



Grades
12/13

English

G.C.E. A/L

ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY

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Department of English
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SONNET 73

William Shakespeare

That **time** of year thou mayst in me **behold**
When **yellow** leaves, or none, or few, do hang 
Upon those boughs which shake against the **cold**,
Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the **twilight** of such day
As after sunset **fadeth** in the west,
Which by and by **black night** doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the **ashes of his youth** doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was **nourish'd by**.
This thou **perceiv'st** which makes thy love **more strong**,
To love that well which thou **must leave ere long**.

2.



SONNET 141

William Shakespeare

In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,
For they in thee a thousand errors note;
But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
Who, in despite of view, is pleas'd to dote.
Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted;
Nor tender feeling to base touches prone,
Nor taste nor smell desire to be invited
To any sensual feast with thee alone;
But my five wits nor my five senses can
Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
Who leaves unsway'd the likeness of a man,
Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be.
Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
That she that makes me sin awards me pain.



3.

Batter my heart (Holy Sonnet 14)

John Donne

Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but oh, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

4.

Song : Go and Catch a Falling Star

John Donne

Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaid's singing,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,
Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand days and nights,
Till age snow white hairs on thee.
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,
All strange wonders that befell thee,
And swear
No where
Lives a woman true and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know;
Such a pilgrimage were sweet.
Yet do not, I would not go,
Though at next door we might meet.
Though she were true when you met her,
And last till you write your letter,
Yet she
Will be
False, ere I came, to two or three.

5.

TO THE MEMORY OF MR. OLDHAM

John Dryden

Farewell, too little and too lately known,
Whom I began to think and call my own:
For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine.
One common note on either lyre did strike,
And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike,
To the same goal did both our studies drive:
The last set out the soonest did arrive.
Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,
Whilst his young friend performed and won the race,
O early ripe! To thy abundant store
What could advancing age have added more?
It might (what Nature never gives the young)
Have taught the numbers of thy native tongue,
But satire needs not those, and wit will shine
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line
A noble error, and but seldom made,
When poets are by too much force betrayed.
Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime,
Still showed a quickness; and maturing time
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme
Once more, hail, and farewell! Farewell, thou young,
But ah! too short, Marcellus of our tongue!
Thy brows with ivy and with laurels bound;
But Fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

AN EXTRACT FROM CANTO 3

RAPE OF THE LOCK

Alexander Pope

A two-edged **weapon** from her shining case:
So ladies, in **romance**, assist their **knight**,
Present the spear, and arm him for the **fight**.
He takes the **gift** with **reverence**, and **extends**
The little engine on his fingers' ends;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the **fragrant steams** she bends her head.
Swift to the lock a **thousand sprites repair**,
A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;
And thrice they twitch'd the **diamond** in her ear;
Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the **foe** drew near.
Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought
The close **recesses** of the **virgin's thought**:
As on the nosegay in her breast reclin'd,
He watch'd th' ideas rising in her mind,
Sudden he view'd, in **spite of all her art**,
An **earthly lover lurking at her heart**.
Amazed, confused, he found his power expired,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retired.

The peer now spreads the glitt'ring forfex wide,
T'inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.
Ev'n then, before the fatal engine closed,
A wretched sylph too fondly interposed;
Fate urg'd the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again)
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, **for ever, and for ever!**

Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.
Not louder shrieks to pitying **Heav'n** are cast,
When husbands or when lap-dogs breathe their last;
Or when **rich China vessels**, fall'n from high,
In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie!

7.

Chimney Sweeper

William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry “weep! weep! weep! weep!”
So **your** chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, so I said,
“Hush, Tom! Never mind it, for when your head’s bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

8.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness, _____
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade for away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where plasy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! Tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain _____
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn ! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu ! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu ! adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music :—Do I wake or sleep?

9.

A SLUMBER DID MY SPIRIT SEAL

William Wordsworth

A slumber did my spirit seal;

I had no human fears:

She seemed a thing that could not feel

The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;

She neither hears nor sees;

Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,

With rocks, and stones, and trees.

10.

TO A SNOWDROP

William Wordsworth

LONE Flower, hemmed in with snows and white as they
But hardier far, once more I see thee bend
Thy forehead, as if fearful to offend,
Like an unbidden guest. Though day by day,
Storms, sallying from the mountain-tops, waylay
The rising sun, and on the plains descend;
Yet art thou welcome, welcome as a friend
Whose zeal outruns his promise! Blue-eyed May
Shall soon behold this border thickly set
With bright jonquils, their odours lavishing
On the soft west-wind and his frolic peers;
Nor will I then thy modest grace forget,
Chaste Snowdrop, venturous harbinger of Spring,
And pensive monitor of fleeting years!

