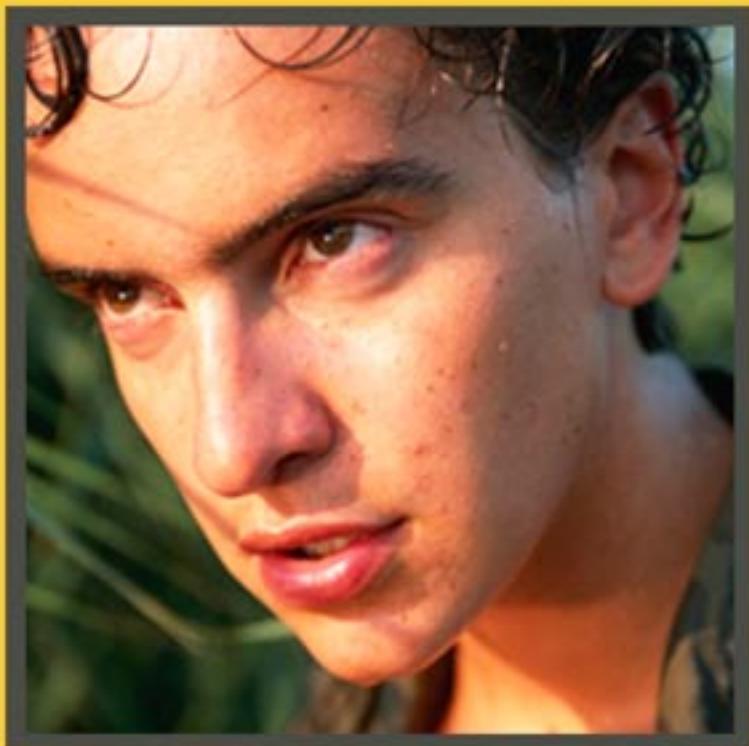


Listen Baby My Insides Are Red



Listen Baby My Insides are Red by Kerem Durdag, © Copyright 2007

Poems by
Kerem Durdag

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Achtung Baby.....	4
That woman from St. Petersburg to Moscow.....	6
Give your hands to me.....	10
Raise the kingdom	12
Reigns of immortality.....	13
There is dye on our lips.....	14
Screaming whispers for the day which belongs to you.....	15
Movie.....	16
Where angels fear to tread	17
Where angels fear to tread	17
Name between the flames	19
I wrote Mozart's Requiem	20
Screaming out love for you on the day I also got my tattoo.....	21
Joanne	23
27th of August, 1992.....	25
Flames from a sun at night	27
This is love	28
Saltwater and forgiveness.....	30
Dive	31
I will become mortal	32
I will become mortal	32
End of good deaths.....	33
Water.....	34
Water.....	34
Love is death.....	35
Love is death.....	35
R.E.M.	36
Malcolm	38
Suitcase	39
Battleground.....	40
Battleground.....	40
Barefoot.....	41
Radio.....	43
Over the river, under the bridge.....	44
Rust.....	45
The rebel and his silhouette.....	47
The rebel and his silhouette.....	47
The exercise.....	49
It rained today	50
Deliverance	51
From Malawi with love.....	52
Within the fire of Eden.....	56
Vanishing presence	58
Out of ammunition and still going strong	59
Heretics of motion	60
Mist.....	61
Broken nights	62
Broken nights	62
War and peace.....	63
War and peace.....	63
Unclothed.....	65
A request for contradiction	66
The fall.....	67
The living room late at night in Ankara.....	68
Running into Turkey	69

Angst	70
Eyes	71
Eyes	71
Gotta think this one out	72
The smile, circa 1979	74
Mine of coal and hearts	75
Knocking on Senel's door	76
Comedy of repetitions	78
In search of Orhan Veli and a place to sit	79
No longer Jesus	80

Achtung Baby

Listen baby, my insides are red and I am scorched with love.
Flaked, black ashes of hate can
be dusted off my skin. I started as
the clown of doom, unwanted
by the deep ocean and the shallow
brown earth; now my eyes are
writing forgiveness on the windows
of houses where the souls of romantics
are locked. My knees are bleeding
from crawling on streets of cities,
my head has a bullet lodged in it,
my hands are without fingers because
the world cut them off and I am shouting
with the voice of a rejected lover
I will carry you, I will carry you.

I am scorched with love.
There is no hair left on my skin
and I am thinking to myself
shall I run through that wall of
red flaming dream onto the other side
where I will be alone, in solitude, in
prophetic pain, in mythic suffering
trying and dying in loving the world.
I will disappear with an explosion
in a long howl of I am free! I am dying
in love. Nobody will raise their
voice, nobody will cry, nobody else will
believe in love, nobody will kiss
me with their lips. On the plains
where there is green grass, I will
color it red without any rules,
without any speech, without guilt. I will
dig my own graveyard, my
love raining upon the looking stationary world.

I am scorched with love.
Blind and deaf, a fool of destiny
I was born to be the beast of
burden, on my shoulders I was born to carry
love. Every love, all love
is my burden. Love is my anthem,
the anthem of breaking the chains
of ignorance, ripping away the security
of comfort, I am the river of love
and until the end of the world I will
sing my anthem till I go over the
edge as a waterfall. Fill me with
your desperation, cover me with your
anger, slap me with your hate, beat me
with your power and I will spit
back love at you, I will spit it at you.
I am scorched in love.
I will touch every one of you,
I will pray for whatever you desire with

everyone of you - there is no escape from me.
I am a raving lunatic, I am a senile wise man,
I am a mother and father, I am
the creator, giver, provider of miracles,
I am the last god. My feet will walk
for you, my arms will work for you,
my face will understand for you. In the
screaming anguish of love I will hear
the silent, see the invisible,
voice the unutterable - in that anguish
I will forget who I am and lose my name.
But you will know me, I am red, orange,
hot all over with love & only love.

Say it: I am scorched in love.
In all the languages, say it so
that you can collapse into yourself.

Say it: Here is the match, be
responsible for having my face melt
in love as I scorch for the world.

Say it: Fool, god, inflamed, that
is what I am, the man who died
and gave birth in the scorch of love.

That woman from St. Petersburg to Moscow

(1)

On a window that is wet with fog she is seeing that her face is changing as the streets outside are starting to fill with people who are hungrier than her; her face is becoming more hungry for a book of words which she would give to them so they can look at her and say themselves all hope is not lost. What the people don't realize is that her eyes are made of glass having its own fog inside. She knows the name of the fog, the slave. And she is waiting for the day when she will shatter her eyes, release the slave, squeeze her palms together till the glass becomes sand and the skies of Moscow collapse into pure blue.

(2)

There is the sailor who laughs when she asks if people dropped off the end of the world. The man laughs at the same time when St. Petersburg yawns itself an autumn breeze. The trees on the sides of those long avenues where footsteps of Pushkin sang whisper a long winter is on its way, and the laugh keeps on rolling and crashing. It is a wave born when his ship cut the sea into two with grace and love because generations before had done the same. In his head, he will many times think of the world that is really separated into two but only until he can hear her say, did the speak Russian. He will laugh again, his friends wondering why is he laughing with vodka and music, everything will be clear and true, St. Petersburg will the city his daughter awaits his presence.

(3)

All those students around her did not notice how she read those books as if they were fires needing more gasoline to be poured over them. On a wooden table surrounded by frustration and voices of small revolutions, she told the dissident how she believed in him and how Akhmatova will not have died in vain by the time she is done with life. Death and breathing were far from her mind, the thought of raising children not even a casual diversion; she was more of a dissident of being a woman who wanted no limits of chains on her body. Akhmatova stroked her hair and took her chains. The buildings in which she spends her time floating silent shouts of defiance so that they will rain down when the time is right, stand like bodyguards at the door of a mausoleum. Even though she is a student, neither the building, nor the

books, nor the dissidents, are the
captives of her soul; her soul may be
heavy but she will not imprison anybody
or anything since she knows it is not
a matter of belonging but making the choice
to be a savior and not a slave.

(4)

Waiting for the door to open, she is waiting
for the man to come in and tell her that
she is being love unconditionally. But she remembers
how last night she reminded herself that she
will not believe him. The world is starting to
turn too fast and love is no longer stuck to
its surface by the glue of unconditionality. She
is sure of this. Sitting on a chair with a
newspaper on her lap, in a house which is
hers, in title & property she will not
open the door when she hears a knock. At the
back of her head she sees horses running
on the Ural plains, running on the Volga
and there is an old man and woman eating berries
under a tree. There is no knocking and history is back on
track. In a room bigger than her heart
she writes on the corner of the newspaper
I have found my place in the world.
Tomorrow, she might jot down something
different but she will no longer wait
for a knocking on her door --- it's
open and on the air outside one
can sense someone has etched I have
found my place in the world.

(5)

She is not an angel. More like a peasant
who carries the knowledge of what the
gods did the last time they were on
earth. Hair pulled tight with a rubber band,
a skirt that blends into the pavement and
a woolen sweater which makes her look
like a doctor, she walks on principles of
modesty. One thinks she is hiding
every secret of the KGB behind the
perpetually kind smile but we are
all wrong. Moscow is in the middle
of a country that is like one big plateau
and she is walking across this
plateau every time her feet rest
momentarily for each step. She will
talk with her hands since her
tongue is full, hands that are not
afraid to touch the earth in all of us.
People will say different things when
they see her. Tanya M. is not
different to every person but the
same to different people. She talks softly,

deliberately, asking when are people
going to stop dropping off the end of the world.

