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DESERT
(fragments from the novel *Phoenix*)

Sólo queda el desierto…
F. G. Lorca[1]

LEGEND

From ancient time and up to ours the days have flowed away as sand,
The nights have left by turns irrevocable,
The years and centuries have left.
In this universe since then so many souls were,
how many stones are in the world, and maybe more.
There were kind people and vicious,
There were strong men like mountains,
There were wise men all-knowing,
There were masters all-abling,
There were people multi-crowded,
Defunct long ago from which are left now only their names …
What was yesterday that is not present today.
In this world only stars eternally rule their way
by the moon since earliest times,
Only the eternal sun always rises from the east,
Only black-breasted ground on its place since earliest times …
And meanwhile rocks crumbled in dust,
And the winds drove that dust away in traceless distances.
The cities were raised, and on old walls the new walls rose …
From ancient time and up to ours the word gave rise to a word,
The idea gave rise to an idea,
The deed gave rise to a deed,
The song merged with a song,
The true story became an ancient legend …

[1] There will be only a desert… F. G. Lorca

OFFENCE

You are offended by your relatives,
You have left your people:
You think they have dried up your soul,
You think they are your most perfidious enemies,
You think they always beat you stealthily.
Yes, when it is hard for you,
When it is cold for you,
And when you are starving,
There is nobody there.
But when you have made your way in life, each dog is a relative to you.
It's them, the relatives, who have invented customs and traditions,
beliefs and religions,
They wrapped a man from every side by chains
That he doesn`t dare to stand out from the people,
That he is as all the people, that he is a cattle, too...
And they, the relatives, call themselves the people,
And they require that all should obey them.
In the name of the people they eulogize and abuse,
In the name of the people they elevate and overthrow ,
In the name of the people they lift on a throne and exile a king...

CAMELCADE

Into my sight comes a desert, on which the camelcade moves.
The camels, strung out on a line
And with unsteady steps, walk slowly on the scorching sand.
Near to each of them,
Hardly tearing his legs from ground, a cameleer goes.
All of them, parched with thirst and wound turban,
Under them only eyes twinkled,
Swayed in time to each other.
All traders led by the head of the camelcade,
Tired by long travel and besotted by intoxicant drunk
Taken for slaking, slumber.
The sun, as a burning hot metal disk, has hung above heads of the travellers
and lavishes rays on ground.
The desert scorches.

THIRST

It seems to me that I am losing consciousness,
My body vanished somewhere into an abyss,
I floated on air for a long time,
The pleasant dream wrapped me up on all sides.
And I saw the desert again.
I trudged on dunes being hardly able to drag my legs along
Some inevitable silence reigned around:
Not a single sapling, not a single bush,
Only endless space of deathly wilderness smoothly flowed in the wind.
Fatigued, I hardly pulled out my feet from the sand.
Some time later, emaciated, I fell again.
At last I broke down, and I begged lifting up my hands:
"Water!.. Give me water!.."
No answer, only deathly silence.
"Water!.. Give me water, please!.."
Walking slowly on the earth towards me a man moved as in dance.
He carried a jug, and every time when he dipped it
a thin stream of water flowed from the mouth of the vessel.
"Water!.. Give me water!" - I sobbed.
The water-carrier came, he held out the jug to me
And stood off aside looking at me.
I greedily clung to the mouth of the vessel,
But however hard I tried not a single drop of water fell into my mouth.
"Water!.. Where is water?" I asked the water-carrier with entreaty.
"There is no water for you here", - so answered the man.
"Why is there no water for me?"
"Because this desert is a track left by you in this world",
So said the water-carrier.
Then he took back the jug and went on his own way.
He still dipped the neck of the vessel and poured out water from it.

CHANGEABILITY

The desert has one unusual property:
Here and only here it is possible to keep watch
over the fleeting transient movement of time;
Here and only here it is possible to contemplate changeability as a constancy.
Just now dunes spread layer after layer
And suddenly by small breath of wind they have passed away.
And I begin to compare myself to a desert:
The wind of life runs along and I rise above the world,
It blows once more and I am gone.

