

Brother Boatman's Ballad

[Translation of Chandrasekhar Kambar's "Ambigarannana Lavani," from the collection *BelliMeenu* (Fish of Silver) first published in 1989]

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1.

In the limpid water of the river, the Moon
Swims like a fish of silver, he said
To cast his net and catch the Moon,
The young boatman set off then.

"All over the skies, storm clouds are gathering
Thunder clouds roar and roam above
Waters of deluge, water, water, everywhere
Don't go to the river, young lad!"

Something beyond words beckons me, waves its arms
Come, mount this peak of pleasure
So, I must storm the palace of light
And the Moon will surely be mine.

2

It was always bluer than blue,
Why did the sky do this today?
The grinning horizon moved away in horror
What lurks in the corners of the world now?
The shining stars have turned to coal
Ah, the burnt smells of scorched dreams!

What shouldn't have happened had happened already
The same water, the same wind—they let you down

Pushed you into the depths of the river
The bronze hands of gods raised to bless
Had simply turned cold

3

Brother Boatman,
When your boat filled with dreams
Plunged into the river,
You made the treasures of the depths
Rise to the surface, brother!
Brother Poet, you sang the songs
Of the sparkly swimming fishes
To fill the desolate waters, brother!
Into those flashy waves like burnished weapons,
You thrust your boat, chased the storm with the rainbow,
Went hunting the Moon, Brother Hunter!
You rowed as if you were fighting the last battle with an unseen enemy
What happened to that strong will now?
You who tamed the waters,
You who sowed dreams in those waters
Brother Boatman,
We never thought you would drown
Even the gods weren't on our side
The river did not know what it had done.

You looked like someone
Laughing at yourself
For having failed to mock
A consummate actor
Who could mime the Eternity!
But the river flows without a care
Choking the neck of the narrow

Path between the hills

4

This is not death but thirst
To flow like lightening.
The thirst to glow and scratch an unforgettable mark
On the heart of Time, before you disappear forever.
Not death, but the thirst
Of those immortal dreams!

5

Whether or not you found
What you set off to find
Your fame isn't like tamarind
Washed and wasted in water—
You gave the rusty idols of gods
Eyes filled with light
You gave us ears to listen to this ballad of yours.
Gave a heart to envy
Gave joy to the God of Water
You gave this river the stamp of epic dignity
To the drowned boat,
To the drifting oar,
To the bones scattered on the riverbed,
To the first rain drops,
To the kiss of the spray
And to the sighs of the smoky clouds,
You gave them all a place in this great epic story.

The river flows without a care,
Your dreams have grown big, and they come floating by.
You rest now, my captain!