

# HOW TO LOVE A BROKEN MAN



WINNER  
*of the*  
WINGWORD  
POETRY  
PRIZE

VANCOUVER SHULLAI

# How To Love A Broken Man

Vancouver Shullai

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Vancouver Shullai

Second Edition

PUBLISHED BY DELHI POETRY SLAM

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Ordering Information:

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by schools, libraries, and others. For details, contact the publisher at the email address above. Orders by India bookstores and wholesalers. Please contact Delhi Poetry Slam Distribution: Tel: (091)8368069337; [www.delhipoetryslam.com](http://www.delhipoetryslam.com)

INR 200/ USD 4

Second Edition

Printed and bound in India by Delhi Poetry Slam

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# Go Home and Wash Yourself

Enough with your rants.  
Stop saying my pants are too skinny  
or that I should comb my hair to the other side.  
I will not sit the way you believe I should sit  
and I will kiss who I want to kiss.

I will not conform by the path you think you created  
or walk with my legs far enough from each other  
so there is room for you to poke your head in  
between them  
and tell me where to go.

Stop discouraging my mother's morals  
simply because your children couldn't become  
what you wanted them to be.  
Stop telling my family that they need your  
assistance simply because  
they cannot speak properly.

Stop and go away!

Go back to your shack of worries and  
Wash your hands a hundred times before you eat

Because you know they touched what wasn't their  
business.



Wash your feet a thousand times before you sleep  
because you know they trespassed prohibited  
territory.

Wash your tongue a million times  
because you know it gave opinions that nobody  
asked for. Then keep quiet.

But if you run out of water for washing,  
come back to my family,  
the ones who knew little English,  
they know compassion in their language too.

# Emotions

I befriend my emotions as I grow.  
I give them an identity, a name, a face;  
So the next time they come around,  
I know how to talk to them

And how to make them leave,  
Or how much sugar they like in their tea if I want  
them to stay.

# The Wait

I am thirteen years of ignorance,  
Five years of mistakes and three years  
Of telling myself not to do them again.  
I am Khasi with no Khasi name.  
Catholic, with no Catholic name.  
I am christened with Imagination,  
Watered with Precision  
And salted with Detail.

It has been exactly one hour  
And thirty six minutes  
Since I arrived at the airport  
And exactly seventeen minutes  
Less of that, that I saw a Maruti 800  
With dents and scratches and a family.

I wanted to imagine right away.  
To create a personal motion picture  
For my mind and my mind, alone:

You see,

There was Dada with little Riya  
Sitting in the passenger seat next to Rajah —  
Their loyal driver who has a North Indian wife  
Pregnant with their second child.  
In the back seat was Anjali, first child

Of Dada - with her son, Ritesh,  
Brother of Riya.

Heading home after a trip to New Delhi  
Anjali was only waiting for a hearty lunch.  
Riya, just as hungry, was waiting to get away  
From her grandfather's sweaty arms.  
Rajah was waiting for a phone call,  
While Dada was waiting to rest.  
Ritesh was fast asleep to wait for anything.

(It was an affair of waiting.)

Dadi waited at home with a warm pot of rice,  
Dal, papad, sabji, Italian pasta  
And three buckets of bathing water.

In their Japanese-themed living room  
Was Anjali's beloved Francis, whose erudition  
Included a Master's degree in Psychology  
And seven Spanish words, one of which meant  
window.

He sat and he read a book of a British writer  
And waited on his wife and children to return.

The Maruti 800, model 1998, entered the gate —  
The sound of which made Dadi run with joy,  
Francis sigh and the papad burn.

# May

May, you problem child.  
Loved with caution tape.  
Cared with barbed wire.  
Too cold, today.  
Scorching, tomorrow.

May, you in-between.  
Forgotten at gatherings.  
Fed with burnt rice.  
Rinsed with April's soapy water.  
Clothed with June's "too small."

May, you problem child.  
Go to school and learn.  
Learn that you aren't a problem.  
That you can run away, May.

You are not Spring as your elder brothers are.  
You are not Summer as your younger sister will be.  
But you are a day richer.  
A day more of school.

A day more of May and less of everybody else.

# Talker

You talker!

We are appalled in this room  
by the ease in the way your body becomes  
a part of the chair.

Awestruck, we are,  
by the effortless of your speech –  
as if you were reciting a nursery rhyme  
You've read one too many times.

