A MIDSUMMER DAY’S DREAM

by Janet Ruth

First spoke pierces ash-blue sky over Sandías, second illuminates a macaw petroglyph on basalt across the valley. Sparks fly where iron wheels clash with rock at the Crest—the chariot begins its roll up arc of New Mexico sky. Embers add to growing heat, where they land in tinder-dry duff—smoldering birth.

No need for bonfires to drive away dragons this day, yet drought has left plenty of bleached bones for fuel. No one need walk barefoot across glowing coals to prove their faith—burning sand will suffice.

No nearby lake or ocean beside which to celebrate the burning. The Rio Grande twists and dribbles at the whim of distant snowmelt, controls at Cochiti Dam, acequia ditch-masters. She never escapes her banks.

Luminosity of waxing moon and diamond-studded night fade behind Mount Taylor to the west. In the bosque, stretched in dappled cottonwood shade, Titania recovers from a night of revels with ass-eared Bottom, while Puck winks in yellow-and-white robes, whistles, flutters on olive wings. Having collected Gambel’s oak leaves on sere foothill slopes before dawn, a curandera threads her way among shadows by the river, collecting yerba mansa and other herbs—to weave into solstice wreaths, to dry as medicines for a winter difficult to imagine in this heat.

Chariot reaches the apogee of its arcing path—time stands still for a moment. Charioteer flaunts his blazing light. All of us swelter in the molten triumph.

Chariot horses with manes of flame scream, impatient, stamp iron-clad hooves against sky, then resume their journey, gallop down the arc of heaven toward a string of sleeping volcanoes, kick up clouds of dust and moisture that build into blinding-white hoodoos.

Mortals below—trapped between gods and dragons—dream of rain.

-- published in the anthology Poetry Inspired by A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Southern Arizona Press, 2023)