

Plastic Flowers

(a Christmas tale) by Chaitanya dasa

*"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight."
from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' (2.1.255-60)*

*"I know a bank where the pine sol blows,
where plastic flowers loom and green greed grows,
Quite over-canopied with officious guards
With sour faced looks and belly lards.
There sleeps America in these days of night,
Lull'd in plastic flowers with dances of fright."
From 'An early 21st century daymare'*

Such is the phenomenon of so-called advancement of civilization. The aromatic scene transcribed by Shakespeare has 'evolved' into an excruciating episode in the lobby of a bank a bit more familiar. Thus we can understand the sickly sweet fate of modern people, lost amidst myriad machines meant for multiplication of titillation; perfectly crafted to strike dead-center the bullseye of our senses. The stereos are louder, the TV's bigger, video games slicker, houses quicker, cars easier, food faster, sex better, drugs cooler-and happiness shallower; satisfaction rarer; depression deeper; and relationships crueler. I dare not even speak of the fate of love.

Word on the street is that we have reached unprecedented levels of advancement; and it is only getting better. Take for example this computer perched in front of me, hypnotically gazing with its one square eye, beckoning me at every moment to wrap up tighter in the crooked confines of the inter-net. Meanwhile the black widow-er lurks. He has ever so craftily laced his world-wide-web with little drops of honey, intoxicating the helpless victims of their own desires for selfish sense gratification. Oh how easy it is to catch your prey, when they are madly running after the trap! The madness of material infatuation having drowned their good reason, there is little they won't do to get one whiff of the plastic flowers.

What are the plastic flowers? Some of you may by now have guessed (though still you are only half way there). In the meantime let's catch the rest up to speed:

Aside from the obvious, plastic flowers are icons of an era of fake. The bill of modern culture is perfectly fit by these scent-less pieces of petrol. We have traded in the wholesome beauty, the simple elegance of days of yore for the amplified glitter and fleeting flash of modern life.

When is the last time you smelled a real flower? Saw a real sunset? Deeply inhaled the crisp air of wilderness? Experienced the luscious sweetness of fresh picked fruit?

Even the 'real' flowers don't smell any more. Their genetically modified petals no longer possess the pleasurable palette of olfactory hues artfully cast by their au-natural ancestors. Sunsets have become smog-sets. As long as the air doesn't have *too* many chemicals in it we think 'quite good'. Fruit is not only tasteless, but now even poisonous. But hey, it looks good, right? Such is the shallow world in which we live. Everywhere we look we see plastic flowers. We seek pleasure in that which falsely advertises pleasurable scents, but - senseless - we just smell harder and faster. Unwilling, or not able, to acknowledge our own stupidity, we continue digging for water in the desert. As we become ever thirstier with each scoop of sand, death beckons with open arms.

What will it take to graduate from this plastic culture, this plastic consciousness? When will we realize that we are surrounded by limitless permutations of plastic flowers, fragrant with the smell of death? When will we seek out the life giving scents of the genuine blooms, carefully hidden by the web-master?

There can be no love between people and plastic. Love lives only in the realm of life, of deep human relation. As the body is thirsty for water, so is the soul millions of times thirstier for love. It is its sustenance; its nourishment. There is no love in the world of artificiality and exploitation. Yet they insist it is advanced. They say we are so much more fortunate than the 'primitives' of old. To that I pose this famous question (since it is Christmas): 'what profiteth a man who gains the whole world at the expense of his soul?'

As we traverse this harsh and sparkly landscape of death, let us be beacons of life and love. As one single lighthouse can liberate countless ships from the merciless waves of a stormy sea, each and every sincere soul willing to tread the path of love and service will on his way illuminate the lives of innumerable others lost in this sea of plastic flowers, desperately searching for some real scents. If you really want to help people, make this you aim, your charity to all. Without love, without meaning, without happiness and satisfaction, what is the use of food, freedom, or justice? All of these are very easily washed away by the waves of the ocean of despair. In this holiday season commemorating the birth of one of the brightest beacons in the history of the world, in this season of giving, and in honor of the wonderful gifts he made to all of mankind, lets deeply consider these essential truths. If after careful consideration you find in them validity, please take them into your heart and make them a part of your life. Become a brilliantly blazing beacon of compassion and love. You will not regret it.

"With every year it becomes harder and harder to see Christmas through its wrappings."

-E.B. White