

My Father's Chappals

My father's chappals—

Placed on the stair

Beside its newel—sitting there

As if an old, museum crown

Of some emir. It's garnet-brown

Hue's like Kashmiri apples'.

A pair of wonder

When I was four.

My feet—mere tetra fish before

These leather-made colossal squids.

"How long will I remain a kid?"

I often used to ponder.

Now pale in shine,

They still retain

Their rank like gold in dulled gold chains.

With passing years, a father's prize

Transformed itself, shrank to a size

That fits these feet of mine.

A Ceiling Fan's Life (is like a man's)

On wintry days, it rarely spins
Except when mopped floors need to dry.
Its mission, once December's in,
Is just to idly hang on high
And watch us squabble, cackle, cry
In earthy dramas' peace and strife.
This is the childhood of its life.

When April faintly sobs, "Adieu,"
And week by hot week May draws near,
We switch it on, but for a few
Minutes when noon rays singe and sear.
Though used at this time of the year,
It's mostly idle—just a teen
Fixed on that childish, old routine.

As summer's tri-month gang stands tall,
Subduing springtime's pleasant breeze,
Its duty never ends at all.
Two great responsibilities:
To cool us down and bring us peace
Of sleep. It toils without a halt—
Hence, finally, a true adult.

When autumn and his peer monsoon
Arrive, their north wind takes its place.
Less burdened now, it hears the tune
Of drizzle that glows nature's face.
Indeed, a sweet, relaxing phase.
It hardly spins—once in a while—
When middle age comes with a smile.

The days of winter come again—
This time as life's enfeebling stage.
Now gathering dust, it is a den
For crawlers. No one to assuage
This plight or clean the blades: old age.
It lies unseen above our heads,
Forgotten, hushed, alive, and dead.

To a Mirror

How long will you keep showing man
His outer, fleeting states
And not the dictum written on
The pages of his fate?

Why is your fervour only for
The phoney and the snide?
They sneer at you; you do the same,
And thus enlarge their pride.

But one who, honest, when deceived,
Ravaged, and torn apart,
Slow-weeps before you, you don't show
The sun within his heart.

Dawn

To have a glimpse of calmness, look at dawn—

The time before the phase of short-term death

Of Earth is finally complete.

Observe the walls intake each cooling breath;

Their tension from the previous night is gone.

Burnt out, they rest now, feet to feet.

Those flowers don't perform their dance for you;

Like droopy ballerinas, they repose

Inside the cold ceramic vase.

Even the camelback is in a pose,

As if some yogi's deftly coursing through

Great depths of meditative space.

And all the things that make you think of noise—

The keyboard, xerox, quartz clock, telephone—

Now lie in their respective graves,

Unwilling to be roused and fiercely thrown

Into this world's shore. Like you, they've no choice

Except to submit to its waves.

The Footfall's Game

From boyhood's archive, I retrieve

The Fall of '03;

My cousin kin and I, one eve,

Beneath the astral sea,

Were captured by The Footfalls Game,

A gripping sport we found;

To rightly guess a person's name

Just by his treading sound—

It's one and only simple rule.

We'd tout de suite begin

To play once we were back from school,

Each for a mighty win!

We chose the lanai as our spot,

Sat by a corner turn,

And when some elder came to trot

There, we'd try to discern

Their name by following the pace

Of rhythm in their tread;

Throat clearings, coughs would make our case
An easy one instead.

A war with whispers: "That's your brother!"

"You're wrong! That's Pradip uncle!

I know his gait is like no other

Because he tends to shuffle."

The one to pronto answer right

In every sequence, won,

And dipped within this great delight,

Our childhood made its run.

Now age's fog has blurred my view.

My skin's all pocks and flakes.

These tubes are all I'm married to,

And I don't know the stakes

Of yet another surgery.

Vim's candle has snuffed out;

The pillars of my memory

Are now no longer stout.

A visitor, one nippy day,

Brought comfort to my soul;

Old childhood zephyr came my way
And made my bosom whole.

The doorknob creaked; a once-felt air
Purged my room's atmosphere.

"Dear Shyam," I said. "Please grab a chair.
I'm happy you are here."

His soft response, "Good afternoon,"
Appeased my longing ears.
The veil of souring lifted soon,
Which kept us cold for years.

His whatabouts...some words exchanged,
Deep sighs, and then some pauses:
A tough task for two souls estranged
To put aside the causes

That severed them long years ago.
"Your smile's just like before."
He uttered. "But how did you know
It was me at the door?"

"Ah, well, I'm spavined, frail, and ill.
Oh, boy, indeed," I said,

But I am not yet short of skill;

I knew you from your tread."

Four wizened cheeks and bowed eyelids,

Some deep but silent sighs;

An ICU; two hoary kids;

Slow brooklets from their eyes.