

BLOOD

By Bethamehi Joy Syiem

Tonight I look upon a full moon, red and bathed in blood
I remember my native country
Where were-tigers come to life
In demonic trances of old medicine men.

My grandmother once told me
Of foreign voices and men thirsty for blood
Of a brave woman who withstood them all
My great grandmother, of course.

“I remember the night I escaped
From the grip of the supernatural
The curse of the father of that house”
She had said.

I remember the stories of wretched witches
And a vindictive man cursing through her door.
She said, it was the blood that saved her

*Maybe that is why
I bathe myself in blood too,*

Just as the moon does
Every six months or so

I think that was what the had preacher said.

My father talked of flying saucers
And old soul reapers
Of bottomless pits
And beautiful mirages.

My uncle said, "There are two kinds of angels.
The godly and the demonic.
You would not like the latter.
They pull men into sordid lakes
Tempt them with river stones,
Disguised as pieces of divine bread."

He also said,
"Those angels (or devils, I am not sure)
They disguise themselves in forms of fish
They fear the broom and not garlic,
As you would expect."

I was told by a friend
That the forest in my ancestral village is sacred
Someone else said it was cursed.
All I know is there have been men
Who have had their bodies

Turn backwards with their heads forward
All for love of defying what the ancestors forbade.

I walked into the same forest
That sacred grove.

I had no fear for I was marked with blood.

I met a man in there
Amidst the thick of the brushwood
He said he was a guide.
He showed us round stone tables
Where he said,
Girls like me, were sacrificed to spirits
Of the earth and of the wood.

*I think it was the blood
That saved my life that day.*

I learnt much later,
He was a spirit.
No guide was known.
That man, with us
With his unkempt beard and haunting yellow eyes
Was never once seen before (or again)

No one had known what the tables were for
No one dared ask. The ancestors had some purpose there.

No one knew.

With the exception of the haunting image of that man.

He knew.

I still remember the way his eyes

Seemed to penetrate through my spirit.

My friends screamed when he turned around

As we neared the waterfalls

His eyes seemed to burn with fire,

A fire that seemed cold and dark

Like no fire I had ever seen.

We ran till it rained.

And there he was

At the edge of that forest

Having outran us without us noticing.

Some cried, some panicked.

I prayed,

Remembering the blood on my forehead.

Maybe that is why I was not sacrificed

To those spirits of the earth and the wood.

REAL

I wonder if I am real,
like the burning presence
of your fragrance. I wonder if I know
myself like I claim to,
or if I am just another darkness
that lies awake in the corner
people's forgotten dreams.

Sometimes I feel like a
pretend paradox, uncomplicated
and only waiting for my chance
to moonwalk on a stage that
is not mine. I wonder if
the things I despise are perhaps
me in disguise.

I don't feel real every day.
Most days, I don't. But sometimes,
I think I own the pain I feel
and the laughter I breathe.
In another world, I would never cry
tears of salt, but only of love.
There would never be fake smiles or
soundless words. In that world,
I would only write poetry for you
and I would always be real.

SELFISH

Inspiration-

I believed

Was in the ruins of a sunken temple

Or in that dead man I saw floating

Obliviously on a filthy river

That was supposed to be holy.

I thought I'd talk of the markings

On the water tanks,

The graffiti on the thousand

Year old steps and stones

Or of those men in black

Who eat burning flesh

Of humans carcasses.

The saffron saint told me that.

And poetry-

I believed

Would find me as I slept

in that damp makan

With cold air running down my back

And large monkeys playing

On the roof.

I thought I'd write of the cages

The humans build
Or those black eyed boys
Who stared and laughed
And told me to take off my shoes
As I approached the holy waters.

They urinated in the same waters.

But despite
The river, the men and the screams

Despite the abandoned temples
And the terrible idols

I found myself crying
only for the supreme misery
In my own heart.

I found myself selfish again.

SHE WALKED LIKE A PENGUIN

She walked like a penguin and had hair like a lion's mane.

We laughed as her eyes
mocked other girls we knew.

