

## The Cherry Tree

Ruskin Bond.

Eight year have passed  
Since I placed my cherry seed in the grass.  
“Must have a tree of my own,” I said,  
And watered it once and went to bed  
And forgot; but cherries have a way of growing,  
Though no one’s caring very much or knowing.  
And suddenly that summer near the end of May,  
I found a tree had come to stay.  
It was very small, five months child,  
Lost in the tall grass running wild.  
Goats ate the leaves, the grass cutter’s scythe  
Split it apart and a monsoon blight  
Shrivelled the slender stem..... Even so,  
Next spring I watched three new shoots grow,  
The young tree struggle, upward thrust  
Its arms in a fresh fierce lust  
For light and air and sun.

I could only wait, as one  
Who watched, wandering, while Time and the rain  
Made a miracle from green growing pain.....

I went away next year—  
Spent a season in Kashmir—  
Came back thinner, rather poor,  
But richer by a cherry tree at my door.  
Six feet high my own dark cherry,  
And- I could scarcely believe it—a berry.  
Ripened and jeweled in the sun,  
Hung from a branch—just one!  
And next year there were blossoms small  
Pink, fragile, quick to fall  
At the merest breath, the sleepest breeze. ....

I lay on the grass, at ease,  
Looking up through leaves at the blue  
Blind sky, at the finches as they flew  
And flitted through the dappled green.  
While bees in an ecstasy drank  
Of nectar from each bloom and the sun sank  
Swiftly, and the stars turned in the sky,  
And moon-moths and singing crickets and I—  
Yes, I!— praised Night and Stars and tree:  
That small, the cherry, grown by me.

## Freedom

Jayanta Mahapatra

At times, as I watch,  
it seems as though my country's body  
floats down somewhere on the river.

Left alone, I grow into  
a half-disembodied bamboo,  
its lower part sunk  
into itself on the bank.

Here, old widows and dying men  
cherish their freedom,  
bowing time after time in obstinate prayers.

While children scream  
with this desire for freedom  
to transform the world  
without even laying hands on it.

In my blindness, at times I fear  
I'd wander back to either of them.  
In order for me not to lose face,  
it is necessary for me to be alone.

Not to meet the woman and her child  
in that remote village in the hills  
who never had even a little rice  
for their one daily meal these fifty years.

And not to see the uncaught, bloodied light  
of sunsets cling to the tall white columns  
of Parliament House.

In the new temple man has built nearby,  
the priest is the one who knows freedom,  
while God hides in the dark like an alien.

And each day I keep looking for the light  
shadows find excuses to keep.

Trying to find the only freedom I know,  
the freedom of the body when it's alone.

The freedom of the silent shale, the moonless coal,  
the beds of streams of the sleeping god.

I keep the ashes away,  
try not to wear them on my forehead.

## Let Me Not Forget

Rabindranath Tagore

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this life  
then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight  
---let me not forget for a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours.

As my days pass in the crowded market of this world  
and my hands grow full with the daily profits,  
let me ever feel that I have gained nothing  
---let me not forget for a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours.

When I sit by the roadside, tired and panting,  
when I spread my bed low in the dust,  
let me ever feel that the long journey is still before me  
---let me not forget a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours.

When my rooms have been decked out and the flutes sound  
and the laughter there is loud,  
let me ever feel that I have not invited thee to my house  
---let me not forget for a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours

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## The Soul's Prayer

Sarojini Naidu

And childhood's pride I said to Thee:  
'O Thou, who mad'st me of Thy breath,  
    Speak, Master, and reveal to me  
Thine inmost laws of life and death.  
'Give me to drink each joy and pain  
Which Thine eternal hand can mete,  
    For my insatiate soul would drain  
Earth's utmost bitter, utmost sweet.  
'Spare me no bliss, no pang of strife,  
    Withhold no gift or grief I crave,  
    The intricate lore of love and life  
And mystic knowledge of the grave.'  
Lord, Thou didst answer stern and low:  
'Child, I will hearken to thy prayer,  
And thy unconquered soul shall know  
    All passionate rapture and despair.  
'Thou shalt drink deep of joy and fame,  
    And love shall burn thee like a fire,  
And pain shall cleanse thee like a flame,  
    To purge the dross from thy desire.  
    'So shall thy chastened spirit yearn  
To seek from its blind prayer release,  
And spent and pardoned, sue to learn  
    The simple secret of My peace.  
'I, bending from my sevenfold height,  
Will teach thee of My quickening grace,  
Life is a prism of My light, And Death the shadow of My face.'

## Always there are the children.

Nikki Giovanni

and always there are the children

there will be children in the heat of day  
there will be children in the cold of winter

children like a quilted blanket  
are welcomed in our old age

children like a block of ice to a desert sheik  
are signs of status in our youth

we feed the children with our culture  
that they might understand our travail

we nourish the children on our gods  
that they may understand respect

we urge the children on the tracks  
that our race will not fall short

but our children are not ours  
nor we theirs they are future we are past

how do we welcome the future  
not with the colonialism of the past  
for that is our problem

not with the racism of the past  
for that is their problem  
not with the fears of our own status  
for history is lived not dictated

we welcome the young of all groups  
as our own with the solid nourishment  
of food and warmth

we prepare the way with the solid  
nourishment of self-actualization

we implore all the young to prepare for the young  
because always there will be children.