

Poetry Series

Ashley Akari
- poems -

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Ashley Akari()

A Loss

The sunlight in my hair
And the breath of clear-glass air.

Eyes alight, youth filled with
Brimming joy.

Oh take me back!
To the sunlight and the air.

Before the loss of the Beauty
And of Innocence.

Ashley Akari

After The Marriage

Sit in the jasmine-scented garden,
In the night heavy with insect voices
And mellow-sounding flutes.
Sit still in the walled oasis,
In the cool tent of darkness—
Shut from the chaos of clamouring thought
And the sacrilege of eyes.

Here the weary winds sleep,
Like children, in the cherry trees
And the stars swim like gleaming goldfish
In the black lake of sky.
Here the fountain falls softly,
Like the sobbing of a lost child,
Like the weeping of a lonely heart,

Like the crying of the Emperor's beautiful girls.

Girls, who like you,
Were too beautiful, too graceful—
Too young.
Plucked from the finest boughs,
They blossomed for a day, a day—
And vanished with the morning.

Such is the fate of those who find favour with the Emperor.

But you, you cannot die.
Life has had its birth
And the Sun is yet a joy to your eye.
You were made for a good man's love,
And the cradling of tiny bodies.

But beauty must have its glory
And a man must have his desire—
Accept the comfort of your father's lies;
The mirage is sweeter than the reality.

Forget the walls, the royal mask

The peril of thought, of movement.
Forget Love's desperate lies
And Freedom's false illusions—
This opulent prison is happiness,
And honour a substitute for love.

Drown the troubling musings—
Life is short and the heart is treacherous...

Listen to the night'gales singing.

Ashley Akari

Almost

My fingers slide through
The sympathetic water,
Like iron slicing through
Warm, resigned flesh.

In the mirror straggles
The most potent blood—
Washed away.
Washed away?

Last night my wife
Dreamed solemn dreams—
This man of Nazareth
Was white as snow;

I nearly let him go.

But I am Pilate;
I am not free
But bound by laws
And duty and rites....
And wreaths and hopes
And fears.

Fears like tenacious,
Clammy hands and
The cry of the Nazarene—
Who, too late,
I think is God.

It is cold in the shade
Of this momentous cross,
Colder than the shadow
Of gold eagles and sense.
Cold with the iron
That holds him there
And a fistful of silver coins.

Clink, clink, bang, bang—

Echoes into eternity.
And I will suffer
Much in my dreams
Because of this Nazarene....

A child at the cross
Is wailing and my heart
Is wailing too—for sudden loss
Of courage and hope,
And the blood that won't
Wash away.

Ashley Akari

Ask Me If I Love You

Do not ask me
If i love you by
Candlelight when
The world is a
Blanket of stars.

For i will say yes.

Do not ask me
If i love you by
Dawnlight when
Life is a joyful
River in my veins.

For i will say yes.

Ask me if i love you
When the world is
Bleak and rainy
And i need to
Hold your hand
Down the dark and
Lonely road.

And I will say yes.

Ashley Akari

Busker

Alone, violin,
You stand at the unfriendly corner,
Waiting to draw the taut
Across the tense strings:
Passers-by, hostile, glare
Resenting your bright presence
As the darkness resents the flame.

You pour your roaring, ringing river
Into their cold, stone ears....
And then they smile.

Ah!
Music to wake Love in a slumber.
Lovely yet keen,
The notes wind about
The vice-ridden city,
Choking the deadly filth,
The evil lurking in lightless streets.
The vagrant lift their
Grief-heavy heads:
This is the Voice
They have longed to hear.

So winds your song,
Joyful as the rising sun,
Vital as wind,
Thrilling as the never-ending sky:
Strong, Ah, almost too strong
To bear.

This is the music born of Angels!

Clink!
Now twisted, soiled silver
Trickles into the red, woollen hat.
Tight hands,
Calloused with care and labour,

Throw their grudging gift
Of lightest wealth—

Their poor return
For a rare tune.

But surely, this Gift of Heaven
Is worth more than fifty cents?

Ashley Akari

Childhood

These phantoms crowd about
My lonely heart:
Their eyes are cold
But their embrace is warm –
Dread yet familiar ghosts.

Childhood.

Old men use such memories
To feed their fading fires—
But they are bitter to me.

