

**Don't Miss Out! Book Right Now
for the Journey of a Lifetime!**

Imtiaz Dharker

We plan a holiday, a mini-break, a long weekend, a stolen week.
We trawl the options, seek out the perfect combination of hotel
and flight, the distant beach, the extra night, consider packing
suitcases, examine the travel clothes and lotions, get as far as
tying on our baggage tags. Then I look at you standing here
in this pale grey light and think that I have miles and miles
to go before I know you, and as in any unknown country
I may wish to travel to your sites, and make repeated
visits to become familiar with you. We look out of
the bedroom window at the usual view and think
we may prefer to linger on here, where we have
each other's endless landscapes to explore,
where I seek out your shore, you stalk my
tigers and the world will say it lost us.
This will be our stolen week, your
kiss my break, my eyes your lake
your mouth will be my Paris.
And as for Machu Picchu,
there are other routes
than dizzy altitude
to render us light-
headed, other
ways than
thin blue
air to
leave
us

breathless, and we are here,
not away not far but where
we want to be, still where
we were, this red arrow
pointing straight at
who we are, and

*You Are
Here*

This poem is an elegy, from the ancient Greek word *elegos* meaning a song or poem of lamentation. The shape of the poem might tell of things running out, but the breath and breadth of the poem is of fulfilment, satisfaction, body and desire and connection and exploration. In Dharker's brilliant hands, the elegiac poem is one that bursts with life and spontaneity.

The word 'you' is present throughout this poem, especially in the first half: 'I look at you', 'miles / to go before I know you', 'become familiar with you', 'I seek out your shore, you stalk my / tigers', 'your / kiss', 'your mouth'. In the second stanza, the language of their lovemaking moves from *you* to *we/us*. However the *you* returns in the final sentence:

*You Are
Here*

The capital letters for these three words, as well as the italics, make the words stand out. *Wish you were here!* is what's imagined to be said in postcards. There's no wishing in this poem; there's pure being. Knowing that Dharker's husband had already died a few years before this poem was published, I see the three final words of poem as a memory, as a moment of missing him, as a moment of feeling him, right in the here, right in the now. The poem's final line is just one word: *Here*. And *Here* is where the poet is, too, in the wake of her lover's sad death, with these glad memories of big plans being spontaneously interrupted by nothing more than just being with one another. The poem spins itself into a solitary word, a word of arrival, a word of presence. Solitary, yes, but not abandoned.

I've loved nature poetry all my life but never felt inclined to write it – I never felt like I had the emotional relationship with the landscape that'd make my writing any more than plain description. I grew up in the countryside, and took long walks throughout my teenage years: from our townland named after the ruined castle, to the shore where an old round fortress stood. Still, I never felt the urge to write nature poetry.

Maybe it's a stage of life, maybe it's the pandemic, maybe it's the loss of a friend who used to phone me up saying *The goldfinches have returned!* but I'm writing poems about nature now, and reading them even more.

A Blessing

James Wright

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their
 happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the
 darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

When I was sixteen, my older sister Áine asked me if I'd like to hear a string quartet one evening. She'd got free tickets to see the Vanbrugh Quartet play Dvořák's String Quartet in F Major, a piece more commonly known as the *American Quartet*. I got the bus into town, made my way to the university, and sat next to her in a wood-panelled room on an uncomfortable chair. Listening to the recital, I was overwhelmed by the sound four small instruments could make together. The next day, back at school, I knew that if I tried to describe what I'd experienced I'd fail, and in that failing, something would be lost. I held the music and the memory in me like a secret.

Many people have experiences of such beauty: a sunset, a conversation with a friend or stranger, a golden moment of happiness, a birth, or even a death. It can be hard to know how to describe moments of such purity, so I understand why many choose not to. James Wright, in this most beautiful of poems, manages to gather beauty and companionship and silence and poise into one hundred and seventy-two words. Even reading these gorgeous lines of his, I'm made shy: shy about the possibility of ever describing beauty.

This poem is set at night. The images of the poem – the ponies, the willows, the fence, the poet and his friend, the 'young tufts of spring' – are all so vibrant that it's easy to imagine the poem's action happening in daylight. But

Say My Name

Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi

Thank you Dad, for my name.

Thank you Mum, for letting me keep it.

Thank you Sydney Nan, for saying my name lovingly every time.

*Lastly, thank you Papa and Nan, and the rest of my ancestors,
I dedicate this all to you.*

My name was my name before

I walked among the living

before I could breathe

before I had lungs to fill

before my great grandmother passed

and everyone was left to grieve

My name was birthed from a dream

a whisper from gods to a king

a shout into the stars that produced

another that shone as bright

They held me without being burnt, humming lullabies in pidgin

My name was passed down from my

ancestors

They acknowledged my roots grew in two

places

So, they ripped my name from the ocean

and mixed it into the bloodlines of my totems

My name has survived the destruction of worlds

And the genocidal rebirthing of so-called ones

It's escaped the overwhelmed jaw of the death bringer
many a time

It has survived the conflicts that resulted in my gods,
from both lands, knowing me as kin,

But noticing that I am painfully unrecognisable and lost

They are incapable of understanding

the foreign tongue that was forced on me

My name has escaped cyclones and their daughters

It has been blessed by the dead

As they mixed dirt, salt and liquid red,

into my flesh

My name is the definition of resilience

It is a warrior that manifested because of warriors

So, excuse me as I roll my eyes or sigh as you

Mispronounce my name

over and over again

Or when you give me another

that dishonours my mothers and fathers

That doesn't acknowledge my lineage to my island home

Or the scents of rainforest and ocean foam

You will not stand here on stolen land

and whitewash my name

For it is two words intertwined

holding as much power as a hurricane

Say it right or don't say it at all

For I am Meleika

I will answer when you call

Miami Airport

Raymond Antrobus

why didn't you answer me back there?

you know how loud these things are on my waist?

you don't look deaf?

can you prove it?

do you know sign language?

