

## **Loneliness**

*KS Maniam*

1

I'm sitting with my friend,  
loneliness.

I remember meeting him first  
as a child.

My mother was suckling  
my second sister,  
gazing tenderly at her.

My other sister slept,  
clutching her doll.

I turned to my play corner,  
and there he was,  
among my broken toys,  
loneliness!

He took me straightaway  
into his warm heart.

When bullies  
or neighbours  
mocked or humiliated me,

I ran to him

He was always there,  
trusty and trusting,  
a comfort I'd never found  
even at my mother's breast.

I forgot him

when my friend, Mike,  
died in a motorcycle accident.  
We'd been known as the inseparables.  
People saw Mike in me  
and me in Mike.  
We too did the same:  
saw ourselves in each other.  
Now I saw Mike's motorcycle  
smash into the car,  
saw him fly through the air  
and land in the ditch, broken,  
over and over again.  
I saw him in the hospital bed  
wrapped up like a mummy;  
saw death steal past his closed eyes  
and still his laboured breath,  
over and over again.  
  
I turned desperately to my only friend,  
loneliness.  
Though I'd forgotten him,  
he hadn't deserted me.  
He was now everywhere,  
even more concretely than before.  
He didn't hold out solace,  
only thrust me deeper into grief;  
filled me with an anger  
that could have exploded a boulder  
or simmered in my veins  
like an all-consuming sickness.

I slowly began to read his intention,  
learn his language.

2

He spoke in unusual ways:

He was a crow perched on a branch,  
his blackness giving the sky its deep blue.

He was a pebble in a stream,  
shining with a fragile smoothness.

He was a child  
beside the ice cream vendor,  
licking joy to its core.

He was grief-stricken woman  
tearing her hair  
as if ripping out her womb.

He was a young girl  
come in from the rain,  
her clothes clinging to her tender body.

He was the brightening light  
in the doorway  
after a dark and stormy night.

He led me into the mind's darkness,  
the crevices of the heart;

led me into the subtle  
revelations of life –  
poems.

Source: KS Maniam, *Selected Works*. Petaling Jaya: Maya Press, 2019, pp 269-271.