You won't find
 anything here," came her quick reply as
 she prescribed the medicine.

Mika poked her father on the elbow
 after she left.

"Didn't Leong's mother and her
 baby die of typhoid? Could it be the
 same with Mum and the baby?" Mika
 asked.

"Sssh, don't say that, darling.
 Nothing will happen to Aiko and the
 baby," Papa assured Mika as his voice
 veiled the fear that reigned within.

Mika held her mother's hands tightly
 to her chest. And Papa waved a hand-
 fan over her sweating body.

The next day he went to the village
 market with a faint hope of finding the
 medicine Yang had prescribed. The
 market lacked regular necessities as the
 country had been plagued by all kinds
 of suffering. It was more like a lifeless
 patch of land. They tortured their own
 kind. They neither provided them an
 access to a normal life nor let them
 escape the land. The fleers were sent to
 the torturing camps when they failed to
 cross the border.

Papa mustered the courage to bring
 the medicine anyhow from the adjacent
 country often described as heaven by
 the countrymen. And he thought of
 fleeing this land with his family once
 Aiko became alright. Though the unfor-
 tunate tales of his known people get-

ting caught and facing the authority's
 wrath haunted him, he was firm on his
 decision.

The ocean had claimed the sun
 before he got home. Freeing his legs
 from the stiff boots, he sat beside Aiko
 and Mika.

"I am leaving tonight. I will be get-
 ting the medicine for you, and after you
 get okay, we will hopefully escape from
 this country," he said quickly. These
 words jolted both Mika and Aiko since
 it was all too sudden.

"But you will get killed. Don't you
 know what happened to Msai and her
 daughter when they were caught?" Aiko
 fumed with anger.

"Don't worry, darling. Nothing will
 happen to me," came Papa's persuading
 reply as he clutched Mika and Aiko in a
 tight hug.

He rummaged through the rickety
 shelf to pack the necessities for the
 risky journey while Aiko and Mika
 aided him.

"Goodbye. Take care of Aiko and the
 baby, Mika," he glanced at Mika with a
 pacifying smile after he kissed Aiko and
 her swollen belly.

As he slid outside the door, Mika
 and Aiko broke down in tears. Papa
 didn't seem afraid of death. A pool of
 tears welled in his eyes too, but he held
 them back. He knew he had to be
 strong. He didn't glance back at them.
 He knew that doing so would have
 stopped him from going. They were
 unattached magnets, and Papa's pace
 was the separating force until they
 became two different poles.

A month elapsed. The cold winds
 made the air nippy. Mika sat on the
 porch as her mother's lifeless body
 rested on her lap. The baby had
 stopped kicking inside her too. Mika's
 tears dried up. She caught a glimpse of
 the sky, aware that Papa couldn't make
 it to the heaven across the border. But
 he certainly made it to the one that
 reigned over the sky.

