

# **ACHERON**

John Xavier

*Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "Father!" And Abraham replied, "Here I am, my son," Then Isaac said, **"Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"***

*I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made from hair and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of their places. Then the rulers of the earth and the great men and the captains and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said **"Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of Their anger has come and who is able to stand?"***

## A CALM FAREWELL

Only the lives of suicides can be sacred;  
Their faces turning into sunshine,  
Green shoots  
Sprouting from splayed fingers

Here the birds soar on mourning violins;  
A music in the sweet spring air  
That the crowds walking these tranquil city streets  
Can't even imagine

The sky hides an invisible sea,  
The uncharted depths of the heart,  
As a mermaid is watching –  
Her smile drawn from shadow

## AMARANTHINE

Surpassing memory and fantasy, a mystery  
Far beyond the sanguine fathoms of the mind,  
Pervading our quiet moments of splendor;  
The energy in things that quivers in our hearts,  
At certain times, leaving us to marvel

A world of stars in whirls and mirrored streams  
And trees luminous with the fullness of the moon;  
Serene nights of secret nocturnal beauty  
Filling the soul with all their glory;  
Together we are the witnesses of eternity

Our sentry endures the ensuing dawns as well,  
Their proud radiance and our paternal star  
Ascending daily the azure dome of sky;  
It continues too through each sinking evening  
Restoring slowly scenes of darker majesty

In the endless veiling and returning of the light  
We are ourselves revealed to us;  
The shadows we see, the shadows within,  
And the brightness that we enter  
The timeless brilliance of our nature

Human life is the eager striving of the flowers  
And the might of every ancient forest;  
It is grass swallowing empty mounds of earth  
And the swollen fruit on the vine  
Trembling with a sweet and yielding flesh

Growth green and thirsting, the spirit spreading,  
Unfurling to gather up the falling rain;  
Leaves soft and hungry opening, unwrapping  
Themselves to receive in purest ardor all the sun;  
One energy, one principle, ceaselessly in action

Every form of being a thing transmuted from  
The primordial force still absorbed in final destiny;  
Amaranthine these vicissitudes which move us then  
And likewise visions glanced in ephemera;  
Amaranthine all of it, motive rich and immortal

## AMPHIBIAN

No one suspected  
But if you looked into his eyes  
The secret was there

Deep in primeval oceans  
Swarming with bizarre tribulations,  
His pale hairless skin  
Seeking communion with the air

Still he went to his office job underwater  
And shook everyone's hand;  
Smiling day in, day out

He gave corporate presentations  
To sea urchins and sponges

If it was an existence, it was  
His daily existence –  
And he bore the weight of the dark fathoms  
Towering over him and he did all the  
Work that he was assigned

The one thing anyone really cared about

Only on rare vacations  
Did he venture out into the unknown  
New world that was his alone

Above the waters, in the  
Realm of death  
Named this by those imprisoned in  
Subaqueous being,  
He surfaced and inhaled

Here was solitude  
And the strange glory of the stars

## ASHTORETH'S LABYRINTH

A water wheel of rotting timbers  
Warped with the age of quiet decades,  
Turned with the speechless power of  
A black stream littered with the last offerings  
Of the fading autumn;  
And the cabin attached to it is caving in,  
The grim unpainted door out front  
Stained with the dozen starlings nailed there

Blood trickles around the rusted door knob,  
An inversion of the sinister trees  
Twisting in all directions as they form a phalanx  
To ensnare the broken tatters  
Of a pale evening sky

The dark forest is hovering on an incantation  
Older than all apostles, something  
Dreadful fallen from the stars;  
Millennia had expired after its descent  
Before it began to awaken,  
A pulsing red heart in the shadows;  
And with this the countryside eerily faded into  
The ravaged land it has become

There was a family living in the cabin  
At the time; a hunter, his wife, and two daughters  
Surviving off whatever pittance  
That they could gather from dawn to dusk

