

Poetry Series

Salil Singh

- poems -

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Salil Singh(19th April 1991)

A Drink Before You Pass

Have a drink, my friend,
have a drink before you pass.
For you will, you will pass away
and I on the corner shall see you.

I on the corner who sit and drink,
while you walk in the sun.

The sun burns you.
But walk you will, and i will drink.
I do nothing, you will say.
I serve no purpose, I am lost.
You strut like a headless chicken, in the heat you cackle.
I am lost.

There is no haze.
I see clearly.
But I am lost.
I can see the light,
but i can't feel the heat.
Thank you, stranger.

Now you must leave, and I
must
drink.

Salil Singh

Do We Know Each Other?

How is it there?
Did it rain?
Are the women good to you?
Are the men?

Are you home?
Is it safe?
Can I come over?
Is there food there?
Did you eat?

I've got a sleeping bag.

What's been happening?
Are you writing?
Are you drinking?
Are you hungry man,
are you happy?

You got a dream, man?
That's important, they tell me.

Is it working, man?
Is it happening?

Have you some love?
No?
Hashish? A bottle of wine?
Fifty rupees?
Some water?

Have you been good?
Are you asking questions again?
Is there a reason for the things you do?
Do you know?

Are we brothers?
No?
Are you my father?
Am I a son?

Are you from here?

You came.
It rained.
I've got eggs.

Don't you love her?
Don't you love him?
Don't you love it?

Salil Singh

Dubai

I sit
in an empty parking lot in Dubai
with both hands
on my temples
and think about the girl,
about other people's troubles
and I realise I haven't had a drink.

Then I realise that I can't, It's Dubai
and I start walking,
suddenly I smell a sea.

I stand
next to an empty beach in Dubai.
and the water doesn't roll in waves
It just goes up and down,
pissing me off.

I have reached
an empty residential colony in Dubai.
Not really empty, they're all just asleep
and I think
they must have drunk at their homes.

I stand at the center
of an empty crossroads in Dubai
I'm getting tired
and all the cars are doing a hundred and twenty.

I look up
at all the towers
of oil-money Babylon
and i curse them.

Fifty dogs start barking
and somehow I am terrified
so I run.

I find

an empty cab
and beg the driver to take me to some alcohol,
I think I was crying.

He brings me
to a hotel bar
thats open all night.

I sit at the counter
the 'tender is polite and Sri Lankan
a beer costs 50 D
but i still
tip him.

Salil Singh

It Is.

Its right there
Couldn't you see it?
Rippling invisible thing
You can catch it if you try.

You've seen it, I'm sure,
My old agile child!
Maybe out of the corners of your beloved's eye?
Escaping, forever escaping
Spinning, but you caught it.
Did it slip?

You have seen it, I know!
Like when you were an infant
and you idled an hour
chasing a squiggle across your eyeball.
Like when you were
not yet mature
and your hands would rub your belly
in public.

Felt it!
In the final morsels of a meal –
Meat and gravy.
In that tiny time before you kissed her,
And when a newspaper slid
Under your door and you stepped over it,
Lone pixel in a bitmap, anonymous.

Known it!
When you learnt that freedom is
Only you consecrated
And if the unexpected
Should make things complicated
When you learnt to flee them
Freedom infinity breathing!

And if you are old in soul
Wisdom is a dog

Faithful under a table
And mild-mannered.

I put it to you,
Tall drawn bodily one,
That if you are the amber mare,
I am the road of blood.

Or seen it,
In a corner of a grubby bathroom
At lights-out time.

You have passed it in time,
In grand gestures
And miniscule hand to mouth motions

Or when you got it
At the belly
Or at the head,
dealing in blown-outness,
In put-outness.

Seeing it in ridiculous places unwary
And laughter ridiculouser!
Or alone
Or at a barbers, that one time.

Its in faces.
Like when you saw a girl with a manface
When you were thirteen
And you got it then,
Penis-wise.

It's in places.
In water and its green worlds
If you're looking at it right.

I put it to you
Intelligent arched brooding one
That if you are the missing link
I am the diamond file.

Its not in knowledge alone
Or outside it.
Its in the tip of a hat to some
In footwalking streets streets trains
In rain!
In asking
In giving
In taking

Its in your legs!
In the spring of your sole
It passes through dancers eyes
Through sculptors hands
Through the smiling and crying
In the sorrowful it sits; Injustice.

