

Picture by H.M.R. Perera

# Death not the End

Why afraid to die  
Death is not the end  
Is there something beyond death?  
May be death is an interval

Every minute and every hour  
We walk towards the death  
It will never betray us  
It will never judge us

Rich or poor  
Black or white  
Young or old  
Every one is the same  
When they meet death

- Dr. Ruwan M. Jayatunge

## Invitation

Bloomed flower in the midst of buds  
shook in the soft wind to and fro  
Dews fallen above slipped to the middle  
until it got collected to be a dew pit.  
Then, bow the petals themselves  
to dribble the dew across  
to pour into the leaf down,  
which sprang up and down.  
As the Sun crept to its core  
the flower began to shine.  
And she, I felt so  
began to swing gently  
as if it was beckoning someone.  
The breeze bent a petal above  
In and out, in and out.  
Just, wasn't it winking?  
To say it was the time.

I hurried to pack my baggage,  
And rushed to the station,  
To catch the earliest train  
To reach home  
Before midnight  
Before the moon disappears.

- Wasantha Thilakarathna

## You will always be in our minds...

With a gentle smile and a honest heart  
We will never forget what you have done  
It brings a tear to our eyes to remember...

Countless lives you saved  
Every act you did  
Every tear and sweat you shed,  
Will be remembered by all

Now draped in white  
We stand by you  
With memories and tears in our eyes,  
Staring at your body  
Now lifeless...

So long, until we meet again.....

- Navindi Fernandopulle

*But I being poor,  
have only dreams.  
I have spread my dreams  
under your feet;  
tread softly,  
Because you tread on my  
dreams...*

- William Butler Yeats

## Introduction

We were there near the gate,  
My classmate and I,  
Watching the noisy sea of students....  
My classmate, eager and curious and impatient,  
Almost pestering me,  
With endless questions,  
Pointing at the column of girls,  
Exiting the premises of the tutory,  
'Where's she? Isn't she there among them?  
Is she one clad in blue?  
Or the one carrying that yellow broly?  
Is she the taller one to right?  
Or the fairer one with pimples?'  
Shaking my head,  
To the incessant barrage of questions,  
Fired by her, I said,  
'Do be patient, dear,  
till she gets here!'

Soon, bursting with delight,  
I showed you to her,  
And introduced you to her,  
'This's my best friend....'  
'Nice to meet you!'  
'This's one of my classmates.....'  
'Pleasure meeting you!'

Ending my introduction,  
I glanced eagerly at the bright gleams,  
Lingering in your brownish eyes,  
And let my eyes ask yours,  
'Did you, my dear, see the reason  
I introduced you to her?'

- Jayashantha Jayawardhana

Glimpsing the headlines in the newspapers,  
tourists scuttle for cover, cancel their options  
on rooms with views of temple and holy mountain.  
'Flash point in Paradise.' 'Racial pot boils over.'  
And even the gone away boy  
who had hoped to find lost roots, lost lovers,  
lost talent even, out among the palms,  
makes timely return giving thanks  
that Toronto is quite romantic enough  
for his purposes.

Powerless this time to shelter or to share  
we strive to be objective, try to trace  
the match that lit this sacrificial fire  
the steps by which we reached this ravaged place.  
We talk of 'Forty Eight' and 'Fifty Six',  
of freedom and the treacherous politics  
of language; see the first sparks of this hate  
fanned into flame in Nineteen Fifty Eight,  
yet find no comfort in our neat solution,  
no calm abstraction, and no absolution.

The child plays in the fire  
scattering sparks  
when suddenly the streets  
erupt  
in waves of flaming hate  
and splintered flying glass  
shattering old amities and sharding bonds  
forged (so we thought) proof  
against heat.

After sharp showers the street boys play in mud  
when suddenly a flood of enmity  
thicker than blood  
descends  
and to the singing of the lead  
khaki and gunmetal and iron tread  
advance and take their vantage at the corner

Hot August night  
with pustulating stars burning like sores above.  
Love is a sweat  
and intercourse in shadows will beget  
lust only for the frenzies of a rape  
of slutish cul-de-sacs and bottlenecks

The bottlenecks are broken; jagged ends  
pierce the vitals of a nation.  
Death words are spoken, old familiars

## Big Match, 1983

The game's in other hands in any case.  
These fires ring factory, and hovel,  
and Big Match fever, flaring high and fast,  
has both sides in its grip and promises  
dizzier scores than any at the oval.