The shadow of the slums
Is hardly shattered by
The mellow glow of Californian suns,
And the birdsongs
Are quite drowned by the
Distant rumbles of empty stomachs.

Mornings, then,
Were not the joyful sunbursts
Of pampered minds.

No.

There was no world outside
The grey, stained walls.
Our fathers saw their life,
Distorted,
Through the beer glass,
And we hunted for a rainbow
In the looming concrete slabs.

This bleak World was our prison,
But we hardly knew we were prisoners:
For there were no visions
In that sullen colony,
No Promised Land.

We accepted the shackles
Of our fathers' disease:
How could we fight for
What we never saw?

But we longed for beauty
With strange thirst:
Our eyes devoured
The rare green blade pushing
Through the black mud
Or the snatch of blue sky
Glimpsed through the
Scowling towers.
Of our Pauper's' Kingdom.

Love, too,
We longed for—
Not the shallow love of secure hearts,
But the steadfast, solid love
Of the loveless.

Other children play "mother and father"—
I was both to ragged brothers:
With hungry eyes,
We watched the sleek passers-by,
The lucky ones:

People who still believe
The World is a bright place:

For them, their happy childhood
Is the blanket to warm them on the stormy nights....

I never had one.

Ashley Akari

Desecration

There was quiet.
There was stillness.
Light unveiled the
Waste of sea and
The Angels sang for joy.

Here is quiet.
Here is stillness.
The warm placenta
Gives false guarantees.

Bursts a new light
On a poor baby screaming.

Torn flesh lovingly made—
Lovingly made.

Quiet.

The false balloon
Is red and empty.
Hands and limbs—
Yet warm—lie dead.
Buried in a garbage bag.

An Einstein,
A Luther,
A child—
So twisted and broken.

The Angels in Heaven are silent.

Ashley Akari

Dust

Look to the silent,
Sloping hills.
Anchored in the deep,
Red earth; we move
Upon them with footprints
Scattered on the wind.

The wind blows.
We breathe.
And our breath
Doesnt turn a leaf.

We are a thought
That builds a form
From the billowing dust,
The basic soil we
Are made on.

But we have the
Very breath of God.
Death cannot kill us
And He has sown
Eternity in our hearts.

Mere thoughts, mere thoughts-
But we are more immortal
Than the hills.

Ashley Akari

Edgar

Stumbling eyeless
On the raging moor
Lost, a tragic zombie—

I never realised how old you are.

How fragile.

This storm was born in my heart,
This tempest in my soul.

Where are the eyes that
Shone on my first gasp?

I would give my broken heart
To give you those old, tired orbs—

But I think you see better in the dark.

Take my love;
The night is cold
And you are colder than I—
Though I think you totter
On Hell's fiery brink.

Give me your hand.
I will not recall the days
You guarded my first, faltering steps.

I will lead you now.

Ashley Akari

We will come and see and conquer
Islands strange, old, unseen:
Go to places we've never been.

And beneath these wandering

Skies we'll dream
Of shores, alien, dark and far—
Of skies endless and
Sown with stars.

Ashley Akari

Goodnight

My son,
How I wish I could
Hold you in my arms
And feel your little heart
Here, against mine.

Life is very short:
But that it was longer,
I might have had time
To give you one last kiss,
Say one last word,
Have one last touch.

Say goodbye.

This pain is such a complex thing,
So deep, so black, so great.
I cannot understand,
I cannot understand,
How a life given
Should be so soon taken away.

I do not know.

And you are such a part of me,
Natural and vital as breathing.

Yes, I do not know.

My son,
Do not be afraid of shadows—
The shadows cannot hurt you.
Neither be afraid of the darkness—
There are no monsters in the closet.

My son....

Goodnight.

Ashley Akari

In The Park

We huddle together,
Hunched in the howling wind,
Crumpled newspaper the only shield against
The cold clawing at our skin.
The rain gnaws at our shaking bones—
But it's not so cold as our tears.

Yes:
Turn your eyes and stare—
Condemn us with your righteous glance—
These are faces you will not forget,
Faces we will not let you forget.

These hands you see,
So greedy, so torn,
Would grasp the tender hand of a friend.

These eyes,
So cold, so hard,
Long to with their light caress
The bright face of a non-existent child.