And the plants in this part are like this changeability:
They even have no roots,
They are always ready to move off from their places and
to be rushed off by the will of the wind.
How many nations tried to take root here, seeking immortalization,
But the vortex of events again and again drove them away
from the desert of life.
Nations came and nations went…
Only yesterday we felt victorious,
Only yesterday we sacked local inhabitants
considered ourselves the masters of life.
Only yesterday we rushed along the flourishing oases turning them to deserts,
And today we have already come back by the same places.
If we remembered that paths lead not only forward,
But by them it is necessary to return,
Wouldn't we have carpeted our own way,
Wouldn't we have turned the desert into a flower-bed and our enemies into
friends whom we have to ask for a drink.
But the memory of a man is short:
Today he is not able to see farther than his nose
and tomorrow he cries for remote bends of his own ways
where he had stumbled.
And so I strayed burning hot sands for a long time,
I was looking for the path back home.
I roamed the uninhabited wilderness that I left after myself;
I wandered on the sultry dunes driven by wind further and further
into the depth of endless vast space,
Without water, without hope and without the firm belief
that I can reach my home town.
Many days I strolled pensively in the desert, thirsty,
Fearing to lose my way in this intricate endless labyrinth.
Ahead nothing was visible except a scorching pale sun above my head.
I was hardly able to drag my legs along tearing my feet from the sand
And leaning on a sword
turned from murder weapon to the staff of a wanderer…

SIMOOM

Simoom… A hot desert wind. It blows up in a squall,
And a whirlwind carries away all, that turns up on its way.
It, as a tornado, lifts a pillar of sand.
It, as a storm, suddenly, clouds all the sky by lustreless shroud,
And sun grows dim, shining as a reddish disk among brown haze.
The worst of it is the silence in the desert,
When for many feet around you there is not a soul to be seen:
Nothing is stirring, nothing is uttering a sound

To find somehow your bearings in an environment.
And you go in unknown obscurity;
Nothing shows you which way you are going.
Where is the south? Where is the north?
Whence you have left and where you go? What waits for you ahead
and whether something waits for you in this infinite space at all?
Who needs you and whether somebody needs you in this silent uncertainty?
Whether to go forward, whether to come back – nothing foretells of any hope.
Whether you will tear the ground by nails
Or you will lie motionless, gazing on infinite blue height –
Nothing will change in this sublunar world.
And then you will cognize eternity …
I was walking in the desert and thought.
I thought much and continuously.
I thought how all suddenly has turned out in this way
that I find myself in the desert.
I thought how all is fairly arranged in this world:
Yesterday you banished the native father in this hot hell,
Today you have found yourself in the middle of shiny cold dunes.
Whether in this the validity of the Most High?
What you will give, that you will get back,
What you will do, that you will eat your fill,
What you will grant, by that the people will thank you certainly.
We are only creations of our own acts:
We make kindness, we receive good deeds,
We make evil, which on the rebound will reach ourselves without fail.
How much you have given, so much you have taken;
How much you have created, so much you reap.
Each of your steps is measured, each of your foods is already in the boiler:
Nothing will decrease, but nothing more you will take already.
You have the right all your due to eat at once,
But also you have the right to prolong your pleasure.
You have the right to run as a racer by this life, leaving a sparkling trace,
But also you have the right as the turtle to drag youself along
prolonging your days.
You have the right to fly up high into the air, illuminating by your light all
that is below, on the ground,
But you also have the right to cut your wings to smoulder slowly
burning down as a dim fire.
You have the right to sing loudly, for all to hear your swan-song,
But you also have the right to wheeze out last damnations to mankind
a dissatisfaction with life.
We weigh exactly as much as how much we give back.
We are the creators of our immortality and our own decay…
So I thought, stared in despair and grief at infinite, boundless distance.
All in this world is fair: and the night comes in time,
And the morning comes without delay;
And the sun shines in the hot summer,
And severe cold brings the frosty winter;
And songs that have been composed sing, and weeping at grief, lament;