11

Remember

Christina Rossetti

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

12.

Among School Children

William Butler Yeats

I

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
The children learn to cipher and to sing,
To study reading-books and history,
To cut and sew, be neat in everything
In the best modern way—the children's eyes
In momentary wonder stare upon
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

II

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
That changed some childish day to tragedy—
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
I look upon one child or t'other there
And wonder if she stood so at that age—
For even daughters of the swan can share
Something of every paddler's heritage—
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
She stands before me as a living child.

IV

Her present image floats into the mind—
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
And I though never of Ledaean kind
Had pretty plumage once—enough of that,
Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
Honey of generation had betrayed,
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
As recollection or the drug decide,
Would think her son, did she but see that shape
With sixty or more winters on its head,
A compensation for the pang of his birth,
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;
Solider Aristotle played the taws
Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,
But those the candles light are not as those
That animate a mother's reveries,
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
And yet they too break hearts—O Presences
That passion, piety or affection knows,
And that all heavenly glory symbolize—
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

Spring and Fall
Gerard Manley Hopkins

to a young child

Márgarét, áre you gríeving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leáves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! ás the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you wíll weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórror's spríngs áre the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It ís the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

14.

Design

Robert Frost

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth--
Assorted characters of death and blight
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth--
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but design of darkness to appall?--
If design govern in a thing so small.

15.

Suicide in the Trenches

Siegfried Sasoon

I knew a simple soldier boy
Who grinned at life in empty joy,
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
He put a bullet through his brain.
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

16.

Morning at the Window

T.S. Eliot

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens,
And along the trampled edges of the street
I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids
Sprouting despondently at area gates.

The brown waves of fog toss up to me
Twisted faces from the bottom of the street,
And tear from a passer-by with muddy skirts
An aimless smile that hovers in the air
And vanishes along the level of the roofs.

17.

Money

Philip Larkin

Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:

‘Why do you let me lie here wastefully?

I am all you never had of goods and sex.

You could get them still by writing a few cheques.’

So I look at others, what they do with theirs:

They certainly don’t keep it upstairs.

By now they’ve a second house and car and wife:

Clearly money has something to do with life

—In fact, they’ve a lot in common, if you enquire:

You can’t put off being young until you retire,

And however you bank your screw, the money you save

Won’t in the end buy you more than a shave.

I listen to money singing. It’s like looking down

From long french windows at a provincial town,

The slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad

In the evening sun. It is intensely sad.

18.

The Cathedral Builders

John Ormond

They climbed on sketchy ladders towards God,
with winch and pulley hoisted hewn rock into heaven,
inhabited the sky with hammers,
defied gravity,
deified stone,
took up God's house to meet him,
and came down to their suppers
and small beer,
every night slept, lay with their smelly wives,
quarrelled and cuffed the children,
lied, spat, sang, were happy, or unhappy,
and every day took to the ladders again,
impeded the rights of way of another summer's swallows,
grew greyer, shakier,
became less inclined to fix a neighbour's roof of a fine evening,
saw naves sprout arches, clerestories soar,
cursed the loud fancy glaziers for their luck,
somehow escaped the plague,
got rheumatism,
decided it was time to give it up,
to leave the spire to others,
stood in the crowd, well back from the vestments at the
consecration,
envied the fat bishop his warm boots,
cocked a squint eye aloft,
and said, 'I bloody did that.'

19.

An Introduction

Kamala Das

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru.
I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,
I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one.
Don't write in English, they said, English is
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.
It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.
When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the

Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.
I shrank pitifully.
Then ... I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
Jilted in love ... I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste
Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
The answer is, "It is I. Anywhere and,
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself I
In this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed" I have no joys that are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I."

20.

An Unknown Girl

Moniza Alvi

In the evening bazaar
studded with neon
an unknown girl
is hennaing my hand.

She squeezes a wet brown line
from a nozzle.

She is icing my hand,
which she steadies with hers
on her satin-peach knee.

In the evening bazaar
for a few rupees
an unknown girl is hennaing my hand.

As a little air catches
my shadow-stitched kameez
a peacock spreads its lines
across my palm.

Colours leave the street
float up in balloons.

Dummies in shop-fronts
tilt and stare
with their Western perms.
Banners for Miss India 1993,
for curtain cloth
and sofa cloth
canopy me.