Spellbound, we are,  
By the way you drink your tea  
and continue your story  
with a regular beat of your cup on the saucer.

You extrovert,  
you admirable sack of words.  
I am envious of your brows for the way  
they can smile with a curve that's southwards.  
I am envious of your eyes and the way  
they seem to have only seen the best of this world.  
I am envious of your arms and the way  
they point in directions of places you talk of.  
I am envious of your thighs and the way  
They don't quiver in a foreign place.

I am envious but I am intrigued.

I want to show you the door,

But I also want to kiss your neck on the way there.

# Kitchen

Build a home on my chest,  
a kitchen within my heart.  
Sit with me at the breakfast table  
and let me chew on your deepest fears  
and you, on mine.

These walls smell of leftovers  
from dinner nights I called before you arrived.  
A dinner of men and women whose names  
I did not want to know;  
clad in Chiffon, some in Velvet, others in skin.

I could've asked them to stay a little longer  
And wait for the sun to rise,  
Whilst clearing the sink of its burdens.  
But no, I couldn't stand the smell of alcohol  
In their breaths, or  
the foul smell of other people's Tongues in theirs.  
Now, here you are, just another ordinary soul.

But how extraordinary is my eagerness  
to know your name, to have breakfast with you,  
to clear the sink with you.

How extraordinary my kitchen feels today.



# We Say

He is a good boy, we say.  
His shirts are ironed  
And his collars crisp as his breath.  
His words, we say, are weighed.  
Ideal, we say.  
Church goer, we say.  
Doctor, we say.  
No, he's an engineer, we say.  
Still very good, we say.

(I'm not comfortable, he says.)  
(This isn't my calling, he says.)

Good boys don't complain, we say.  
Have no say, we say.

He is a good boy, we say.

# Body

What are you doing in my body  
if the sound of my name still  
doesn't stir your insides  
and start a storm in your heart  
that makes you want  
to seek shelter in mine?

What are you doing in my body  
if the only reason you drove  
all the way here was to simply  
run your hands on my skin,  
yet be so afraid that they may  
slip in between my ribs  
and into my heart?

What are you doing in my body  
if the soul that keeps it alive  
Isn't what you are looking for?

# Unfamiliar Spring

Spring did not feel like the teenager  
I had always known.

She wasn't the easy-going,  
Exuberant daughter from a traditional family  
Who knew her values and wore her skirts  
Below her knees.

She wasn't the singer that resounded  
In cathedral gardens or the president  
Of wildlife clubs that spoke wonders  
Of her abilities and refreshing persona.

I met Spring this April morning  
And an unfamiliar air surrounded her.  
She smelled of polluted blood,  
With littered shoulders,  
And an unwelcoming train of thought.

She suffocated me with her uninterrupted  
Accounts of her trips to foreign countries  
Where the temperature is conditioned  
And it didn't matter how hot it got.  
She went on about how the weather  
Was always the same throughout the year,  
Almost as if all the seasons had an affair;  
And how she only had to buy cotton garments.

It was an unfamiliar Spring I met –

An air-conditioned Spring.

# Bloody Inspiration

There is a strong smell of guilt  
that surrounds a poet when he writes about disaster;  
because out of all the  
vessels he could've  
shelled inspiration  
from He found it in  
the sight of blood and  
trauma, Of bombings  
and shootings,  
murder and rape!

I cannot ignore the inspiration that overflows  
in coloured pixels, making crystal clear  
an exploded Manchester, a bleeding Paris  
and an almost non-existent Aleppo.

I cry, I cry for you concert-goers  
who lively entered the arena and left lifeless.  
I cry for you diners,  
whose stomachs were fed with bullets  
instead of your daughter's first pay check.  
I cry for you, oh innocents,  
whose city fell on you  
before you even knew its name.

I am human, before artist  
and I ought to feel, before I'm inspired,

to pray, before I write.

I seek your forgiveness, oh fallen,  
that you may not take this poem  
as celebration of my art  
but only as salutation to you.

# How To Love A Broken Man

Before you dive into loving a broken man,  
know that he will not favour  
that you stick him back together.

Mornings will find his existence  
scattered all over the warm sheets of your bed,  
at whose side he will sit  
and gently rub his palms on his face.

