

## **THE SNAKE**

I met a snake a long long time ago when I  
was very young.  
It was in the East and I was out walking  
about half a mile away from where I lived  
On a hot September day just after the  
Monsoons.  
It was a heavy, humid, sweltery day and flies  
were buzzing, buzzing in the heat.  
Sometimes a frog croaked or a bird sang or  
a cricket chirped nearby.  
Occasionally from far away there was a  
monkey cry  
But most things seemed asleep.  
And I was walking, being lonely that was my  
sort of play:  
Walking alone in the grass though that was  
quite a foolish thing to do  
But I was very young & not quite seven then.  
My mongrel dog was somewhere near.  
We called him Thurber, after a cartoon, and  
he was sniffing around, hunting smells  
Or rats or anything and panting in the heat.  
Soon we would turn back home.  
It was in afternoon, the sleepy hour when all  
the adults doze,  
The hottest time when I was walking,  
And I was growing tired and slightly bored,  
Nearly melting from the heat.  
So I stopped and sat down under a tree  
On some smooth grass to play with a stick or  
flower for it was cooler there, in the shade,  
So I sat down - and then I froze.  
A yard away there was a snake  
Almost invisible in the filtering shadows  
where it had been asleep and I had  
disturbed it there.  
It spread its hood and rose and swayed.  
It hissed and went on rising about two foot or  
so into the air.  
I could not move. My mouth was open but I  
could not speak.  
I could not cry out for help. There was no-one  
there and my throat was dry with fear.  
My skin was wet and it suddenly seemed  
cold. I almost shivered in the heat.  
It peered at me, shortsightedly, like a school  
teacher with glasses set upon his nose.  
Its pronged tongue flickered out and in as it  
hissed - quite threateningly.  
The markings on its hood showed up clear,  
A sort of curling shape like spectacles

And then I pause and go quite still  
More from awe & wonder somehow  
Than from fear remembered from that hot  
and sticky day  
When the cold sweat ran down my face.  
I remember now that I could not move and  
the sweat tickled as it ran down my skin.  
It was almost agony and I could hardly hold  
myself in from moving.  
The snake moved. It swayed a bit.  
The shadows flickered on its iridescent skin  
Where the markings coalesced and seemed  
to gather into motion - almost hypnotically.  
A poke of head, a hiss, a feint; it swayed, and  
still I could not move. I was frozen, still.  
There was no sound now.  
The birds went dead quiet suddenly and  
everything seemed motionless.  
Perhaps the world was waiting breathless  
until the cards of fate were fully played.  
The snake swayed. I sweated.  
It was not sure; I hoped it could not tell, if I  
was really there or not  
Or if I was dead or not.  
And I can tell you that I nearly was.  
I had nearly passed out or fainted but still I  
did not move.  
I could not move. It did not move. It paused;  
Waiting perhaps or preparing for the strike,  
the kill.  
Then suddenly there was a bark.  
My dog had smelled a rat.  
He crashed around in some bushes over  
there some way away.  
The spell was shattered as shockingly as a  
broken glass bursts on the ground.  
The snake turned quickly, silently  
And without a further sound vanished into  
the dark shadows of the grass.  
I did not move. I could not move.  
And Thurber barked again - he'd lost his rat  
And came up to me all bouncily and started  
to lick my face - and then went on licking.  
He liked the sweat, the saltiness, the tears.  
And still I did not move.  
Until at last I rose and slowly, very slowly,  
walked back home,  
For it was very hot.  
And since that day  
I have not told a soul about that day,  
The fear and heat and the beauty of the  
snake that frightened me so