I put it to you,
Things of beauty,
That if you are the clouded moon,
I am the crystal dawn.

Its in mother
Blowing on your stomach
When you were little; with her lips

It was in that little boy
With fish eyes,
When you were a girl,
And in breasts;
as a boy.

Didn't catch it then?
You were looking too hard.
Its in Sita passing below
Into the chasm
Opened for her alone.
It was in Greece
In eureka and the rest
It sat in our villages eons ago.

I put to you, erudite,
broad- foreheaded one,

if you wish to Jesus these lepers
I'd have to be Judas too,
And I'd do that for you.

Salil Singh

Melancholia

I get in the train towards Connaught Place.
Fishing in my pockets, I only find
a fifty rupee note
and a moldy ten.

Its the same seat as yesterday
and I face the question I pose to myself -
What will it be today?
A quarter of whisky
or a haircut?

I look up, look around at
glassy eyes, pot bellies and
weary housewives.
I look down, I push my nose around
like I can adjust it.

Of course, I can't so
I get up, get off and get out.
The sun's going down,
the sky is orange
and I walk.

They're selling televisions in the first block I pass,
All of them are tuned to
the same channel;
the police have been busting
little children's birthday parties.

I cross familiar haunts
but nothing calls me back.

Suddenly I am happy to see
the best abandoned fire exit in the world
(Rusty little thing under this flyover,
I tell everyone about it)

Men I've seen everywhere
are throwing cards

and insults at each other,
all in the circle.
They've been drinking and I
break into a happy little half-jig.

Spirits raised, I make my way across
in two seconds flat. I make short work of
two streets and a park, this is my territory
and those unsuspecting men
had solved my dilemma.

I meet Babloo, a real man of about forty I think
who likes me, he calls me Sher Khan.
I smile at him, this guy gets me
even when he isn't trying to sell me pot.

I bum thirty more off him
and go to the cheapest bar I know.

Lads in black and white are talking at one table
I walk up, I wonder if they are the waiters.
They are.

Three hours after I left home, I am drinking.
Students are singing, Seedy men are watching them.
I am scratching a bent head,
looking for the word.

Man I hope you never have to choose between
a quarter of whisky
and a haircut.

Tuesday, 3 am - to my troubled friend N

Here's the scene,
I'm going to tell it to you like it is
one time and one time only,
the secret of how cities fall,
and civilisations meet their doom.

And I am aware,
sometimes you ask yourself

Irritated, at your wit's end
"What was I thinking? "

Well, brother
You weren't thinking.
Now what you've got to do
Is look closer at what you were doing
Where you were doing it before
And how.

And I suppose for all of you all together,
That is, society and civilisation
The same applies.

Because the only thing worth knowing
About history is
That it repeats itself
And everything as it gets modern
is progressively more ironic.
Think about it

But smile, you son of a bitch.

Salil Singh

Poor Malbenis

He shambles through street lamp-lit arcades, a shambles
Dogs howl at his impending demise and growl
They all want a pound of his flesh..
The cold girl, the multitude and the frail contender
connive to kill the deliverer of ill fortune

A little love for this pitiful wreck
stab wounds in his chest and arms, they'll stop at nothing
Oh no, they'll stop at nothing
He will come to an end, and all will be fine..
Thus they pray.

Malbenis lived in an unshaven house with a pubic growth on his face
All his milk was curdling on the refrigerator – a shame, he is dying.
Pull him to a café, Make it Irish – and he'll give you mad apocalyptic poetry
And it's a good deal, he's cheaper than whores; you should try him

And if the general stench gives you a headache in that household,
Pull a filthy pan from the pile and smack it over his head
May that belter raise a welter
And push his pitiful wits away

They say he has been sat there in waiting for a woman
But whiskey-breath needs to be taught what a woman wants.
"Isn't love enough"? – BANG! That's that pan again
You're doing him a favour.

Angelheaded whores frolic in Malbenis's gardens
But Malbenis is a servant – and these women are of high breeding
Anyway, who knows if the poor sod can get it up at all?
Hahhahahahahahahhhhhahaha – point and laugh, point and laugh
You can hop while you do it, the whores are having a nice time
Malbenis drank spoilt milk, and he's puking in the shitter.