He will drop uncountable pieces of his being  
on the bedroom rug and  
then stand up leaving a trail of incomprehensible  
moods and obscure expressions.  
Now, you are to love them.

Do not love him as a complete specimen,  
love him as parts of the complete.  
Love each piece solitarily, one by one,  
as if each piece held him in his entirety.

Do what you must:  
separate them by colour,  
compartmentalize them by odour,  
set them aside by texture,  
or simply grab what you get and just love!

It isn't easy loving a broken man,

But perhaps, you can start loving the pieces  
that fall on his pillow.

Wake up half an hour before he does  
and love him.



# The Inspiration Is Uncanny Tonight

A thin layer of April innocently sits  
on these open pre-summer pores of my face.  
Rejuvenating my existence as if  
I was being born again.  
Hunger seems to be knocking on the walls of my  
belly  
Which I find absurd – I had just eaten an hour ago.

Inspiration, too, knocks on the walls of my skull  
Which I find uncanny because it has never been this  
loud.

I feel connected to almost everything around me.  
I feel one with my pillow case,  
One with the dark,  
One, even with the saliva I swallow at regular  
intervals.  
Which of these I wish to write about?  
I am undecided.  
I give allowance to natural enlightenment, thus.

If there is a force that wants me to include its name  
on this note,  
settle upon my lashes and  
tickle my eyeballs.

The inspiration is uncanny with no definite shape.

It knows not what it wants.

## Our Rug

We swept our muddles under the rug  
and cooked dinner like nothing was amiss.  
We spoke of our day in minute detail  
but skipped the parts where we cloaked the mess,  
knowing vividly that we both wouldn't be able  
to find solutions for its disposal.

Meanwhile, we distracted ourselves  
with people and their ephemeral offerings.  
We needed distractions from the rug  
and the imminence of having to displace it.  
The inevitability of witnessing dead portions  
of foul-smelling mistakes and unsolved  
disagreements was an impending nightmare  
we did not want to acknowledge.  
But we certainly wanted to do away with all of that.

In a room of dying love,  
the rug is still in place.  
It hasn't been moved.

We are still walking over it,  
having dinner over it  
and making love on it.

# Shame

Somewhere between our cup of tea  
And our glass of wine,  
we learnt to lie without looking away;  
And I wonder if it was the tea or the wine  
that sent the lump of shame  
from our throats back into our stomachs.

# Who You Are

You are the product of your father's love for your mother,  
an outburst of the purest form of love-  
the strength that you so proudly carry on your arms  
is the nourishment of your mother's bosom,  
that braved the cold as you awoke to cry  
at forty seven minutes past three, that January.  
This juice of unconditional love aspired for you,  
it dreamt for you, it aimed for you.  
While you fed yourself and only chose to fill your  
immediate hunger,  
that love painted in its mind a picture of your  
success  
in bright indelible colours.

Your father!  
Your father was the height of this love,  
this unconditional love  
that was patient when your legs started to lengthen.  
It was optimistic, it was eager and anxious.  
It waited for you to be as tall as your father;  
and when you did, it laughed.  
When you went beyond, it celebrated  
with savings at the bank,  
with security in its eyes,  
and pride in its heart.

# Grow

Grow into the shoes that my mother couldn't wake  
in, because they were only made  
for the Memsahib.

Grow into the trousers my father couldn't wear  
because he was brown even though his complexion  
was closer to wheat than it was to mud.

Grow into the dress that my sister couldn't enjoy,  
one that independent India found too short because  
her sun-deprived ankles were seen.

Grow into the job that closed its door on your father  
because he was too learned for an untouchable.

Grow into my courage of telling you this.  
Grow into me.

Grow into the Twenty-First Century with its tale  
and remember that your victory isn't just yours,

You share it with a race.

# Winter

You were like Winter –  
seasonal and frigid,  
But something I was so fond of.  
You were beautiful  
the way frostbitten leaves were beautiful –  
A charming façade, yet no warmth.  
But I was hooked, I tell you,  
attached to this sin because of how right it felt  
at the wrong time.

You come and you go.  
You came and you went.

And whilst silence turned into Spring,  
I never liked flowers.  
Then walked in Summer,  
But I never loved the Sun.  
Autumn then knocked,  
But when I opened the door  
'Twas a cold gentle breeze that said hello.

Winter stepped in and kissed my bones.