And a breast heaves stealthy sighs; and hoarse plaints are heard at midnight;
And pigeons coo on the roof of a high house,
And the snake quietly makes its way on beams to its nestlings;
And the clocks strike, hurrying the people to hasten with work,
And the chimes beat off the night watch
And morning awakes from slumber;
And the ringing sound of bells is heard,
inviting idle people to an evening prayer,
And the strings sing plaintive songs;
And above all of it reigns the peace and silence at the indispensable hour
shuddering from roars of lightning and thunderstorms.
Such thoughts come not each day,
And not each day the people are driven into deserts,
That here, in impenetrable stillness, slowly,
in complete silence to recollect the life
And to think, as you lived:
Whether you acted correctly, and whether fairly judged;
Who was a friend to you, and who was an enemy to you;
Whom you loved, and whether you were dearly loved;
Who hated you, and whether you forgave your enemies;
Whether you held the memory of the dead,
and whether you keep death in mind;
Whether you have brought up your children to respect adults,
And whether you appreciated grey-bearded old men for your good deed;
Whether you were unfaithful to somebody, and whether you could forgive the friends and
relatives that betrayed you;
Whether you sang to your son a lullaby,
And whether your relatives mourned over you when you left to fight;
Whether you were sad for your lost youth,
and whether you were pleased at the odoriferous freshness of morning;
Whether you worked in the sweat of your face
bent over raised, worked ground,
And whether you ate the bread, enjoying fruits of a horny hand;
Whether you defended the homeland, rearing up by a breast-lathered horse,
And whether you rushed with the joyful tidings of a victory to your kinsman...
The sun was sinking below the horizon.
Today for the first time I met a sunset in the desert.
It is growing cold, and I even had firewood to kindle a fire.
This is one more property of desert: in the day-time here stands intolerable heat,
At night the terrible cold penetrates the bones.
I sat at the edge, and in the distance howled jackals,
But their howl was not terrible to me, and I myself desired to howl;
Somewhere hard frost was cast, but I was not cold from it,
And in my soul it was cold from loneliness;
Around stood the awful darkness, yet not from the darkness I was blind,
But from the comprehension of my own insanity.
You may hear and not hear, you may see and not see,
You may behold and not understand.
And our blindness is not that we would like to see, but that we did not behold;
And our deafness is not that we would like to hear, but that we did not hear;

And our muteness is not that we would like to tell, but that we did not say;
And our weakness is not that we would like to make,
but that we did not accomplish.
And one thousand times we shall be sorry for being forgiven,
But what is made, is already made, and what is created, cannot be overlooked.
So I sat and I was giving way to bitter meditations.
And nobody could help me in this world
Where everyone makes mistakes knowing that they will be forgiven,
Where everyone who is ready to be deceived for themself is ready to deceive,
Where everyone commits sins knowing that they will be guilty all the same.
And having achieved the top of greatness, you will be overthrown,
And having achieved all riches of this world, you will be a beggar,
For there is nobody more terrible than a mean-spirited…
So under the howl of jackals and the wail of the wind
I thought lying on cold unsteady sand, but not trying to fall asleep:
I was not thirsty for sleep, but meditations, and if I did it earlier in a palace,
maybe, I should not ponder today in the desert.
The night has passed, one more day of sad thoughts has come.
I continued to sit silently and to examine distant bare country
whereby red flowers were scattered, not burnt out ephemeral plants,
And pherula and poppy blossomed in all power of sweet smell.
In narrow gullies here and there were seen poppies.
By bright spots green feather-grass showed,
And red phalanxes were mad from the inexhaustible heat,
not knowing where to put the surplus of their forces.
I sat carried away by sad meditations,
And I did not notice how from the nearest dune an easy wind drove the sand.
By small trickle as a golden snake it has run away
from the top down to the foot.
The yellowed clouds scudded low above the desert.
Dim shrouded as if a curtain hadclosed in the distance.
The day grew dim, the sun grew dull and around all darkened.
The storm approached …

A FATHER AND A SON

How all is fairly arranged in this world:
Yesterday you banished your father to this hot hell,
Today you have found yourself in the middle of shiny cold dunes…
Oh My God! Has all really turned full circle?
Are we really doomed to turn in the same circle?
Can we really in this life only repeat the mistakes of our fathers?
So we are not moving anywhere, if all life lived by us
is only a shadow that follows anxieties and the cares of our predecessors.
And really never will it terminate its vacant rotation,
where the fathers and children meet on each turn,

