

AWAKENING

By Nirmala Pillay

Waiting at the traffic signal
I saw her every day a child-woman,
Darting hands out stretched
Between cars halting
To clear the signal.
Selling a few wilted roses-
Sometimes some incense sticks.
Nimble of foot she danced
In deathless begging between the wheels-
A rag in the hand
Swabbing at window glasses.
Dusting and dusting then hands asking
Payment for work done.
At males she batted her eyelids
Swung coyly her thin hips
Cajoling the reluctant coin.
Abuse and curses wove the twilight
With her wails and passionate cries.
As hungers gnawed, she floated
A fractured moon in the bubbling cesspool
Of the city's heart.
I watch with wonder
Her gently touching a pink chain
Round her scrawny neck, gazing with love
Into a broken mirror admiring herself,
On a traffic island
Amidst the zoom of wheels.