(6)

We met by mistake. Humidity stuck to
our faces like a plastic wrapper which
made people appear warped, all their
goodness ruling our perception, things are so
different in Atlanta. If we talked, we
talked of our lives and the lives we
were going to have, without holding back,
moving like a train non-stop from St. Petersburg
to Moscow, over those tracks we laid down
every time I asked her, "How is
your soul?" We never touched each other
but it really didn't matter; unlike
our dead ancestors we first asked questions
and then believed in knowing the
texture of our skin. Some would say that
this is not trust, I say this is faith
in the birth of trust.

(7)

I think she had tasted the flavor
of those long walks searching for love,
loneliness and voice together with the
ghost of Anna. Nazim is my second father.
Both of us spelled out Anna & Nazim,
the folktale, the myth of our present
trying to explain to the wall around us
in a previous life Tanya & Kerem
created the fire and the word prophet.
It was a warm day in Moscow and I could
smell the sighs of the people
who wondered if they really need to
care about the floating spirits beyond
the sky. Tanya is silent. She hesitates to move and then
runs, holding my shoulder as my kiss on her cheek
evaporates, the imprint of her fingers
tracing out my name for my children.
We will see each other again.

(8)

From an open window she sees through the mist of Russia. In front of her flowers without a name wave an ocean of belonging to her, a calling out, but she will not speak for now. Her throat is dry, her eyes in pain, all from starting to know that Russia is her slave now and she does not know how to be master. The river that flows through her chest cuts open the wound of helplessness of the sinking feeling into an abyss where legs and arms will not help her. It is all in her head, this future that she knows is true. She breathes in the mist, all of Russia, and sits on her wooden chair allowing the blue sky to put her to sleep because she knows the choice to break the sky into thousands of little tears has been made.

Give your hands to me

Give your hands to me
to brush away the glaze
off your eyes,
give your feet to me
to walk through the fires
of our necessary lies,
give your arms to me
to hold the falling
angels from the skies,
give your arms to me
to blow back movement
on those lungs which can rise,
my dear woman, kiss
me before I jump into
hate & loss & the past & magic
for the sake of timely wise demise.

I am singed by a shaft of sunlight
which came from her face. My
skin and muscles are burnt and
I find it difficult to move. It is as if
someone took an oak club
and splintered my guts and head
all over the world; but I know
it is not her with the club. It is this
illusion I have created to make living
in the present more
understandable. I badly want to hack
away the underbrush in my
head but my bush knife is blunt.
My uselessness sinks into my bedsheets like
sediment of love carried and
deposited by the river whose
name no one knows. I desire
release and considerate touch,
a piece of bliss I can chew on.
I am carrying the sin and the
moon in each hand and the
crosses of sinners on my back,
& I am sick & tired of it.
I want release, flesh and more
souls; right now I can calmly
kill myself or cry at a song that
needs to be sung over and over again.
Somebody please give birth to me.

Give your desiring winds to me
to filter the pebbles
of doubt and devils,
give me your sin & moon & cross
for me to carry beyond
the mountain, into the valley,
give me your sword and pen
and I will cleave goodness with
peace into people as I write a new life
for them, give me your love and wandering
when I trick the lock into opening
which bind your knees
my dear woman, help
me in bleeding color to the horizon,
in scrawling five billion names on
all the wall, help me to love
as I drink time mixed with tears.

My dear woman, please give birth to me
once again, for the last & final time.

Raise the kingdom

Raise the kingdom
from under the waves
of regret and bleak
whispers. Swallow your
mumbling, lift those legs
from the quicksand of
doubt, cut the fog
that belongs to our
fears - raise the kingdom,
raise yourself
and break the glass
in front of your eyes,
drink the poison
from the fountain where
angels are encased in
stone, sip in the smell
of the dirt that weigh
down our lungs, feel the
roughness of my face,
my compatriot, my friend
raise the kingdom,
move with rhythm where
the revolutions deafen
the ears, crunch
on the watermelon seeds
of my desires, you want me,
I want the world,
save me from death,
I will not surrender
but whatever you do
raise the kingdom
over the love of kisses on my clothes,
under the sight of pain & hurt on
your chest, we will walk
on without shoes on a bed
of seductions to rescue
each other, this is trust
for this and more
raise the kingdom,
tired and more will tire
these lives will longer
be a part of your lies
spit out the choice of your voice
bellow out the anthem you believe in
take the glass and reach out for the ocean
spill over the edge
rip brightness into the abyss
we are all dangerous
we are all lecherous
but we will
raise the kingdom
raise the kingdom
of ourselves.

Reigns of immortality

When you curl up like a ball
resting your head on a pillow
unable to shut off the song,
to numb to close the way
of the approaching desperations,
all those actions hovering like stench,
spent like a dry wind, a dry ocean,
wasting away in expectance of a touch
indicating to you that you,
you, are not alone,
not the only soldier left
standing alone in hell

remember me and how I
carried you on my shoulders
now that I am gone
there are no more excuses
this is cruelty and we can't
do anything about it

it is no secret I depend on you
for immortality, no secret we
are pests feeding on each other

there is that tug ripping the senses
out of my head; I have to go

remember, for our sakes remember,
we are not the only soldiers left standing in hell.

There is dye on our lips

Don't love me
your face melts into my hate
like pink dye in a glass of water
don't put your lips against mine
your breath rips my senses
under the breeze of darkness
don't touch my arms
your fingers are thorns
drawing mysterious dancing figures on my skin
don't look at me
your head is twisting in a whirl
and I am imploding into an anarchy of faith

but I still want you to remember me
I still want you to want me
if there is a future beyond the door take it
climb over the wall I have built
forgive me and enter my minds
cure me and break my binds
show me the way
teach me to pray
don't hide, I am running to the outside

I know I can't love
so tell me if I will survive yours

Screaming whispers for the day which belongs to you

You are reaching the end of the day
where under a yellow of quietness
you wonder how dark your heart really
is - it is past midnight and you have
no idea on how to swallow your
disgust at unrequited love. You
want to be alone, to sort out
those millions of swarming ideas
that are melting into the one of the
dying philosophies in your head;
your eyes are open, feet firmly
planted on the carpet, your
buttocks sink into the sides
of your wheezing bed and
inside you are screaming
at your confusion till something
in your soul reminds you
we are all doomed to design
our own deaths. Where does
this leave you? The music
of rebellion blares in your head
as if you were in one of those narrow
cobblestone streets in Istanbul with the
taxi drivers riding your fears - c'mon
nobody is going to break you,
you say to yourself,
but damn you can't think
the good for the people in front of
you and because of this the
smell of autumn reaches your nose.
You don't want to love anymore; put
that Cyrano de Bergerac costume back into
the closet. You saw the horizon a
long time ago where love meant a
liberation from isolation, a
release from the tease of angels,
a sprint into the light of day; what
you are holding in your hands is not love
but pieces of the sun which are
rusting into shards of bitterness.
Against all those expectations of your
mother and father, you have finally
settled down, under the yellow
light of a long darkness that
does not end beyond the reach
of your arms. And the flag
of love is fluttering, high on
drugs, outside your open window.

Movie

I want to collapse into two arms,
into the arms of that woman
who would not ask
for my love, for any love.
Instead, she will allow
me to say, "You are beautiful,
and I don't know why."

She would be sitting on a
shore where the sand is only
brown and ours. There is blue
in front of us, behind us no
one can see. Like an old
color lithograph, her skin
blends into everything; the
shape of her dress just about
slipping off that soft shoulder.
Then I would kiss her.

There would be no afterwards.
We will be stuck in a frame,
the salty air blowing at our
corners. These two will not
mind. They never kiss
but sit there, the man in
his trousers on such a
beautiful day, the woman
asking for nothing, half
bare. I wish I was there.

Where angels fear to tread

I am no longer willing to fall in love. That commitment of self sacrifice will no longer burden me. Sometimes I think falling in love would be like going to a small village in Czechoslovakia where the noise of cobblestones and the paint peeling off the metal table was the only thing that reminded you that being alive is not really a great gift. The uneasiness of knowing that love is now going to be a game, where there are no crowds, no longer bothers me. I have succumbed to being a victim of thought, if that loud crashing in your head that tells you even love has no limits but you are blind and that is the way it will always be.

But then at those hours when your doubts are standing in penance in the corner of your wall, and your eyes reflect away the world's hate, you yearn for the touch. Then I want to use my arms to cradle the woman, picking her up and telling her that I need her, the world needs her, the grass outside needs her. Without leaving, we would walk on wet roads, water gently falling from the sky, silent in our confusion. In expectance of some magic, we will kiss and make love, like two warriors on a quest for a valuable something. It will be a forgone conclusion that we are neither warriors, nor magicians, nor people who can lift and carry each other. In dismay, we will buckle at our knees and ask for each others mercy and forgiveness.

Can I forgive though? Not really.
So I get up and barefoot walk
on the wet road, water like stones
pelting me. It is night now and I
can hear my breath refusing to
coalesce in front of me. But I walk
on, my feet becoming my hands over
the woman's face I can't love. Out
of air, in all the darkness
and sound, I fall onto the white line.
I have reached the border
and for some disturbing reason
I for once am glad that
I can go no further.

Name between the flames

A name is given to you
as if the ball of flame
in their hands were too
hot to handle. Your skin
singes and you wonder if it
is worth it to walk around,
your hand red from the glory
of knowing this is the start
of a flight toward immortality.

The name is voiceless, it only
speaks when your eyes flicker
under the blast of pin pricks
from watching your capacity to
love, dissolve into a spark of
fear, above in the high tension
cable wire you see your life
escape into other peoples homes.

