

In the Spring

some verses

by

James

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—Some Verses—

By
JAMES

Colombo
Sri Lanka
1977

Fifty copies only
are printed of this book
and of them
this is No. 11.....



The Image

PROLOGUE

*“Should e’er unhappy love my bosom pain
From cruel parents or relentless fair
O let me think it is not quite in vain
To sigh our sonnets to the midnight air”.*

Keat’s Ode to Hope

These are not sonnets obviously. But these too, were sighed “to the midnight air”. They were written in an alien tongue by a youth of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) when he was between the ages of eighteen and twentytwo.

They refer to a boy and a girl romance with all its attendant risks. The parties belong to different communities, Tamil and Sinhalese, the girl being from the latter.

It all began some fifty-four years ago when the girl was thirteen and the boy eighteen. It lasted for five years but did not end up in marriage, solely because of obstruction from parents on both sides.

Each party went his or her separate way, and was very happily married. The girl became an endearing wife, a fond mother of several children, and a doting grand-mother. The boy too went through a similar experience and had a supremely happy married life, indeed a very exceptional one, and is now a proud great-grand-father.

Both are now bereft of their spouses to whom they are ever devoted. The boy and girl had never met with one another for well-nigh half a century.

These pitiful protestations of love and frustration, besides some others, couched in rhymes and jingles were recently discovered, carefully wrapped and preserved among the papers left behind by the boy's deceased wife.

The verses claim no literary excellence. Some of them perhaps do not scan. The heart often misses a beat in these cases, but the message was clear and the voice was music—sometimes sad—to the intended ear.

They have survived half a century. Let them be preserved for some more time to come, in a handier form to serve a close and very limited audience—so some say, while, naturally, age and infirmity slowly claim the toll from these once adventurous man and maid.

JAMES

Colombo 17 February 1977.

I

INTRODUCTORY

Oh! this is but a violet
A withered violet!
What use from it can any get,
From such a flow'ret?

But still, some press it to their heart
A withered violet;
They say it pulses with their life,
E'en such a flow'ret!

II

THE NAME

And know if Ivy be your name
The human heart is shaped the same
The seasons make no change with you
For you are evergreen and true.

III

MIDNIGHT

I wake: the candle burns the time away
The clock doth strike —tomorrow greets today—
The voice of silence haunts the chilly air
The world sleeps freed awhile from anxious care
I wake to see me lord the barren night
Alone I reign, myself I rule, til. light.

LATER, THE SAME NIGHT

The night is fast closing
The day will soon gleam
I yearn for reposing
To see her in dream.

STILL LATER

The morn was lovely forming
The night was taking leave
They bade a tender farewell
To meet again at eve.

IV

EACH BEING

Each being for some purpose did He send
And mine I thought to love
I loved and prayed for one to condescend
To look me from above.

It must be true in His Providence
God is most kind to men
For when we love we talk with diffidence
To angels now and then.

V

FIRST LOVE

When in my youth I won her grace
Proud of possessing the sweetest face
Amidst the sighs of jealous peers
And other maidens' roguish tears,
I lordly strode the market place.

VI

ON AN AUTOGRAPH ALBUM

It is so sweet to see these lines
These lines writ in thy book
But sweeter far to see thy face
To have but one short look.

But let these lines suffice for now
To keep the fire aflame
Until we meet by God's good grace
Ne'er to depart again.

VII

DOLLY'S LULLABY

Sleep, Dolly
Sleep by me
If burglars
Creep
And disturb
Thy sleep
Wake me, Dolly
Wake me.

Fear not, Dolly
I'll hide thee
In my bosom
Sheltering thee;
They'll take me, Dolly
But not thee
So sleep, Dolly
Sleep by me.

VIII

ENDEAVOUR'S ALL

Dou look for Saints in the Calendar
For those that the Church has hailed
I look for them in the prison cells
For those that have tried and failed.

IX

FOR I AM BLACK

I cannot rule my land
For I am black
If I had a white hand
I'd have the knack.

Our fathers were great men
As all do tell
They must have been white men
To rule so well!

X

DANTE'S VISION

I love to see her love-lit eye
That pierces like a dart
I love to see her magic smile
That captive makes my heart.

I love to see her sable locks
That dances on the side
I love to see her noble gait
That carries every stride.

I love to see her fairy form
So graceful and so tall
I love to hear her wondrous voice
That thrills my panting soul.

I love to feel her electric touch
That sets my heart to her
I love to have her for my own
And live with her for e'er.

XI

PARTED

A heart beats down in the lowlands
It tick-a-tacks for me
And I am up in the highlands
I hear it beats for me.