Now and then silly tourists come to the door
"We heard of a great old fool who lived here, yes"
And when they see him, some scurry, some gape and tremble
But there was this one guy who got it, he sat right down
His family's still looking for him

The two still haven't spoken, it's getting on twenty years
And the whores wonder where these madmen find each other
But perhaps fifty beards worth of pondering later
They will give us the word.

Let our heroes sit where they do, and we can observe what occurs in the
adjoining rooms
where their loves are being stripped naked and fondled by unworthy men, its
consensual
And somewhere in working class homes their stories are being told
So that little kids may know better than to play in the bearded man's house.

But i'll be damned if you can stop 'em.

Salil Singh

Rats

I was thrown into this world
a little sponge.

I absorbed first my mother
and then my father
before I went to school
and sucked in all the
lessons, children,
parents, teachers,
guards, bus drivers
and random strangers
who came my way.

I was a big sponge now
(but still a sponge) and I
leaked at times, and I hated
what oozed out of me
so I regurgitated what I could
and set about despising the rest,
disappointed.

I began to fool myself into thinking
that I was not a sponge
but a rat.

So I began to look for holes
to hide in and to stuff all I stole
and my little rat friends came by
and we ate our cheese together.
This went on for quite a while.

I ran around from hole to hole
looking over my ratty shoulders
for the cat I thought would eat me
but never came.

I ran from my parents,
older rats, younger rats,
lies, truth, honesty,

dishonesty, good, evil,
from the greedy fat ruling rats
and the stubborn reds,
from the police.

Everyone was a rat to my eyes
because I was one,
naturally.

Things happened, my perspective
started changing. I began to see
things in other rats
that I didn't before.
I saw those things in myself.
Sometimes I even forgot we
were thieving rodents.

Then I met a great doe
who thought she was
a rat too, but i knew she wasn't
and then I knew I wasn't.

She was a sponge just like me.
And though she leaked
sometimes, I took that
and began to accept it in myself.

I hope I can remember now
that I am just a sponge.
And if I forget,
remind me.

Salil Singh

The Golden Gate

Behold the Golden Gate.

On the first hundred meters of the road that leads to it,
Seventeen foreigners stand apart and shout,
"Thou shalt not pass! "

It's a long walk
But the road's always empty
And the weather's always good.

Hunger
Thirst
Fatigue
and
Loneliness
are
your only foes
before
The Golden Gate.

Before you set out
The lame will cry
into their braces
As will women
into your faces,
But walk.

If you must,
Fill your pockets with bread
for your hunger
And silly string
for your loneliness
(Or a cat)

A lot of things might happen.
I know,
for instance,
that you will
think.

You might think
That you have died.
You will wake up.
You will blink,
then you will cry.

You will then laugh
Begin to wonder
and stumble
and wander
and sit.

Then you might stand.
You will discover that
your arms and legs are long!
To the gate by sundown
they help you lope along.

Do I catch you
Mumbling to the wind,
"It's fate"?
The sun has caught you up
You are winded
and cold.

You bundle up and sleep there
Exhausted, right under
The Golden Gate.

Friends!
Fools!
That selfsame sun
will soon be dawning.

Driven oblivious
by your eight hours,
you open your eyes
and
curse that
Gate
next morning.

Salil Singh

The Loss Of God

Let me teach you about
Heartache and the loss of God
That is, the loss of
a presence - all-fulfilling,
staid.

Preceding an unlikely joy
You will find yourself always
Wandering, wandering
from dim star to pole star
One faraway light to the next
Through a depthless silent night
And with me a- strolling
Cold, loveless gypsy light of mine!

My shores are lapped by murky panthalassas
(All land is still one continent)
Where man was never born,
He never walked
And nothing did.

Salil Singh

The States

I tell you this;

one goes left
one goes right
but the states
stay the same.

one goes up
one goes down
but the states stay the same.

My Love	Our
Faith	
My Berries	Our
Feast	
My mind	Our
disease	
My poem	Our
alphabet.	
My beer	
Our Love	
My eye	
Our face	
My foot-steps	Our
Fate.	

Salil Singh