

The Summer Poem

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*for Norman Pridmore
who travelled further than I did*

I

what is that voice in the air?
the summer ships the tall evening grass
the yawning morning the beach full of stones
the sand dunes rich with girls
what is that voice?
the ancient amber sandals of the sun
a holocaust of pebbles between trees
the dry morning staggering towards noon
what are those rock-formed faces aghast with salt?
arms waving in the sea
the ships the sacred summer
the blood tightening like fire
what is it?
setting off into the glorious mist
the moon hanging timidly over an alien hill
riding into an unknown town thirsty for sights
look! the tall masts the cool harbour
the voice what is the voice?
countries and languages flowing over you like water
the sun clutching your body as a lover does
daytime settling down over the steaming sea
the sacred coast the voices never silent
what are they?
ashes of beach fires cliffs suddenly leaping
the heart heading for the mouth
a foreign cathedral splitting its sides with jewels
what are the voices
sailing out and away
the ships
the summer ships

II

and we shall be free where the wretched deserts hang
in their stone cells
the jewels floating on the sea
the cloudy heads of forests
weed-throated pools and streams enshrined among herbs
see! in the shining distance a cottage
gossiping in the fields
walls bristling with maps of pilgrimages
water falling behind a hedge
far away the poem of some bells
on the low horizon a bank of cloud roaring
up from the sea a wind singing transparent psalms
a harbour hanging mysteriously the throaty voices of ships
over a church hovers a dome thick with saints
bells descend towards the cobblestones
look! we are moving out into the night
unbelievable languages whistle through speakers
in the darkness a fish starts up from the water like a bird

III

rush round me sea full of lemon globes invisible with heat
you towns come wandering along forest paths
in the very depths of summer
domes inhabited by saints
swing on your gentle chains in the sun
and you documents of islands drifting
on the half-empty surfaces of pools
read me and write me
oh holy night pinned up on trees
come down and drink with me
evenings in your purple jackets
where shall we go tonight what shall we think
still shallow rivers weeping with herons
let us talk through the afternoon
these are good problems to have
throaty flowers bellow your scents
in full voice this untold noon
let the port cities open their gates
let food and drink and paper be brought
let the dew foam against the walls of morning's tree-lined bath
and let paintings be suspended from branches
I want to be part of the exhibition
let the buds of uncertainty ripen into the orchids of discovery
oh sea without age wrap the sky in liquid
open the eyes of my heart to dance beside you

IV

approach forest shepherd calling towns into their fold
approach holy face rising out of the sea in answer to prayer
join us you stones which rise and fall on beaches
for years and years
we are travelling to the city of white temples
we are travelling to the city our pockets are full of seashells
we know the way we are all men and women
we are travelling and our voices are growing stronger every day
we are not accustomed to silence
to the city of white temples come there can be no other journey
in the city there will be balconies and severe arches
and temples with women singing
we are travelling to the city of white temples
we all move out into the sun together
after spending the night under trees
we are travelling approach you drivers of boats with sails like maps
to the crystal city of white temples
to the birthplace of meteors to the houses filled with science
to the voices the storms the rivers clasped by streets
to the living city away away

V

 speak you who slip without speech
 under the heavy circles of religion
 speak you who travel out to the broad ships hanging in the bay
 and you who descend naked into the sea
 with arms upraised turn and speak
 my discoveries half-concealed by palm-fronds
 hear my voice come out to me and speak
 let your voices come into the air with wings
 let unexpected possibilities become apparent
 ah! let me discover you
 suggest to me ways of uncovering your body
 will you not speak my angel
 who studiously turns pages of thin paper on a shop counter
 sparrows and other birds who march towards us piping
 speak and let all who listen be surprised
 you silent constructions in the sea
 uninhabited by man what will you say to us
 you figures who back away into the shadows in my soul
 as I ask about you come contribute to my refurbishment
 catastrophes in the international calendar
 I compel you to explain yourselves
 flat coast which marks the conclusion of country
 what is your name I shall make you some day into my lover

VI

and so let all the new things be offered to us
let unusual discoveries rise to our hands
look! the red light changing to green
the stern invitation to journey
the grand cities shuffling behind their walls
the endless beards of forests
and let us make plans for travel in palatial trains
for visits to attic rooms
for robes made of sunsets and diamond crowns like small seas
we will have heaven!
we will have new bridges flinging their arms over dark canyons
and we will have fire
and I shall lay open the marble book of your thighs
many times the stone mouth of a tunnel will drink us down
and let the catholic jar of Europe pour its summers over us
let Africa release her arab sounds
and twitch aside her jewelled curtain
may the distances contained within Asia
repair our grief and expose us to starlit evenings
anoint us with the oil of places oh God!
hold our heads under the surface of change
speak to us again and again of the open summer
let us have letters written in surprise

VII

deep in the grasp of London we shall dream and dream of summer
under the heavy sack of work we shall dream and light candles
in the long dress of winter we shall tear ourselves we shall remember our nakedness
where the dark evenings crouch to jump out at us we shall write songs about our noble
journeys
among the columns of smoke we shall not depart from summer we shall talk of summer and
our journeys
in the twiggile of the streets we shall shine like moons we shall shave our faces in the
darkness of the early mornings and remember
arrested by the tall arm of the fog we shall sing and in the distance we shall see the new
approach of summer
we shall see the waving banners of summer in the exultant noon the year rolling over on to its
back
and we shall pray for the roaring fire of travel the open eye of a new country
the kiss of the sea the movement of the sand
give us again the voice of the wind on the tossing water
bring us the energy of engines the throbbing of the heart the new values the history of love
give us again the summer turning over the point of a hill the towns replete with churches and
with pools
give us motion! distance! fire!