ID?

why didn't I see anyone that looked like you
when I was in England?

why were you in Africa?

why don't you look like a teacher?

who are these photos of?

is this your girlfriend?

why doesn't she look English?

what was the address you stayed at?

what is the colour

of the bag you checked in?

what was your address again?

is that where we're going to find dope?

why are you checking your phone?

can I take your fingerprints?

why are your palms sweating?

you always look this lost?

why did you tell me your bag was red?

how did it change colour?

what colour are your eyes?

how much dope will I find in your bag?

why isn't there dope in your bag?

why did you confuse me?

why did you act strange when there was nothing on you?

would you believe

what I've seen in the bags of people like you?

you think you're going

to go free?

what did you not hear?

Prayer

Faisal Mohyuddin

you cleanse
regions
then stand
of prayer

the uncovered
of your body
at the foot
mats facing

the qibla
your cluttered
from the tangible
trances

unfasten
mind
hold of secular
bow down

before
glow of God's mercy
to a centripetal
of a more perfect

the cascading
submit
course toward the gates
emptiness

here
you can plunge
chamber of the soul
with your share

now
into the most secluded
commune
of the universe's

initial burst of
housed within the lamp
waiting
beheld

light eternal light
of mystery
to be
five times a day

The first thing I notice about 'Prayer' is its form. Ten tiny stanzas arranged in two columns. How could the shape of this poem be described? When I initially read this poem I wondered if I was looking down at prayer mats from a height. Then I found myself wondering about the five pillars of Islam. Then I looked at the space between these elegant verses and thought how only smoke – or incense – could fill the space between them. The shape of this poem is one that invites us to look at the blank space; perhaps that itself is one of the messages of the poem, that prayer is what's found in the in-between.

'Prayer' contains no punctuation: no periods or full stops, no commas, no em dashes, no colons or semi-colons. Reciting these ten stanzas aloud – you read from left to right across the gaps – you're left wondering where to take a breath. Taking this poem into your body you must meet it with the pace of your own breath: a poem about prayer brings you into the economy of prayer.

The poem's first focus is the body: it describes the preparation for prayer in the Islamic tradition, where uncovered parts of the body – the face, the hands, the feet – are washed. The person stands in prayer, facing the qibla, the direction of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca.

Physical preparation invites inner preparation and the form Faisal uses lends itself to spaciousness and a lack of rush: the distance between 'you cleanse' and 'the uncovered'

Father

Carlos Andrés Gómez

I

In the basement of the crack house I used to visit
as an outreach worker on 121st street in Harlem,
I was convinced He refused
to travel north of 96th. I wrote a letter
to Joanna on her mission in Taiwan, detailed
each irrefutable piece of evidence proving
we are all, in fact, alone.
Told her about the nine-year-old orphan
forced to sell her body
for three years before ending up just off
Times Square, discarded in a dumpster.
I told her about the eldest son
who answered a burglar's call and was shot,
paralyzed from the waist down. I asked her
about drought and famine and endless
civil wars – what lessons does His book
refuse?

II

When her heart rate dropped by half in less
than a minute, the population of our cramped
hospital room tripling in a handful of seconds,
I grasped for anything that would keep me
upright. At first, the wall: cool and steady,
demanding my body ascend beyond what seemed
possible. Then, nothing,
no one. I stood in the waiting room
of the O.R. waiting to be called in,

to find out if my child had survived.
I spent each second trying to pull tiny shoe-coverings
over my too-large feet. I confessed every wrong
of my life to an empty, overlit room of steel
and sterile instruments that all reflected back
distorted versions of myself. I fumbled
for any prayer I could remember, hoping
that I had all along been mistaken about the hollow
blackness of the infinite sky. I never wanted
so badly to have been wrong
about anything in my life–

and then a disembodied
voice called out, seemingly only to me –
a tiny growl at first that blossomed
into a wail dwarfing any thought my mind
could possibly hold, any faith
I'd ever been so foolish to claim.

Seventh Circle of Earth

Ocean Vuong

4

On 27 April 2011, a gay couple, Michael Humphrey and Clayton Capshaw, was murdered by immolation in their home in Dallas, Texas.

5

– DallasVoice

1

6

2

7

3

-
1. As if my finger, / tracing your collarbone / behind closed doors, / was enough / to erase myself. To forget / we built this house knowing / it won't last. How / does anyone stop / regret / without cutting / off his hands? / Another torch
 2. streams through / the kitchen window, / another errant dove. / It's funny. I always knew / I'd be warmest beside / my man. / But don't laugh. Understand me / when I say I burn best / when crowned / with your scent: that earth-sweat / & Old Spice I seek out each night / the days
 3. refuse me. / Our faces blackening / in the photographs along the wall. / Don't laugh. Just tell me the story / again, / of the sparrows who flew from falling Rome, / their blazed wings. / How ruin nested inside each thimble throat / & made it sing

-
4. until the notes threaded to this / smoke rising / from your nostrils. Speak – / until your voice is nothing / but the crackle / of charred
 5. bones. But don't laugh / when these walls collapse / & only sparks / not sparrows / fly out. / When they come / to sift through these cinders – & pluck my tongue, / this fist rose, / charcoaled & choked / from your gone
 6. mouth. / Each black petal / blasted / with what's left / of our laughter. / Laughter ashed / to air / to honey to baby / darling, / look. Look how happy we are / to be no one / & still
 7. American.