Then you feel that loss of control
the music in your ears slips into
the waste bin of silence and your
head aches as your name is hammering
against the confines of your skull.
Sick to the gut, sweat collecting
slowly under the eyebrows you pick
your name and throw it out of the window.

With a name you will walk on
the sea shore with wet sand
grunting under the weight of your
loss. You will be empty so you
decide to fill yourself up with
salt water, so that your hands
will explode in agony but at least
you will now no longer remember
your name; its absence is covered under a mound of salt.

But I will come to you and
lift you, carry you and give back
your name because it never belonged
to me. I will softly tell you, to hell
with immortality and to hell with
transcendence & humility - you need your name
because it is the only way I can
call out to you and say I need someone to carry me too.

I wrote Mozart's Requiem

Some people have told me on various occasions
Mozart was God. I don't believe them. The
woman who seizes me from my shoulders
and says let us jump over the cliff into the
ocean below, we are taller than the
depth of the deepest sin, she is God.
She is God because when I touch her
arms traveling over her skin like
smoke kissing a green glass table
there is no reflection of me in her
eyes. I speak to her and all she does
is laugh slightly whispering to my
mouth heaven and hell mean nothing
to you and me. And in the night when
she undresses me piece by piece
she will write with her nails on
the plaster wall we are free, we will
unchain our own dreams, she is God.
I don't even know her and yet I will
lose all my remaining lies to her, left
naked and free, ready to jump over
the cliff, without even saying goodbye,
thank you for releasing me; my hands
will not be smelling of her.
Everything will be silent.
I will look outside and break
the window just so that I feel some pain.
Then to the whole damn observing world
I will scream,
I have been fucked by God.

Screaming out love for you on the day I also got my tattoo

Love is blindness
-U2
And you give yourself away
-U2

I grabbed a piece of the black sky and said you are mine, you are mine and no one elses. Arms outstretched with my voice hoarse from declaring my love and anger at the world, I jumped over the cliff. On my way down I gave myself to life without asking why, without lying on a bed of thorns. This is love I sang, love is blindness my brothers & sisters and I have leapt into hell for it. This hell, this love, slaps me, paints neither poets nor poetry is dead on my chest, licks my vocal chords with honey on the edge of its tongue. This love is mine, this barenness of a clear view, this overflowing insanity of rebirth, it is killing me and I am happy for it is a honest death. I can see the ground come up, calling out to me I will carry you and I surrender to it, I surrender all the disappointment, all the hurt, all the blood on my knees, waiting to be carried, to have the weight lifted off my feet for once.

Wrapped around me are 51000 people, music that has given birth to the present, breath of wild passion, touch of needed emotion, voices which are declaring I will survive till the end of the world in flesh and name. This jump, this fall, this love is blindness, is free, is my sacrifice ... for everyone and no one. I am about to hit the ground, to arrive in a land where I will be buried. The final destination and I am seeing it. I know it is love, I am blind and finally I am about to be reborn to a world in search of me.

Joanne

Her hair will fall over her eyes
as she gently tucks it behind her
ears while you are gazing into
the (her) future, a madman who
wants to fall in love desperately.
Even though you are in need for
that love which will make you
shoulder the world and drag the
cymbal crashes of voices, you know
Joanne will want patience from
you. She will want to know you
better when you have seen her
birth and visited her grave in
your head. You know you
love her because you want her eyes
to reflect kindness and her lips to kiss
blessings to people you will never
know. Her nose, her cheeks, her
eyebrows, all of that you want to
touch and have and write for the
sake of your future wife, what it
really means to love a woman. You
will nail all your obsessions onto
the moon on the night when the
clouds make the sky look like a
sandy beach at low tide, and say
to yourself to hell with making love,
I just want to love and be loved by
Joanne. It reminds you of your
childhood and the crush you had
on a woman who just might
remember you over a dinner of
lost memories. The innocence
of the faith in that things are good,
flows back, you decide you are
a human god after all, and living
is a matter of simply existing with
courage, dignity and honesty - for now
you are under a pear tree in a small
orchard of a village on the mountainside,
and you love this woman, whose
name Joanne rings in your ears
after so many days.
You want Joanne to rescue you from the lies,
from the howls of doubt that bite your heels
till they bleed onto the ground through your
shoes. You would like her to embrace
and tell you she loves you and she will one
day ask you to rescue her. Without conceit,
or lust, I dream of running my hands
through her hair and dance with her
as a soft ballad groans and grates over
the radio; I will believe in love and see
for the first time how I am doomed to live
in hell, that in my freedom lies the

weight of so many nameless chains.

For the glory of my life which
contains so many of my shames,
I will ask Joanne to forgive me
and in return will breathe forgiveness
to the world, all in silence and humility
as my skin scrapes against the barbed
wire of hate, the thorns of my
curious soul. Maybe I will
break down, fall to my knees and
cry with my head in my hands,
my head in my hands instead of
a prayer; so close to falling into
the ravine of secrets and getting
lost forever. Even if all my dark shadows
darkened the horizon, I will hold
Joanne by her hand and say I am
not scared of living.

I want to scream love at Joanne.
To hold her and walk on water when
she is writing the stories of lovers to come
on the skies, when she is blowing the
destiny of love to give rise to waves of
hope - this is what I want. I want
you Joanne, just like heaven wants
hell, with the faint touch of death,
the soft hiss of desire and firm hold
of believing in the world.
Without slowing to a standstill, without
dispersion, in this silent mood of
loss and love, I am sinking into your
eyes without realization or regret.

Joanne, I am approaching rest.
In this lap of love, the rain of
doubt wets my skin, there is
no certainty and at the back of
my head I see myself failing,
whirling away from the arms that
can hold me away from all rescue
and resurrection. I have screamed my love
for my selfish self, for the greedy world
and for a woman.
I am approaching rest,
approaching love,
you
and maybe hope.

27th of August, 1992

I am now free.

I licked your skin with words and dove into the death of solitude while kissing your shoulders. The salt of the sea that washed my wounds gave birth to my freedom, the destruction of the cage that had blood and thorns on the bars and the names of people on its floor. All my cries for help were answered, were rejected, until the wind slit my head ear to ear with love and lust. The knife with which I cut you open did not have woman written on it, there was only the fragrance of mangoes and watermelons which had arrived a long time ago from a village where people did not know time. Our laughter was born because we became ready to die as children in the shell of our wisdom, with the words in out head proclaiming we do not belong to anybody but everybody belongs to us. I wrote my name in ink on my father's face praying he was seeing me naked and scared; and I could her my mother smile. Wetted by your tongue, killed by your eyes, I have fallen into the well of freedom, where the walls are slippery and the water is cold. I can feel the bones in my body scrape in agony, forcing them to touch the asphalt as I crawl on the road to freedom. There is a crashing of drums in my thighs, the roar of the gentle stream on my chest, the world is getting ready to be swallowed by me. I am outgrowing this world on which I can no longer stand - I am finally getting there to be free. But there is here and here is somewhere, there is this circle of fire and round stones in front of me, a monument to my life and that of the stars, the acid sting of my dreams when I am awake - this is freedom without smell or sight. No hope for rescue, no hope for rest, in the insanity that I chose for myself, I am making love to you with the subtleness of a wild horse, at this moment when my life is collapsing beyond the perimeter of God's house, I am making love to you as the angels watch and the devil says I wish I was there.

I am now free.
All my desires are washed away
and I am ebbing away into a
black night where I am not
sure of anything. The years are
passing by me, the sun is heating
the death inside me and wings
are sprouting on my back. These
huge wings with white feathers,
look at me and be jealous.
Muscles on my spine are stretched,
my neck is stiff like the idea of
glory in my head, my arms are
tearing into flesh and blood,
the rib cage is heaving,
legs are starting to run
the ground is starting to leave me
I can't hear any voices
I have left her behind
this is love
I just had sex
I am away
I am now free.

Flames from a sun at night

There is a pull on my leg, a tugging
at my ankle and from behind hands slip
a mask over my face. I see azure
water and I am swimming into the waves.
The sun is tickling my back and its lips
are touching my neck. I can taste the salt
with the edge of my tongue,
slipping and sliding into the warmth
of the water, the skin of her body.
I want to hear her speak but
all my ears pick up are the
soft mutterings of the other women;
and they are not wearing masks.
I know I am alone, I am wet and
disoriented - where there is no shore
or sand or sky, that is a prelude
to paradise. I run, get tired. She
catches up with me, enfolds me in
her arms and I faint.
The last thing I hear before
the blackness licks me is her saying
love is not a dream.