I have new brown veins.
In the evening bazaar
very deftly
an unknown girl
is hennaing my hand.

I am clinging
To these firm peacock lines
like people who cling
to the sides of a train.
Now the furious streets
are hushed.
I'll scrape off
the dry brown lines
before I sleep,
reveal soft as a snail trail
the amber bird beneath.
It will fade in a week.
When India appears and reappears
I'll lean across a country
with my hands outstretched
longing for the unknown girl
in the neon bazaar.

21.

Phenomenal Woman

Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them
They say they still can't see.

I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman

Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.

I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need of my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

The Fisherman Mourned by his wife*Patrick Fernando*

When you were not quite thirty and the sun
had not yet tanned you into old-boat brown,
when you were not quite thirty and had not begun
to be embittered like the rest, nor grown
obsessed with death, then would you come
hot with continence upon the sea
chaste as a gull flying pointed home,
in haste to be with me!

Now that, being dead, you are beyond detection,
and need not be discreet I confess
it was not love that married us nor affection
but elders' persuasion, not even loneliness.
Recall how first you were so impatient and afraid
my eyes were open in the dark unlike in love,
trembling, lest in fear, you'd let me go a maid,
trembling on the other hand for my virginity.

Three months the monsoon thrashed the sea, and you
remained at home; the sky cracked like a shell
in thunder, and the rain broke through.
At last when pouring ceased and storm winds fell,
when gulls returned new-plumed and wild
when in our wind-torn flamboyante
new buds broke, I was with child.

My face was wan while telling you and voice fell low,
and you seemed full of guilt and not to know
whether to repent or rejoice over the situation.

You nodded at the ground and went to sea.
But soon I was to you more than God or temptation,
and so were you to me.

Men come and go, some say they understand,
our children weep, the youngest thinks you're fast asleep:
theirs is fear and wonderment.
You had grown so familiar as my hand
that I cannot with simple grief
assuage dismemberment.

Outside the wind despoils of leaf
trees that it used to nurse;
once more the flamboyante is torn
the sky cracks like a shell again,
so someone practical has gone
to make them bring the hearse
before the rain

23.

Animal Crackers

by Richard de Zoysa

"Draw me a lion."

So I set my pen

to work. Produce a lazy, kindly beast . . .

Colour it yellow.

"Does it bite?"

"Sometimes,

but only when it's angry-

if you pull its tail

or say that it is just another cat . . ."

But for the most part. Indolent, biddable,

basking in the sun of ancient pride.

(Outside, the sunlight seems a trifle dulled

and there's a distant roaring, like a pride

of lions, cross at being awakened

from long, deep sleep).

Then

"Draw me a tiger."

Vision of a beast

compounded of Jim Corbett yarns

and Blake

stalks through my mind, blazing Nature's warning,

black bars on gold.

"DRAW!"

You turn and draw the gun

on me, as if to show
that three-years-old understands *force majeure*
and as you pull the silly plastic trigger
all hell breaks loose; quite suddenly the sky
is full of smoke and orange stripes of flame.

BUT HERE THERE ARE NO TIGERS
HERE THERE ARE ONLY LIONS.

And their jackals
run panting, rabid in the roaring's wake,
infecting all with madness as they pass
while My Lord
the Elephant sways in his shaded arbour,
wrinkles his ancient brows, and wonders-
if, did he venture out to quell this jungle-tide
of rising flame, he'd burn his tender feet.

"Put down that gun. If you do, and you're good.
I'll draw a picture of an elephant.
A curious beast that you must understand"

DONT LOOK OUT THE WINDOW-

Just a party down the lane
a bonfire, and some fireworks, and they're burning-
No, not a tiger- just some silly cat."

Colombo, 25 July, 1983

24.

Explosion

Vivimarie Vanderpoorten

On the day the truckload
Of explosives
Drove into the Central bank,
For a long second
Time staggered
All sounds of a workday morning
In the city
Even the cawing of the crows
Merged into a solitary
Boom
Prism of fire and fury

Lives ended
Eyes were blinded
Retired wage earners
Collecting provident funds
Were crushed
Under brick and glass
The nearby vegetable seller's
hands were severed
like cucumbers,
Women in sari
held their eyeballs in their palms
and blood spattered
the streets,
erasing memory.

Out of the broken window
of a damaged car-
dead driver-
the radio blared, unscathed
on a commercial break
a man's pleasant voice
announced
that big or small, insurance
protects them all.

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