Winter was you.  
You were Winter.  
And even though the temperature dropped –  
I was in love with the cold.

# Grandchildren

My neighbourhood goes dark at eight, every night.  
Our share of the half-hour visits of quiet power cuts.  
Tonight was different, however.  
The load-shedding was welcomed.  
I did not hear the usual "*Lah lip lait!*"  
Or the high-pitched female voices  
That typically chorused in detestation from nearby  
houses.  
Tonight was different.  
The darkness took its place  
Like a sleepy grandmother  
Compliantly telling her grandchildren stories,  
Simply because she is a grandmother.  
But we don't even listen to these stories,  
Because we've heard them a hundred times before.  
We're just waiting for the current to crawl back in  
Like grandchildren waiting for their grandmother to  
fall asleep.

*Annotations:*

*"Lah lip lait!" - Khasi dialect. Translates to "The light is gone" or "The light has been switched off".*



# Men And Women

Halt, you angry men! Halt!  
Halt your words and your hatred,  
You who come out of the same womb  
Who aren't speaking to each other!

Enough, women!  
Enough with your morning prayers  
When you allow your hypocrisy to fuck you  
All day long!

I dislike you.  
I cannot stand your disrespect.  
You have no love, men.  
You disgust me, women.  
Born of the same father,  
Born of the same mother,  
And feeding on each other!

Men, you are wrong!  
You are wrong, women!

You teach your children to be kind  
But you yourself are spiteful!  
You teach your children to love  
But you hate!  
Well, here we are,  
Here we are, just as hateful as you.

Bravo!  
Bravo!

# My Catholic Mother

We lifted our hand in the name of the Father,  
Came down to our hearts in the name of the Son,  
We crossed to our shoulders in the name of the  
Spirit-  
Closing our eyes for our prayer has begun.

My Catholic Mother has paved us a way  
Where faith is the bridge to your glorious new day!  
You are what you pray for,  
and the deeds that you do  
Must praise your Creator in your daily life through.

“The Word of the Lord should your guide forever  
be,”

My Catholic Mother tells my sister and me.

“The Lord is your shepherd, you shall not want.”

“His kingdom shall come and His will shall be  
done.”

Christ is your breath as He is your bread,  
He resounds in the love of the hungry you’ve fed.  
So do all the good that your goodness can do –  
Yours is just one, child, from amongst every two.

Be close to the Lord, my mother repeats,  
Attend Holy Mass at least once a week.  
Sing your hymns well for your voice is your prayer

To your king in heaven and angels dwelling there.

My Catholic Mother has brought us to know  
That we live and walk for He loves us so –  
He who's the Father, He who's the Son,  
He who's the Spirit – thrice Greatness in One.

# Orange

The evening wore an orange light  
That seemed to sit upon the air that we breathe  
So effortlessly, so lightweight.

The Autumn drizzle was fulfilling its duty  
As it pierced silently through the orange light.  
My mother had asked me to deliver a piece of bread  
To my eighty-seven year old grandmother  
Who had been ill for quite some time now.  
The cold weather had gotten the better of her!

My grandmother's house was next to ours.  
It was raining so I had to take an umbrella.  
My umbrella was orange with light-orange floral  
prints.  
I entered my grandmother's home and into her room  
Where she slept in bed with an orange blanket.

She didn't seem very ill to me.  
I sat with her for a couple of minutes,  
And listened to her usual words which spoke of  
hard work, success and spirituality.

She says it all the time, how my sister's name and  
mine are mentioned in her prayers  
more times a day, than once.  
My grandmother then raised

part of the orange blanket  
Where an orange cat slept,  
cuddling three orange kittens.

# Scars

Lay them before me  
Like sticks of uneven length,  
I will not judge.  
All those paper cuts on your fingers,  
Bruises that hug your knees and elbows,  
Wounds that bleed under a blackened sky.  
Lay them all before me  
As I unveil my unkempt locks of insanity,  
My shortcomings,  
My bitter premonitions and how sometimes  
They come as naked reality.  
But judge me not as I lay before you  
The erosion of my soul –  
One that has endured turmoil so silent  
That even the hair on my chest did not hear.  
Judge me not  
That I awake with hope,  
And sleep in hopelessness,  
Or that my countenance lightens up  
In your presence and my knees rattle  
With insecurity as you near me;  
Judge me not for how ready I am  
To embrace your thunderstorm,  
Or how willingly my heart yearns  
To calm your winds.