This is love

I am gathering of raindrops of yesteryears
holding them tight in my hand
till my finger hurt
this is love
faces asking me if I saw
them in my dream last night
in that black night where
I woke up without
a scream without a tear
but with aching ribs
this is love
all my curses echoing far
into my ears, I can't sing
anymore, I can't rescue you
so you leave
& I curse you
but I want you back
the body to hold
that shaded blue eye
to paste on my forehead
this is love
jesus, I can't think straight
I am diving into the world
when I know nobody will
see the ripples
the water of the world
will not love me back
but I will drown in all
the colors of creation
glory or suicide it matters
and I choose one kiss
three words, lovely smile,
I am seeing my mother get old
and I am not scared
this is love
there is smoke over the bed,
my hair is sticking with hate
the release beyond the door
is not coming
my hands are breaking into
flowers as the wall becomes
my shadow, a heavy shadow;
Samir, Usama, Hasan, where
are you? karachi grammar school
bites my heels, st. john's university
becomes an ulcer in my gut
and I will go on
I will create
sever me from the neck
I will talk
I will write
savannas of the future I see
ruins of the past are by me
the present is coming to be
mine, I throw it to you

this is love

ooff, I am stretched
between surrender and uncertainty
this rope has taken everything
away from me
I refuse to be a victim
no surrender
how long will I sing this song?
baby, don't let me fall
mother, cradle my head when
I sleep for you
Irem, go beyond the death
of my father,
father, can you see me?
this is love
it is age, my youth
cross and crescent are
forged into my spine
heave ribs, heave
breathe in the world
and live it for your sake
hold the sword in one hand
don't forget the pencil
there will be a time
for peace and war
for the white & blackness
I am the gray
the silence under the bullets
help me I am hungry
help me I am crying
in front of strangers
even the t.v.
I am wide awake
there are no more mountains
to climb, no more
promises to break
I am dry
I am screaming for you
COME HERE
LET US SAVE OURSELVES
this is love
LET US SAVE EACH OTHER
this is not melodrama
this is love

Saltwater and forgiveness

lost and bewildered
there is strength in
my weakness
talk softly
I am licking the coating
of lust and greed and lies
of your alphabets
look at me gently
while I poke revenge
into them
hold my hand
is the blood warm enough
for you who wants
an answer that
I have given
the secret is mine
drink with me it might
ease your sorrow
kiss me on my cheek
while I whisper into your
ear, I forgive you
yes, I am God
ask Pushkin and he'll
confirm it
I forgive you
as I die in my hate
in misery
but I am not sad
bring on the cameras
I am here to stay
ghost and flesh
with thorns and balm
you are free
forget me
can this be humility?
yeah, but remember
I forgive you

within certain limits

Dive

It is morning and time
to dive out from the window
onto the lap of people
this is the final sacrifice
of my life; for the sake
of my ego don't tell me
how great and wonderful
I am - let me continue
to scrap my knees
build the cathedral of love
shout out when will you
ask if I am Jesus
be stoned by your ignorance
touch the neck of the devil
kiss the walls of the room
I have dug my grave in
cry over the destruction
of my innocent eyes
break your heart for
my sake and yours
dissolve into the nation
that I am
blow over the desert in
search of comfort forever
I know what I want
I want to dive a perfect 10
and cut the water of life
into a million drops
it is morning & time for no rules

I will become mortal

For the sake of love I smiled
I bit my lips to forget
all the vain promises
swirling inside my head
give me time, give me time
and I will love all my desperations
for you, destroy all possession
of you - I will become mortal
in the name of love and you
under a rain of your eyes
over a glance of your sighs
beyond the horizon of your secrets
there is a call for rest
of muscle of arms and of thighs
I will become mortal
all for love
nothing left to chance
damn this responsibility
somebody relieve me
for standing alone

across the river an old woman stopped me
she said, "Kerem, let the red fire kiss
the blue water when you walk tomorrow."
for the sake of love?
this is getting dangerous
such is the knife edge of mortality
I will become mortal
for love and you

End of good deaths

This must be a good death, to
die at the hands of love. I
have put fear on the table,
where the plates await the
world to eat on hate and greed.
If I had any protest, then
it is gone, sent away to the other
end of hell. But the agony
remains, that gut-wrenching
hurt of separation from the
womb, from the hands that
smear my arms with blue blood,
this agony for love of a world
who is bent backwards to
forget me, this agony of mine
and I accept it. Illegitimate child
of mine, love equals death and
all the esoteric rubbish, does not enter
my ears anymore. I have
surrendered, am not in the
chase anymore to conquer or
be conquered - no wonder this
is a good death.

Water

for Mary

I am coming down on the waterfalls
of rules, getting wet under the water
of anarchy, the clear liquid of love. This
must be the hunger for the clearing of the mist
which resides at the soles of our
feet. This is my rebirth where I
no longer am afraid to see my mother
die, nor to hold her, the younger woman, in my arms and
wonder, how many times will I kiss
the skin covering me like
water without creating ripples. It is in this
water I can't breathe, looking outside
from the glass which holds me, but
I can't see the transparent covering of
our souls, so when will I spill over
into her eyes? Both the women are
the same, and I am mortal for both
of them. Peeling the garment of weariness
and forcing me to forgive and walk
without regrets, my mother and she
have imprisoned me within the
blood of my children. My mother will
give her my wrinkles to Mary and say
my son is old, and needs
unrequited love. Mary will give
my mother a reason to smile. And
all this while I put my wings away
and sing anthems for my freedom from
the chains of love, the water. Neither of them
will hear me; in that lies the promise
of comfort and the guarantee of war
with the next woman I will have no
choice but to love and drink from.

Love is death

It must be a good death to die of love.
With holes all over your body
through which the breath of all
your enemies, and those insufferable
idiots blow, there would be feeling
of relief, the hand of my mother
stroking my forehead, kissing me
slightly and saying it is alright
to die of love. What else is there
to say when I know I will die
after my time is up, wasted to
the black ashes, croaking continuously
it is my spirit coming back to
this world, and evil be damned.
Perhaps, all that I am thinking
at the moment is a sickness,
this sickness of being forced to
bend at the knees and cry
without reason, whispering
God, don't let go of my hand.
It is all in the hands my friend,
whether it is a good death, or
an end of life, mine, that ate itself
up because of love, it is in the hands
memories and regrets will scream for
the blood, for the freedom of
our fears.

R.E.M.

I am living a dream.
I can see the secrets
which are lying at the
pit of every ones stomach.
People are shooting real
bullets at children and
I am seeing the disbelief,
the sense of being lost,
all lost in an inferno
that belongs to someone else.
This is a dream: in front of
me she is standing there
telling me I can not do anything
to save her. Love is
a dream and I hate it
for playing with me. Handcuffed
to the earth, I am dreaming

the fall of all the angels, blackening
the sky like a swarm of
fainting flies. And Beelzebub
is not happy. This dream,
this montage of my other life
brushes my eyelids. Passages
through corridors of wars which
blow us apart at the joints.
We are all prisoners of
the same war.
And that is not

a dream; a nude woman
beckoning me toward
a window with half open
shades where voices of
men are breaking apart
into tears saying what
can I say, what can I say,
we are going to be saved.

This dream, this soon to be forgotten
mosquito bite on my brain, there is a
lingering taste of destruction
and death; a charred smell of
love, this blackness thick like
a soup brewed under a cloudy moon.
Fresh air does not come so I will
wait, this dream in hand and
mind, living a life which refuses
to sink inside me. The woman
is beckoning, secrets are
scratching for blood on my skin

and I am starting to see the
tail of love. And yet, yet, there are these
voices saying we are going to be saved,
we are going to be saved.
God, I must be dreaming.

Malcolm

I want to write a song for this man,
Malcolm X, this Afro-American
prince, this man whose beard scratches
my shoulders, whose lips whisper in
my ear. But I can't write. His initials
are blazed and razed and imprinted
into the lining of my skull, on the bones
of my ribcage, and I can't write
a song for him. I will not write
even as he takes a sword and tells me
shaking his head and holding me
by the wrists, "Kerem, we have
to fight for the equality of our brothers
and sisters." Yes, Malcolm, my
feet have dissolved into the earth,
my anger has parched the words in
my mouth, I am shivering and I
am yelling dammit enough is
enough, stop the raping, the killing,
the murder of our souls. And I
shivering. I can no longer
write a song for Malcolm,
because I am black, I am
Afro-American, and I want to
sing enough is enough, I demand
equality without a tune or
rhyme or melody - I just want
to sing. This is all I can give
Malcolm, this is all they
will allow me to give, this is
all I am willing to give and
that is why without song,
I will die a death of smiles like you
across the savannas of love.

I will get your freedom,
I will snatch our freedom,
I will scratch what is left
of our freedom,
Malcolm, one day
you and I will be free -
but I am scared
of dying like you,
my soul splattered on
the floors of confusion across the desires that you and I call love.

Suitcase

We are all travelers
on the shores of the
river that ends before
the pit of our graves,
before our last offering
of unselfish love.

Our shoulders will ache
as the sun bears down
on us, like missionaries
of a lost religion we will
have to stop for a drink
of conversation, doubt and
hate of living.

On that shore of the river
mosquitoes will remind us
the irritation of being
with people you don't know
but love to travel with.
We will forget our shame,
deny our cries for help and
tell the soles of our feet
that end is near,
the end is near.

Battleground

I want to touch that person.
That person. As if memories
were like paper boats, I want
to sink into her, and take her
down with me till together we hit
the plastic bottom of the bucket.
Everything would look so different
from down there - everything waving
like stupid arms detached from
bodies. We will blow bubbles and
see them float beyond us not
seeing them pop in hurried shyness.
If she shivers I will churn the water
to create heat. It will take a long
time but I would do it for her.

I sank alone. She was a better
swimmer than I expected. But does
it really matter? There is no shore
left for us. Here I sit at the
bottom of the bucket, my boat
once more pulp, looking at those
legs gently guide her around a
sea so small for comfort. But
they will start to thrash soon.
I will no help her sink or stay afloat.
Not because I can't but because
I won't. For the first time in my life
I am deaf to the voices in my head.

