

## *Refuge in the Forest*

148

So I have roamed through perilous lands  
in fruitless pursuit of reward,  
relinquished my pride and my birthright  
to fawn in futile servitude,  
shamelessly eaten in other men's homes,  
cowering like a common crow.  
Greed, you gloated on my wretched deeds;  
even now you will not rest content!

149

I mined the earth in search of treasure,  
smelted iron mountains' rocky hoards,  
crossed treacherous oceans' expanses,  
placated kings with devoted care;  
bent on evoking occult powers,  
by night I roamed the burning grounds.  
Not even a broken cowrie shell did I find—  
cursed greed, grant me some reprieve!

150

I bear the villains' taunting words  
intent upon appeasing them.  
I choke my tears, which in disguise  
become an empty heart's laughter.  
I pay vile homage to my foes  
stupefied by wealth.  
Hope, you are barren—how  
do you still compel me to dance?

151

The cyclic recurrence of sunset and dawn  
daily serves to measure life's decay,  
but burdened with his mundane tasks,  
man does not grasp time's movement;  
seeing old age and pain and death,  
he does not experience terror.  
Drunk on the heady wine of delusion,  
the world is mad in oblivion.

152

If other men did not see his wife the pitiful victim  
of poverty's woe, and the gaunt faces  
of his starved and whimpering children  
as they pulled at their mother's ragged clothes,  
how could he stammer out the word "give"  
that sticks in his throat from fear of rebuff?  
What high-minded man would stoop to beg  
for the sake of his own empty belly?

153

All desire for pleasure has waned,  
the esteem of men has ebbed;  
beloved friends and peers of life  
now are lost to heaven;  
the simplest movement requires a cane;  
these eyes are veiled in darkness.  
How bold this body is to fear  
the final blow of death!

154

I failed to fix my aimless thoughts on Shiva's  
holy foot to cleave these mundane bonds;  
I heedlessly shunned the righteous way  
which penetrates heaven's massive doors;  
I even failed in my dreams to embrace  
woman's voluptuous breasts, and her ample hips.  
I lived my life like an ax, wasting  
the forest of youth my mother slaved to nurture.

155

We savored no pleasure,  
so we are consumed.  
We practiced no penance,  
so we are afflicted.  
We did not elude time,  
so we are pursued.  
We did not wither craving,  
so we are the wizened.

156

My face is graven with wrinkles,  
my hair is streaked with gray,  
my limbs are withered and feeble—  
my craving alone keeps its youth.

157

Even the sensuous pleasures which rest  
within our reach inevitably ebb away.  
Is the pain of abstention so intense  
that man cannot renounce them himself?  
If pleasures abandon him at random,  
man suffers unparalleled anguish;  
but if he renounces them at will,  
he reaps the fruit of eternal calm.

158

Even though my food is alms,  
a single meager daily meal;  
though my bed is bare ground,  
my servant no one but myself;  
though my clothes are tattered,  
patched with scraps of rag,  
the lures of the senses  
never grant release.

159

Her breasts, those fleshy protuberances,  
are compared to golden bowls;  
her face, a vile receptacle of phlegm,  
is likened to the moon;  
her thighs, dank with urine, are said  
to rival the elephant's trunk.  
Mark how this despicable form  
is flourished by the poets.

160

Unconscious of its violent power,  
the moth flies into a flame.  
The unwary fish through ignorance  
bites the baited hook.  
And even we, men who perceive  
the tangled net of ruin  
which passion casts, do not avoid it.  
Alas, delusion's sway is inscrutable!

161

Forest fruits are my only food,  
mountain water my drink,  
the bare earth my bed,  
bark cloth is my raiment.  
I cannot acquiesce  
in the impudence of evil men  
whose drunken senses totter  
from the wine of trifling wealth.

162

This world was engendered long ago  
by gracious men with noble hearts.  
Some sustained it, others conquered  
to give it away as if it were straw.  
Men of courage even now enjoy power  
over the various realms.  
What then is this fever of pride  
in men who rule the smallest town?

163

You are a king;  
I am exalted in homage to an honored guru's wisdom.  
You are notorious for your might;  
the poets spread my fame across the worlds.  
O prince of pride,  
the gulf between us is not great.  
If you turn your face from me,  
I am quite indifferent.

164

When warring rulers never cease  
to ravage and divide the land,  
what glory is there for a king  
in conquest?  
But men who rule some meager plot of land,  
village lords,  
who ought to feel despair,  
rather boast delight—the fools!

165

Our intellects are not intent on knavery;  
we rank not as dancers, lewd buffoons, or songsters,  
nor as women bent with weighty breasts.  
Who then are we in the palace of a king?

