

Voices – House at Puri

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1. The Green Room

I am a green room
The colour of sea on misty days
Froth-discoloured wave flung
Frozen inside childhood
Perhaps yours

Beneath my layers of peels
A pristine wall white
With ten incarnations of Vishnu² painted for
A lusty godman who lived there once –
Your grandfather's guest

I have seen it all
Hunger scheming hate envy
Strange thing love
As you grew on my red cement floor
You so carefully painted once on now moth-eaten canvas

I am a green room sea green
Unfamiliar to the leaf green of the guava tree
That used to peep through window
To make sure of my colour
Till your uncle cut her down

I sit in my time like stillness
Among growing kitten spattered rain

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² Ten *Avataras* or *Dasavatras* of Hindu mythology.

Walls you tried to paint once
Frozen seawave now to break
Masterpiece your brush failed

2. The Kitten

I jump and stretch and yawn
And eat crunchy things that you mash
With rice call fish

I love to play with brother
Uncle cousin mother I love to play
With your daughter until sleep

I am white sparkling with flicks of red
Sleek beautiful soft
I love to play in green rooms red floors

I climb trees with ridges like sea sand
Pounce on white flowers soft tiny
Brother I bite tear

3. The *Tagara* Tree

I have survived
For when they demolished the thatched front yard
Dismissed the tenants and built all over again a new house
It was touch and go

They needed flowers for their gods
And your grandmother with diabetic leg
Whose wounds I could smell in the rain
Who sat immobile on her chair and gazed at me still lived

They cut a couple of fingers but stopped there
And so you can see me now with your kittens
Digging young claws into wrinkles long after
Your grandmother was carried away on heavy shoulders

I am a tree I can survive act as if I don't see
Can remember without memory
Childhoods births deaths growing up
And my perennial blossoms you steal

4. Grandmother

After the funeral my sons drove in an iron nail
In a wall like a full stop to keep me away

But things don't end like storybooks with a last page
Lies created by men for men

I hover in my room in the shadow of the shadow
In spite of the charm of the iron

I am ephemeral weightless can't sustain for long
So my voice is thin

My daughters-in-law sit on my chair curse them
And my sons are tame cows

My husband the devil take him ninety three
After a few tears ogles and rants

I suffer oh the agony I suffer how I plead
In my grand daughters' dreams

But they talk of my dying with tears
The way they did when they waited for me to die

5. Daughter

My name is Pihu
And I am very sweet good beautiful
Wait a moment did you see that kitten his name is Jublee
He is my best friend shall I show him to you

The world is wonderful
We grow hair like threads so funny
And here at Puri I go to see Jagannath
He is my best friend and also a god

I love this new house
I hate the green room smelly
Stairs where my mad great-grandfather sits pisses
The cracked red floor the dust I will not go

6. Grand Pa

I am beautiful like the god of love
You should touch my body come touch
And see just see how the fire in my loin stirs
I'm barely twenty and you should give your daughter to me
I will give you a dozen grandsons
And your daughter heavenly pleasure

But you must understand I live carefully
On tiptoes I cross the threshold of dreams
On the other side they scream at me and tell me
"I am your son, I am your son's son, I am your daughter-in-law"
The devil prick your asses and stuff your mothers
You bastards sons of whores I am not even married!