Where the people already for a thousand years live solely for daily bread,
Where one murder only replaces another,
repeating a ceaseless line of evil deeds,
And all our history is only an endless chain of crimes,
And we are unable to break it off,
But we are capable only to come back to our brute condition.
Yes, the new generation thinks in a new fashion,
but its actions mirror his ancient fathers.
From their savage caves they struggle for their living,
not daring to think beyond today for future generations.
The same as the sons of Adam and Eve,
They kill each other, having forgotten that all people are brothers.
And you have repeated my mistake,
And now we are together in this boundless desert.
Yes, my son, what you will give, that you will receive;
What you will overturn, from that you will crumple;
What you will pay, that will be returned to you.
And this sequence of mutual duties is never-ending for all time,
And nobody will break off this chain.
Therefore people will stay dark and ignorant in all times
And history will repeat itself.
Each new generation considers itself cleverer than the previous,
But each time it stumbles on the same place.
Yesterday I betrayed my king, today my son has expelled me to the desert.
And now he stands before me and too repents …
Who sometimes remembers
what was spoken to him in ancient wisdoms?
Does not a son hear constantly his father's sermons, not obeying him?
But he does not carry them out, and as a result he gets from his son
what he was up at one time.
Did not a mother teach her daughter to keep honour, and did she obey her?
Already the daughter sobs from her husband's beating for past sins.
So it was in all times and for all peoples,
So, probably, will be forever.
That is why mankind is doomed to wildness, ignorance and need.
The people starve without enough bread,
Rather, that greedy one went to pick up too much,
enough to rot in his cupboard.
And the lazy one does not aspire to live better at all.
In youth it seems that life is infinite, and we shall have time
to correct our adolescent mistakes;
And in old age we only grumble seeing young men make the same mistakes.
No, my son, a man, probably, never will learn not to make mistakes,
And he only could collect wisdom during his short life.
And we come in this world not to correct or to improve it,
But we come to be corrected and to be improved in contiguity with eternity.
In it, probably, consists the wisdom of life:
Do not oppose the world, but polish yourself,
Do not struggle with the world, but live in harmony with it.
Both of us have made the same mistakes,

And both of us have found ourselves in the same desert.
And both of us should leave in eternity …
We shall go, my son…
I did not wait for you very long,
And you were not tormented in this hard hot sun too long…
We must be thankful for small mercies!
Let us go, sonny!
The father has embraced his son,
And both of them have disappeared in a dusty cloud:
Simoom devoured them and whirled away both in immense infinity.

PHOENIX

And then the bird Phoenix blazed and it has illuminated all the world.
And the flame burned as a fiery flower.
And the gold glow enveloped all the universe…
And the bird flickered its blazing wings, shouting and groaning in a pain.
And it burnt down to the ground, leaving behind only ashes.
But a faint small light kept the warmth of the burning hearth…
And the fire did not smoulder, but burned.
And the flame flashed again as a gold flower.
So the bird Phoenix revived from its own ashes.
And the ashes were carried by a strong wind on time …
And time rushed it to infinite distance.
And the sunset burnt down, leaving only a whitish haze of a fog.
And the bird Phoenix died each time on fire …
And again its strength was ebbing and ebbing,
And it burned down to the ground.
And it laid motionless for the time being.
But songs were sung to it, and hymns were composed to it.
Because it was an unusual bird…
And each time the people recollected it, when life became unbearable,
And then the bird Phoenix again stood up from ashes.
And again it flared as a gold flower.
And by the people songs were sung to it, and hymns composed about it.
Because it was a bird absolutely unusual …
And the people sobbed when they had no happiness.
And having the happiness, they did not appreciate it.
And then the bird Phoenix showed them the transience of life,
burning itself …
And again people waited for the bird Phoenix, praying to its ashes.
And it revived from the ashes, as hundreds and thousands of years ago.
And again the people lost memory, leaving to themselves
only a myth about a bird Phoenix…
Both fire burned, and the candle too.
A moth, shivering from fear, came closer to the flame.
Transient time now approached happiness, now removed it again.

And the people composed a hymn about the unusual bird Phoenix …
The happy people sang songs in chorus,
And wretches only wheezed in last convulsions of life.
Decay left only ashes after them,
And they tried to immortalize themselves in songs.
But the songs were composed only about strong and clever people.
And the fools lived out their days by a decaying light…
And again the bird Phoenix burnt itself.
And again it left after itself only ashes.
But the people knew, that it again would revive from its own ashes …

Translated from the Russian? Kyrgyz? by xxxxx