She taught me cuss words
and told me she did not know their meanings.
So we danced as the sun cried.
Then, we promised
we'd never say them till we knew.

We cried both ways
when we were sad and betrayed, and also
because her stories were getting funnier.
She would make the whole hundred and three of us laugh
But I was the only one who would laugh until
my body bled water made of hilarious gossip.

She always nagged me to eat like she did.

She ate like an elephant
though she would never get fat.

She would shake her head and laugh some days
for she thought I ate too little
and yet, gained way too much.

She smiled and swore,
we would be friends forever and ten days
and that she'd be the hairdresser at my wedding
someday (if I ever did marry).

Then we would take pictures in colour
and we would turn them vintage sepia
so we looked prettier and her acne wouldn't show.

She liked to hate people sometimes,
it was her noontime hobby
and for a grim fortnight or so,
I was also victim to her cruel game.

I forgave her soon enough.

Though she had other best friends,
who were down south
in that place where politicians' children got
educated at a price of a few starving families
back home. She always loved them more.

She told me all this later
and that too only because she was high on some
chemical she had found in a small room behind
the chemistry lab at school.

It was there that she would go

to roll paper torn from a classmate notebook
and then burn it to inhale the smoke
it did not matter that there was no tobacco,
she preferred the white powder that the lab assistant had.

I once asked her if it was dangerous
then, she looked into my soul
and laughed through her tears.

That was all that was needed in the moment-
Laughter birthed from intense misery

She was hilariously beautiful
with all her hidden pain.

And one day, she made me promise
I'd write poems for her
and for our moments of secret laughter
if ever we should walk on different sides of the road.

SOMEWHERE

A cobra
sips white milk slowly
while scheming plots
and plans
against his provider-
Strikes the human
on her left heel
and hisses pleausurably
While somewhere
ignorant mothers
feed their babes
murky waters, they think
are blessed.

Those cows swallow
up this sea
of rice or so,
I think
while somewhere
poor men's children
cry for a handful
of that white gold.

That man hugs trees
like he were to make love
with each one

Yet somewhere,
I know, there are
what would have been
pretty faces,
denied the right
to see this world,
denied the right
to be loved.

In this world
men in black suits
raise funds and awareness
some in white
ask billionaires to take up
useless brooms
as they parade about
in large cars
and designer clothing.

"We want a clean country"
They say.

THE SONG

I have been singing your song for a while now
recommending it to every mouthpiece
that caught my distracted attention
I did not know I'd find myself singing about
terrible things you say I've done.

You sing of knives, fire and pens
of how I hurt you when you were already weak
of what I do when all you want is love.

I am hatred, envy, prejudice
I am not yours anymore.

So when I heard the music
I left you in your white room
with that voice of saints
while I sat and made my own saltwater
out of big brown eyes
in a lonely corner
as you run about accusing me
of not loving you like I should.

You did not tell me
when I took you to church.
You did not tell me when I kissed
the water in your eyes.

I could not make you see
that I still loved you even
though I believed you were not right.

Instead, you hear only the hate you got,
you see the betrayal
from lovers you chose to love,
men you chose to walk with.

Today, for you, I am those men.

You will write more songs for me,
you will win more pink ribbons
and I will not love your songs
like I used to.

You, however
I will always love.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN?

What do you do think will happen

When life becomes a big black pick-up truck,

Yet you cannot drive by the countryside

You're stuck in city traffic.

You're like the hookers who make love for a penny or two

As you cuss on Monday, but pray on Sunday

When your body is not yours

For it holds too many untold stories and chronic diseases

You see through a drained tea- strainer

And all that is left are blanched tea-leaves of that thing you once called hope.

Bio:

Bethamehi Joy Syiem is a seventeen year old girl from Shillong. She is currently living and studying in Siliguri, West Bengal. She is an avid reader and lover of poetry. She has been writing poetry for a couple of years and has had five poems published in The Shillong Times, a daily from Shillong. She has a poetry blog called, 'A Poetic Journey' with over a thousand followers.

The blog can be accessed through this link: <https://mypoeticconfessions.wordpress.com/>