In a tall house dim with old books and pictures  
calm hands quit the clamouring telephone.  
'It's a strange life we're leading here just now,  
not a dull moment. No one can complain  
of boredom, that's for sure. Up all night keeping watch,  
and then as curfew ends and your brave lands  
dash out at dawn to start another day  
of fun, and games, and general jollity,  
I send Padmini and the girls to a neighbor's house.

Who, me? - Oh I'm doing fine. I always was  
a drinking man you know and nowadays  
I'm stepping up my intake quite a bit,  
the general idea being that when those torches  
come within fifty feet of this house don't you see  
it won't be my books that go up first, but me.'

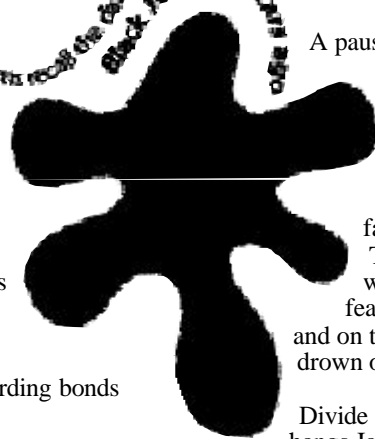
A pause. Then, steady and every bit as clear

as though we are neighbors still as we had been  
In Fifty Eight. 'Thanks, by the way for ringing.  
There's nothing you can do to help us but  
it's good to know some lines haven't yet been cut.'

Out of the palmyrah fences of Jaffna  
bristle a hundred guns.  
Shopfronts in the Pettah, landmarks of our childhood  
Curl like old photographs in the flames.  
Blood on their khaki uniforms, three boys lie dying;  
a crowd looks silently the other way.  
Near the wheels of his smashed bicycle  
at the corner of Duplication Road a child lies dead  
and two policemen look the other way  
as a stout man, sweating with fear, falls to his knees  
beneath a bo-tree in a shower of sticks and stones  
flung by his neighbor's hands.  
The joys of childhood, friendships of our youth  
ravaged by pieties and politics  
screaming across our screens her agony  
at last exposed, Sri Lanka burns alive.

- Yasmine Gooneratne

These poems recall the 25th anniversary of Black July 25 years ago



fall silent and retreat to roots.  
The junction stations soon will fill  
with seething hordes like ants before the rain  
fear-breathing herds hard-riden to the kill  
and on the concrete platforms hob-nailed boots  
drown out the thunder of the train.

Divide and rule. And pendulous to the North  
hangs Jambudvipa stained with her own blood  
bleeding heart red as ripe pomegranate  
and bitter as the damson. All the fruits of hate  
quivering she holds. Waiting to drop  
into our gaping mouths.

Dark faces on the city pavements pale  
beneath the mysteries of holy ash.  
What of the roots spread wide and deep  
and far beyond the limestone of the North?  
A wind blows through the halls of high commerce  
the brilliant trembles at the flare of nostril  
flames falter in the sacred lamps of brass  
in dwellings on the arcades of Colombo

'71  
was lots of fun  
we had our curfew parties.

'58

## Apocalypse Soon

was not so great  
and now .....  
what happens now?

Will out of blackened streets and rubble ruins  
caravans ride forth into the blazing  
deserts of isolation, where the crack  
of lonely snipers' rifles fills the air  
and Brahmins hover, flickering in the haze  
of heat-filled sky?

Has the Fifth Horesman come again to raise  
his banner, and wreak havoc on the land?

- Richard de Zoysa

**Author's Note**  
**Jambudvipa:** One of the names the ancient  
Sinhalese gave India

**Brahmins:** Brahmin kites - birds of prey commonly  
found in the coastal areas of Sri Lanka's Dry Zone  
(the term, in its original sense of the upper crust of  
India, is also used for senior Indian Civil Servants,  
in particular those who make foreign policy)  
**Fifth Horseman:** see Tarzie Vittachi's 'Emergency  
'58'. He suggests the Fifth Horseman of the Apoc-  
aplypse is Racial Strife. August 1981