

## Bones for Breakfast

*Urna Bose*

Between you and me, sits a belly.  
No head, no liver, no spleen.  
A fattened protrusion, its carnivorous cunning  
on an anonymous lease from the Venus Flytrap.  
This belly's on an overdose of steroids.  
OD now. Think later. Rehabilitate never.

Biting off in uncanny chunks Wordsworth's limb,  
the flesh – red, warm, inviting.  
Tagore's wrist, marinated with care, in hung curd overnight.  
The tongue of Sylvia Plath, on a bed of bhut jolokia<sup>1</sup>.  
The thumb of Octavio Paz, with a measured  
drizzle of soya sauce.  
The left eye of Kamala Das, comatose, like a sorry dumpling.  
Nissim Ezekiel's hair, sundried with sea salt and sea breeze.  
The fibrous veins of Jibanananda Das, the calories uncounted, uncountable.

The inner lining of this belly, a hive of invincibility,  
secreting the sweetened, addictive ego hormone.  
Nodes simulating neurons – of yours and mine,  
slowly masticating the residue of *me-ness, you-ness,*  
*individual-ness, broken-ness, enough-ness, poet-ness.*  
Its GPT-2 exoskeleton working up an appetite for more,  
and more, and more. *Yeh pet maange more*<sup>2</sup>.  
Regurgitating metaphors, syntaxes,  
charcoaled cloned cadences.

---

<sup>1</sup> One of the hottest peppers in the world, originating from North East India.

<sup>2</sup> Literally means “this stomach desires more” in Hindi. However, this is a derivative of the popular advertising slogan ‘Yeh Dil Maange More’ for Pepsi India coined in 1998 which literally means, ‘This Heart Desires More’, and later became integrated into popular Indian culture as a colloquialism.

Try turning back the hands of time,  
lament and mourn and grieve the burial  
of crafting a painstaking line, then another, and another,  
be warned – it'll spew its digestive enzymes,  
and impatiently order the sternum and the femur,  
the shinbone and the tailbone of poets for breakfast.

## How to Become a Bot for Dummies

*Urna Bose*

My heaviness is in a tethered bondage to  
this strange, raw thing. I now must upgrade it  
into a state-of-the-art assemblage.

A team of Swiss scientists is over to video-record  
the procedure, a filming crew in tow –  
a ready reckoner for posterity.

Under the piercing gaze of strobe lights, the footage  
will make for a DIY manual, easy-peasy. Tried, tested,  
proven, applauded, marketed with panache.  
Me: a guinea pig, a lab rat, a don't-know-who-I-am-anymore.  
I buy fortified steel reinforced sheets, the specifications  
checked a hundredth tentative time over.

The steel sheets, I make a note to myself, will  
replace the outer walls. A tight aluminium wire-mesh  
girding though for the softer insides.  
Certified, advanced, industrial nails I lay down, one by one  
on the fallow slope of my palm,  
should anything spill out, slip through the cracks.

Lights, camera, action: my hand doesn't shake  
when I hammer the steel sheets in.  
My lower lip twitches not when the nails are thrust  
into the circular grooves. I'm almost done.  
The Swiss scientists nod in reverence. The cinematographer  
zooms unpixellated – my wordless, white-page face.

It's only for a nanosecond, when I yank out the arteries  
dripping in a primal seismic ache, that I think of you.  
Tissues collide helter-skelter, at the back of the throat,  
the phlegm of a volcano, above this  
Morpheus stalactite, programmed-not-to-giveaway,  
computer-coded, homicidal, AI heart.

# My Bicycle is a Time Machine

*Urna Bose*

My bicycle is a time machine, and me  
a ‘velocipedestrienne’<sup>3</sup>, riding astride a black hole –  
crouched purple quicksand, smoke rings of paternity.  
In 1895<sup>4</sup>, a dogged society forms in New York, of men who  
solemnly pledge never to talk to bloomer-wearing women.  
And, breeches are too close to that unshakeable  
bastion of saccharine decay – trousers.  
Then what about the height of my hemline, Mister?  
The not-so-coy, 19<sup>th</sup>-century equivalent of the chastity belt,  
the casus belli, trickling fickle – a this or a that - quickly  
shapeshifting in the war of the sexes.  
A djinn, a jinni, a houdini – take your pick.

With acid on my tongue, I declare to history’s mysteries,  
the wheels of the bicycle do not rattle my innards,  
un-apologies for much-more-than-rattling  
your spinal cord, oh-so perpendicular.  
Unchaperoned I ride – sexual liberation, my pillion,  
meanwhile 1868<sup>5</sup> morphs into 2023.  
And, labels are still consolation prizes. The ‘Fairer Sex’ –  
a house of cards paper thin, ain’t a compliment –  
a clever disguise for generational unfairness,  
my face now a hard-wired snooze button  
I chew your cud demurely. In India, a cow must be  
owned as must be a woman.

---

<sup>3</sup> The female bicycle pioneers were known as “velocipedestriennes” in the early days.

<sup>4</sup> Most men never approved of women’s bicycling costumes and in 1895 in New York, a society formed of men who pledged to never talk to bloomer-wearing women.

<sup>5</sup> In 1868, in the earliest women’s bicycling race in history in France, many women wore scandalously short skirts to pedal better and avoid accidents.

Your masculinity purchased by another man – my father,  
for the dowry<sup>6</sup> of a Mercedes-Benz.  
Of course, a boy must have his toy, you grin,  
spouting the virtues of hollow feminism.  
Overlooking equal pay at work is just math –  
a historical atonement for women’s suffrage.  
Remember honey: one can’t have it all, you spit out.  
Mock jest, its red betel ‘pichukkh’<sup>7</sup> stains the fork in the road,  
my half-grunt half-laughter; hot vapours of what you think  
is a woman’s acceptance of your bullshit.  
FYI<sup>8</sup> only: I didn’t get bowlegged from too much peddling,  
my feet didn’t stop then, won’t stop pedalling.  
Now. Ever.

---

<sup>6</sup> Money or expensive gifts a woman’s family gives to the man she is marrying.

<sup>7</sup> Paan is an Indian after-dinner treat that consists of a betel leaf filled with chopped betel nut, and other assorted ingredients. Paan is served folded into a triangle, and when spat out the red stains can make for grotesque graffiti on wall corners. ‘Pichukkh’ is a reference to the splotchy ‘sound’ of spitting out the red liquid-y residue.

<sup>8</sup> For your Information.

## The Diary of a Robot

*Urna Bose*

Of all the pleasures of life,  
leafing through old diaries is a labyrinthine one.  
A heat haze rising out of a tropical, inebriated siesta.  
Or, a phantom show of slides in a loop on a projector.  
Some days, I am looking for the gun  
that reduced my ribcage to smithereens.  
Some days, I am looking to shapeshift into oblivion,  
negotiating a peace treaty with salty metaphors.  
Humans want to be robots  
and, robots want to be human again.

Silicon Valley serves up a haloed phantasmagoria –  
à la carte, buffet, takeaway, home-delivered.  
Sell your soul to the highest bidder – a casual tick-mark  
to the cookies notification when it pops up,  
*“Oh, so chatty and sweet,”* remember to  
look away from the dagger stuck in the back pocket.  
And today, Dear Diary, I am looking to gulp down  
a constellation, coded seamlessly for cloud backup,  
a future-ready immortality with the wedge of a lemon  
for digestion, and no condolences to fragility.