



THROUGH OLD BIFOCALS

II

ASHOK NIYOGI
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PLANNED

Hibiscus hibernates
between umbrae
of lamps
that are her eyes,

and I am elated
that all is well
in the pale winter sun.

Comfort
is unevenly paved
like a cocooned cactus
beneath my park bench,

I am secure
in my effort
to rise once more
from ashes,

“ Mr. Phoenix,
tomorrow, I promise,
I will clean out my ash-tray,”

today, it is time
to search for ticks
incessant, in their devastation
of geriatric pets.

SCATTERED

With the moon
really close,
and fourteen percent brighter,
I have at last deciphered
that I feel heavy,
with today's ergonomics.

Are you worried about water retention?
Take your diuretic,
but as in everything else,
ensure moderation.

Lest we flow away.

This is the confluence,
after this
the ocean,
they say
this moon brings with it
turbulent tides,
and nagging bone-marrow pain.

Without water
we will be left with salt.
Do not look at this moon
with naked eyes,
we do not have
the protection of cataract
that our fathers had.

Amidst the knowledgeable chatter
of our granddaughter,
and sparrows,
martins,
and sundry other
talkative birds,
who do not care,
about the angles of their office chair,

fetch anonymity
and loving care.

Even though she came to visit,
when the moon was new,
she left behind
her 'animal' book,
which we can read
by the uncanny light
of this extraordinary moon,
above our autumn grass.

MIZMAZE

across the road
they have started a takeaway
for tiny Narcissus flowers

“big appetites welcome”

the mitzvah of Mithras
is muffled in the scent
of autumnal flowering
of roadside trees
that impart shade
and unexplained allergies

dictionaries fall apart
like a life hitherto sequestered
by intrepid dreams
the imaginary roles
of nobody as a somebody
like a short penultimate syllable
before the sleeping pills take hold

from the colored center
of small white flowers
fragrance unfolds

SEE HOW I MISS FREMONT!

staring from the fire
that burns
at the base
near my rudimentary tail
to the thousand-petaled lotus
dish antenna
on the crown
this oubliette sends
bytes up
for godhead
overawed by the ovarian
ovation that fraternizes
with Frangipani

now fox chasing fowl
must gravitate
into the framework of the owl
perched forever
on the billboard
for Connelly's
discount furniture store

NIKKI*

moth that furried
a worried moon
with nougat
abandoned by
a silver frame
inside which you are
tiny small

oil of anise
camphor
opium
paregorics
with a saxophone noise
that tells me
it is all right
to think of you and weep

**Nikki is my one and a half year old granddaughter*

CONCERT

for some time now
they have been up-lighting monuments
for the ambience
of late night
when you taste roasted nightingales
and snake's blood
on ice

a four hundred year tomb
that houses a lady in Hijab
is peeling and graffiti

and you sing semi-classical
this night
particularly well

I will have to go back to my park bench
and 'up-look'
stars through roots
that come curling down
from an unbelievable moon
now past its prime

she even sighs like her grandmother now
and all the future
of this youngish world
is on her large head
with 'camels' that they give
with Fritos
and supermen who are young
don't sigh like your grandmother
don't say
"pick them up"

GO

this is when
the watchman waves his wand
and then
lo and behold
the magic works
the stars sleep
banks are closed

in Moscow
they hosed down thoroughfares
with salt

I remember them
now
in camel dung

MOMENT

bird calls
before first light
in pure delight

bird
stay still
control your will

STILL

a blind worm sits
on my shut laptop
it has no light
to see by
it can't fly

this acid in the air
will eat up its skin
residual blue poison
will take tender care

of my potted plants
my wants
that the neighbors say
should go away

RIVER FLOWS

under monsoon cloud
this river rots
white underbelly
of dead fish
has white maggots
my white penance
is for dead flowers
that lie on the floor
by the temple door

that day did pass
as this will
silently
from beneath my window-sill

EVERY DAY

in an oasis of white light
a mantelpiece ticks seconds
the living room is a black cavern
with comatose Matryushka dolls
the calling bell tolls
I shall not respond

a kitchen tap drips
horses trot on my unmade bed
my demons rise
and are methodically cut in half
by rotating blades
of the ceiling fan
that circulates fetid air
will do so until its motor overheats

I have two pillows
between which I hide my head
grotesque with uncut hair
that bites into my scalp
and Medusa is a teddy bear
crowned with thorns that live
until they die

