

**THE
SLEEPING
CITIES**

In this poem my soul becomes a bird and flies with its mate to a remembered place. The route lies along the North African shore and across to the Western Desert – finally down to the equatorial countries of East Africa. These two sense the areas of bitter conflict as they pass overhead. This poem is called:

The Guilty Dream

Springchild, my seabird, from his spotted cliff
Weaves footprints up then down the surfing wind.
Before the deafened coves he struts and bleats,
Fritters in the waves,
Soars up again to bat above the grassy sand –
Once more, with baleful eyes and frightened pompous yells
He settles near at hand
To pad between the roaring shells.

A fat white Russian dove
Wheels above,
Squeals as keenly from her journey's love
As if the myriad miles were two
And her travelled sunsets on the frosty seas
Merely herald to our ventures from this gluey frieze.

Before my naïve thoughts she shouts, she prances,
Gestures to the sea,
Makes as if to hop into the air again, but dances
White-filled wings full-circled near my shaking head –
She beckons sunsets from our journey up ahead.

“ The Moors hold turrets still” she said “ see,
They ring around the Northern Shore ;
Castles, dungeons, cellars – deep with sacred fish – throw hefty doors
Which cross the straits – “ and visible “ she said “ Gibraltar waits ... “

Our hearts the Middle Sea : Turk and Knight join battle –
Here a hill is taken.. one small war is lost.
Throughout the Middle Years two armies fought
For purchase on an island ...
The fighting rages, stage through stage advances and where the victor
Was once, now he lies, with some unburied, some uncrossed
While some in death still rattle.

“ And now the ancient seawalls, chained to stone, which held, alert,
A peoples in their peak,
Back up to a cannon-scattered desert.
Try if you will to make the sand dunes speak ...”

My blood took in the running sand
Oblivious tapestry she stirs
Bent in the wind this grimy land
To shed the sense a hideous mirage blurs.

Swords-in-stone

Have in this Western Desert grown,
As will a pearl when left alone ;
Fuller shapes are etched beneath the saucer-sky and figures
In the shapeless sand materialise and shake amid the heat.
They grow and walk, they form straight lines and exercise.
Their tented form looks out
For warning sounds or engines growing urgently
Above the muffled shouting of the sergeantry.

The scene switched to sounds and squeaks of mobile regiments
And sudden roar of flames from tattered trucks,
The wails of burning crews, the whine of speeding vehicles –
Tanks engines screaming, hit –
The hail of bullets through slow-stepping ranks
The end, the aftermath...a blank.

It is so small-to God-so small one six-year stretch of war.
Yet its soldiers now take absent parts, buy their families houses,
Stir the grate and hardly think of wretched nights.
But deep within their hearts they lack a little :
Although they took a transient part, once wild with fate, now
They take their destinies as unperceived and old – and ill
With despond, shivering in the Western Desert still

... - Private ! Here .. on the double ! What's this !?

Plate, Sir.

Don't call me Sir call me Staff !

Yes, Staff

Answer to everything man !

Plate, Staff

Thank you, private. Yes. A plate. But is it a clean one?
You see these scratches .. marks ..

Stand up ! Sit down! Stand up
Sit down ! ..

Now you take your bit of emery paper and rub until I can
See the sun's arse in it !

We met a sandstorm and the particles
Shrieked about our ears and cheeks.
We had no cloth to bind about our mouths
And we huddled to each other, shouting at the inches in the brawling wind

Now the spit slackened whipped into our eyes
 And then the full grim force of silted floors
 Of useless sand, more sand and sand across our naked sores.

The sickly yellow spread across the massive sky
 And took its lines,
 Steadied, punched our bruises, gashed our chins – ranks and ranks of waste
 Took its orders, fixed its knives
 Forward bent then marched across our face.

Down to temperate lands we limped
 On to that special ledge where we could watch
 What we pleased from the point
 Where no vast milky way could join to these small cotton clouds
 No such shroud made for our cosmos in the general universe.
 We watched wheel the birds
 And we waited for the shadow from the cloud above
 To uncover our head, hereto unheard.
 Roofs glittered in untiring magic of the sun.
 Pathways fainted in the heat. Every single one
 Repeated ruffles. Banana trees forever ever throng. Blue distances.
 One glinting car distracts
 Which then is gone

Our little town holds a candle to the stars tonight.
 Your face holds in the folded hollows now, for me,
 One hundred tiny spaces where cold water runs right
 On down for seconds, long, long, long seconds ...