These lips,
So thin, so twisted,
Would offer a tender, tremulous kiss....

Like animals,
We live to survive;
Selfish we contend for every scrap....

Yet we too were once human:
We, like you, once quivered
With the joy of living,
Rejoiced with the rising sun.

But now,
We wake from the kind Oblivion
And wish the sun
Never rose in our eyes.

Death—for us—
Is no dread Phantom,
But a friend long-coming:
The longed for rest
Whole and not plagued by fears.

But even we have dreams:
In the black pits
Of our hearts we hope,
We long,
To be freed from the shackles:
Free from the miserable
Monotony of a hopeless life.

We long to love
And be loved:
To esteem and hold near
Those we would hold dear—

We look for a Day
When 'home' will be more than a word,
When we look upon our children
And see no mark of suffering:

The Day when the shackles will be loosed,
And we'll see a rainbow in our skies....

But our hearts have been
Frozen too long,
And our hands have been
Turned to violence.

Yes, scorn us,
You who live in the World of Light:
Crush us, despise us
As you would grind sly vipers
Beneath your feet:
But know this:

We are only people waiting for someone to care.

Ashley Akari

Independant Woman

The image of you
Still accuses me,
Stark in the stunned
Shell of my mind.

How could I do it? —
I do not know but that
I do not do;
I am.

I sat and weighed
With my crazy balances
And you smiled with
My teacup in your hand.

Do not smile or
I may forget
That your true love,
My love, is wanting.

For rings and chains
Are both metal-made,
And freedom's strong
As blood.

So smash my cup
In rage and go—
Go far where
I cannot hurt you.

Hate me, my beloved,
But understand.

You love me
And I am killing you,
For the sake of what
I am.

Ashley Akari

Jerusalem

Old woman,
You shiver on
The bomb-shattered street;
Alone

Lift your weary eyes
And scan the wasteland—
The rubble, the wires,
The concrete walls:

The dry bones of Solomon's glory.

Mother, don not weep;
Your tears were shed
Centuries ago.

For I know the pain of your race:
The burden of your blood
Is heavy.

The anguish was knotted
With your bones.

Surely, God is your witness:
And the Moon over Jerusalem
Will not be silent:
For she too has seen
Your bondage, your silent
Prayers from broken hearts.

She too has seen your children
Crushed by the agony of bloody wars—
Crushed—yes—in heart
But not in spirit.

For God is yet your Spring
In the hostile desert—
The Life-giving Water.

He will lead you out of Egypt,
Out of the Land of Slavery,
Out of the Land of Exile....

You are going home.

Rachel, you are weeping
For your children....

Lift up your head, Jerusalem,
Weep no more—
The Promised Land is yours;
God will trample your enemies,
The lions at your walls.

Mother, old mother, rejoice—
The King is at the Gates—

God's waiting to gather his children beneath his wings.

Ashley Akari

Lost

He took his umbrella and turned away
And walked down the dark, rainy road.

I did not think that he'd look back,
I did not want him to look back.

In the grey puddles I can see my face,
And the hot precipitation down my face.

Mad, I sing a careless, confident tune,
Just to make sure that he'll not turn back.

But I think the clouds above weren't fooled;
They were black and grey with no sight of blue.

The brave blackbirds on the wires dropped dead,
And I locked my numb heart in my head.

Tomorrow I should throw a funeral
For the girl left here who isn't me at all.

He looked back.

Ashley Akari

Love

Love is love.

No one knows why
Strangers are friends,
Why a chance encounter
On the street,
Ends in a kiss.

Love is not blind,
But with eyes open wide,
It searches the good
Swept into the corners.

Love binds the foundations
Of the earth, gluing a
Man to his brother.

Love is not a whirlwind,
But the soft drip, drip
Of water on stone.
Gentle, incessant, inexorable—
Revealing colours
The sun never knew.

Love is vital,
Transparent,
Enduring as water.

The sole Hope of a lost World.

We are brothers—
Let us love.

Ashley Akari

Memory

I see your face
In many things.

In coffee cups,
In works of art,
In traffic lights.

A memory sparked
And you live again.
I should bury you
Safe and deep—
But my heart won't let
You die again.

The pillow feels
Like your hand.
At night I wake
With smiles then cry
Because you are not there.