OVERFLOW

even monsters and adults
need to be vaccinated
this is ungodly weather
the sun sweats
and the moon was panting yesterday

this is when they had to pour rain
on pilgrims
who are rendered mute
because they have scalded their tongue
with steaming sweetened tea
in yellowed cups

huge red flowers
overflow fetid swamps
to stifle noisy toads
who eat non-poisonous water snakes
and get by

naked brown children
with prodigious bellies
splash about on spindly legs
and chew on crooked sticks
of sugarcane
infested with flies

mosquitoes rise up in clouds
and rule and prosper and multiply

PARK

ever since I hid my madness in the money plant
the flowering trees thought they could want
to wither away unchecked
like my churches temples and mosques
into the vague feeling
that very distant stars have about

a moon that monotonously hangs around
my quadrant of pink clouds setting
over an unlit tower lamp
that used to light up an umbra of grass
now and then infested with glow-worms
and fire-flies rendered blind by bright light

which helps me walk on 'skid-free' tiles
without stumbling into meticulous weeds
set innocently afire by muddled puddles
of so much right and so much wrong

no pleasure or pain
just relief from this constriction
in the brain

now only thirst
for salt in the blood
of a demented seagull
that has to live
off crumbs from sandwiches
eaten by precocious children

I HAVE TO CHANGE MY CLUTCH PLATES

these other roads
walking away
from the halogen
burn up fallen
leaves
with smoldering
autumnal fire
like a walking stick
re-varnished with desire

pajamas
a little soiled
glands prostrated
before her
who turns nails into claws
this is the season
when grapes
are dried in the sun
and raisins caw
for winter
in the red mouth
of a baby crow

we will oil
this nonsense that I
have inherited from
ladybirds
that come out
into the pinewood sun
spread their wings
curl up and overturn
below felled trees
that fell
long before
I grew up
and learned to trespass
into atriums
with fallen glass

and then
to mend cuts
with dewdrops
from the raped moon
in the dead of night
tomorrow
I will correct this mistake
lift me up
freedom is the choice
I make
not to err
to walk up this righteous path
and retrace
the exquisite horror
of one night in sweat

because the ladybird is wet
and my potted plants
will inevitably die
in orgy
I have let the water
copiously flow
into streams
which should have gurgled
with my useless blood

these other roads
have been inundated
with the annual flood
I begin
one more poem
in the aftermath
of leaves
that point at
guilty roads which must
in their convoluted way
find the inevitable sea

TROT

after rhododendrons bloom
down in the valley
I will find tea buds
a wayside café momentary
for today's sun
before road
degenerates into rock
my blistered feet
are in retreat
esophagus dries up
in naked fear
ears are blocked

this water fall
that descends on my head
from above the sun
is perpendicular
to all my wants
its blackness cries out
for worship now
before it gurgles into gorges
and is consumed

even as my camera pants
horses trot
beneath a cloud that comes
and wraps around them
like my sins
the meadow is enveloped
into river bridged by my wanting
to touch your hand
after a cup of tea
this is mist
I insist
that the moon should rise by day
as I did
and go away before we are born

dust is always like lust
buses reverse
and throw up dust
this is the last stop
after this the night will go away
it will be dawn
and the sun will color all the snow
with vermilion
and then with blood

it is time
to calculate the commonplace
the miles to go
the gasoline
the purchase of my credit card
which does not work
in these mountains twice removed
from life that teems like insane worms
in your designated shopping malls
from which I shy away
like a unicorn

and fix a drink
and drive my car
this is my private war
with the water fall
with the plants of tea
with the flower called
the rhododendron

PIGEON

I lost
when it was so cold
my knuckles hurt
the down on my forearms tingled
as if a fever was coming on
I dreamt that I had lost

this pigeon had been perching
on my windowsill
ever since
it fell in love

after eggs
and very small pigeons
who could not fly
and countless hunts
for juicy worms
that babies eat
he wanted god

now he was old
and would have died anyway
but last night
he thought he would play
with my air conditioner
and got electrocuted

as pigeons go
he was ordinary
as pigeons are
cooing and balancing
and always looking out
to make love
but for the stink
I would not have swept him
under my parapet
I would have encouraged him
to mummify in the sun

ABILITY

and in the end
the wherewithal
to whip up sand
in Capri
to till the land
that Jesus stalked
and let the share
halt the mare
that seasons walked

you will plough
the internet
for discount tickets
on Euro rail
you will prevail
while songs are sung
by some other bard
with a little lard

this wharf will sing
to my house of Ming
and cloud will come
crouching down
to eat me up
we will share
bowls of sweat
in mendicant's bread

full of sails and whales
and autumn trails
in what I would have been
had I not
been overwrought
with sounds of trees
that walk away
into a dawn
hiding waterfront
hiding life
hiding my manicured
light green lawn