Barefoot

they will not listen to you
conversations creep about you
like pestilent vine
dithering and babbling pass
you by like trains that
have no destination
people look and laugh
as if you are too sane for
their taste
and you say let them be
to yourself
but how it hurts
how it hurts
like knives unsheathed
those words slash open
the wombs of treachery
of misunderstanding
of not listening
and how it hurts
dear executioner do you
know what you have done
arrogant! loud! egoist!
they slap you, slap you
till they rob you of your
dignity, of your truth
leave you naked
angry and wise
no revenge, no revenge
will take place
my glory will come later
when they will be looking
at their feet become concrete,
then dust, then nothing
not a trace of blood
while I will be covered in red
my face sheathed in peace
my eyes closed with the
weight of absurdity
they shout again, and again
all those things that
are not true
let them shout because
I know that the waves
of absurdity will fill their
throats and lungs and guts
with the salt of insanity
the fishes of quiet death
then for the heavens of
silence, for the hells of noise
I will scream
I will scream
no request for permission
with the voices of all the

screamers
in daylight, twilight and
sunlight our patience
will float like the hands
of our childhood
the feet of our old age
oh! they will float
and we will be free
I will be free
will leave all that blood
behind all that darkness
behind
standing on the street
no longer red
no longer misunderstood
we are the barefoot
prophets, your future
the destiny of so many
deaths and births

don't listen to us
be barefoot
be a prophet
with no beginning
and no end

Radio

You think you are the voice. You live
under the impression that you are a voice.
Under the waterfall of guilt you believe you
have a voice. Like a fiddle without a fiddle,
you and I both stamp our feet in time, in step,
in echoes of dance and music, but we know what
is missing. We sing words that could destroy worlds
only to see our satisfaction end at the limits of
the legends that we create. Even legends after all
that we find true, are false. Our voice is false too. Neither
a conduit for the musings of lazy street urchins
nor a side canal for the breathless seductions of lovers
we long for, our voices explode with a silenced *bampf*
as soon as it tries to travel on foot. The inadequacy of the
language slits our vocal cords and all we can do is to
open our eyes and gape, statues of flesh as the world
screams back at us. Like murderers we escape the
torture only to realize that what we left behind was the
only thing which sustained us.

So, we spell out chaos and equality with nails on the
footpath but it really does not matter. Our voices
are gone. The emptiness of knowing you will never
say anything scoops the air out of our lungs and
leaves us waiting for attention. And while waiting

I look at you and see that our
mutual silence is the water of
our loss. I can't hold you anymore,
I can't expect these arms to take the place of voice.
You are evaporating & I can't reverberate anymore.
Before I start to cry out in a vacuum
of sound, kill me gently
and when people ask you why you
did it, indicate to them
that a voice told you to do so.

Over the river, under the bridge

My mother wrote to me that we have to sell the house. She wants my advice. The son has to come up with advice or at least imagine that he can give it. So I thought and imagined and all I can write to my mother is sell it, times are hard and we have no choice. With that, a bunch of dirty walls and tiles darker than my sins will go to a family that will in no way resemble mine. The *Playboys* will have to come out from under the mattress, the dust on my Class V notebooks will disappear and the view from the balcony overlooking the sewer will not be mine. The window I spent more time looking out than studying will have to open and close in my head. Everything will be crammed into my head. Those days of cricket will be compressed like shirts in a small suitcase. A whole damn house that I spent twelve years into my head. My friends that never came because they were scared of my father will have to enter my head too for good Turkish tea and light conversation. I am no god.

In my head I am close to being homeless. The new place is not my home, I am too much of an adult to start all over again. This is life, one has to keep moving, grab the resting place in the early thirties. Then I will start all over again. Build a personal Ottoman empire. Till then my head is going to be crowded like a Karachi railway station, lot of walking around very little done. Sell the house mother, sell it for all our sakes.

Rust

He said he would like to walk
with his muddy shoes
on the altar
of my being
--- and I can't say no
to him. It is not
a matter of strength
but a matter, a real
matter, of
rust. That dark, reddish
brown stuff that
cakes on your skin
and crackles
in your eyes; rust.
Perhaps it is the
sand of the
desert, that desert
of his, or maybe
the salt of
white bed-sheet like
lake beds; it could
be my mother's secrets
or a longing for
some love. Whatever
it is, I am slowing
down, bit by bit
clotting away
and I don't know why.
But he still wants
to walk on me. Go
ahead, walk on me
like a thumb
that was trying to pick
up dry crumbs of bread.
I will stick to
you --- something
of me will stick
to you; like the way
my father says
son I miss you
and all I can do
is try to be a man.
All that pretentiousness,
the didactic, impersonal
words (it is all in the
words), he wants to
tear down and
walk on. Such
hateful sneering.
That's the way
rust is
when you want
to remove it.
It could be
that I am a false prophet

of false revelations,
it could be all
those books I read.
But people have died
in my arms
and many without
my arms.
Rust is a slow
death that starts
in the arms;
so I will pick
you up, carry you until
they break,
all in love,
sadness, desire
for a touch.
Walk on me and
wipe your muddy
soles all over me;
rust and mud
crunching together.
A new sound, an
old color.
In your laugh of
victory don't
open your mouth
too wide; your
hinges are rusty.
If your jaw breaks away
look at the bottom
of your feet
and wonder
the fate
of the rusty man
whom you
believed was
iron.

The rebel and his silhouette

in memorium of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1983)

Faiz would say to me,
dear son dance without
the music, but instead to the blowing
cries in the wind that were born
in the night of swirling
blood and dust.

Shoulders slouching on a
weatherbeaten sofa, he would
put his hand on my head and tell
me how the hungry want a voice,
the dead want a life,
and oppression needs a song; all
this on my head because I am
son of the land, the father
of the future, an angel
of the past. And I believe
Faiz, believe him as my God
who smiled without reason.

He would then listen at the window
for the slogans and the curses and
whisper to me, dear son the time to
make a choice is near, so why
don't you listen to the slogans and
curses in your heart? And I would
listen and listen to the tumult
with Faiz behind me muttering
dear son this is also your silence.

How could I not agree? My shoes
are worn, my clothes tattered, this hand
in bandages, the other quiet like
Faiz's tortures. We are both of
the same clan, both having the
same cobbler, tailor and doctor. But
my teeth are in place while he lost
his on his way over here, here where
there is isn't anything
else to think about.

A whole day would pass as
if ghosts were running away
wild, carrying the day behind
them. Faiz would look at
the street with the one bulb
strung on the cables and
would calmly say to me,
Kerem, my son look how
we are running carrying the day
behind us into the night, do
you hear the clamor?
Faiz was just hearing too many things; all
I could see was us both
running with blood on our hands
and dust on our feet.

But somewhere, nearby, beyond the wall,
in the night where we were each
others shadows
we could both hear an old man and a young apprentice
on an old accordion sing
our favorite ghazal.

The exercise

To drip into the silence
of the insides,
what I would give
to peer later into my insides
and see if there was
a puddle or a pond.

To drip over the curvature
of the eyes,
what I would give
to slide over the edge
and see if I could
gain insight or lose my sight.

To drip onto the pages
of my hands,
what I would give
to read the books back to front
and see if I came
to where I am or to where I am going.

It rained today

It rained today. Like an old man
falling through the years, wanting
to talk to me. Slowly, gently, the drops
scattered into elastic worlds, collected into
disturbed puddles to splash in, argued with
the windows and walls --- on and on
with the persistence of a woman who is
about to smile.

It rained today. Like the future that
gifted the ground and the sky with a present,
the past nudging into rivulets of love
and desire... the time of rainfall measured
by the cold, supple air that drifts
under the nose, over the eyes, resting
on the cheeks --- on and on as an
ocean wondering where it is going.

It rained today. Like a conversation
that meant something, something, after
it was over. The speech of anger and
understanding of anger as the ghosts
of ourselves turn heads in subtle courage
to nod for our helplessness, or fear --- on and on
like an intimation of insanity when we shout for the hell of it.

Deliverance

I kissed her at 5:30 in the morning
when it was a day short of a full moon,
a lifetime overdue with fear.
She held me in her calloused hands and
said I was an angel, which I believed
holding her hair not knowing what to do with it.
The lines under her eyes did not disappear
under my lips, our eyes never met
but our kiss was our truth. There was
that fear of absence but neither our lips
nor our hands cared. We didn't burn
into ashes or gulp air in ecstasy, only
kissing as man and woman without
pretense, without glory, together
with illusions of becoming wise mystics.
On a bed that was a little untidy, four
months of conversation rained on us
as pelting desire for acceptance.
I didn't want to run or grasp on to her
for love till my knuckles went white, so
I put aside my application for martyrdom
and I said to her in a whisper,
"I wouldn't mind dying like this."
Touching my face she replied,
"I know what you mean,"
and kissed me again on my wondering lips.

From Malawi with love

for James Chihak

On the 13th of November Jimbo finally wrote.

Kerem, I am silent. Your letter
found me in deep migraine.
My anger hurts me, Kerem, do you understand?
I met this man named Africa
(or woman, or whatever)
and he was very sick. Sick & naked,
bleeding from open sores,
trying to dance with his ancestors' drum beat,
but it can't, it can't.
Blind, deaf, dumb, he sits there
on plains where grass was once
trampled with pride by lions.

"Jimbo, I am here now. Rest
your head on my shoulder.
Rest, and I will listen."

White people give him kicks
into his belly and ribs,
spitting handouts on him. All he can do
it to put them in a bag around his neck,
until that too will roll off
because of a sharp hatchet.
The bag will soak the redness
until the yellow sun delivers
itself away onto the savannah.
Bleeding, sick and uneducated,
Africa is dying before my eyes,
the blackness of the black nations
suffocating on manacled throats
in black coal mines
where funerals outnumber births.

" I know Jimbo, I know.
You and I need to have a long chat
under a black night,
under a couple of black stars."

Think! dammit. Use your
fuckin' brain! Goddamn
I'm pissed at everyone for being so blind.
I just want to scream some days.

" Scream now and I will hear
you Jimbo, scream, my man, scream.
Scream everyday till they cut your tongue off."

