

Tibetan Side Of Town

Bruce Cockburn

Through rutted winding streets of Kathmandu
dodging crowded humans cows dogs rickshaws --
storefronts constellated pools of bluewhite
bright against darkening walls.

The butterfly sparkle in my lasered eye still seems
to hold that last shot of red sun through haze over jumbled roofs.
Everything moves like slow fluid in this atmosphere thick as dreams
with sewage, incense, dust and fever and the smoke of brick kilns
and cremations --

Tom Kelly's bike rumbles down --
we're going drinking on the Tibetan side of town.

Beggar with withered legs sits sideways on his skateboard, grinning.
There's a joke going on somewhere but we'll never know.
Those laughing kids with hungry eyes must be in on it too,
with their clinging memories of a culture crushed by Chinese greed.

Pretty young mother by the temple gate
covers her baby's face against diesel fumes.
That look of concern -- you can see it still --
not yet masked by the hard lines of a woman's
struggle to survive.

Hard bargains going down
when you're living on the Tibetan side of town.

Big red Enfield Bullet lurches to a halt in the dust.
Last blast of engine leaves a ringing in the ears
that fades into the rustle of bare feet and slapping sandals
and the baritone moan of long bronze trumpets muffled by
monastery walls.

Prayer flags crack like whips in the breeze
sending to the world -- tonight the message blows east.
Dark door opens to warm yellow room and there
are these steaming jugs of hot millet beer
and i'm sucked into the scene like this liquor up
this bamboo straw

Sweet tungha sliding down --
drinking on the Tibetan side of town.