Wings of emerald, gold, and sable  
Limpely curling from their impaled feathered bodies;  
Even as late as that  
Last summer, the birds had swarmed the  
Branches with their prattle;  
Stunned they were felled by miasmas though,  
Where cowed figures reaped them

The children were the first to  
Notice the strange unease that had crept  
Into their isolated valley;  
They tried to warn their parents and were soon  
Unwilling to even go outside alone

Night now conferred only sulphurous dreams,  
Each sunset the cruel harbinger  
Of intensifying nocturnal ordeals where  
Visions of divine terrors and  
Incomprehensible realms of abomination  
Haunted the sore eyed mornings that followed;  
With diminishing sleep there also came  
A diminishing strength of mind

Even the parents were convinced,  
And the figures seen prowling  
Around the edge of the clearing where their  
Cabin sat exposed  
Were watched with helpless dismay

Slender totems with crude grimacing faces  
Soon appeared like protrusions  
From the underworld;  
Decorating them were scraps of flesh  
And garlands of small bones;  
One daughter had touched one when they were  
First found and a delirium overtook her

The family was trapped,  
Besieged by the horror spreading around them

Shut in their house  
They listened as her voice assumed its throne  
In the phantasmagorias of sleep that  
Afflicted them;  
She spoke to them of lust,  
And blood

Her insatiable thirst nesting in  
A labyrinth made from a shroud of thorns  
And withered branches wreathed in tortured shapes;  
Its tunnels formed by the paths of  
Vanished creatures  
Metamorphosed into chimeras

The thudding of the nails driven into the door  
And their long tinged shafts penetrating  
To the anguish of those inside

The mother had done the only thing she could  
To protect those she loved, resorting to  
A folklore defense  
Against the influence of evil spirits;  
With shaking hands she reached into her urn of flour  
And strew this in an unbroken powdered circle  
Around all the members of her family;  
She added too, four glyphs  
Evenly spaced apart, expressing  
The same desperation as the prayers she spoke;  
Her husband meanwhile sat silent,  
Fearful, as he clung powerlessly to his axe

A howling inhuman throng had  
Gathered around the cabin  
But because of the woman's precautions  
They could not instantly breach it

Yet the slaves of darkness  
Are profound with malevolent ingenuities;  
A chant arose in a chthonic tongue  
And a towering ram-headed being stepped forward  
With a cage of fidgeting starlings;  
Art against art was going to decide things

So the birds were slaughtered  
And the foul spell spoken  
And a whirlwind  
Was summoned within the house,  
Scattering everything that could be lifted inside

The ward protecting their cabin broken,  
The family was pulled screaming  
From their home

In the center of the maze the beast conceals herself;  
Her scorched and mangled wings  
Covered in supernatural unblinking eyes,  
Forming a dome around her

Ravenous she waits for her stealth servants  
To return to her  
Each evening with new sacrifices

ASIA

You who have forgotten more empires  
Than the rest of the world  
Has created

Asia, I address you

Supreme of the occult,  
And devourer of civilizations –  
No territory can rival you

Pantheons upon pantheons of deities you house;  
A land of limitless pathways to the divine

Across your mystic and remotest realms  
Unfolds a continent of plenitudes, of unnumbered  
Argots and patois,  
And jungle swallowed cities  
Nameless in the mists

Samarkand and Angkor Wat and Hong Kong and Ulan Bator;  
Every species of city is yours, every people

Unconquerable Asia;  
The Mother of All Khans

Asia, Asia

The thought of you weighs on me;  
A man living in a place where no mystery prevails,  
Where daily routines persist  
Unpreyed upon by unfathomable powers

You though  
Are pregnant with deeper truths;  
Things unimaginable

Like hushed elephants emerging from nocturne forests,  
Your revelations come

*AT ONE WITH DARKNESS*

A skeletal infant  
Dead from starvation;  
Hundreds of thousands more like her  
Waiting to die  
In a city of tents and mass graves

