

A Grey Cat Called Solitude

Poems

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For Lara Bouraada

*"Out of my own great woe
I make my little songs."*

- Heinrich Heine

I

Hassan lay in bed
and simply waited
for his heart to stop,
but the fucker ignored him
and went on working like a clock.

Earlier that day,
on the morning of his twenty-third birthday,
Hassan suddenly realized
that he had no friends
and that he was going to spend
the rest of his life
alone.

All this dawned on him
while he was sipping
his morning mint-tea,
sugarless as it was.

And it bothered him
that is the sugarless tea
not the realization.

It wasn't much of a realization to tell the truth;
he had known it all along.
Now it was only a matter
of accepting the facts.

Yes, that what was needed: acceptance!
Not change or hope or happiness;
acceptance, simple and absolute.

II

You were my favorite person
back then.
You had that perfect accent
and you joked about everything.

Once we were talking about that old Caesar, money,
and I said, "For what profits a man if he
gains the whole world but loses his own soul."
You yawned and said,
"You are a store full of old clichés."

You started getting jobs after graduation;
you worked hard,
you worked like a dog,
you slaved the days away,
peeling off the remaining of your soul
from Moanday to Shatterday
for the sake of a bank account.

Last time I saw you was in April.
You had purchased
a new handshake.
"What's going on in your life?" I asked.
"Wine and women," you replied with a wide winning grin.
"But wine and women don't last."
And then you had to go
because she was waiting for you,

the fake blonde with the Yves-Saint Laurent purse
full of castrated men.

I searched for the old you
in you
in vain.

What have you done with him,
the guy I used to know,
the one with the perfect accent and the funny jokes?

Did you trade him
for a suit and a tie?

III

Life is no bueno,
that's my whole philosophy.
Now I know that the optimists
will damn me for saying that;
they will open their Gospel of Rainbows
and sing a song,
and others will flock and sing along.
They will bring a pig
and paint his mouth pink;
they'll clad him in royal purple
and come kiss his ass
like witches on the black Sabbath.
But that won't be enough,
so they'll bring a bull
and ordain him the high priest
whose bullshit shall fertilize the land.
They will drink their self-help books
and drown themselves in their orgies of hope,
but I will still have my conviction intact:
life is no bueno.

IV

For you,
to whom I confessed my love
and paraded my heart
like a retired clown,
I could have written odes and epics for you
had you loved me back.

It's too late now, isn't it?
Too much like ancient history.

But you know what?
I would still drag the clown,
I would still attempt the epics
for you.

V

Life is harder on the pure
and the more innocent.

Each one of us
must prepare his secret chamber
where to weep away
this world of care,
and to comb the tears
into perfect shape
to suit the proud posture
we must feign.

In order to survive,
we must all adopt the dumb stoicism
of a quiet cow
under heavy rain.

VI

You were troubled
and full of worries last time
we met.

Your mind was like a death camp
with a busy chimney.
You were burning your memories
and their corpses were written all over your face
in black bold letters.
Every sentence began with a skull.

You had ashes for lipstick
on that mouth of yours
which was once a birthplace
of so many cradlesongs.

"Let go of the urns," I said.

"I can't. They are my only possession."

"But why would you want to possess such a thing, you fool?"

"Because I can't bear
standing with empty hands."

VII

And we sat,
two strangers shaded
by palm trees
in the half-empty café
where even Time had to pause
like us
to drink the moment in a cup;
my book in my hand,
your lips, rosy and natural,
around a cigarette;
the incense would reach me
like creamy clouds
journeying over the lines I was reading,
the lines I could not read;
how could I concentrate in your presence?
I was overwhelmed by the perfection of the moment.
I was trying to savor it in my memory and on my skin
like a desperate king
swimming after sinking gold.
And the moment was perfect
because nothing was said,
and nothing was known.

VIII

Play on,
unknown pianist,
nameless master;
thou seems to know
the curves of my soul.

Play me on,
play my uncommunicable whispers;
play me whole,
the false notes
and the silences included.

Don't play me as if I were some delicate thing,
a Chopin or a Schubert,
no,
play me as I am:
disharmonious and fragmented.

Don't aim at perfection.
Don't seek to please;
just play on
for as long as you can stand me,

and then abandon me
when you feel like I am starting
to sound like music.

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