



**Tulip in  
Sand  
Dunes**

Naeem Pasha

*It is only by 'dint of grace' that I can get away with introducing a life's work when I haven't even reached the eight day of creation. But it is also befitting: my father's words have been swimming around far too long. They were bound to be caught and I'm honoured to be doing some of the catching.*

*The wonderful thing about life in Pakistan is that you are surrounded by words. Reading is secondary to speaking and reciting and singing. Listening is a virtue we cultivate. So in a house resonant with Faiz and Iqbal Bano, Abida Parveen and occasionally T.S. Eliot, there have also always been these words. They made music by which I learned to walk and talk, and the fact that it was obscure and difficult to comprehend delighted my father even more.*

*"Clues to the universe, merey bachay! Figure it out."*

*It is a great gift, then, to know that you come from music. My father - architect, painter, and poet - plays with space and words and eyes, but he slow-cooks you with the music of it. His poetry is full of alienation and hunger, some anger and a great sense of humour about the hard work of life. It is addressed directly to the listener because the images, the emotions, the sounds are meant to engage you and no one else. You are meant to pay attention and you really can't help it.*

*So these are not poems for the page. That is why I say that they have been caught. These are poems to be heard, a rare thing in English, but an occurrence so common in Urdu, Punjabi and Hindko that it is not even worth mentioning. The poems took their first breath aloud almost as soon as they were composed; the English ones often in Pittsburgh, where some unsuspecting American found a whirlwind of culture suddenly descend upon him. With every recitation, they grew over years and geography, so that if you asked my father to recite, no two recitations would be truly alike. That's how this poetry is music.*

*What is before you is a life's work because it documents a life of work as an architect, a painter and a poet: and as father, partner, and person. It is by dint of my father's music that I can say this.*

**Kyla Pasha**

# *Life is coming to an end*

*Life is coming to an end  
and I have yet to start  
the motionless task of existence.  
Who cares about life and living?*

*Every once in a while  
I stare at myself  
across the street  
walking in sad dreams  
a picture window  
of yesterdays and tomorrows.*

*I am a stained glass  
in the image of Christ  
I am as passive  
Maybe more so  
My nights are empty  
my days drag me,  
I await a cross.  
I have none in sight.  
My palms keep itching for nails.*

*I don't wish to be a god  
or worship one.  
I have carried a cross too long  
but I have suffered none.*

*I am just a plaque  
a tombstone  
no sweat, no blood  
there isn't none.*

*Life mourns and groans  
and I surrender my will  
for a coin  
a little love  
desire*

*a cushiony pad  
an illusion of living  
and plead for sanity.*

*I am human.  
I am no saint.  
I am just a stained glass  
in the image of Christ.  
Will I be lifted, too?*



# *Stale memories*

*Stale memories  
foggy nights  
my tears and songs all gathered  
in a blanket of icy feeling  
the idea of another ecstasy  
falls from my mind.  
Don't say I didn't try:  
I couldn't.*

*I have so often wished  
to be chained  
in the eternity of a single night  
to be loved in love  
in soft hands  
and a tingling sensation of whispers  
endlessly;*

*and been so often berated for chains  
thrown quite frozen  
into this icy feeling of lifeless nights  
and when I choose  
I cry again.*

*I want it all  
and one moment lost  
would be the one I wanted most.  
You can't have everything,  
they say.*

*It's only a mortal world;  
dreamers will be sorry  
they have lost the salt of the earth.*



# *They tell me go sing*

*They tell me go sing  
sing with guilt  
I have not sinned  
I have no guilt  
where can I go  
what can I sing*

*I am just a fading evening mist  
and any moment night may fall  
with guarded steps  
I am going towards my grave*

*Some years ago I lost my soul  
What beats in me today  
is muffled, falsified  
sounds of yesterday  
and any moment  
I may lose myself again*

*This moment is my moment  
You name a name  
just any name  
and I will be on my knees.  
Though there is nothing to boast about,  
but not long ago  
I have been a god myself*

*And yet today  
I am lost in this oblivious world and every time  
I try and crawl around the sun  
this soul of mine  
slimes out of grave  
and drags me down.*



# *Sifting through*

*Sifting through these fingers of mind  
I contemplate about  
my country, my life, myself  
we are drowning  
in these vast seas of endless turmoil  
drifting ashore occasionally  
an exhibitionist urge  
temple taps by lonely strangers  
who think our thoughts  
yet be doomed if ever  
faced to confess it.*

