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Author

Tejani, Bahadur

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POETRY

Song of the City

by Bahadur Tejani

When father died
and the hearth was cold
she didn't like the idea.

But there was nothing to eat
and no one to till the fields
so finally
mother said
yes
unhappily
and I went.

Girls in the city
her eyes kept crying
afterward
girls of the city
all come
to the same end.
A heavy stomach
and swollen eyes
your lips hard as
parched leather
which no man ever
wants
afterward.

Our cousin
soon tired of me
and very little to do
in her room
with the bed taking all the space,
so sometimes I went
and sat on the bar-stool
at Muguro's
thanking him
for not minding me

for being there.

It was the terror
of waiting
the not knowing
where to turn next
whom to talk to
that unnerved me.

Once when I needed
a stretch from the wooden stool
having tired myself
from gazing in the mirror
smarting under the slow
pain of everyone
drinking, talking, laughing
he came.

His eyes unused
to mine
fired up
when I stretched
and yawned
so I did it twice
and from the corner of the eye
saw
his two
play on my dress
and upraised breasts.
I could read my
mother's warmth in his
fingers when shyly
he shook hands,
and it at once
elated and
depressed me
making my heart cry quietly
in moan of mother
while we talked heavily
of ourselves.

In a while
we were both
drunk happily,
for me it was the strong

smell of the city beer
and intoxicating warmth
of his laughter
that had left me
since I left
my mother.

It was late
but mine was the
agony of the morrow
thinking of
this stranger
who could be
a friend
so free
and clear
the song of his throat.

In the dark
of his room
his burnished
fingers
held me in
a cold power
and I went
into an
eternal sleep
while mother's
voice cried in
my ears
girls of the city
girls of the city
with swollen eyes
and heavy hearts
never daring
to look back
on home and hearth
you left behind.