

Blood And Tears At Fateh Kadal

It was a season of rains and wind-howling in Srinagar,
Skies were in turmoil and the air felt damp and sultry,
Streets were awash and traffic arrested,
The mood of loneliness descended in on everything.

I was nailed down near old Fateh Kadal,
Close to former Mission School.
At the corner of a deserted crooked lane,
Waiting for a rendezvous with her.

It was 6:00 P.M. and the fear cut the air,
People looked at each other with deep suspicion.
Tucked in a raincoat and a baseball cap
I felt I was at a moment of destiny.

Her society wouldn't let us meet during daylight,
So we chose the dark layers of evening to camouflage us.
Meeting time came and went by but she still didn't show up,
My apprehension climaxed into anxiety.

I had almost given up when I saw a black silhouette walk toward me,
It could have been a militant out to assault a stranger.
As the covered figure came closer I saw that it was a burka,
My fear shot up in a crescendo.

When a few inches from me
The figure lifted the front panel of burka.
She peered at me with an apprehensive intensity,
I closed our gap fearless of the surroundings.

She told me how difficult it was for her to come to see me,
If her family found it they might even kill her.
The pressure on me was awful and I hadn't imagined
That love could be deadly.

I swam in her eyes for several lingering minutes,

And moved in to kiss her on the upper lip.
She held me in a close embrace
And hung her right hand over my shoulder momentarily.

The minutes ticked on in painful pace,
My fear rose exponentially.
Then I tore her from me in a cruel snatch,
She dived to hold her balance.

Finally, she bade me khuda hafiz,
And let her burka flap fall over her.
As I watched her go,
She dissolved in the mists of the evening.

The danger to her life
Kept me immobilized for a while,
But suddenly I heard loud yelling
Cursing her for loose behavior.

She screamed, sobbed, and sighed,
But was forced to go along with some angry men.
I protested loud for them to let her go,
But soon two men grabbed my torso and socked my mouth.

I was kicked in the groin,
head, back, and chest;
Gyrating to ground with a groan.
They threatened to kill me
For corrupting a local girl.

When I opened my eyes an hour later,
I found myself in a gutter,
blood trickling from my mouth.
In the pitch darkness around me
There was no one to help me.

When my energy started returning,
I slowly managed to get up.
Like a drunk I strutted forward,

Not knowing where I was going.
The streets seemed dead, the air felt dead,
The death mood covered everything.
I walked slowly toward my hotel
Passersby looked at my blood but said nothing.
I fell on my bed,
Universe spun around me,
I didn't know who I was
And why I was breathing.
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