

## Huseyn Javid

### Prisoners of "Freedom"

It was a fashionable salon, and how the laughter rang;  
The glasses clinked with mellow sound and only half-tones sang.  
The gilded chandeliers like diamonds shone with facets seven,  
And dripped with crystal star-drops bright as any stars in heaven,  
As they caught the maze of lights, reflection-wise.  
O many were intoxicated, with bright and swimming eyes;  
And languidly they kissed, or in a frenzy and with thirst.  
Through the laughter and the noise reciting lyric verse.  
As if on a stroke of the clock, the mood changed all around,  
The tints and the tones of rapture faded, the cries died down.  
And the rhythm of dance music throbbed, and the dancing began-  
Each invited his lady-muse, and in whispers the song-motif ran  
Through the dancers who swayed on their toes,  
Clinging, enraptured, and dancing with eyes half-closed.  
The music fell down to a whisper remote, and the lights went  
down-  
A crimson spotlight beamed, and the room into darkness drowns  
Lit only by falling leaves, leaves of a sharp September  
That flutter down like sparks in embers.  
The merry eyes seem dulled in a drowsy dream,  
And from some far horizon appears a rosy gleam  
That glimmers and melts, as lips to lips are pressed,  
Like a friend concealing secrets in its breast.  
The quiet of the steppes recalling Spring from a far recess-  
And the flowers nod and speak with tongues of sweetest  
tenderness;  
The fountains wreath in a murmuring movement of spray. . .  
Of a sudden, this beautiful panorama dwindles away,  
And the music fades and passes.  
Through the reigning silence again rings the tinkle of  
glasses. In the semi-darkness, twilight-soft, like a muffled guitar,  
On the stage appears the chanteuse, a famous star.  
First in a throaty whisper her voice pulls at your heart,  
Then rises with warmth as quick as birds' wings dart,  
And falls again to a doleful sound  
As the singer breathes of her love profound:  
O God! Around me a net it wove?  
Love, love, and forever love.

\* \* \*

Wild flowers knelt before me,  
After me the turtle-dove cries,  
Dawn spreads its light within me:  
They found passion in my eyes.

When the Shepherd's Star upon me smiled,  
I was sure that I was Heaven's child;

I never knew Life's bitter sting,  
Till a golden cage confined my wings.

\* \* \*

The curtain fell, and the ovation broke the trance...  
And the music called for another dance.  
Again the languorous eyes light up with passion's bliss,  
Again the desire rose in each to embrace and kiss,  
Again the goblets are filled with rosy wine;  
To get their breath back, the dancers take their seats and  
half recline.  
The stage lights up, and then appears  
The answer for all hearts, despite their years:  
Living statues, nude, but a rhapsody  
In flesh, their lissome bodies all one ecstasy.  
And one young goddess, surely of Music's fane,  
Stands on the stage like a thoughtful, sad refrain.  
"Oh, what art, what loveliness and charm!"  
The public cry, as the curtain closes like fronds of a palm.  
Now several people leave, but the rest stay on,  
Lovestruck fanatics, wanting to postpone dawn.

\* \* \*

Eyes flash with passion, hearts seek the bud-like Spring to claim,  
And every hunter closes on his game.  
But rich Americans come in, say five of them or ten?  
And the ring of gold comes ringing then,  
The naked girls, as if from an old, exotic fable,  
Take heart, spread wings, and join them at the table.  
The target's reached by every glass of wine,  
Anything goes, and nobody draws the line.  
Passion throbs in the temples, intoxication drowns the mind.  
Into one curtained loge, a couple stagger as if blind.  
And laughter bursts till the curtain shakes with the gust,  
And then all hell breaks loose in unbridled lust.  
The proud American stags don't spare their gold  
To kiss the European girls, such lovely things to hold.  
Watching this Bacchanal orgy, Azer holds his head,  
Swept by nausea, wishing he were dead.  
Not far away, three women sit alone:  
Faded and old, and talking in low tones.

FIRST WOMAN:

"My poor daughter's still quite young. But we've little means.  
Our lives were wretched. Troubles strike unforeseen.  
And even this stinking place seemed to us paradise.  
But she's going crazy? **from drink, and all this signifies.**"

SECOND WOMAN:

"In the war, my husband and my brother died.  
Left me poverty and two girls? **none wanted them as brides.**  
(points at one curtain)  
There's only lust and passion in this den,  
Given full reign by wild and aging men."

THIRD WOMAN:

"Behind that curtained silk, it's strangely silent, I fear,  
But my daughter said: 'Mother, wait for me here.'  
So I wait. I have to: there's no other way.  
Whatever she gets, small or big the pay,  
We live on it, though little enough it buys."  
And she could not hold back the tears that filled her eyes.  
From all this, Azer's heart within him bled.  
He thought for a moment, and suddenly said:  
"Once upon a time, perhaps, in the Asia of yesterday,  
In the Caucasus, as in Africa, it was the way  
To sell and buy a girl by force, for gold.  
Yet Europeans called it vile, I'm told.  
They called us depraved, and made believe they were shocked...  
Made drawings and took photos? **all our ways they mocked...**  
But what do you call this? The soft-natured eyes  
Of these same Europeans avoid and quite despise  
A young maid's tenderness and love when for sale?  
Are these the so-called 'normal situations' that prevail?  
Aren't they ashamed, this dreadful business to uphold,  
Where a loving daughter must sell herself for gold  
And her mother sits and trembles, waiting for the pence.  
O hateful, wild society whose culture is all pretence.  
It looks like a thriving business: poetical, but for their wages,  
The doves themselves fly into all these golden cages  
In hope of getting enough to last life through.  
Any cage is good, if there's plenty of money, too!  
They fly after money...  
and settle like flies on honey.. ."

\* \* \*

"Let go of me. I'm choking. I'm dying... Ooh!"  
"Whose voice was that? Who called? Oh no!"  
And the mother guessed; no sound, and all was still.  
She screamed? **her voice was loud and shrill,**  
"O God!" she sobbed, and fell half in a faint.  
Her voice, "O God, they've killed her!" cracked all restraint.  
So the curtain was pulled back, but it was too late.  
Such a crime, only wild passion could generate.  
In the fashionable salon, now a terrible silence fell. . .  
And the silence smiled on a flower dead, but the smile was out of  
hell.

Translated by Gladys Evans

### Yesterday and Today

Happy the shining eyes? **but yesterday:**  
Here grief and mourning lies? **but come today.**  
Brave words so full of cheer? **but yesterday:**  
Full of despair and tears? **but come today.**  
Gay heart of yesterday? **it aches today.**  
Dead dreams of yesterday? **revive today.**  
Old Fortune is a jade? **without a heart:**  
Always with man has played? **and torn apart.**  
With her it's all in play? **to smile, betray.**  
He, sentenced yesterday? **is judge today.**

Unlucky, yesterday? **in luck today.**  
Those happy yesterday? **are sad today.**  
A different world today? **new laws, in fine;**  
The cups of yesterday? **held blood, not wine.**  
The king of yesterday? **a slave today.**  
The slave of yesterday? **a king today -**  
The pledge of yesterday? **washed out today.**  
The long-time enemy? **a friend today.**  
And Nature's not able on land or sea  
To stay quite stable, eternally.  
Without exception, changes all creation.  
The law of life is "perpetual alteration".  
What does not change? It's inconceivable.  
Could there be such a law? **inflexible?**  
Just as firm steel is gnawed away by rust  
At every step the Great turns into Dust.  
Today is not concerned with Yesterday.  
New knowledge lights each minute of each day.  
In every Darkness throbs at least one Gleam.  
Each Truth - a womb that bears at least one Dream.