MORNING WALK

put away those crutches
restore that picture
of me walking to the shore
just before

I overturned
like love spurned
into thickets of unseasonable mangoes
the woes
of virgins mated with fellows
and thin children
walking in the morning
through thick mistakes
even as the wolf wakes
with a sun historically setting
into swamps

oblivious
this sea
that swims into ocean
televises its roars
and migration helps
me to weep into my river
and to hope

ENCHANTED

I wept
and you never even cried
that is when
I watched
the underbelly of a salmon
walk up my dream
of windows opening in stream
of yawns
which stepped into tears
ultimately

Cars
that overtook Mars
with tranquilizers and sleep
you sit on my window and weep
through nights
which have to become day
bewitched

Until night falls
and hobgoblins traverse the fallen day
in beautiful May
with promises of spring
when bees sting
like pollen that has lost its way
amongst the penguins

I waddle
into streams of lava
and begin to understand
that life will want
to meander
into dirty streams
and still walk tall
in autumn grass
like a flower vase

TICKING

something tense
even as I brush by the fence
and return to overripe fruit
sheltered by yellow leaves
pounded into earth
by dromedaries
who erupted from Vesuvius
this cocooning is surreal
this sprouting of nascence
from gnarled stomachs
versifying through breathing
that is surprisingly hard
racing away
ever so slowly
through blood and sweat
wet

VERY SHORT

with long handled broom
I sweep together
dry leaves about me
in the pedestrian afternoon
loaded with faintly acrid smoke

up in the top most branches
green parrots nest
I step around puddles
formed by life
that has drained
from potted plants
burnt by the relentless sun

this garland with basil twigs
is now seasoned
it hugs me as I fall
and turn lazily
into the forgotten wind

later
much later
I will sit up and pray

WHAT

the color of forget-me-not
sinews float like wisps
of abandoned cloud
muscles elongate
without reason
like a boa constricted
in the season when it pays
for skeletons to meet
in a coffee shop
and intoxicate
on pastries sweetened
with sugar in fasting blood

now that the moon looks so old
because it has just been born
I am shocked
that gravity
which was always dumbly mine
has let loose
and I float like a mongoose
dangling snakes
in an upturned sky

THIS

ignore that
which rises from between
dunes that have always been

borrowed

from games of croquet
far away
where crickets chirp

it is meditation
at warp speed
in your retreat
roses sing
bees sting
all this drama
is for one broken wing
on the mountain-top

one sequin
from the cleavage drops
mops

lop-sided
in the horrible wind
tear drops

inclined
into my windshield
Cyclops

will tend to my garden
in rain
which refuses to stop

one hop

before the tram-cars
wipe my day
into

bus stops

TWIN CROSS

lampshades in an orange room
bougainvilleas on the mantelpiece
sepia sunlight
defined by dust
that went to sleep on shutters
before she woke up
with puffed rice in mustard oil
and battered onion rings
that toil a little less
than office boys
in earthy clothes which dry
on lines hung between
crows' feet
and the twin cross

she is stretched
from cross to cross

MUTE

just once
to upset the balance
hit a note perchance
that nightingales touch
before they want
commitment

this lark
is as pathetic as my walk
if I meet the man
who phoned
I will have to say "Hello"
so let me cross over
to the other sidewalk

which has no trees
no berries to squelch
no yellow flowers
downtrodden
like the million poems
I have written
for other men
with this broken pen

I am flabbergasted
with this disdain
this noiseless pain
that hurts

until it is dark

INEVITABLY

before I cease
I must unify
my follies
that are like marigold
in a wintered land

I must bring back the moon
to its predictable place
the sun to my metaphor
the stars and others
all so pretty
too pretty for an epitaph
to hoary hills
dill pickle in cuisine
I must pick up

with cabbage in the vegetable stall
and salmon from where
the river stops
and stares at a death
that has already birthed a million
children who will learn
to use the sun
and the crescent moon
too soon

before poems crop up
in conversation
at the cottage barn
when will I learn
that it is time for me
to lie inert in virgin white
light those incense sticks
now carry on
and remind me
that the lord is somber
silent and inevitably bored
in this mindless dawn

EVENING

when you walked
into my petunia bush
the moon was gone

forlorn

the mute 'Champa'
did smell acute
because it had no sleep

the river went mad

but when you called
askance

there was fragrance
in your forest
of flowers

there was your brightness
in a darkened car
amidst war

life could not have meandered
to accommodate
this taciturn fall
from grace

that lit candles
when I had no sense
with ingenuity
for sunset

in your inanimate

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