

Where Ink Defieth Ash

When first I took the quill unto mine hand,
I deem'd the task small
To set in parchment such mortal names
As Time might else devour

The candles burn'd in quiet cloister halls;
The winter winds did chant
Against the ancient stones,
And all the world seem'd held in holy peace.

Yet came there one whose visage wore no smile.

He laid before mine eyes no crown,
Nor seal of lordly blood,
But only whisper'd,

“Write”

Then wrote I one
Then twain.
Then names past numbering

Mine ink did falter not,
Though all the wells of earth cried empty.

For every named I penn'd,
Ten thousand shadows stood behind,
As silent pilgrims seeking leave
To dwell once more in mortal speech.

“What realm is this?” quoth I.
“What grievous war hath harvest'd souls so vast?”
The stranger lifted not his gaze.
He answer'd but,
Forgetfulness.

A little shoe lay mute beside the gate;
None came to claim it ere the snow did fall.

Mothers whose lullabies were borne away
Upon the breath of ash and smoke.
Yet still they came;
Not crying out for vengeance,
Nor for the sword,
Nor for the judge.
One boon alone did each beseech:
Forget us not.

Then brake mine heart,
Yet brake not mine own hand.
Though feather fail,
Though flesh grow frail,

Though kingdoms sink beneath the dust,
Though tyrants crown themselves an hour,
The written word outliveth both the throne and pyre.
For fire consumeth parchment,
Yet cannot kindle Memory to ash.

I mark'd not crowns, nor banners stain'd with gold,
But little shoes unclaim'd beside the road,
A braid of hair, a page half writ,
And numbers inked where once fair names had dwelt

So long as one true voice doth read these lines,
The stars themselves shall bear their witness still;

My candle guttereth
Mine ink groweth thin.
Yet one blank leaf remaineth
I dare not close the book.....

By Dr. Mehak Burza