# Laitumkhrah

My birthplace, Laitumkhrah.  
You were the breath of October that I sucked into  
my lungs  
As I was slapped at my sole, let out my cry  
Into your crisp morning air of '95.

You were the convenient Laitumkhrah –  
With hospitals and pharmacies at distances  
That kept my parents  
Independently dependent on you.

My institution, Laitumkhrah.  
You taught me of colours and sounds.  
Names of cars, names of food.  
You gave me footpaths to use my manners.  
Roads, to use my etiquette.  
Stores, to use my “please” and “thank you.”

You were the convenient Laitumkhrah –  
With your schools at distances  
That kept my little legs exercised  
Yet my shoulders never too tired.

My love, Laitumkhrah.  
You have grown with me.  
As I grew in height  
You were piled with buildings.



As I added weight, you were shattered.  
I don't walk with you anymore,  
I walk over you.  
I stamp you, I litter your face,  
As if you weren't my cradle;  
As if you hadn't made room for my milk;  
As if you didn't sing me my lullabies;  
  
As if you didn't enter my lungs that October.

# There

There, where postcard-like photographs  
are taken from,  
there is where I wish to stand.  
There, where the grass, intoxicatingly green,  
Perfumes the tranquil'd land.

There, where I can walk barefoot  
And naked – unashamed;  
There, where the waterlogged mud  
Can fuck my christened name!  
There, where the world won't judge  
The lustful moans of my feet;  
There, where my singularity thrives –  
Aloof from man-woven creed.

Oh! Take me out of this wooden bench  
And silence this uselessness!  
Silence the commands, silence the rules!  
Silence the exasperating cement-mixing machine  
Outside the window, too!

# Shillong

Ko Shillong!

I want to write about you,  
But even if I spill my ink into a thousand adjectives,  
I would still be understating your beauty.

Ko Shillong!

You are strong as you threw hailstones  
At our windows, yesterday,  
Then showered the sky on our heads –  
As if to let us know of your strength.  
We know you Shillong.  
We honour your might!

Ko Shillong!

I want to sing of you  
And cry a ballad at the feet of your hills,  
But I still wouldn't match the harmony  
That resonates from your trees  
Whilst you blow your winds across their leaves.

Ko Shillong!

How ravishingly made are you,  
With all your splendour pervading your grass.  
How perpetually beautiful are you,  
For all who sleeps on your soil  
Falls in love with the texture of your skin.

# Wind

Listen child, the wind is blowing  
From the past when you weren't born.  
Smell it, for it carries the scent  
your mother wore on her wedding day.  
Listen child, the song the wind is singing  
and ask your father if that was what they danced to  
when they united to create you.

This spirit that you do not see  
is blowing from the years that are gone,  
and upon its wings it carries your grandfather's  
name  
and the names of all those who stood before him.

This power that's rattling your tin roof  
and unearthing trees and houses at nearby Umpling,  
is a traveller journeyed its way  
from when nothing existed, to this day.  
This traveller has stories to tell you,  
and it is blowing to remind you  
that your story is being noted –  
to tell your children and your grandchildren  
and their children too, of the scent you wore today,  
tomorrow  
and  
the days to come.

So dance, let the blowing wind be your song.  
Let your rattling tin roof be the melody your  
children ask you about,  
someday.

# Winter Song

If Spring is of birth and bloom  
And Summer – sunshine strong;  
If Autumn is of death and doom,  
Winter is a song.

If ever were a tune of greet  
with melody three bars long,  
Harmonised to perfect sweet,  
winter is that song.

Now, if you're lost and saddened blue  
With nowhere to belong,  
Warm your ears and know that you  
Have Winter as your song.

# Time

I want to get a hold of Time  
and narrate stories to Time of how  
I did not want to see it grow before my eyes,  
from an innocent 9 PM to the ruthless 4 AM.

I want to kiss Time  
and introduce to it the essence of touch,  
So it can realise the beauty that exists in a frozen  
moment.

I want Time to fall in love with all that excites me,  
So it understands how lovely it is to dream of  
infinity;  
And how torturous it is to have that dream taken  
away.

But Time is a clock  
and Time is a watch –  
mould in silver, steel or gold.