*We are what we are.  
Who cares what comes next  
etched memories on ice  
glimpses of life  
hangmen hanged and vultures poised  
on a floating drowning mindless corpse  
booby traps  
fungus fathoms deep  
entwined yet free to float  
a striptease of shallow intellect  
great desires to be rewarded, recognized  
for all that we do not cherish  
for all that has hitherto escaped us  
why smile?  
It's only doomsday hush.*

*Sifting through these fingers of mind  
I gesticulate  
in Lenny Bruce diction  
obscene saviour  
of times to come and times gone by  
same thoughts thought over  
two hundred thousand times  
yet fresh, lively, little droppings  
of a brilliant mind.*

*You self-appointed sycophant,  
please yourself.*



# *Sins of my forefathers*

*Sins of my forefathers  
are mine to own.  
Shrinking from the fears  
revelation after revelation  
I hunt myself with dexterity  
a victim of my own tyranny  
a dog in the rubbish  
hoping to be a saint  
sins of my offspring  
are mine to make.*

*A flower in my womb blossoms  
in this war-torn desert.  
All hunched up  
I gather my sadness  
a tear drops  
to make an oasis of hope  
and bathes me in my own anguish.  
Sleep overpowers  
The fears of another dawn.*



# Death toll

*Death toll  
deserted street  
consulate burning  
calm outside  
And chaos in the minds  
of children not yet born.  
It's the year of the child.  
Elder statesman's hegemony  
roams the streets  
in coffin closed armoured convoys  
I live my child's life  
and bleed tears of hopelessness.  
Have we finally come to the  
threshold of doomsday,  
is this the calm  
before the storm?*





# *Let us gather together*

*Let us gather together  
today this day  
and mourn the demise  
of a long gone friend.*

*Let us gather together  
the reverence of  
a Buddhist monk  
and a saintly saint of Isfahan  
and try and find  
where Galileo went wrong.*

*This friend who out of a  
carelessly contrived independence  
dealt with your life and mine  
in total callousness  
like Galileo's talk of  
pink Mars and cloudy  
blasting universe.*

*Let us gather together  
the callousness of my  
descendants and yours  
and create an anarchist  
nihilist world  
of which you and I are so thoroughly aware.*

*Let us gather together  
all the friends we cherish  
and sit on a live bomb  
and blast it - and us,  
all of us.*



# *Loving you*

*Loving you is nothing  
compared to a dying candle  
in a hitherto forgotten church*

*Loving you has always been  
caring for a nocturnal flower  
in a vast empty desert  
where Moors reign  
and make a mockery of a mosque*

*Loving you is nothing, nothing,  
compared to yearning for  
a tulip in sand dunes  
on a moonlit night  
in high tide  
and watch it  
wash away*

*Loving you is nothing nothing nothing*



# *Prussian green leaves of mine*

*Where are those Prussian green leaves of mine  
where are those fluttering winds of spring  
have I left them behind  
has the time gone by  
am I getting old  
has the time taken me this far  
to mourn my own demise?*

*But I have  
yes I do have  
some things to boast about  
my yellow ochre rustic leaves  
my orange marred with brown  
deep yellow dirty green  
that sepia tinged with cobalt vines.*

*Yet melancholy digs me down  
the winds might come  
and I am so scared to shake a leaf  
or move a twig  
and bring my end too soon.*

*You know sometimes I hope  
a passerby might come  
and I could proudly show just once  
See how pretty I get  
just before I die?  
And yet I die  
every time  
with a hope of a better  
lasting spring next time.*



# *yesterdays today*

*Don't think tomorrows shun yesterdays today.  
enough is enough.enough.*

*But then  
dreams need tomorrows  
and tomorrows seek substance from yesterdays  
and I get hung  
every morning, noon and night  
on this trinity's lopsided cross.*

*Destiny's echoes  
distant thunders  
its haunts, its taunts  
seek destruction, seek love  
seek care of whooping cranes;  
and here I sit unmoved  
oblivious of truth  
of minor saints.*

*No, it isn't like that anymore.  
Dreams do need tomorrows  
but I really do hang myself  
on this lopsided cross  
when I seek truth in my voice  
and I am sleeping  
when life stares into the sorrow death bed of death  
and I am weeping  
thoughts unleash  
thunders pour  
then there are crosses, there are crosses  
there are crosses all over.*



# *With a LUMP*

*With a LUMP in your throat  
you scratch the World  
there appears a CRACK  
you scratch the crack  
there appears a GASH  
you scratch the gash  
there appears a WOUND  
you scratch the wound  
there appears a WOMB  
you scratch the womb  
and you are BORN AGAIN*

