

Nothing But Death

There are cemeteries that are lonely,
graves full of bones that do not make a sound,
the heart moving through a tunnel,
in it darkness, darkness, darkness,
like a shipwreck we die going into ourselves,
as though we were drowning inside our hearts,
as though we lived falling out of the skin into the soul.

And there are corpses,
feet made of cold and sticky clay,
death is inside the bones,
like a barking where there are no dogs,
coming out from bells somewhere, from graves somewhere,
growing in the damp air like tears of rain.

Sometimes I see alone
coffins under sail, embarking with the pale dead,
with women that have dead hair,
with bakers who are as white as angels,
and pensive young girls married to notary publics,
caskets sailing up the vertical river of the dead,
the river of dark purple,
moving upstream with sails filled out by the sound of death,
filled by the sound of death which is silence.

Death arrives among all that sound
like a shoe with no foot in it, like a suit with no man in it,
comes and knocks, using a ring with no stone in it,
with no finger in it,
comes and shouts with no mouth,
with no tongue, with no throat.

Nevertheless its steps can be heard
and its clothing makes a hushed sound, like a tree.
I'm not sure, I understand only a little, I can hardly see,
but it seems to me that its singing has the color of damp violets,
of violets that are at home in the earth,
because the face of death is green,
and the look death gives is green,
with the penetrating dampness of a violet leaf
and the somber color of embittered winter.

But death also goes through the world dressed as a broom,
lapping the floor, looking for dead bodies,
death is inside the broom,
the broom is the tongue of death looking for corpses,
it is the needle of death looking for thread.

Death is inside the folding cots:
it spends its life sleeping on the slow mattresses,
in the black blankets, and suddenly breathes out:
it blows out a mournful sound that swells the sheets,
and the beds go sailing toward a port
where death is waiting, dressed like an admiral.

—by Pablo Neruda, *translated by Robert Bly*

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Published by
Chandrika Sharma for
International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India
Telephone (91) 44-2827 5303 Facsimile (91) 44-2825 4457
E-mail: icsf@vsnl.com

ICSF Brussels Office:
Rue du Midi 165, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Telephone (32) 2 - 513 1565 Facsimile (32) 2-513 7343
E-mail: icsfbrussels@yucum.be

Edited by
KG Kumar

Designed by
Satish Babu

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