Yet always there
And such a pain.
Raiding my dreams
Like Howard Carter—
I should bury you,
Safe and deep.

But you were like
The summer sun
And grass and trees
And things.
Always there and
Such a joy.

I should bury you,
Safe and deep.
And we'd finally die,
Us two.

Monologue Of A Twisted Mind

The stars sparked flames in her violet eyes;
Lashes matted as the the tree-tops' twisted arms,
And lips and mouth, so red, so red.
Red as the darling dove's hawk-gashed heart
At my feet. Her breath-how can I say? Her
Breath burst, an apple-scented orchard.

Fair Helena!

She murmured love into my ear,
Bent o'er this midnight's forest pool.

Sweet Helena!

How could I help but love her,
So needful of my strong arm-
So beautiful, so young.
Ah, so young!

Time is my rival.
How can I but hate the hand
That ravishes such beauty as hers,
Corroding the bright eye's spark,
The sweet lips' red?

No.

Time is my enemy
And my Helen's too.
That is why, for her sake, I
Hold the black tress'd head
Beneath the night-still waters
And watch the lamb
Breathe in fresh water-
Breath so sweet, so deep,
So deep.

And there she lies.
Beauty smiles and unmoving sleeps

Beneath the crystal waves,
The midnight sky,
Beauty eternal-yes, eternal.
For I have spilt my own heart's blood
Beside the quiet and sacred pool.
And I will lie beneath the waveless glass
With her. Sweet Helena, dear Helena.
Our arms about each other,

Together.
Together.
Forever.
Forever.

I sink beneath these death-dark waters,
Eyes turned to the neverending sky.
What fear of Death have I?
Of Time? Of Space?
For Time cannot touch us
Beneath unchanging water-

Time cannot ravage Love and Immortality.

Ashley Akari

Past

Her hands lie paper-thin
And still, on the frilly
Shrunken lap.

Eyes blue, watery and bright,
Blur printed words and
Spy distant friends
Down the road of years.

She calls me 'Anna'—
But my name is Jane.
Yet she knows the whistle
Of the milkman's boy.

So long ago, so long ago.

She was young, once,
And sceptical
Of walking frames and
Hearing aides.

She had teenage fits
And bleeding loves
And growing pains.

In bold sweaters
And sipping cola ice,
She lived and defiant,
Did the 'twist',
Clicked her heels and
Got a 'teddy boy'.

Then in a sudden
Fit of sense,
Fell in love and
Got an oven mitt.

That was mother
And so long ago....

She does not know
How long ago.

The records are gone
Now the air con blares;
Fluffy slippers caress
Small, cracked heels.

Are they restless
For a dance? —I do not know.

My mother mumbles
And I lean closer,
To sort the ramblings
Of a woman playing pretend
With the past.

Ashley Akari

Rahab

The black hair was
A glistening wave
Down, down her
Curving back.

Her lips so red
And tender
With pressing.
Eyes so old
And flaunted with kohl.

Hear the enticing
Tingle of bracelets
And a fringe of
Immoral bells....

Scarlet woman, scarlet woman,
We do not want your wares.

She bent her brazen
Mouth so close;
"The Lord will bless you"

She dropped the
Cord and in the dark
Her heat burned
Brighter than the sun.

True beauty dressed
In scarlet veils
And faith within
A harlot's skin.

Faith so strong,
So beautiful,
So true,
Covered arms
And painted eyes—

"God bless you too"

Ashley Akari

Salem Justice

They await, bare posts,
Seven heads in seven ropes.
Glittering in a morning sun,
Under a quiet, blue-painted sky.

He looks unafraid, and he,
And she as well,
 and she,
 and she.

Voodoo? Their calm troubles the crowd.
So yell and spit to drown the sound,
The fearful sound of guilty fear.

'Their breath has the taint of hell itself! '
So stop their mouths! And shut those eyes!
Those eyes pure and all alight.
For might their prayers call Heaven down
To curse these men who call wrong right?

'God forbid! '
Yes, God forbid.

The pastor breathes in long and deep
And trembling, halting says a psalm,
Makes a prayer to ward off harm.
'Curse all witchcraft! Lord God help us! '

Amen.
May the Lord God help us.

Oh help us and erase the spot
Of a crime that wont be washed,
That wont be washed by tithes and tears.