166

You are a king of opulence;  
I am a master  
of infinite words.  
You are a warrior;  
I hold a skill in eloquence  
which subdues the fever of pride.  
Men blinded by riches serve you;  
but they desire to hear me  
that their minds may be pure.  
Since you have no regard for me,  
the less have I for you,  
O king—I am gone.

167

Why, my heart, do you waste the days  
seeking attention of other men?  
Why do you enter the thicket  
of anguish just to curry favor?  
If you find contentment within yourself,  
your thought will become a wish-granting gem—  
zeal for freedom's joy  
will starve your worldly craving.

168

To cultivate lives as ephemeral  
as droplets on a lotus leaf,  
what do we not stoop to do  
when discrimination fails us?  
In front of rich men,  
senseless from wines of wealth,  
I shamelessly stood boasting  
about my own virtues.

169

Alas, my friend, great was the king  
with his circle of courtiers,  
the counselors at his side,  
the ladies' moonlike faces,  
the host of haughty princes,  
the bards and their tales—  
but we submit to time,  
which swept them all from power  
to the path of memory.

170

Our parents, who begot and bore us  
to the world are long since dead.  
Our friends of youth are banished  
to the realm of memory.  
Now, from day to day, we wait for  
death's imminent call—  
like trees on the frail sandbanks  
of rivers, we wait for the flood.

171

In a house that once was full,  
a solitary man stands.  
Where many descendants lived,  
no one remains.  
They toss day and night  
like a pair of dice  
and move men like pawns—  
Time plays a frenzied game with Kālī,  
his partner in destruction.

172

Should I sojourn in austerity  
on the sacred river's bank,  
or should I, in worldly fashion,  
court women of high grace?  
Or drink at streams of scripture  
the nectar of rich verse?  
In life as transient as a flashing glance,  
I can choose no single course.



173

Hope is a river  
whose water is desire,  
whose waves are craving.  
Passions are crocodiles,  
conjectures are birds  
destroying the tree of resolve.  
Anxiety carves a deep ravine  
and the whirlpool of delusion  
makes it difficult to ford.  
Let ascetics who cross  
to the opposite shore  
exult in their purified minds.

174

Days which dragged through the heavy pain  
I felt entreating wealthy lords,  
days which fled to naught while my mind  
was ensnared in the sensuous sphere—  
let me recollect the laughter  
of those cursed days' end  
when I awake from meditation's depths,  
seated on a mountain cave's stone couch.

175

I never learned pure scholarship  
or amassed any wealth;  
my mind was not devout  
in reverence due my parents.  
Even in dreams I failed to embrace  
maids with trembling eyes.  
I passed my time like a common crow  
groveling for other men's crumbs.

176

Though I search the triple world  
through all its mundane passages,  
no man has met my vision's field  
or come within my hearing's range  
who could really bind  
to a post of self-restraint  
the raging elephant of his mind  
with its drunken desire to court  
the world of the senses.

177

I dwell content in the hermit's dress of bark,  
while you luxuriate in silken splendor.  
Still, my contentment is equal to yours;  
disparity's guise is deceiving.  
Now let him be called a pauper  
who bears an insatiable greed;  
when a mind rests content,  
what can it mean to be "wealthy" or "poor"?

178

Pleasures are as ephemeral as lightning  
flashing through a canopy of clouds;  
life is as fragile as a water-filled  
thunderhead blown by the wind;  
transient for mortals is youth's caressing.  
Wise men, reflect on this and hasten  
to fix your minds in yoga,  
purest fruit of calm and trance.

179

Wandering through holy cities or sacred forests,  
bearing the covered alms bowl,  
begging where the smoke-gray sky  
gives sign that priests offer holy oblations  
whose remnants are fit for mendicants—  
this is the righteous way  
to fill a gnawing belly.  
The proud mendicant is still blessed,  
but not the parasitic wretch  
who grovels daily amid his kinsmen.

180

Abandon the depths of sensuous chaos,  
that prison of torment!  
The course reaching beyond toward bliss  
can instantly allay all pain.  
Initiate then a peaceful mood!  
Renounce your gamboling unsteady ways!  
Forsake the ephemeral mundane passions!  
Rest placid now, my thoughts!

181

My dear, rest content  
with forest flowers, herbs, and fruits;  
with earth's bare couch  
and garments fashioned crudely of fresh bark.  
We retire now to a sylvan silence,  
to the forest where no echo sounds  
of wicked men whose muddled minds  
show their confusion—  
vile lords whose tongues stammer folly aloud,  
confounded by disease of wealth.

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182

Purge your delusion,  
find joy in moon-crested Shiva,  
dwell in devotion, my thoughts,  
on the banks of the heavenly river!  
What certainty exists in waves, or bubbles,  
or streaks of lightning?  
In women, or flames, or serpents,  
or torrents of water?

183

Songs sound before you, eloquent bards  
from the south are at your side,  
behind you are plume-bearing maids  
whose anklets ring in play.  
If you so desire,  
taste these worldly delights.  
If not, my mind, plunge into  
deep meditation, into a trance  
free from fantasy dilemmas.