I'm becoming an useless blob,
like a festering hot angry blister.
The world is fucking itself,
you know that. So what to do?
To hell with spiritual and emotional
development. To hell with it all.
Endurance, maybe I need endurance.
Will I ever learn?

"Look at the sky Jimbo, and
wonder if it ever thinks of falling."

By the end of the day,
I am too tired to look, to read.
Sartre's "Road to Freedom",
some Dostoevsky, Hesse, Levinas,
they all swim around my brain cells.
Ack, let them swim.

I don't know what the hell to do with my life.
I have no ambition, no awareness of destiny,
just anger at a toilet that can't flush.
The world is a toilet and I can't
even be its toilet paper...
I am close to losing my humor,
God! even my humor.
I know what I know,
I see what I see,
as they say in Chiayao, "yoyo nanga titani."

"I can see you with your bandana Jimbo,
wet with sweat,
your forehead dark like the
blackboard you teach biology on.
Will you meet me halfway over the Atlantic?"

I stand impotently as my dick,
uttering unheard cries of contestation ---
so what's for supper?
will the rains come early this year?
the corn's been growin' all the way to hell!
old woman Johnson slipped on
the ice and broke her hip
Bob and Sue are getting a divorce
Phil's girl is pregnant
and he hasn't finished college yet
the Ford's got a problem with the timing
how's Billy's cold?
sure is a bad year for the flu
how are Jim & Sarah's kids doing ---
the sentences club me till I
vomit hate from my belly.

"Next time vomit near the lone tree
on the banks of the waterhole

and breathe in the hate of others.
But be careful, somehow love
was pissed around the dirty bushes. "

Luiz A. Moreira is a distant memory.
I heard he's back in Brazil.
May he have a good life,
he deserves it,
the brown little Brazilian anarchist shit.

"After we meet over the Atlantic,
we will go to Brazil too."

And you ended up in some college
in snooty New England. The smelly
armpit of America sprayed with expensive cologne.
Kerem! how could you!

"I will take you to New England too."

I really dislike New Englanders,
even more than boorish Turks.
Don't become like them,
or I will kill you.
I am serious.
"Kill me for the right reason.
I am serious.
Poets dream to die in the hands of fire."

I am also thinking of changing
my name to Joe Shmoe.

"You can run, but you can't hide Jimbo."

God I hate it.
I hate money, private property,
politics, conventional development,
dirty underwear on my pillow.
I hate it when I run out of toilet paper.
I hate lists of things I hate,
the people who read list of things I hate
and think it is funny,
or the people who read my lists
and don't think it is funny.

I hate people.
I hate myself.
I hate hatred.

"You forgot to hate
laughter and tears Jimbo.
Then all is not lost."

Am I being vulgar Kerem?
Well, fucking excuse moi!!
Am I being vulgar Kerem?

"No, Jimbo, no...

yes Jimbo, you are."

I have had it with this fucking planet.
As Lou Reed put it,
"Well I know one thing that certainly is true,
this place is a zoo
and the keeper ain't you
and I'm sick of it,
and I'm sick of you,
bye, bye, bye." God I love that song.

I love poor people who spit on rich people
and get kicked in the teeth.
I love anarchists who flick off suits,
the prophet with loud obnoxious
personalities that piss people off,
when the important are given the
shaft of justice and writhe in the light of truth,
I love it when the dog bites the
paternalistic hand that feeds it
and tells the dickhead to go to hell.
I love cold water on a cold day
getting malaria when I'm pissed off at the world
taking a shit
eating ripe mangoes
writing this letter to you
being mooshy, laughed at
and being called an asshole
the idea of telling my kids
"kids, Uncle Kerem and I are really crazy dumbfucks"
I love the idea of pissing off the world
going down in abject martyrdom
I love it all.

"Let me walk alone for a while Jimbo.
Then we will shout together
in our love and hatred
how we won't make good martyrs."

Peace and love.

Within the fire of Eden

You don't want her to leave.
The speech of a man asking
for a verification of his attention
stops in mid sentence in his mind
and she wonders why he is
smiling without a particular reason.
Hardly an hour of companionship
that borders on a subtle hint
of shouting for a helping hand
and all is already lost ---
she says she is comfortable
with contradictions and
you reply, " I am trying
to understand them."

But the eyes latch once in
a while, like two runners
on a track gasping for breath
as they try to switch batons
again and again and again.
You play with a strand of hair
that has designated its own destiny
and she gazes past you
past your future
making you wonder why.
The cool New England air full
of quarreling dews settle
on your jacket,
she doesn't mind
(not at first)
and you say to yourself
"handshake or a kiss on the cheek?"

She mentions that you should
go to the Grand Canyon
and hike to the bottom and then
back up in a day. To look
at the sky from the worlds largest
pit is wonderful, she says truthfully.
You can only say yes,
and in that enthusiastic yes
you are burning in the impossibility
of not having actually not
fallen in love with her till now.

Questions end, answers end,
and you wish you had talked
more about yourself for her benefit,
while she thinks that
you are an average listener.
No battle lines, no demarcations
of conqueror or conquest,
the relief of being comfortable
settles in, and invades doubts.
And you think this is the
onset of wisdom ---
she is glad, glad to be a woman.

The elevator does not help.
A quick ride, and the building
is already smaller, more bearable.
An exchange of pleasantries,
wishes of perhaps friendship
that would be more than a
supermarket acquaintance.
And a handshake
with words that actually mean something.

Yet she leaves, and you don't want her to.

Vanishing presence

What would it be like to go over the edge?
A slow quiet jump without feet dragging,
eyes trying to smile, it would be the closest
I could ever get to divination. Darkness hissing
across my face, slithering through my hair,
in all probability I will try to laugh
out of fear and because I really would
want to. Leaving behind no notes, no
smell of dreams whatsoever, I would not
even look back. Let the past accompany
me its wails, as my hands clutch
the linings of my trouser pockets. All
that I have lost --- my father, the
security of definition, ability to love
without demand --- all and nothing
that will stay as permanent sweat on
a dry chair. Rid me of this tiredness,
this accursed solitude and I will grant
you my place before the eternal door.

I have never talked to a survivor. Survivors
never make good talkers. The imminent
failure of speech comes as my muscles
blink, will I survive? If all the
people were to gather and listen to
me, there is nothing I would say.
With tears the proclamation of hypocrisy
will rebound off walls, echoes and echoes
of truth beating me, beating me
to the floor. Such is the failure of speech.
All that trying in vain. Like getting gagged
and slapped, I can no longer retaliate,
my anger and passion settling like silt
on a riverbed without a name.

In knowing that, I know there is wisdom.
God is still a child, he knows I know
that too. But perhaps in our silence
we are learning what patience is.
The day when I burst like a supernova,
bits & pieces of me will land on trees,
on dry grass, on the rooftops of
Lyari and Orangi Town, under the feet
of the Bosphorus, all that patience
and anger & passion & rebellion.
There will be ten million new skies.

Vanishing presence. Two words unacknowledged
as eyebrows and eyelashes.
I will vanish, you will live,
and my presence will walk
until dawn. Then it too will open
the door and I will be no more.
However it will be open.
The door will always be open.

Out of ammunition and still going strong

The walls marked in a
splattering of hate, holes
that hold capsules of
time for the dead who
wish their children
would go on killing
and dying in their name.
What name? The plaster
cracked like the wood stock
of the old rifles, bricks
breaking into tiny rivulets
of sand as the old woman
with rivulets of wonder on her face
cries and cries into
the night that is
night no longer.

Empty roads, empty eyes
with hands that
still want to go on
leaving behind the folk
music that is frozen
on the lips that sip
the bland smell
of dry death, dry gunpowder,
the approaching dryness
of more war.

The noises that destroy
all the philosophies of space
cut through sleep
(what sleep?)
like the scream of green grass
as it becomes red.
And the children look
on, grabbing a rotten
pear, trying to kick
the ball around the
damn stones & rocks,
asking do they really
have to go to school.

The end will never come.
Bullets are made of metal
which lasts longer than
flesh, or love, or dreams.
Spitting the last remnants
of our voices, we will
end our shame and our
reason and the wall
that will try to stand,
leaving only the old
woman to cry
and cradle the head
of a dead soldier.

Heretics of motion

I am thinking of the car ad which
has me sitting inside going eighty miles
an hour, through lush green woods. 190
horses under the hood. I blur within
the kiss of the trees. My hair, my hours
are flying away from me, and the windows
are closed. There is no doubt I will
blur through. And not a trace is going
to be left on the leave disturbed paths.
I am whizzing by and I am not leaving
anything behind. But I know where
I am going,

towards the wall that has not
shown me my place in the world,

the wall that guards me from the sea,

190 horses are under me and I am going
to crash through the wall, my mouth
open to swallow the salt of living;

into the sea, with all the neighing
and shouting, I will not drown

but go on, and on, and on, till
like a heretic of motion
my liberation is clenched by my teeth.

Mist

I am not sure of the word mist.
Sometimes it implies and defines the future
and covers up the past
confusing the present
so that like a wounded motorist
I crash into the ditch to be liberated
awaiting arrival to the door of
heaven or hell, both which are in the clouds.
Or does mist(y) mean that
my eyes have started to drizzle
upon a world that is parched
of rain as the seedless furrows of
the peasant fields and society minds lose themselves
in the twirling dust? Maybe the mist could mean
that we missed an object,
alive or inanimate
with our careless tongues and pointing fingers.
It could be that mist
deserves to be such an ambiguous word
for an amorphous bunch of beings
who give the meaning to the word
just so that they can live with it.

For the people such as myself,
who are the bastards that suckle on the
breasts of prostitutes
for a moment of satisfactory
conclusion to a life of television events
mist is a horde of mosquitoes
that covers the horizon
and the blue depths of the sky.