Time is a clock,  
Time is a watch –  
mould in metal, hard and cold.

# Artists

Artists!

Why are you so afraid?

Why is it that you fear to write about the stench  
of your unbrushed mouth in  
the morning?

What holds you back from singing about  
the nameless man you had sex with?

Why are you not dancing about the pain  
that sleeps on top of you, every night?  
Why do you paint your lover's picture  
with clothes on, when you adore her breasts  
so very dearly?

Artists!

You who put the world at the apex of beauty,  
Scrape off the romance, and reveal to their eyes the  
unattractive worn out colour beneath all the plastic  
flowers.

Write about your neighbour's  
greed and  
teach them what they ought to learn.

Paint your relatives' hearts with a dirty paint brush  
and show them how they have



damaged you.

Dance without your trousers and flaunt to your  
audience how your waist  
twists so gracefully.

Artists!

Run

beyond your boundaries.

Bite off your chains.

Excellence is an illusion,  
satisfaction is real. )

# The Modern Man

Modern is the man who speaks  
of where he comes from  
than of the place he is flying to.  
Modern is the man who knows  
how deep his roots sink,  
before measuring the height of his tree.

# Brave

How uncertain our days.  
How thin the thread that keeps us alive.  
But, how brave! How brave we live our finite lives!  
How brave we teach, how brave we learn;  
How brave we thirst, how brave we yearn!  
How brave we love, how brave we hate;  
Oh, if courage could settle our fate:  
How braver we'd live, how braver we'd be,  
Oh, if courage saved you and me!

# Comrade

Stay awake, comrade,  
and remember what you say;  
for all that you spoke against, last night,  
may just be what you did today.

# Be Angry!

Be angry, you who know!  
You who are educated, be angry!  
Permit your knowledge to make you furious  
and your fury to change the course  
of Earth's revolution.

Be angry, youths!  
Be angry because you are aware  
that what is, is not what should be.  
Be angry because your rivers are dead  
and your air is dying.  
Be angry because your forests are on fire  
and your lungs are tired.  
Be angry because your sisters are raped  
and your brothers, shamed.  
Be angry because your father is wrong  
and your mother keeps shut.  
Be angry because your cities are robbed  
and your hearts, emptied.

Be angry because you should be angry.

Be angry enough to transpose your anger  
into the bitterness of the world  
when it realises you have left  
and you can't be angry anymore.

# The Human Compassion

The human compassion breathes.  
It exists with its own capabilities,  
yet fractured by the strike of pride.  
It hits the ground and trembles the air,  
knocking kindness unconscious,  
but keeping our ego wide awake.  
The human compassion is wrapped  
in a plaster of white rules and norms,  
then rested in a cast of superiority.  
The human compassion is handicapped  
because it cannot fulfil its very purpose,  
or function the way it is designed to.  
The human compassion perhaps, dies.  
A death with no funeral nor decay,  
the kind of death that's not spoken of  
because they never returned home.

# Dear Diary

You saw the sun and moon before I did,  
they would say.

Perchance the stars too, I opined,  
as I made my way  
through our mother's womb,  
the room  
you and I spent a good nine months in  
before life could begin.

You grew with me,  
a year and three months quicker.  
Yet being ever ready  
to come back to my understanding  
to make me understand.

How do you do what you do?  
The way you are able to dive into my obscurity  
or be a roof when it isn't even pouring.  
You knew it was pouring inside of me  
and how I needed you to be  
a tree  
with your branches sheltering my sensitivity.  
You scream at your lungs  
if I defended my pride,  
when I ramble – my flickering caution light.

Sister, sibling, I call you by right!

My journal, my diary, in you I write.



# Drowning

Your eyes,  
carved in the most intricate design of his  
intelligence,  
have carved a shape on my heart  
the size of your humility.

You have drowned me in your beauty,  
ut as close as I am to danger,  
I want you to deluge me.

# I

I'm not an impeccable piece of art,  
or a mesmerizing sunrise.  
I'm neither a necklace of perfection,  
nor a masterpiece of handcrafted ice.  
I am fractures, cracks and cuts –  
where light doesn't touch.  
I'm where winds do not blow,  
where water fails to flow.  
but as dark as I can be,  
as coarse as I can get,  
I'm here, hear me.

