

Boomtown



By Ibañez (Damodar Prasad das)

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Instagram: @damodarp1008

Twitter: @Daniels_Prom

email: General.Judah108@proton.me

Website: forestsongs.neocities.org

The Beginning

I

Love bestowed is betrayed by the love of taking
And heart yet unbroken by broken bond is breaking
There is much in gentleness
An offered flower awakens sorrow
There was much that was meek and heart-felt
And I tried to let it go
But the things I clutch onto
My God
Why do I not die of shame?

II

It's a golden light that falls
Like heat cascades upon the copper soil
And in large puddles in irregular grooves
Children grow cool with play

I remember
Sitting in this train
You
(Sitting now absorbed)
Only yesterday
Flinging your body with a mad shrill, crying:
“Dehi!”
And the cow you called galloped
Recognising something in that voice
“I’m a cow too, didn’t you know?”
And I remembered dreaming upon your lap
When we were newly-wed
You were a cow
Looking back

Now the countryside flies past
Thick dry woods and shallow rivers with sandy beds
Tinged with red
Something’s still left of the former reigns
Upon this land
The great empires she fed
Between monstrous factories and mills
Grinding whole cities and towns
Blood and bones for bread
But a wandering sage could never see all her homes

Where the glimpse of joyful worlds unseen
Adds to the spur of waking
Before the morning gleam

III

When the sun of the morning pierced through night's fog
And all the world was new
Yet was night's shame not forgot
Nor night's clinging fumes
The animals could smell it:
The cow drove me away with her horns
The monkey latched onto my bag
Disdaining the semblance of my form of a man
For man's duty I neglected to do
And so of man's noblesse shorn
I became the weak target of the furious pounce
Lurking like a quiet movement of fur

After everything was broken

IV

The love I've chosen is a thing of dreams
Woven from the images I see
And made to move and speak
If they know then the knowledge lies buried
Buried like my ring
Beneath a sky of grief

V

Boomtown is a yellowing town
Growing mellow in the Autumn sun
How long will she remain - this sun-blasted town
Of vanishing tradition and minaret calls
Shop upon shop and high houses behind high walls?

“This town rivals Indra’s kingdom!”
I once thought
For the lives that beckoned me
Flower-like piety behind those walls
In this small town amidst the dumps
Made by brick-building hands
That in daily prayer were laid upon the floor
What roses grow there beneath the veil?
What anthems ring there
Twirled and flattened in a duck-like drawl?

Pigeons now flutter upward
In Sunday’s golden sun
Some boys play in the street
With a cricket bat and ball
And a young girl with black hair
Leans against the shop door

VI

I've left no friends behind me
Where we stayed
Only images
A mental map
Of where girls would play
Why should I list them?
Let them fade away

VII

What was the life we lived?

She sat in darkness, waiting for bed

I, burning the hours recreating a life in my head

Cupboard rank

Tumbling roaches in stink

Fear of ghosts

Locked doors

A life half-lived

Two dead sparrows by the fire lit to consume wasted things

Two dead plants

They survived the shadow

But not the sun and free soil

VIII

It was in the world of the dream I held you
As I used to
Like a covering blanket
And said: "Do not mind our friend"
(It was the ghost I meant)
"Do not misunderstand:
"It's only when he's here I can hold you so
"And even though I don't know
"Who stands behind us now
"I know that I'm holding you
"And that's enough for me."

And you were silent

A broken thought trying to be whole

But then you spoke:

"When my life is over
"This *Gazaga*..."

IX

Must it be only the captive mind
Allured by an image
That moves me to write?
Very well:
The dusty girl, thin
Addicted to sweets
Bare dusty feet
Wandering the streets during school week
Accent rough
Words corrupt
But her feet
And she looked and looked again
To the wife by my side
A garland in her hair
Grief of years lost
Fear of life in her smile
A lingering and curious blessing at my side
In the time of parting
In sorrow
In Fear
To the unseen line fast holding

Fragile Sustained

X

And I can see now
The things you believed like a child
Were true
Though I smiled
The ritual of madness and lust
Destruction of innocence and truth
In the seedy chambers of power

XI

I have seen the world against one

Sat again to receive rebuke

Banishment

Exile

Harsh warding stares

And I joined the world in sending her away

XII

It is the effort which failed
Which touches the heart
The joke met with silence
The silence with rebuke

XIII

How innocent are those who give cheer to the crowds
Raising laughs with a good joke or clownish movements
But my heart ached, Love, for you could not do the same
The room remained silent
Only you laughed at your sayings
Thank God for Sri Guru
He joined in with a word
And everyone melted with joy

What does it mean?

XIV

It was a bad day

I ran away

Leaving Radhika alone

In tears calling my name

“Damodar!”

She screamed

Answered only by the cold stares of the street

It was a bad day

When I walked away

Leaving her questions unanswered

Weeping at Sri Sri Nitai Gaurahari's Feet

XV

Though we may wander upon our separate ways
(and the thought of what you were:
How it pains)
It seems we but wait upon the precipice fall
The terrible reckoning we call Fate
At least I may think so
Being here where I loved
(Though it now seems strange)
Where we shared
Where something awoke
Sinister or fair
And thinking of where it led you
Praying that imagination and fear has painted it worse
And thinking of my crimes as a man
Violent or cringing
As driven by mind
I sinned against whatever I held dear
Of feminine beauty
Or manly virtue
I remember it here

XVI

My memories might bring me comfort and thanks
If they did not make me feel ashamed
The soccer world cup was won by Spain
We spent the night together on the eve of my birthday
The lord in the temple
My confession
Such were the first steps of future ruin
My only hope and fear:
The story goes on