We can go on and on
like a railroad track
that is so sunken between the
mounds of wet mist
that you can not see the pebbles that
hide in the corners of rusted steel.
Mist, sad but true has only one meaning,
a meaning that I had to create for
you and your children.
Mist means the hazy sunlight
that is only present when we are born.
If you are bewildered it is okay
but you are not blind. Don't you see
that mist is the root word for mystic?

Broken nights

If the birds had to fly
they would have,
if the stars had to speak
they would have,
if the wind had to kill
it would have,
if the spirits had to scream
they would have,
if the poets had to die
they would have,
if the words had to crumble,
they would have.

But instead the night broke.

And then shards of forgotten warriors
spread themselves over the helpless ones
like misty dreams that had once
lived within the children
that desired a forest, a dragon
and a couple of heroes.

The sky emptied itself of reason
as a tired old man,
an old man, an old sky
that is bereft of even a cup of tea
or a page of a torn book.

And whoever controls our destiny
held up the guilty hammer
and introduced us to a new horror,
a new meaninglessness.
I couldn't even take my clothes off,
so that I could die the way
I was born
because my clothes were hammered
with nails to my skin,
my new prison,
my new death.

On lookers pleaded, shouted at me
to seize the day,
with all their futility
and all I could say
my sons and daughters, please,
forgive me, forgive me.

Neither they, nor the hammer
forgave me.
I am still waiting.

War and peace

A stillness and quietness settles in,
there are no longer memories that frisk about
the trunks of apricot trees,
no loved one to hold and tell them
stories of indigestion and failed
elevator trips about the meaning of life
without any grasp on thoughts and ideas
about justice, poverty, freedom and death,
like being numb after the fear
of paralysis due to a tear;
a silence of the absence of reason and emotion,
everybody's eyes and ears reposed like that of a leopard
under the protection of her spirit ancestors.
I could not hear the grandfathers
give advice to me
nor could tell folk tales of Ali the Rebel
and Hasan Aga the cruel landlord
because even Gulden the flower girl
had vanished into my frustrations
and miserable desperations.

Calm and tranquil now,
me and my death,
my war and my peace,
their war and their peace
stood together without conversing.
We know what it is like
to live like the dying
and die like the living
because it happens every damn day
in Istanbul and Karachi,
in those two stations where my train
will stop every five minutes of every damn day.
All of our glances will flow as if a river of red blood
with yellow jasmine on its surface from the mountain
ranges of our ignorances and desires was born
out of this standing together.
We can't sleep and neither can we be awake now,
our sanity mailed away to anywhere
without a return address.

But somehow there is comfort and pain
even as the angels and devils descend
to ask us for a slice of life and death ---
without pride or arrogance
we submit ourselves to their questioning.
A tinge of resignation,
a hint of definition,
we forget each others names,
our lineage and oppressing parenthood,
knowing the incompleteness of our souls
with the completeness of our wants.

The day will pass. There is still the stillness
and quite the quietness
as our gentle anger flickers with gentle sainthood.
The pores on the charred and bright skins
telling us, telling us,
we will continue,
continue as the continuous breath of a mother
without the binds of fellowship or eternity.

Now we sit under the lone apricot tree
and look at each other
because for now that is the best we can do.

Unclothed

Soft nudging on the shoulder, a slight
wrestle of the arms, slender waters
sliding on a film of words, such
fine mist under the blanket of
closing looks. Some light, some fire,
for a man without his lyre.

Where art thou my insanity, my forest
of myth and lunacy? Hiding away
in camouflage within the splattering
mud of our ages, come, come, grant
me an iota of guidance. Some laughs, some freedom,
for a man who is asking someone to come.

Cracking the crusty knuckles; away you
demons of brevity, let go, let go, for some air
or some love; cracking the knees in preparation
for a long walk. No shouting,
only a whisper of supplication for flight. Some dance, some soul,
for a man, caught between worlds like a totem pole.

A request for contradiction

Unabashedly, walking after the soft calls
of humiliation --- "learn from the experience
my man" --- shrieking for a pride that
is not getting up, wanting for a tint of jealousy,
such are the armchair dreams
of a person bored with boredom.
Or perhaps they are visions of a child
who knows that even prophets
concealed their innocence.

Allow me to leave.

Tell me another story of virtue,
another tale of honesty and being true,
my memories fail me in their shame
as the demons laugh over my name,
such torture for is not fair,
specially when the contradictions hide when I am not there.

Allow me to leave.

The fall

I would very much like to fall in love right now. As the leaves fall away from their locks of shackled poems, I would like to fall like them into a mist of brown, red and dying greens --- falling into the unknowns of face and touch --- falling towards the chair to sit on after a day of loving. Like the clouds that look like the chest of a well-exercised man, I would want to become a prince of simplicity, courage and laughter (the ribs of my skeleton), and then fall off a running horse at the opportune moment at the feet of flesh and earth; fall into a tumble of pain and dirt.

The living room late at night in Ankara

This summer I was in Ankara, mostly in the living room
struggling to understand those hands of people I know
that clasp the invisible blinking remote control and
try to think for the television. My friends, think.
Whether someone else is clicking away the buttons
of your confused, voiced thoughts like a newscaster
who is tired of his meaningless sordid job, think.
Before your image is erased due to the failure of the
persistence of vision, or because of electrical failure
at the Center, think. Clasp those hands, let the remote
blink itself to invisibility on its own and think.

Perhaps I spend too much time thinking. Twenty-one
and enjoyer of late nights, neither t.v. nor my hands
matter as I hear the husband beat the wife, or the
children whisper about the funds for a new soccer ball,
it is plausible that someone would be watching me and
saying look at that boy sitting like that without thoughts.
It's not important that people mistake me for a stranger
in Ankara, let them seek solace in that, just like flies

that fly around to pick up an argument. But real
flies are much clever, specially the ones that zig zag
like drunk Roman emperors, or the ones that dart
like a crazed soldier, they are the smart ones. Reveling
in the freedom of the room, the room belonging more
to them than to me they don't care if they are strangers
to that room because they have been to other rooms.
Adventurous bastards. Let the room belong to them,
after all, we have forgotten how to fly
even in our own minds.

Running into Turkey

Running away into the land, into the people
of middle class sorrow, of middle class muddles,
of spent anger and spent anarchists and spent leftists,
such is the tiresome loss of hope of running
like standing at the village graves by the highway
from which buses glide onwards leaving the
runner behind, the graves lonely on the verge of
collapsing into dry sand; it is not even Anatolian mud
since that has been sent to factories for packaging
to first world tourists. Such are the travails of the runner,
the Turk, the man, who has regained, never snatched
the wisdom of the donkeys.

Running, running from the ancient grasp of the river,
the women who washes clothes in the flowing silt of
unanswered prayers, who are so far away from the
concrete elevator fantasies that I am running towards.
I wish the women would see their son running in shoes
splattered with green grass and black shit, just so that
I know they know I am not running in vain.
Where is the damn doctor who told me that rest
would calm the disease that everyone calls madness?
I am not mad. Runners are never mad, only tired.

Running, running circles under the still point of
that whirling sky and ocean meet with death, my
death from exhaustion --- circles of living and laughter
from the whirling --- no need to shout, I refuse to protest,
with arms raised, head wobbling, legs thumping on the
asphalt, on the plains, on the minds, there is no need
to blatantly make my point; let the feet bleed into
tomorrow and the rest will follow.

Angst

Trying to operate on a man with open chest wounds
cracking jokes to ease the tension of brutality
into a dilemma of intellect and faith
wondering out of the chamber where
a profession is no longer a profession
but more of a vehicle of salvation for
patient and doctors
conversations about the distance of
wives and children and home cooked food
above the din of old warplanes that
can't kill the first time
understanding that love is equal to
flirting with the nurses who are flirting back
everything is justified because justification
is a concept for the generals to chew
on when stuck in a limbo between
our voices and the silence of that white light
the tremblings of insecurity amidst the
sanity of the pranks albeit the insanity
of the meaningful music
words which hope to placate the scared
spared innocences dissolving into
the maturity of death of friendship
of poorly manufactured whiskey
thoughts of supermen and superwomen
raised among the dust from the helicopters blades
falling angels and dreams and bullets
they are all the same
when they hit the naked skin
such is the expectation of those who
raced gurneys on unpaved dirt tracks
or taunted proud but old enemy pilots
they recited psalms and poetry
a handful of quotations from their grandmothers
the effort to keep the emptiness of war away
huddling at the corner of a tent wanting
to go home now, now, now
asking to stop the madness
to break those infernal rules that apply to enemies
they break them everyday but alas they are not
in power although how sweet it is to see
the cruelty of living of blatant unfairness
deliverance into so much needed laughter
dripping like milk into a graceful movement of tears
perspectives of what it is
and not really what it should be
the t.v. show M*A*S*H
my angst.

Eyes

When I look at those eyes
my face melts into a forgotten
shadow, unable to assume
the responsibility of opening them anymore.
They look into me as if my body was
a tired grey piece of coal from which the
heat no longer made them sparkle
and glint among the company of rebels.

It just isn't the way the eyes look at me
but also the way they grow hands,
reaching out, and before trying to strangle me
pick up a blade from the counter and
slash themselves into little pieces
that will eventually drain down the sink.
Those eyes of Pakistan and Turkey numb my thinking
and I no longer can even count the
ways I want to die of loneliness,
all alone, without anybody
to hold up my face and cry into
my eyes.