# Self Love

There was born a love so deep and stealth  
only the Creator knew about.  
It was this love that invented dessert  
This love that coupled cream with coffee.  
This love runs its hands on thighs and smiled,  
It strokes damaged hair again and again,  
And again.  
It is this love that laughs a thunder,  
This love that cries a river.  
It is invincible and seamless,  
fierce and strong!  
It lives beneath ribs yet complains not  
it is a brook that goes on.  
It is this love that sets alarm clocks,  
this love that writes reminder notes.  
So profound, so divine, this love.  
Then we started running blades on our arms.

# Magic

Perhaps for most nights,  
what leads us deep into the wee hours  
is the lust for magic!  
With lust, so innocently inexplicable,  
we crave magic  
that imitates Christmas, Diwali,  
Breezy afternoons and forehead kisses.  
We desire it because it's a flickering kaleidoscope  
of city lights.  
We desire it because it outshines the mid-month  
moon.

It takes you places, this magic;  
It buys you food, exotic plates of priceless  
intercourse.  
Then it leaves you naked,  
with clothes on;  
And you lie, unashamed of your disarrayed soul.  
This magic untangles you.  
It gives you validation –  
Shedding light on all doubtful corners  
You've curtained for too long.  
It will destroy you,  
only to build you better in moments.

Now, do you understand why I'm awake at this  
time?

It's almost sunrise and I want magic.

## Letter to the tender

Infants,  
before you start to bathe yourself,  
you ought to understand –  
it is a frightful place, here,  
its greed will corrupt you,  
its power will grip your arms.  
It will eat you without letting you know  
you've been devoured.  
It will decide for you  
and make you call it passion.  
Then reward you, with peace:  
that starts with retirement and ends in death.  
Now there is nothing peaceful in compromise.  
Hear me, dear tenderness:  
create a path through the foliage of people,  
rebel against the crowd.  
Be a crowd all by yourself.

## To write and write

I shall now write aimlessly  
Of how devoid of inspiration I am.  
I'm in no position to vomit out verses  
No matter how far I propel my fingers  
Down my throat of poetic artistry.  
Hence, allow me to beat around this leafless bush  
in an attempt to reach the bottom of this device,  
Without coming across as a monochromatic son of a  
believer!

My emotions are hibernating,  
snoring away silently behind my heartbeat.  
I have learned to tame them, to tell you the least.  
They've been a nuisance all this while,  
coercing me to write and write of love and passion,  
of hate and hurt, of the good and the better, the bad  
and the pleasure.  
They never gave me sleep and  
would even snore deliberately loud  
in the most exasperating fashion one can imagine,  
just to wake me from my slumber,  
only to write some more.  
So I wrote and I wrote - of him and of him, and of  
Him.  
Then there were days when I didn't want to write,  
so I danced and I sang,  
but little did I know that

my dance was thrust by  
the same emotions And  
my song mirrored their  
menace.

So I wrote again,  
until I realised that these troublesome creatures  
are what I am made of and goodness, am I glad to  
feel!

It is a blessing to be aware of the chaos in your  
spirit.

It is a privilege to  
know the beauty that  
holds your organs  
together, The beauty  
that glues your bones  
together.

So if ever you must feel you shouldn't  
Write about this chaos, your very own beauty.  
For when you do so,  
you shall fall in love with it.  
And you will write, and write, and write.



# Your Guide

Adversity is a problem  
for only as long as you dwell in its cause,  
it becomes a lesson when you seek for its solution.

Thereafter, it is your guide.

# Paradox

You were a paradox –  
the freezing point that warmed me,  
the knife that sewed my wounds,  
emptiness that felt enough.

You were a paradox –  
My agreeable contradiction.

# Sincerity

There is no sincerer love than the words  
I pour on this paper for you.  
I could have slept and snored and dreamt about you,  
but all of that would have been forgotten  
by the time I brushed my teeth in the morning.

That is why I stay up with a pen,  
because I know no sincerer way  
of saying I love you  
than writing about you while you sleep.

# Words

I need words,  
I need simple vocabulary to illustrate  
the feelings that my clouded mind cannot fathom.

I need words.  
A word, rather.  
A beautiful word to encapsulate every blow of this  
storm with vowels and consonants.  
A word to assure me that standing exactly where the  
lightning strikes,  
will not kill me.

# Love Unedited

In our pursuit to end this friction between us  
let us make ourselves vulnerable.