Here the air lies hot like warm wine
 And we hide
 In modest arms
 In modest arms of this town
 In modest arms of this town's mountainside ...

It was not a mountain but a ridge
 Of hundreds of feet merely
 And with our friends and their baskets
 Up those paths went all whom we love dearly.

But affection wavers in the gaps among the plains
 Our childhood myths withstand then bend –
 Deep-seated worries shake our fantasy
 And wake an instinct through the savage pain.

Although my happy thoughts revive upon that ledge
 Association gripping unseen corners at our friendship's edge, nostalgia
 Leaves vast space unquarried and ill-fed
 To make the lonely hills more futile than they are.

The magics in our special heart grow tired
And sweetness turns away from our desire :
Our myths of purity, of common drives
Sink beneath a strange expedience in our lives

The evil done, our personalities discover parting shots
And make quite bitter any former trust.. Anxiety
Concern, determined solidarity are undermined.
They tragically withdraw response, responsibility,
Provoke phenomena – from childhood with its grasping ecstasy –
Which, forgetting all they find reflecting sympathy, adaptability,
Turn back to petulance, peculiar to, consistent with, their island quality.

From such splendour and such tiredness all my guilt awakes
Recalling how I up and left her, left her bobbing on the lake.

Up up I went, beyond her tiny dot

And, crossed by breezes, fought against the twist and brake,
Half-decided which direction and what winds to take,
Soared across the Rift in funnelled cloud
In patches felt the air grow hot –
To soon grow cold again – I shot
From sun to shade
The sunlight spinning on the ground

Dipped, wallowed turned around .. around .. around

And glided on across the quiet range
To drive with sour tears and rage
Through this first leg and lonely stage

The vacant scape as violent as my fear
Turbulently chased my trembling ear.

So if we think now of our childhood and early adolescence and recall the clumsy advances which were our first steps to where we are now.
This is my take on that struggle

Strength of My Fantasy

Oh! At birth when horror-struck and dandling limply
At the air, I cried to sighs and whispers ...somewhere
Somehow expectant of one voice, one smile for agonies incredible to bear.

No scars have healed And now a stricken citizen
With muffled cries and shouts
Coughs and rolls about, grimaces with pain to see they vacant stare at him.

On one uneven groove this mark is placed
In time unchanged, just gathers pace
Trembles in its heart and blood
For greater space.

Those sweet young tales beheld my frail fifteen
To dress me like the dashing pirate, sliding faster than the galleon.
I leant across her bows, without guile, to ask for food and drink
Asylum in her smile.

Confident, oh so very confident
To stand astride her flesh
Yet he does not know all women well
Who cocks his hat to tame their swell.

So then, unsmilingly, he reads her verse, tries to assail
Her with his words ; but nothing, nothing, no avail
In anything he does or says. Her mind is set and patiently as after gales
She purses lips and waits to trim her sails.

When she is gone he wanders dazed
And like a lamb on shaking shins
He wonders why he hungers for her gaze
So tame have grown his fiery limbs.

They wonder why after all their smiles and grins
They cannot charm her, cannot trip her up
They will not tire
And they shall not have her won for their desire.

And so they pick them up and wander off.
Slowly, phoenix fires return them sane
And reassemble all that before did yearn
And back he comes to topple like a clumsy pup again.

I saw her walk along with my dreams at her jutting chest
Answers none
No signal in a longing stare, no sign
To float my dreams above despair.

I thought my greenness to her breast
To put my daydreams to the test ;
But still she answered nothing, nothing answered and I passed by
Frustrated, bitter in my helpless tenderness.

But when alone I know we'll smile as sweet as any lovers young
While from her cheek will come her slender tongue
And through my mouth will stretch the crisp wet agony
Her whiteness through my hand

.....And clenched through all the kingdom of my soul
The blessed river leaping out, sweet-blooded and with sanctity.