My eyelids close in the night-time
It's a lullaby to me;
My eyelids ope in the sunshine
It's the rising call to me.

A heart beats down in the lowlands
It daily calls for me
And I'll be soon in the lowlands
And it will beat by me.

XII

THE TRYST TREE

Though worn and old it suffered quietly the pain
When with my knife I pierced its bleeding bark
And carved her name, my love's; how proud it stood
When I kissed its trunk for the name it bore;
Our only friend in troublous times of woe,
It whispered when the tell-tale wind did steal
We hushed and watched for lovers fear the wind;
It gently smiled when our hearts were glad
And drooped its leaves to share our grief when sad;
Oft has it hidden us from strangers' eyes
And sheltered us from fierce unkindly storms
The silent witness to our promises
And secrets, never known to break the trust
It was our standard, guardian, mutual friend.

XIII

LAST SATURDAY*

I met my girl at the Motor Show
Last Saturday
The last, last day of the Motor Show
Last Saturday;
I met my girl at the Motor Show
The night was fair, and the girls were there
The crowds did crush in the scented air
And oh, in the push, I let her go
Last Saturday.

I lost my girl at the Motor Show
Last Saturday;
The last, last day of the Motor Show
Last Saturday;
I lost my girl at the Motor Show
I kept a vigil with my heart quite still
And she kept one with a similar thrill
We met at length at the exit door
We blessed the Show for that exit door
Last Saturday!

*February 1927

XIV

TELL ME TONIGHT

Where art thou now, my love?

I saw thee last night
That smile of delight
Where is it now, my love?

Lull me to dream, my love
If sleep be so sweet
And sad be sun's heat
Lull me to dream my love.

Why does it dawn, my love?
When night is so bright
With rays of thy light
Why does it dawn, my love?

Thou art so far, my love
But sweet is repose
For thou canst come close
Though we be far, my love.

Where art thou now, my love?
Do tell me tonight
In dreams of delight
Where thou art now, my love.

XV

THOUGHTS

I hear the cuckoo calling
From o'er a coc'nut tree
The rain is falling, falling
In showers of confetti.

My casement door is open
My hand rests on my chin
My eyes are fixed skywards
And thoughts come flying in.

Tell me, sweet, if it's raining,
Hear'st thou the cuckoo's cry,
Dost thou look from the casement
And heave a heavy sigh?

Oh, I am here a prisoner
And thou art there the same;
These bars of silver liquid
Do hold us for their game.

And wilds of endless distance
With mountains lie between;
But we are ever meeting
In far-off lands unseen.

I hear the cuckoo calling
From o'er a coc'nut tree
The rain is falling, falling
In showers of confetti.

XVI

AS TINY TOTS

As tiny tots together
We merried on the lawn
We played with one another
In the days of our dawn.

We woke up in the morning
We quarrelled in the day
We broke up in the evening
With promises to pray.

I grew up into manhood
And she a lovely maid ;
We left the pleasant neigh'rhood
Where all our dreams were laid.

But oh, to be together
To merry on the lawn
To play with one another
As in days of our dawn!

XVII

THE FORMER HOME

Soft, soft my soul, remember where
Thou art, soft this is hallowed ground.
The light is gone, the place is bare
The silence magnifies the sound.

O Earth that bore her lovely form,
O Walls so honoured by her touch,
O Sky that stood by wind and storm
Lament for her, your fate is such.

Come solemn air that gave her breath,
Come fill my heart, my grief dispel
And waft me from this living death
To her, my lovely Ivybelle.

XVIII

O MOTHER, O MOTHER

☞ mother, O mother, so at last you have given
The word that had meant a great deal to you
The word for which so long I had striven,
And so at last my dreams have come to be true.

You love her I know with a love that is strong
And you know that I love her as much as you do,
But you thought of my race and you thought it
was wrong
That a Tamil should marry your Sinhalese *du**.

But now you have changed and have come to know
That a love that is true cannot be killed
That races and castes are but empty show
For when hearts are united, by death they're
stilled.

*Sinhalese for "daughter".

XIX

A LOCK OF HAIR

My lovely lock, O come to me
O come to me I'm here
O walk the land and skip the sea
My lovely lock, my dear!

Curst be he who robbéd thee
I guarded thee so well
Curst be he, whoe'er he be
And let him go to hell.

XX

A BIRD'S APPEAL

Strike me not with that stone, laddie
Strike me not with that stone
I too have a home laddie
Though I am here alone.

I too have a life, laddie
I too have pain and joy
Though I be weak than thee laddie
My life is not thy toy

On yon tree-top's my home, laddie
My love waits there for me
When I return to her, laddie
She'll sing so merrily.