The time has come.

Seven heads in seven ropes,
Seven deaths to all our hopes.

Oh let them jeer.
Oh let them stare and all
Their words fade into air.
The cool breath of Eternity.

Silence.

Blow, strange wind, blow and still
Those seven heads will not awake.
Blow and still their bones wont make
New men or make a cold heart warm.

Ashley Akari

The Bushman

I know how the silent stars
Burn and glitter in
The roaring night.

I feel the familiar nocturnal wind
Sweep over the red plains,
The rugged, brown landscape
Of my body.

Here beneath the old grey trees
And the huge, bronze nailed sky,
I take my roots in the
Red, red dust.

This is my mother,
This is my father,
This is my life in the dusty
Hot womb.

Let me roll my swag,
And hear the cicadas sing.
This hard earth's so soft-
I'll not ask for more.

Ashley Akari

The Entymologist

Able Ptolemy Gideon Crombold
Was an odd little man, sparse and bald:
He wore pince-nez and favoured black:
His dress was neat as a polished tack.
His eyes were cold—he ne'er smiled at all—
Said life was a "terribly boring funeral":
But one passion had he to spark his fires—
A peculiar hobby shared by his sires.
For all his quirky, weird joy was found
In sticking bugs in a book (leather-bound) .
And his dreams were thick with butterflies
And the only song he heard was the crickets' cries.

* * * * *

One dreary Autumn day,
Able Esquire felt particularly grey.
He placed an ice-pack on his throbbing head,
Lamented the ache and went to bed.
Alas! The moment he closed his fluttering eyes,
He was swamped by a host of butterflies,
And malevolent beetles and weevils too
And shiny black ants in ranks of two!
He leapt from his bed with a piercing scream
To find that the dream wasn't a dream!
The butterflies and the beetles,
The little black ants and the weevils
Were streaming from the 'SPECIMEN' books
And casting him vengeful, dirty looks:
And Able realised with alarm
The creatures meant to do him harm!
With piercing screams and desperate calls
He squashed the insects on the walls,
The ceiling and the carpeted ground—
Wherever the monsters could be found!
But still they came in twos and threes,
Crawled over his head and bit his knees,
Scrambled over his hands and over his feet
And poured out of the window, onto the street!

Bravely he fought them, loudly and long
But eventually the revengeful throng
Tackled poor Able to the ground
And gave him a beating, sore and sound:
And from his waistcoat they did gnaw
Long threads to bind him to the floor:
And when they bound him did begin
To torment him with a long steel pin
(Just the type he had often used
To secure the insects he had abused)
At last when he could scream no more
They left him and flew out the door:
And Able-with a moaning sound—
Consulted the first doctor to be found.
The learned man said 'twould be best
He cease impaling innocent pests:
A bruised and battered Able agreed
And with many moving tears decreed
(Swearing on his ancestor's reverend name)
That Able Crombold should never again
Impale an insect or cause it pain.

Ashley Akari

The Fears

Remember, old one, you could never keep
Alive the dreams of a distant sleep.

A love is lost, joy walks with pain;
So christen your failure with a softer name,

Exorcise the ghost and never give
Life to the life you were born to live.

Ashley Akari

The Friends

The foam of a million seas
Washes over the cold sand
And rises up between the living
Mountains of our feet.

The end of the world is
So far away—far beyond
This great and terrible sea
That engulfs men in their frail ships—

Frail, like our frail bodies.

You sigh.

The sunlight breaks through the
Clouds like the breaking of
Budding new life.

We both know that the sun
Is setting and that today is
The day of your dying.

But you are not afraid
And I am almost unafraid.
We have been one for so long
That our thoughts run together,
Like the colours of a masterpiece.

But still I'll miss the form of you,
The laughter in your eyes
And the hand that has been
So strong and guiding and firm.

So firm it hurt and I cried
Out in pain—but you always
Loved me too much to let go.

But you will let go now.

I can feel your cold hand shivering
And the clouds are painting
Shadows on your skin.

You smile one more time
To show that Death isn't so very bad.
Or so very cruel if you do
Not fear it.

And you do not fear it.

The play is done
And the red curtain falls softly
And finally on our scene,
With only an audience of Angels above.

The sun is a flaming ship
And the stars, also, flame in their
Endless orbits.