Put ourselves in situations that make us  
uncomfortable.

Perhaps, even stop talking to each other?

Let us meet people who we know will destroy us,  
people who will take away our best parts  
and leave us unsheltered.

Let us go on dates to places that won't make  
for good memories, places that will leave us going  
back

stuck in traffic for hours on end, hungry and weak.

Let us kiss these people awkwardly  
in uncomfortable public lavatories.

But one thing, let us prohibit ourselves from falling  
in love

With these wretched souls.

Let us make sure we tell them that  
we need to get home,

Every time they start talking  
about love.

Now, here's the twist:

We will not make home a concrete existence.

Or to put it in a more direct way:  
we will not make home a house.

We will make each other home.  
After every sloppy dinner or senseless intercourse,  
let us remind ourselves  
that we have this destination we need to reach;  
not in a few hours, or days, but years.

It can be five, ten years or even more;  
So much as long as we don't forget where home is,  
Or rather, who home is.

And when the time comes,  
Let us be at our worst.  
Maybe arrive in a rusted bicycle, with our pants torn  
right at the seams and our eyes, dark as our senses.  
Let us arrive with blisters on our toes  
And an empty stomach.  
But most importantly,  
let us arrive broken and drained out,  
exhausted down to our bones,  
with our underarms smelling like a labour animal  
and our lips too chapped to be kissed.  
Then let us kiss, and make love,  
And put ourselves to sleep.

Then let us fall in love again,  
The way we always wanted to,  
Cleanse each other's wounds  
in the most gentle way possible,  
do all the things we never had the time for.

That, I'm sure, will make for a better love story

Than anything we've tried to tell.

# Here's to you

Here's to the care there is for you  
through which I wish you find  
comfort and ease in the little things  
with a beautiful peace of mind.

May the alarm that wakes you up  
be not of annoyance but bliss.

May you find your socks in pairs  
And your tea mug, a gentle kiss.

May your shirts be unwrinkled  
And your hair stay right in place.

May the roads be clear of traffic  
When in your little hurried race.

May the door behind you close itself  
As you rush in through the hall  
May someone come and slow you down  
Should you stumble and you fall.

I cannot wish for bigger things  
for fate is not my friend  
but this I pray and hope for you  
that gladness never ends.



# Names

I see pride in young parents  
when you call their child by the unusual name  
they assign them.

It almost seems like a contest  
with a trophy to them every time  
you call out their children's names.

Meanwhile, they anticipate a stubbornness  
On the little creation's behalf,  
just so they can savour the sound of their creativity.

# Walls

Even if you wall your houses  
with hay or clay,  
concrete or nothing at all,  
I pray you find solace within  
the boundaries you shelter yourself.

Even if your ribs are the only fence  
hugging you,  
I pray you find peace in your inner home.

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*Artists!*

*Why are you so afraid?*

*Why is it that you fear to write about the stench  
of your unbrushed mouth in  
the morning?*

*What holds you back from singing about  
the nameless man you had sex with?*

*Why are you not dancing about the pain  
that sleeps on top of you, every night?*

*Why do you paint your lover's picture  
with clothes on, when you adore her breasts  
so very dearly?*

Vancouver Shullai is the winner of Wingword Poetry Prize 2017. He was born and brought in the Khasi community of Shillong. An explorative artist, Vancouver writes about love, sexuality and the importance of freeing oneself from the expectations of society.

He has a Master's degree in English with Communication Studies from CHRIST, Bangalore. Owing to his love for art, Vancouver also enjoys singing and music. He has amongst his laurels a National Child Award for his exceptional ability in singing from the Government of India, which he received in the year 2010.

In his debut collection of poetry 'How To Love A Broken Man', Vancouver encapsulates the right amount of endearment and rage necessary for a thrilling read. A taste of wanderlust while being stuck in traffic.



*How to Love a Broken Man is a collection of thoughtful and honest poetry exploring varied shades of life. Vancouver Shullai associates himself as the wild child of the society: unshaken by Auntie's rants or judgements. His poems are razor-sharp, delving into experiences of love and the fervent desire to be free in a controlling society*

ISBN 978-81-935082-7-5



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Published by Delhi Poetry Slam  
[www.delhipoetryslam.com](http://www.delhipoetryslam.com)

INR 200 | USD 4