



The Cost

*Many things in life,
they had told me, were costly,
but, to measure the cost,
had taught me
only one way.*

*A husband, a home, a vow,
a household, a name, honour -
so many things, very very costly,
which I was to go ahead and get; but
if their cost was to be met,
it could be only
with my willing death, or with,
at the very least, a willingness
to live a slow, slow dying,
to melt, to drain away,
and think myself drinking;
to be cut from myself, split up
in ten thousand pieces,
and then to endure
the insult of those torn pieces
being called my many facets;
to name a double, dishonest life
the ability to adjust.*

*Perhaps they did not intend it,
but, who knows how, it happened -
very soon, in this life, grew a heap
of many costly reasons to die.
I had to search
for just one cheap, one small
reason to live.*

*I certainly did not intend it,
but, who knows how, it happened -
the small desire to be what I am,
grew larger than that heap of theirs.
Truly, it was not my doing but theirs
that a poor, helpless, little mouse
stood up against so large a mountain.
Had this not happened,
that little creature
would have run up the mountain,
shaped its life
in the shade of the mountain.*

*But this happened.
So it dug
with its teeth,
mined the mountain,
mocked the peak,
and laid tunnels
in the base.*

- Archana Varma
(translated by Ruth Vanita)

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