You are still and I am an Actor
Alone on the stage—for
You are far beyond the
World of glitter now, with no use
For masks and tears.

But one day the curtain will lift again
And we will play with a
Script with no ending.

But until then I will smile bravely
And let you rest.

You are weary and grateful for Sleep.

Ashley Akari

The Sepoy (The Indian Mutiny)

All the hot red glow,
The raging booms are gone,
But the grief hangs still
Like a tattered English flag

Limp in the windless air
And the overcoming silence.

The pariah dogs mourn
For men who do not
Yet know that the
Sword is double-edged,

Yelling like banshees
That have well and truly come.

A child sits in the immense ruins
Of his nursery and his innocence—
Slowly pushed out,
A gunshot at a time.

His mother lies dead
In the bottomless well—
That day he turned a thousand
Years old,
But he's not too elderly
For tears.

The sepoy sits in the hungry ruins
Of Freedom and Vengeance's illusion,
Slowly crumbled when
The battle yell died.

He flung his soul
Down a bottomless well—
With a wound mortal and immortal,
That cannot be cured with tears.

Ashley Akari

Trust

I.

Stumbling naked and alone,
To the bank of the oily river

The waters of Hell
Lap loud and low....

Loud and low.

The world is silent here
But for the echoes that
Make mockery of your
Secret words; your acts
In hidden places.

They thunder in your ears.

II.

This is the sound of
Fear itself—the preacher
Ranting on the street,
The insistent knock,
A funeral dirge, so
Loud and low....

Loud and low.

The searching wind
Blows away the last
Tatters of life's illusions.

With trembling hands
You examine the crack
In your spectacles, the
Log rotting in your eye.

III.

This is the last terror,
The final oblivion,
The quiet sinking into
Nothing—

Quiet but for the distant
Clamour of the mighty
Angels' weeping

And the muted cries of
The tortured heart that
Sees a pit of fire in
Death's dark, earthy bed.

Here we wrangle with
Angels and demons—
The comfortable lies, the
Looming Truth, larger
And truer than life.

IV.

This flickering moment
Is the terrible match held
To the hideous truth—

The hopelessness of life.

Unless this river should
Be our Ganges, the true
Water of our Baptism

We are lost.

The Love we crucified
Is our final hope,
The last candle in
This thick'ning night....

But should this Light
Turn will-o'-the-wisp,

Should not Nirvana
Dull a broken hope?

A bird falling from the
First, dizzy height must
Crush its wings or fly—

So we must trust
That in our drowning,
We shall take our
First, sweet breath.

Ashley Akari

Wasted

The sheets are too white,
The air too clean,
And I never thought
Death so hard

Shoved up against
My bedroom door
With my little brown jar
Of vile green pills.

No.

Death was escape,
Like dismal music,
And the deep, deep black
Of my dyed straight hair....

A black more permanent,
More solid, more true.

But the truth crashed,
Crushed, divided and tore –
Like the pole that ripped
My car in two.

With a smashed face
And smashed limbs
I heard the blackbirds sing
In tune with my first breath.

Life is beautiful.

The sheets are too, too white,
The air is far too clean –
All the things I'd do again,
All the places I'd see.

All your dear faces are swimming
And the great, big world is spinning....

The big, jingling machine's still beeping,
But in my heart a blackbird's singing.

Beep, beep

Beeeeeeep.

.....

Ashley Akari

You Said Goodbye

I remember,
Like yesterday,
The blinking city lights—
The yawning gulf in your eyes.

You said goodbye

And sealed my heart
In a glass jar—
A nice little trophy
For your mantelpiece.

You said goodbye
And I let you go....

Away, away.

You said you would return—
But you never did.

And you left me
For the great, wide world,
Stronger arms
And a bolder heart.

You said goodbye
And walked away....

But still your shadow
Dances on my paths
And overshadows
The sun.

Still you walk
In my black, black dreams
Leaving footprints
On my poor, white life;
In the vast sands
Of this lonely desert.

In the awful darkness,
You shine;
Like an eternal candle,
Like the blazing city lights.

Maybe someday
You will return.
Maybe someday
You will love
The soul trapped
In this shell....

Yes,
One day you will
Come back to me.

And I will wait for you.

Ashley Akari