

# Five o o o o o Poems

By

*Jessica Mehta*

**WHY I LIKE IT; Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...***Jessica Mehta is spellbinding, if not bound for greatest, I'll be gagged: To bad I'm not, and lucky for us she isn't. With each brushstrokes of her implement, from 'Fingers in the Foxglove,' 'Filthy Tiger Chai Soap' to 'Flora and Fawna,' she writes strikingly, as I permit myself to steal her thunder: "...When I picked him up, / he was hollow, eaten clean through, / a shell / of what he'd never become." What's more, in 'Exchange Rate of a Pound,' "I shrank down fun / sized to make you love me" "the nobodies and some / bodies and curious sticky / eyes" Is Jessica mega-meta- or what? "when automated garage doors / didn't register my number?" "The headache clung like a teething child" "between noosed ropes of necklaces and rings made from typewriter keys" . . . "Between the apple trees and past the pumpkin patch, I rode...my pony a horse, a unicorn, a hooved goddess on speed." Beautiful, to paraphrase the artist, what she slips fast in our pocket can't hide in your fist. Gist when you guest, 'what can't she do?' Scope the site 'RoseUp' she'll answer that too. Not sure if I'm aloud to plug 'em or not . . . Here's one for us, if Mehta has deigned to submit to Fleas, we must gotta be doin' some thing, right? I just might be fondest of 'Flora and Fawna,' and not just 'cause of the wordplay; but it's almost just next to impossible to choose. Each one's a winner, with Jessica, you just can't lose. Let's get Mehta-physical. (To maintain poet's spacing, each poem is on a separate page. Please scroll down.)*

*Fingers in the Foxglove*

Dead winged beasts fell  
all around me—for a week  
I stepped over a sparrow  
chick fallen from the heavens  
of my cottage. *He just gave up*  
*before giving life a chance.* I asked you

if swans fly. You told me  
you didn't know, but they're protected  
by the monarchy. I walked on butterflies  
at the garden and clawed  
my fingers into the foxglove  
soil. Here, I was to bury  
the chick. When I picked him up,  
he was hollow, eaten clean through,  
a shell

of what he'd never become.

*Exchange Rate of a Pound*

I shrank down fun  
sized to make you love me  
and prove my strength  
to the world, all  
the nobodies and some  
bodies and curious sticky  
eyes. It's easier to love

what slips fast  
into your pocket, what  
you can hide in your fist  
to pull from a child's  
ear. Was I simpler to love

when automated garage doors  
didn't register my number? Lighter  
to bear when only kid blood  
pressure monitors fit? Tell me  
it was worth it, that I made a good  
choice, that I bought  
your approval (my god, the price)  
with my weight, pound  
after pound after toddler  
clutching mom's skirt scared pound.

*Filthy Tiger Chai Soap*

That headache clung like a teething child  
every morning I awoke in New York,  
and the Hindi filled my mouth—  
thick and blundering as an elephant calf—  
but still I pushed on.

Boy, *Ladkaa*,  
Where is he, *Vo kahaa hai*,  
All gone, *Sub khatam*.

I wandered the boroughs for miles,  
wore my boots down to dust,  
dug up hangnails and ground my bones  
to dull, aching pulses looking in vain  
for something you'd adore. Something  
that would bring me home.

It was in Greenwich Village, between  
noosed ropes of necklaces and rings  
made from typewriter keys where I found it.  
Filthy tiger chai soap, a tiny square  
of fat and spices  
shipped from somewhere as foreign  
and beautiful as you,  
somewhere so far away and alien  
that the words to take me back,  
Home, *ghar*,  
stuck fast and thick  
like dry roti in my throat. I choked  
on the perfectness of it all, teeth  
titing quick, jaw locking tight.  
I was an animal, I was the tiger,  
sloping hunched and silent  
and mad with cravings for you.

*End of the Harvest Season*

Between the apple trees and past  
the pumpkin patch, I rode my Shetland pony  
through Farmer Beebe's orchards  
down the street. I was five  
and my pony a horse, a unicorn,  
a hooved goddess on speed.

Together we flew between the fruit  
laden towers, my creped thighs  
rubbed raw against the leather, straps  
burning into my palms  
and in that instant we were whole,  
unbroken and alive. Later

in the pasture, her belly thick  
with hay and me itching for the wild, again  
we cocktailed together, her anger nipping  
tighter with each gallop. My beautiful beast  
turned sharp, bore down on the iron seesaw.

I learned early what it means  
to take a hit, blood and sharp-nosed  
pain, lips splitting dark,  
an over-ripened harvest. It took years  
to try again, hoisting onto her back,  
immortal and permanent as a throne. By then

the years had made me heavy, her shaky and old  
so that I might break her back in a cantor,  
her athanasia with each stride.

*Flora and Fawna*

Gift me peonies and it takes all my strength  
to stop myself from beating you senseless, the heavy heads  
drunken with blossom, begging for someone to grip them tight  
and bludgeon your endless curls with frantic idyllic petals  
into an explosion of fragrance. It's the same way  
I always ache to trudge through fresh snow, maddened  
by the perfection, to scoop  
out that first dollop of peanut butter, the insanity of flawlessness  
in the plateau too much to bear and yet

I've always resisted—willpower and a senseless respect  
for order, but this,

this weekend in the Gorge, hours on the road trailing  
behind us like pollen stains, you pointed a finger thick as god's  
to the frozen doe across the median, hooves cemented in time  
stepped into the highway, her fawn trailing behind, mere leaps  
ahead of us.

And when the sedan before us smashed

efflorescence towards the sky, a smattering of horridly stunning  
glass, fur, lean limbs  
the body shot beyond the rails, and I

I wanted to soak up that pain, wrap one of your blueblack curls  
around my forefinger,  
ask you to bring me peonies in inflorescence  
to gush and die,  
quietly,  
piece by piece, hour by hour, un-missed

and unnoticed in the corner.

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *Poetry has always been my best, most natural form of communication. I have "poems" I wrote at 6 years old. I am of the persuasion that, for better or worse, we write similarly to what we read. The driving force behind my work is my life, experiences, and in many cases it is an active tool of de-colonization. I am always reading, but favorite poets include Li-Young Lee, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. However, I write because I must. If the demons cannot sing, they will find another means of making their complaints known.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Jessica Mehta, PhD is an Aniyunwiya (citizen of the Cherokee Nation) artist and poet. She is currently preparing for her Fulbright Senior Scholar post in India and completing a post-doc fellowship at Forecast Change Lab. Space, place, and ancestry inform her work. Learn more at [www.thischerokeerose.com](http://www.thischerokeerose.com).