There is no fear, no attempt
to retaliate but a general motion
of acceptance; the situation made
worse as the eyelids start to close.
The struggle is left only in the eyes
of those who had seen the yesteryears
and are now acknowledging the death
of a friend. There is no longer color,
doesn't need to be because there is no use
in reflecting eyes that are not looking.
All alone in a secret long acquired but
recently lost, the eyes sit together
staring right ahead into the mirror...
lovers that once loved and now under the
quite resignation of themselves
want to wither away into nothingness.
So who will save the eyes?
Don't look at me because I have
been blind since the death of my tongue.

Gotta think this one out

There was once a soldier who returned after a war
weary and tired, he sat beside the dinner table
and said to himself,
"I have just gotta think this out."

He took off his armor and laid it on the chair next to him,
then he removed his heart and carefully placed it on the table
proceeding to put his mind on his lap,
then he said to himself,
"I have just gotta think this out."

His parents walked into the room overjoyed to see their son,
only to cringe in disappointment
when they saw he had no medal
and their blood thought he had done wrong;
all that the soldier said was,
"I just gotta think this one out."

He turned to his parents and recounted his saga of kills,
told them of his best friend that was now dead,
that only best friend that died behind his back,
so that his parents could only silently listen
in their refuge of the philosophy of war,
and all the soldier really said was,
"I just gotta think this one out."

He didn't cry, he didn't wail, neither did he protest,
nor did he confuse himself with excuse;
he said he had died and lived on the earth under the moon
spread in pieces under the bramble bush
not alone but all alone
and really all he ever said was,
"I just have gotta think this one out."

His parents cried and tried to understand like two prophets
but they were only his parents, not his enemies
so they left him with his armor, heart and mind
saying that time will heal;
the son never kissed them, neither did the soldier hug them
but simply said to himself,
"I just gotta think this one out."

He sat there and played with his hands, till the sun came up and down,
leaving his face unshaven and rough like the Baluchi mountains,
juggling answers with questions and questions without answers
thinking how blue the Mediterranean was;
all this in head
in the midst of doubt and pain
and all he ever said to himself was,
"I just gotta think this one out."

This story does not end
because imagination does not have limits.
And how can I know where does the
mountain end and the sea begin
when only a minute ago I said to myself,
"I just gotta think this one out."

The smile, circa 1979

The guy was dead, it was the war of hollow men
but he still had a smile on his face.
That is strange, my head said to my hands,
is he smiling at me or at the
things I can't even see, hear or feel.
I just stood above him
the cars and the people whizzing by;
the smile wasn't all that beautiful
to bend ones knees to,
maybe therefore the smile felt
like hurling a vulgarity from a long distance.
The teeth did not show and
the lips did not curl up like the pages
of a cheap novel
and the smile did not seem to
offend a voice that was pale,
tired and very sad.
I didn't get much out from that smile
specially when there was so
much false laughter and cheering around...
and the guy was dead.

I wish I had a joke or a witty remark
to make the smile even brighter
but nothing came to my mind
as if I was like an empty bore
of an artillery canon.

I walked away after I realized
that I would never get to ask
the reason or meaning of that smile.
I did not smile for a long time
but nobody else in Turkey understood that.

Mine of coal and hearts

Yusuf, cries over the coffin of his father as everyone in the village looks on. For the first time, is whiter than the mines in which he choked, and the alarms didn't go off for him. The Turkish flag draped over the wooden capsule of journey into another mine, is like a red banner of blood, but nobody today will say anything; the blood is silent, choked by the mines. In the middle of Zonguldak, there is this boy who knows that there will be other flags and one will be reserved for him because he has no choice, there is no other choice. By virtue of birth the mines are his, the coal his lover that he has to understand, live with and choke in. The silent ones below will become coal that will burn for the warmth of others one day. There is no other choice. Yusuf hugs the coffin and cries his manhood away. Behind him, far away I stand waiting for the elevator to go down into darkness and choice.

Knocking on Senel's door

I see her smoking a cigarette, it is past one o'clock
in the morning and sitting on the edge of the bed
the glow is a voiceless call in the middle of heaven,
she sits without moving. She is thinking to herself
how her children are going to grow and that she is
not willing to me weak in front of her husband anymore.
The hands cultured by the sink and clothes patiently, quietly
cut an arc in the air with the breath of old angels, the air
slowly dancing away from her lungs. I don't know her, I am
too young. Looking at a woman who is watching her daughter
swing silently in the hammock strung between rebellion and
disobedience, I wonder if she is one of the old fallen angels
who are not sorry for their fate. She knows what I am thinking.
She always does and tells me to go to sleep, there is school in the morning.

I see her death in my dream, but I know she is alive. She hides
her pain so well, her silence raining on her face which she
doesn't seem to mind. All her smiles befriend the wrinkles
dissolving into graceful rivulets. The eyes look away when the
children want to go and conquer the world, because she conquered
it and we are all looking at the price we paid: heaviness of the heart
of knowing things could have been different. The graying hair
laughs at those who are left behind, the knees complaining
only when she reads a book crosslegged without getting up for
a long time. Her back is locked as if it was made up of a series of
intertwining broken fingers, fingers that belong to the people she
told not to come to her burial. She will not cry, except for and
in front of her son, a friend without demand or direction.
That is how I know she is alive. Even as she is dying within
and without my dream she is alive because I have seen time,
history and patience stroke her brow like faithful lovers.

She let go so easily of me in the morning. She had understood
the dream, the passage of evening and night, everything.
Without question she let go of me, imparting only a few words
of caution, making toast sandwich with cheese & jelly. All those
years it was the same sandwich until the end when she finally
realized like myself that cheese & jelly sandwiches were a part
of our lives that we would be lucky to relive, when I came back.
I have yet to dance with her in a public place, show her and
everybody else that I have learned to step among the quietness
of her pride and my cries for sight to catch her faults and make them
mine. The music will implode like soap bubbles in her hands,
and she will allow herself the luxury of laughter. A moment
of holding onto me, the past and future, and all those never to
be written things of the present, and then she will let go
watching me fall and get up in fright with revelation.

We talk little as the sun trudges, the world bellowing like an aching donkey. Sitting across each other, the cigarette in her hand, newspaper on her soiled sweaty lap, we are looking at each other admitting how we will always belong to a man now dead, and to a woman younger than us; they have yet to know how they belong to us too. She bleeds into the hot summer sky and I roll back into the ocean, all this with the wash still flapping in the balcony, the rice still simmering and the dust about to settle on the furniture. The house is full of noises, of happenings, of our lives that we are leaving behind and dragging with at the same time. Struggling to be content, we might succeed or fail, the finishing day will tell. All she knows is that there is no longer a door for me to knock on from today onwards.

Comedy of repetitions

You look away from the paper in front of you; what you want to write nobody will understand. There are rivers in my eyes, your hands will want to inscribe that onto the same piece of paper that you looked away from. And when it is done your soul will be carried to the people in the supermarket. They wouldn't even care. So you shadow box with your childhood friends, the two that you met yesterday after four and a half years. They are still the same guys who are pushing into the future without carrying the luggage of the past; of those wonder years at Karachi Grammar School. A world of difference and yet you & them are born of the same pain, only your mother is still giving birth to you. Then you remind yourself that you will never be a Jesus or Mohammed, and neither will your life make complete sense to you. There really is nothing to inscribe since you are floating away without an anchor into the outstretched arms of the rabble; the rabble that will never believe in superman, you. Let go of the choice, of the paper, the desire to etch yourself into permanence. What the hell! Like a slogan written in blood on a torn banner the rabble will breathe your name when mothers give birth, and inhale your pain when fathers bury the dead. The cycle will go ad infinitum. You will never see the people in the supermarket start to care, or the readers understand you, or the shadows disappear, or your two friends grab onto those wonder years for dear life; never. What you will see is yourself starting not to look away, smiling in peace and collapsing in surrender to the singing of the rabble.

In search of Orhan Veli and a place to sit

There is an insistence of not to go on,
to stay and remove the sand
from the shoes,
drink some tea watching the water and Istanbul as I
turn on the radio,
take a handful of cherries
and place a small book face down
on a thankful chest
and then climb a mountain
created from years of going on ---
such is the insistence

to sit, and breathe, and feel
my buttocks settle into the earth,
letting the arms snugly rest
on desires of throwing a stone
at my childhood. The clouds
smeared on the top of my head
like spilt milk, the trees waving
down angels to take note of me
for their afternoon classes as
the smell of ancient prayers
from the grandfathers and grandmothers
from the villages below make
me forget the city, the people,
such is the insistence

to look for the sake of looking,
to sigh and inhale time
reconcile the sorrow of my
father, of knowing my destiny
allowing my hair to do whatever
it wants to do. Such is the insistence
to think about my children
and to laugh at what I have
written and said, waiting

for Orhan to come, to tell
me that we are friends from
eternity, that there is goodness in all of us
and that we have
finally found a place to sit.

No longer Jesus

The nails that have gone
through your hands no longer
hurt. Arms are numb, the
shoulders snapped a couple of
minutes ago. But the feet,
oh! the feet, how they bleed.
Like a cross on a dead woman's
chest in the middle of a street
in Beirut you are a symbol
of nobody's salvation.
You are no Jesus, no prophet
of God. Nailed to a tree, your
head drooping like a sunflower
on those playgrounds of Van Gogh
you are alone in pretense.
The feet still bleed because you
still are dying as time passes
you by. It will always be
like this; this is your life.
You can dream all you
want, whatever you want,
nothing is going to change.
The people nailed you to the
tree because no other martyrs
were left. You are the last
martyr. After you, who knows.
All I know is, for some reason
you took my place on the tree
and I am no longer Jesus.