If thou shouldst strike me now, laddie
And linger me to death
No more could I return, laddie
No more to hear her breath

My love would look for me, laddie
And get alarmed when late
And tearing eyes would turn, laddie
To Heav'n wards for her mate.

And here below I'll lie, laddie
Before thy cruel eyes
But oh, to leave her for, laddie
The nest beyond the skies!

XXI
TIME AND LOVE

"Time travels in divers paces"—Shakespeare
As You Like It

Is this earth, is this life to roam like this?
A madman raving at the clock—its hands
They move at snails' pace. Say how many years,
How many gloomy years do make a day?
And how long must I wait?

O Time! Hast thou no heart, hast thou not loved?
At Night love Day, at Day love Night and thou
Wilt e'er go fast behind thy love. O Time!
Pray love and sympathise with me, a wretch
Whose only virtue lies in that he loves.

* * *

Is this bliss, is this life? O tears of joy!
They melt in trembling drops of thanks to God
A nobler gift no man could ever seek
Than to love and be loved—such Paradise.

She sits by me, this angel formed in flesh
The brightest day is brightened by her look
And smiling Nature struggles with the wind
To feel her chastening glance of purity.

* * *

Alas, O Time! Why movest thou so fast?
O cruel Time, be slow, move not so
For shame thou countest moments by the years;

O Time! Hast thou no heart, hast thou not loved?
If now be Day—we care not what it is—
Do love the day, its brightness and its smiles
If now be Night—it is the same to us—
Do love the Night, its dreams, its lonesomeness,
Whate'er it be, O Time, do love but one
For else in loving two, thou lovest none.

XXII

ASK THE HILLS

Ask the hills of Badulla and Bandarawella
They will tell thee
How I love thee
How ere the early crow
Had left to wake the town
I had wandered
Amidst the snowy mists
Of the dawning day
Singing thy name to the skies.

Ask the trees of Badulla and Bandarawella
They will tell thee
How they let me tear their barks
With the songs I made for thee.

XXIII

WISHING WELL

☪ ye that wish us well
Ye fathers, mothers all
Love is blind, love is blind
In wishing well, you give us hell.
You loved us from our birth
You love us still we know
But love is blind, how true
In wishing well, you give us hell.

XXIV

A FLOWER'S WISH

To rest on her breast
Was all it wished;
But she passed by—
And left it
To droop and die.

XXV

JIMMY KAY

Ha! Ha! Ha! here he comes
Jimmy Kay the lover
He boasted of his pretty girl
And daily he grew prouder.

Ha! Ha! Ha! here he comes
Jimmy Kay the lover
His eyes are filled with many tears
And never was he sadder.

Jimmy Kay! Jimmy Kay!
O wipe away your tears
Girls are funny, fickle maids
All throughout the years.

XXVI

DESPISED

Is it for this, is it for this
That I have waited all these years?
Despising all I sought thee, dear,
And now despised am left in tears.

Is it for this, is it for this
That I have kept long nights awake
And mused till morn the happy home
With you, as Queen, I yearned to make?

Is it for this, is it for this
My inmost heart was bared to thee?
And oh, those lips that renounce me
Are they the same that kisséd me?

Is it for this, is it for this
I held thee mine, my very own?
Well, be it so; I'll love thee still
In tears, in tears I'll love alone!

XXVII

BLEEDING HEART

A broken, ghostly, lonesome lad I saw
He uttered naught, was dressed in careless garb,
Looked wasted, lean, afraid to raise his head
For fear of shame. He stood outside a door;
The storm was raging loud and wild. The rain
Unkindly beat upon his shivering frame
And tears were trickling down his haggard face.

He held a bowl with both his hands, and there
Within, a torn and shattered bleeding heart
Was beating slow and tears were mingled with
The blood! He looked at it and wept—and wept.

XXVIII

EXILED

Forsaken by all I hold near—
The home that is still to me dear—
Forgotten on some distant hill,
The savage that knows but to kill
Befriended by him and the beast,
With fear of being a jungle feast,
Mocked by the air I clasp in vain
A prisoner in a Hell's domain
I live and hope though fettered be,
That Love will triumph finally.

EPILOGUE

*"I am just like the Ivy
On the old garden wall
Clinging so tightly
Whate'er may befall*

*As you grow older
I'll be constant and true
I am just like the Ivy
I'll be clinging to you".*

—A. J. Mills (19th Century Song)

Printed by Mervyn Mendis at The Colombo Apothecaries' Co., Ltd.
125, Glennie Street, Colombo 2.