This is the world you live in;  
Not the fantasy you've created for yourself

Every day you pretend it doesn't exist,  
It still exists;  
Every hour you pretend it doesn't exist,  
It still exists;  
Every second you pretend it doesn't exist,  
It still exists

You are always surrounded by suffering  
However happy you are;  
The walls of your paradise  
Merely dampening the screams of the damned  
To an acceptable level

(Allowing you to forget the truth)

The dead girl can see you though;  
Through the shroud of her unbeing  
She is watching, remembering

Let us join hands against her friend;  
Like you, I too do nothing

## BATTERING RAM

Trumpets blaring, their throats fountains of war,  
The hate that moves the siege machines,  
The rivers of black chains,  
The shouting of engineering soldiers,  
The fear pressed beasts of burden,  
The rancor, the spilled armfuls of weapons,  
The onrushing squadrons,  
The tents wildly flapping in the wind,  
The grim commands, the splashing latrines,  
The fires, the hammers,  
The harsh laughter, the terrified crying,  
The beating hearts of those who say nothing at all,  
This industry and chaos, all of it, an offering

Ahead the citadel awaits in its silent arrogance,  
Mantled with stark walls scarred by centuries of failed efforts;  
This is the maternal darkness, the first, the mysterious,  
But now she faces a new god come into his own

Totem with the face of a snarling wolf,  
The battering ram is the chanting of an overflowing church,  
The hunger of primitive man in blood dripping furs,  
The fire mouthed forge devouring raw metal;  
The battering ram is power,  
The power of illiterate hordes overwhelming empires,  
The mindless passionless power that gives life to the flesh,  
The true power sovereign in underworld;  
The battering ram is a destroyer,  
The original destroyer in its latest form,  
The incarnation of something venerated before mercy,  
The word of the final judgement  
That will endure until the end of time

Behind their fortifications, the defenders peered out at the enemy;  
Certainly the assault was coming soon, the encircling army  
Was unable to do anything to disguise this,  
And those inside dwelt in the dark thoughts of  
What was about to be unleashed upon them; war feasts,  
War is hunger unshackled, the air turned to acid  
So that everything visible is suddenly in danger of dissolving and  
Who among us can fathom the depths of its appetite?

Through a parting multitude, the battering ram arrived;  
The gates of the citadel trembling slightly and  
The defenders, seeing this, shivering;  
The revelation would not wait any longer,  
The ones who'd been charged with delivering it were  
The instruments of a cosmic obligation;  
The battering ram was pushed towards the gigantic doors,  
The defenders engulfing them all the while in  
The torrents of their desperately expelled missiles;  
The counterattacks though failed to stem  
The inevitable and wherever an assailant toppled  
The supply of new men, queued to die, provided another;  
There was no shortage of human sacrifices waiting

It was the same force revolving the planets  
That was playing itself out in the carnage of the battle;  
Every life extinguished was something recycled,  
An energy being transmuted into the far reaches of destiny

Tremors shuddering the outer edifice of the citadel,  
The doors of the gate groaning from the strikes,  
The urgent shouting to keep on,  
The gong of upheaval, the trampled earth,  
The fulfillment of a prince's many sleepless nights,  
The splintering wood, the buckling hinges,  
The hiss of boiling oil dumped below,  
The chaplains insincere in their solitary prayers,  
The clattering of thronging spears,  
The churning blood, the dripping sweat,  
The repetition and repetition of the violence and  
The final bursting of the failing doors as  
Those inside flee before a wholesale slaughter seeping in

## CIGARETTES ARE WONDERFUL

Feeling the fresh pack under your fingertips;  
The plastic wrapping gently sliding off,  
Softly crinkling at your touch

And then pulling one from the many,  
Each of them rolled to perfection

An anticipation of ecstasy

Your lips are moist before the immaculate filter  
Has even found its place between them,  
A subtle taste inspiring saliva

