

Poem on the Imminent Death of a Domestic Worker

By Frank Jousen

This is the
cross of a
domestic worker

*you're not a
child
beautiful one
you're not a
child
beautiful one
you're not a
child
any more but*

*you want to learn
to read books
they let you
read their lips
you want
to wash
your long
beautiful hair
they make you
wash or hide
their dirty laundry
you want to sleep
in your father's house
they let their sons
sleep with you
sometimes their
husbands too
when you want to
understand and complain
they make you
forgive and forget
or regret
you dare say
just once
"It's my life"
and they make you
commit
suicide.*

*you are
alone
and you feel
like
a child of
a lesser god
yes the child of
a lesser god
beautiful one*

View from the Ground

your names I could never remember
your faces I'll never forget
when you laughed with us
and danced in the dirt
- small street children of Madras

you smiled up at our white faces
and said they were lovely indeed
we didn't know what to say
or what we'd really come for
- two little idols gone astray

Nicole said she'd be a school teacher
with kids quite exactly your age
maybe you thought she'd be back
but still you wouldn't let go
- when we finally gave you the sack

down and out we're back at the hostel
starting on a diet
due to India's heat
- while you're leaving your books in the school yard
to take once again to the street.

Encouraging Beggars

*(a poem including three quotations from the South Central Indian Railways
"Travel Safely" sign)*

"please discourage beggars"
do give them nowt
so they can
breathe and eat
the dust you raise
in peace

don't talk to street children
for they are strangers
from another planet
who have got nothing to do
with your mother's milk,
'our daily bread', etc.

don't treat domestic workers
as if they possessed
a grain of self-awareness
let alone intelligence
to recognise the sneer
masked as a smile
the phoney irony beneath
your 'hush-now-it's
alright-girl' shooing voice

“please travel light”
“do not disturb fellow passengers”
on this train trip to nowhere
this space flight without a number
or this ‘slouching towards Bethlehem’
whichever you prefer.

Poverty Poem

It looks like the idyll from the Kipling story.
There are the huts, the dusty field paths,
peopled with sari girls
carrying milk, water, firewood,
the cooking women and the chatting men.
And at night the beast roams freely,
restlessly circling the sleeping village.
But the beast is inside, not outside,

roaring in the tummy of a sleepless boy,
poaching in the nether worlds
of unemployed men’s overactive minds.
Never falling prey to
the ingenuity of the hapless cooks
in front of their cold pans and empty pots.
Too clever, too streetwise to
ever be slain or expelled.

Only a girl with pen and writing pad
fresh from school stands the chance of catching it.
If you don’t send her away after college
to the Bombays and Bangalores,
the million cities India has become,

where she'll forget these vivid images
and reproduce for the global village
the idyll from the Kipling story.

Bio:

Frank Jousen is a German teacher and member of one-world and peace groups. He has had numerous publications, e.g.: In North America in anthologies published by *Poet Works Press; Big Pond Rumours, Poets Against War, Poets Against the War Canada, The Gazette, Writer's Lifeline, Raving Dove, New Verse News, The Pedestal Magazine, Kota Press, Raven Poetry*. In G.B. in: *Poetry Kit Magazine, Caught in the Net, Pulsar, Poetry Scotland, Poetic Hour, The Measure and Memories*, a book with twelve "cancer stories" and 144 paintings; in Ireland in: *Boyne Berries*; in Australia in: *New England Review, Ullitarra, Imago, Southern Review, Eureka Street*; in India in: *Poet, Poetry Today, Metverse Muse, Muse India, Poets International, Canopy, Triveni, World Poetry, Creative Saplings, Literary Ruminations* and various anthologies, the latest one being "Celebrating India" by Nivasini publishers, Andhra Pradesh, 2012.

His first collection, "Building Bridges", was published by I.D.E.A.S. in Andhra Pradesh in 2008. He also edited a short anthology, "Anthologies I" containing the poetry of three Indian authors plus his own work, again in India, in 2011.