184

Are roots extinct in the valleys?  
Have mountain cascades ceased to fall?  
Are boughs that bear fruit and yield  
the hermit's bark withered on the trees?  
How can the world bear to behold  
the faces of arrogant rogues  
whose brows dance in the winds  
of a little hard-won wealth?

185

O beneficent Shiva,  
behold a solitary man,  
free from desire, tranquil,  
drinking from his hands,  
wearing the sky as his raiment.  
When shall I master the way  
to root out the store of my karma?

186

If wealth which yields all desire is won,  
what then?  
If your foot stands on the head of your foes,  
what then?  
If honored men are drawn to you by riches' force,  
what then?  
If man's mundane body endures for an aeon,  
what then?

187

When man feels devotion to the Lord Shiva,  
has the fear in his heart of death and rebirth,  
indulges no bonds of attachment to kinsmen  
or frenzy born of amorous passion;  
when he dwells in a lonely forest  
free from the taints of society,  
he lives indifferent to worldly concerns.  
What loftier goal can man strive to attain?

188

If you men perceive your deeper selves,  
then reach toward Brahman boundless,  
enduring, remote, and pervading;  
and it shall follow that  
power and pleasure in the world  
will seem the obsessions of wretched fools.

189

You descend to nether worlds,  
you traverse the sky,  
you roam the horizon  
with such mobility, my mind!  
Why do you never, even in error,  
remember what is pure  
and part of yourself,  
that Brahman, through which  
you would reach your final bliss?

190

Earth his soft couch,  
arms of creepers his pillow,  
the sky his canopy,  
tender winds his fan,  
the moon his brilliant lamp,  
indifference his mistress,  
detachment his joy—  
tranquil, the ash-smeared hermit  
sleeps in ease like a king.

191

Why do men need scriptures revealed, remembered,  
recited in legend? Why tedious tomes of precepts?  
Why the labyrinth of ritual acts  
performed for reward in heaven's abode?  
When compared with the fire ending time,  
ending all the pain of worldly toil,  
and leading men's souls into bliss,  
all these are the goods of haggling merchants.

192

Life is a rough uncertain wave.  
The splendor of youth is a transient bloom.  
Fortune is imagination's whim.  
Pleasure flashes like lightning during the rains.  
Even fond embraces of beloved arms  
do not rest long in their show of love.  
Meditate then on that highest Brahman  
to cross beyond this sea of worldly dread.

193

Moonlight beams, a forest glade,  
the fellowship of friends,  
the legends told in poetry,  
all are enchanting.  
Enchanting too is her lovely face  
gleaming with tears of anger—  
enchanting if only your thought can forget  
their ephemeral nature.

194

While his body's vigor is whole  
and old age is remote;  
while his sensuous powers are unimpaired  
and life not yet exhausted;  
only then will a wise man  
strive to perfect his soul.  
Why attempt to dig a well  
when the house is already burning?

195

I failed to master the knowledge  
needed to conquer the host of polemist  
abroad in the world.  
I did nothing to spread my fame  
across the sky on the rapier  
made to pierce war elephants' heads.  
I never sipped the moonrise nectar  
from women's beautiful,  
tender, blossom lips.  
Alas, I passed a futile youth,  
like a flaming lamp  
in an empty house.

196

You are favored men who sit in mountain caves,  
in meditation on an inner light,  
while on your laps calmly perch birds of prey  
to drink the tears of bliss.  
But we, poor fools,  
waste away our lives in games,  
dallying in pleasure groves and ponds  
of castles desire creates.

197

Birth is scented with death.  
Youth's brilliance is shadowed by old age.  
Contentment is menaced by ambition,  
calm, by impudent women's amorous looks,  
virtues, by men's malice,  
woodlands, by serpents, and kings, by villains.  
Rich treasure  
is plundered by transience.  
Is anything spared the threat of eclipse?

198

Youth in its prime is sapped  
by a hundred plagues of longing.  
Wherever the bird of wealth alights,  
misfortunes swarm through open gates.  
Soon death is sovereign  
over every helpless creature born.  
What is fashioned to endure  
through capricious fate?

199

Still unborn, man suffers a painful  
confinement in woman's foul womb.  
In youth, he suffers separation's pangs,  
the misery of each parting  
lover's embrace.  
Even old age is accursed,  
exposing him to women  
flashing looks of scorn.  
Tell me, men, does worldly existence  
offer us any joy at all?

200

The span of man's life is a measured hundred years,  
yet half is lost to night  
and of his waking time,  
callow youth and hoary age each claim a share;  
his prime is spent in servitude, suffering  
the anguish of estrangement and disease.  
Where do men find happiness  
in life less certain and more transient than the waves?