Faint, with our tender moment gone
Each eye seemed sad and dead ;
The spirit glows within the flesh
Who out from a bitter world has fled

The mists cleared and I was privileged to see
A sunset stalking up our tree.
Twinkling legs disturbed the grass
Great leap .. leap .. leaps from scrub and bush.

Ears pricked up, alert with quivering limbs –
The grass moved and so the thorns.
A coldness crept into the eye and all was still
Within a wild dogs cry.

Mighty scenes of drama grew amongst the hills
I saw the soldiers stepping smoothly as if still.

And I believed that in this moving scenery
While jackals howled disturbance in the night
And the moon leapt up like a shot dog
We lifted frightened earth, her heart, our soul's machinery.

The vanished soldier, woodlands and the trees
A vast array of pities in a tightening space ;
All these, my soul, all these I seek to
Blend upon her face.

In the riverside as on savannah
Encouraged by the blast of elephant
The soldier crept
The soldier slept on leaves torn off banana.

On the nearby white-capped mountain
Russian men slid to-and-fro
And the ' Crack! – Crack ' on the crisp air eighty miles away
Told me of this new slain youth, buried in the snow today.

The growl of Panzers muttered in the forest
Padded at the leaves and scared the deer ...
The howl that blasted through the air
Churning a whole hillside bare
Was grumbling on.. then on..then on..
More strongly shocked our frightened hair.

One moment slender as a thread
Deep in a growing passion hung,
Deeper yet and sad
 But deeper still
Our wandering tongues
 Through sighs and whispers fled.....

We two seek the woodland to debate
Of how we came to grief,
And we break the rumour to each leaf
Of just how leaked our anger into real estate.

My Beloved Brother-in-Laws Funeral

We stood at this churchyard gate
 And black and drab await the minute hand's ok.
 Uncertain we are then
 By flicking glances wonder : what's for me to do and when.

Someone's decided and we take our place,
 Ousting the professional men, as Sheila signals "other side" to me
 I take my cue, discreetly racing in and round
 To carry Jim.

Gloomy we move with left foot first and
 In despair and pain we plod –
 All six for access dropped our hands
 And through the doorway trod.

Now as with our holiday trip we stood
 Yet misery dispelled familiar days
 When Paul and his rugby friends told jokes
 Which locked us safely in a genial haze.

Since then has change begun to grow
 Now full-circled in its subtle loop.....
 And Bob had also died but at that time
 I was not told – I did not know.

I did not know and with such dispirited regret
 Helpless in collective gloom
 I say nothing
 We all look down we all say nothing yet.

We miss dear Jim
 We used to miss him living just apart.
 We felt not valued quite as much
 And missing would not cause such ripples or such fuss.

Friendly Fergus, just in control lays forth
 Unworldly qualities of him. His undying friend and all
 Understood the mystery of nature's few
 Their tolerance and unbending human view

Around this room we hang down all our heads
 While silent ghosts with gentle sounds arrive
 An endless stream of souls are hushed
 Their lives on pause as if ashamed to be alive.

A fitting place for Peace we said
 Freeze-framed around a country fringe
 His body ever held in pause for us.

Down through these empty years to come
Our family gutted to the core lies
Flapping on a stone-cold slab for evermore.

Necropolis and the Nails of My Grave

In the stars a hammer swings
And rabbits start across the plain in scatterings.....
Heat-hazed antelopes switch the wind across the grass
Or mourn the ancient lion in his bier ;
Or rhino limber like Canadian logs along the weir
Who rolls downriver those she to a sawing brings.

Man is two-mile nearer heaven than before
And Whittington is buried with his city.
Those coaches past are creaking on their springs
They lie encrusted in fatigued self-pity.

The Spirit of Man shall come again
When Siberian Plains are glass

The Spirit of God shall rise again
In the molten sky above us.

Our sad cities are a –cinder....dry the drinking fountains yet
The dew is diamond clear
on the mighty plains and mountains.....

The wind swings the forests
Nips the ears of rabbits as they hop.....

.....Pole to pole the hammer scythes about the jungle,
Rends the axis of the earth.....her habits
.....Fall asleep.....and totter.....
.....Like.....
.....the.....
.....spinning-top.....