

## The courtesan

The last of the sun goes up in smoke  
Streets go homewards  
Books are closed.  
The world of the attached  
Endures on in orbit.  
The world of the unattached  
Swirls around her.

She,  
She who whispers poetry,  
On the heavy evening air.  
She who takes the temple bells,  
Clap of horse-carts,  
Sizzle of jalebis,  
Humming of mosquitos,  
And melts them in her song,  
Welcoming all to her kingdom of pain.

They flock to her.  
They,  
Who do not know what to feel.  
They sit in her courtyard  
And wail with her.  
She is so fragile, every song  
Breaks her into bits.  
Applause rises to her fragments  
Her song crescendoes with applause  
Sorrow glistens in her song,  
So exquisite,  
Who would ever need joy!

The sky wears its nightly covers.  
Streets are empty  
Stray dogs howl  
Her audience rise  
And stagger back,  
Having found catharsis.

She is still trembling  
From the echoes of applause  
She lives for that applause, like opium.  
Tonight she will peel  
Fresh skin from her old sores,  
She will cry  
She will retch from the pain.  
But,

Tomorrow, she will sing on it,  
And they will all weep with her  
And it will all be worth,  
A life of sadness.

## Chronic insomnia

Night sits up for me  
Hugging the moonrise.  
Looks out with mischief  
From the corner of his eyes.  
He has drawn his covers,  
Ready for the game.  
Impatient but calm  
He calls me by name.  
I say, "You must wait"  
My day is not yet done,  
I have chores to finish,  
Before the rising sun".

Night smiles back at me,  
And in a tempting voice,  
Says, "Come oh dear,  
There is not a gasp or noise,  
Let this quietude soothe  
Your worn and weary soul.  
And I will sing in your ears  
Dreams to make you whole."  
I say, "Sweetheart know,  
You cannot mend my wear.  
I cannot suffer dreams  
Anymore than nightmares."

Night turns away, fakes  
Anger he does not feel.  
Steals glances between sulking,  
Assured that I will yield.  
He finds me hard at work,  
Engrossed and remote.  
He tries hard to swallow  
The growing lump in his throat.  
He thinks this is my arrogance,  
In my silence, he hears disdain.  
At length he closes his eyes  
To arrest the flow of pain.

Night has fallen asleep  
But I still stare out in the dark,  
His arms are open for me,  
Like a velvety arc.  
I wish I could lie by him,  
And listen to his misty voice.  
But it's a love I must refuse

I have no other choice.  
How do I tell him, Lord –  
In the darkness of its grave  
My heart sits up for another,  
The one whose love I crave.

## Masquerade

I wonder if it was  
In the crematory of my dreams,  
Or the streets I wander on  
To escape their dying screams,  
I saw you  
On a heap of torn up journals,  
Stories bleeding from the pages  
Set ablaze.  
Your face burning in rage,  
Like embers fanned by the wind.

Fear tore my entrails  
Fire choked my cries.  
Cold even in the blazing riot,  
At last I asked you "Why?"  
You started pulling off,  
Masks covering your face,  
A smile, a slur, a kiss, a bite.  
Your face crumbled,  
Blood flowed down your temples,  
As they came off one by one.

When you peeled off,  
The final mask called pain,  
Who was it that stared back,  
From under the torn membrane?  
Impassive but so known  
A mirror in front of me!  
My cheeks singed in the flares  
Fell in my palms,  
I picked up with a trembling arm -  
The masks that you skinned.

I raised them up to my burning face  
And put them on one by one.  
Your blood, tears,  
Your raw flesh touched my own.  
I stood upon the ashes of those journals  
The masks are on,  
And the show has now begun.

## LED man

What's the hurry, where do you go,  
O little LED man?  
If I lingered long enough  
You'll wave your red LED hand.  
And then we'll high five and strike a bond,  
And we can be best of friends.  
And I can tell you all my secrets  
Until the timer ends.

O little LED man, there are,  
O there are, so many, just like you.  
They come in a hurry and walk right by.  
Sometimes they greet you with a "Hi five!"  
They stop briefly as their clocks tick away,  
And then they are gone in the blink of an eye.

I must walk too, LED man,  
Before I run out of time.  
What is this street, if full of cars,  
No time to stand and rhyme.  
We'll meet again, at the next block,  
Crossroads are aplenty in this town.  
So long, lets keep walking our ways,  
O little LED man.

## When Ma washed me at the well

Clank, whoosh, whirr  
Splash!!!  
Down went the iron pail  
Past the moss covered innards  
As the earth napped  
Open mouthed in the sultry afternoon.

What did he see? What mysteries  
What ancient treasures did he spot,  
In the hollows of the brickwork  
Before he touched the cool black water?  
Splash!!!

He tilted his head  
Ever so slightly,  
Let loose for a moment by his puppet-master.  
And in that moment, he drank in all he can.  
That sweet black mysterious water  
And let out a satisfied gurgle.

Now somnolent and heavy  
He reluctantly left the cave,  
His destiny hauled by a rope.

He shed a tear or two  
In the memory the treasures  
He so painstakingly carried,  
Wasted by an angry mother  
Washing the dirt and sweat of a full day's play,  
On the fighting child  
Who knows something about magic.