As the flint of the lighter sparks with a  
Satisfying flame you lean forward

Inhaling and it feels amazing

It feels like forever since you had your last one  
So now a warm rush is enveloping you,  
Spreading through your body

Your legs become weak with pleasure  
Yet you want to be overwhelmed

Life is a beautiful wound

The beast of euphoria is swallowing you  
While its ambrosial poison swirls  
Inside your innocent body

Even more, the fire you've unleashed  
Has revealed something now

Death is your friend

## CORVID SYMPOSIUM

Scowling each, they descended  
In a wealth of black wings;  
The group silent  
As they preened and strutted  
Among some rocks along  
The ocean shore  
Before conversation began

Earlier the crows had all agreed that  
The humans were odd

“As another winter looms,”  
Exclaimed an elder,  
Pecking at the feast of mussels  
Laid out by the low tide,  
“We convene to discuss the issue of”  
“The food shortage”

“Specifically,” another interrupted,  
“The hoarding by mankind!”

“Yes! Yes!” squawked various brethren,  
And for a moment the agitation  
Simmering in the flock  
Threatened to send them into the sky again

But calmer beaks prevailed

“Are we not here to discuss matters?”  
Insisted one, “Then let us discuss them.”  
“The humans discard”  
“Many delicious things and yet they”  
“Lock these treasures away”

“Why? Who knows? It doesn’t matter.”  
“The question is”  
“What should we do?”

“Shall we petition them?” asked an  
Especially thoughtful fellow

“No! Peck them!” cawed an angrier attendee

That suggestion led to another surge of  
Furious uproar which  
Only settled down when a crow,  
Older than all the rest,  
Ruffled his feathers and murmured

“All... creatures... without... wings...”  
“Suffer... a... madness...”  
“Born... from... their... despair...”

This was an avian proverb they all knew

“It’s as he says!” snapped one,  
“We cannot make a pact with groundlings!”  
“With the eggless and wind scorned!”  
“Let us turn then to”  
“Those we share branches with!”  
“The gulls! The pigeons!”  
“Even the herons if need be!”  
“Together we”  
“Will force mankind to”  
“Surrender its precious garbage!”

For the humans walking by in  
The adjacent city park,  
It was nothing but bird noises, yet  
At that moment  
A war was being hatched

The crows were getting ready to  
Stage their vote though  
When the surprise charge of a terrier  
Off its owner’s leash  
Sent them  
Scattering into the air

After this, all their  
Grandiose promises were  
Soon forgotten

DALI SAYS FUCK YOU

Nothing succeeds like the grotesque  
– War for example

Why? Because  
Beauty is just another thing to surrender  
In the pursuit of self-gratification

And so, when the monstrous beasts of the subconscious  
Spontaneously overflow into the world,  
They are naturally greeted with delight and acclaim  
By a bored plutocracy

Consider, for example,  
The man who painted "*The Great Masturbator*"

(Apropos no?)

When the other surrealists  
Became resentful of his pre-eminence,  
Staging a vote to condemn him,  
What did Dali say?  
He said "Fuck you. *I am surrealism.*"

That's capitalism  
– An absolute indifference to other people

It transcends obligations,  
Like surrealism,  
And therefore Dali mastered both

When George Orwell  
Disparaged him as a good draughtsman  
But a disgusting human being,  
What did Dali say?  
He said "Fuck you. *Painting is an infinitely minute  
Part of my personality.*"

He saw himself as a giant,  
He became a giant

And Dali's pet anteater  
Will vacuum up all the puny Marxists

And other ingrates  
Scurrying under the synchronized footfalls of  
Goose-stepping corporations

Don't like his paintings?

Fuck you.

Don't like his moustache?

Fuck you.

Don't like his commercialism?

Fuck you.

Don't like his boredom of politics?

Fuck you.

Don't like the absurdity of his antics?

Fuck you.

You're not Salvador Dali.

You're nobody.

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