

When Light Goes Out

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Introduction

There are poems that arrive as a verdict, and there are those that arrive as a mirror—held steadily, without a tremor, before the very face that first pronounced the judgment. The eighteen-part sequence gathered under the title *When Light Goes Out* belongs to this second, more piercing kind.

It originates from a familiar, fiercely rhythmic accusation: that the male gaze is a twisted, predatory instrument. It is born from the claim that every fold of cloth, every shade of skin, and every contour of the body is read by men as either invitation or offense, and that when the glowing lamps are finally extinguished, the same distorted hunger unites them all. The original cry was fierce and absolute, certain of its own justice. These poems do not deny the visceral force of that cry; they simply refuse to let it stand as the entirety of the truth.

What follows is a counter-music. It listens to the exact same notes—the crimson saree and the silken gown, the onyx darkness and the pearly fairness, the fullness of virtue and the leanness of desire—and gently turns them over in the dark. It observes that the eye is not the only organ that consumes; that attention is a potent currency both sexes mint and demand. It dares to point out that a body meticulously dressed to capture the gaze expects to be looked at, and feels the heavy expenditure of beauty wasted when that glance is withheld.

Crucially, it records without flinching that when darkness falls, a profound divergence appears. Men may, and historically do, set their ancient fevers down to walk toward a quieter, breathless liberation. Women, however, more often remain trapped inside the softer, persistent need to be seen—to be reached for, and to be validated by touch long after the confirming lights have died.

The poems do not claim moral superiority; they claim only asymmetry. They remember that the ancient chronicles of renunciation list millions of men who abandoned their lust for the unmeasured quietude of *nirvana*, yet among women, those same chronicles name almost only Radha and Meera—two luminous, singing exceptions against a vast and reluctant silence. The point of

this sequence is not condemnation. The point is a refusal to pretend that the hunger for attention, and the capacity for its ultimate transcendence, are evenly distributed.

These pages, then, offer neither a defense nor a counter-accusation. They are an attempt to restore proportion to a dialogue that had become dangerously one-sided. They ask the reader—man or woman—to stand for a moment in the velvet gloom after the last lamp has been blown out, and to notice what still moves, what still asks, and what has already grown profoundly still.