XVII

Of all your suffering I feel myself to blame
For I remember my anger
My envy
My violence
My shame
And I caused you to cry
Whatever else had gone
Whatever else came
I sat brooding in envy
Beneath a tree that has fallen
I became vicious like a hoarse beast
A vehicle of a demon

XVIII

The journey there and back again
Is filled with lusts and fears
And they seem to increase
I look forward to desolate years
In cold bleak plains
Dripping crags
Finding scant berries
And cringing shelters from driving rains
I go with my mind
And return again
With its burden of envies and cares
I am not relieved by the fire I lit while I was there
The sacred flames devouring our markers in time

Memory

XIX

We were happy at times
At times we had hope
At times the comfort of a shared bond
There was a glimmer of belief
A glimmer of hope
I saw it in the photo
The photo consumed by flames
There was also something else
Hidden
Lurking in the glance
And we let it have its way

XX

If I say nothing now, when I am tired and squeezed by time
When will I say it?
And can I say it?

I remembered: they would not take *prasad*
Because she'd cooked
And my heart became sore
I remembered her spending hours on a puzzle
And fitting hardly a piece
And my heart became sore
I remembered watching movies and movies with her
Because we were stuck in the flat
My heart became sore
I remembered how she had to wear nappies
And maybe she wears them still
But my heart never broke

XXI

Lying on my back looking at the sky
Upon a blanket my wife sits by
Painting roses on a sheet
A slow secret unfolding
Like clouds drifting
Studied unchanging
Look but for a moment away
- White specks of life against
Unfathomed blue flickering -
And everything's changed
Clouds floating
A small creature lines in flying
Clouds floating

The Bond

XXII

The potted plants
They stand there now in the rough night breeze
The potted plants now freed
To sink dried and tired roots into currents of loam
Shaken now by thunder and rain
Showered by sparkling drops
From the tossed neighbouring trees
Who enjoy the buffeting of a free breeze
Those potted plants
Grown pale and old
Shaggy and cold
Having stood sentinel so long in places dark and close
Wasting companions to furtive looks and cobwebs
Perhaps it was too late to save them
But if they die
They'll die free

XXIII

What terrible import there is in the heart moved by love
Compelling us like prophets to reveal our innermost truths
How terrible it is to weave our romances into song
When currents of confession burst open the walls
And we glimpse beyond
Terrible it is for those who've taken the vow
Being carried by love's song
What is poetry if there's not something grand?
Foreshadowing the span to the pure land
Where we leave our very selves – so it must be – behind?
But here and now, what a troublesome quarrel

XXIV

Twice is the world enwrapped in thick veils
The first resembling what is, though pale
The second, a network of plighted oaths and crossed words
Making what *is* seem more obscure
Now when I see her eyes and cheeks glisten moist
Gone's the wonder at this sacrifice for Truth unseen
The close-netted way is all I see

Regeneration?

XXV

I have made myself a stranger to life
But nature comforts us with humour and hope
In the depths of our fall
I saw fiery filaments of gold
Stretch across the sky
The ribbed veil of cloud
Lit by a falling sun

XXVI

Feeling let down by God, I left God's parade
And went to find God in another place
Driving by the place where God resides
Going God knows where for God knows how long
Maybe to find a new life
Maybe just to die
I could not bare to be where God was praised

*Let me but turn aside and think and stop for a while
Even here the country is not free
Walls and houses and dark roads oppress me
Where shall I go?
Where shall I sleep?*

I came to a place I thought secret and safe
A hovel from the past
A familiar greeting
A familiar face

XXVII

It was on the way back I saw how terrible life could be
Passing yellow and black fields scoured by the icy wind
Then thousands of houses huddled near the road
Then industrial wastelands and slag heaps
Barbed wire
Dirty streets
Dry yellow mounds cracked and furrowed
And brown-brick flats
Was there anything at all worth looking at?
I should be ashamed of setting in words
The treasures of my heart
Stored up in this weekend past
Fragile beauty lingering in a fragile world

XXVIII

What is this place on the farthest outskirts of the South?
Where trains (people-pressed they stared as we clung our way home)
stop on the journey to even remoter places?
The township bakes in the open sun
Stands naked to the furious rain
In the distance, barren hills and plains stretch far away
The minaret calls
Almost all that keeps witching shadows at bay
Here we are stranded, so far away
A place for worship
And meetings in the market place
Here flowers beauty unknown
In a dancing gait
Or a smiling face
A bluebell grows quietly
In the midst of the war against squalor
Migration and decay

XXIX

There is memory of love bruised
Broken
Lost
In the human stench of filthy streets
And the blackened bodies
Features leery and stretched
By drugs or drink
There dwell too the silent
The sad
The roughened and the bold
And they hear the Holy Name
Unlike the rest of the world
Busy in their ways
When they are given love
They take
Because of the grace
One can see the clouds glowing white
In a bubbling sea of silvery grey
And the soft summer grass with flowers
Wavering
The earth is pregnant with the rains
A cup of golden mead has spilled in the sky
It is from Life and Love
That we run away
Or with sharp fences
Keep it at bay

XXX

How easy it is to settle to a mistaken point of view
Then in false consciousness to say something we think necessary and true
It is about feeling "I am right and not to blame for what I shall do"
So I thought to free myself
Free for another doom to pursue
And after speaking
Feeling a greater rupture from within
The unguessed portent of spoken word
Only I felt the ruin of sin
For a night wandering the wasteland
Of distant stars and windows broken in

Sometimes I would see you hopeful
Eager
The child long since forgot
By our mingling of worlds the balm of life renewed our hearts
For a time made by sorrow warm and soft

Fin