



MY VEGETABLE GIRL

By Harry Jivenmukta

How it all started

I was at the market and
This lovely girl
Serving at the fruit and vegetable stall
Caught my eye.
I thought to myself
That if I fell in love
I would fall in love
With a girl like that.
She is about five feet three
Brown hair tied
Back in a pony tail,
About ten years younger than me,
Very slightly protruding front teeth
That make her even more attractive,
And dressed for the cold
So there are no curves and bumps
To evaluate.
But like all lovely girls
When I put all her
Attributes together
There is music in my heart.
When I say music,
It isn't a 108 piece orchestra yet,
But is growing from one man
Playing a recorder
Into a string quartet.

Loose words and good onions

I went to the market
As usual to get
Some onions.
But the sign didn't read
Onions 27p lb
As it normally did.
Instead it said:
Good onions 27p lb.
And that threw me into a spin.
Did it mean I usually
Bought onions that weren't good?
Or were these particularly good?
Did it mean that they also
Sold bad onions and how
Much were they for a pound?
And what makes an onion good?
Or for that matter, a bad onion bad?
The whole of quantum mechanics
Began to spin and made me
Think of what onions actually were.
Or if they even existed.

At home
The meal I made was lovely
With bits of good onions mixed in
With a nervous uncertainty.

In the actual exchange with the girl on the stall who I now see as my 'vegetable girl', I asked her what was so good about her onions. She looked at me with a sideways glance, as she continued to stack pineapples, and didn't reduce herself to my level. She didn't say a word. I took that as a sign of repressed passion and imagined that she would now fill her nights with extended fantasies of me.

Tangerines

She never said it to me
But I heard her say
To a customer that
There were ten tangerines
In each bag;
'I know that because
I packed them myself'
She said.

Back home I hummed
With a growing warmth
As I peeled a tangerine
Handled personally by her,
For me.
It was possibly the best tangerine
I have ever eaten
And I enjoyed sucking
The sweetness and inhaling
Her perfume,
Her orange aroma,
Packed into a tangerine
For me.

Capsicum Peppers

She told me she was sorry
But this week the peppers
Were more expensive
Than usual.
I told her not to worry
And almost blabbered out
That I was in love
With her
But resisted at the last moment
As she turned to take money
From someone else for
Half a pound of mushrooms.

I compared the green pepper
To her earthiness and honesty,
Working long hours
With no time to stop to think
About anything,
Let alone falling in love.

The red pepper made me catch my breath
As words rushed into my head:
Passion,
Heat and sweating bodies
Intertwined,
With no time to serve other customers.
No time now for winter woollies
But instead for flimsy silk,
Stockings and blushes.

The yellow pepper didn't
Raise anything in me
So I just kept it safe
For now.

Healthy

She didn't realise
That she was making me healthy.
From a beer swilling also ran,
I was now eating lots of
Fruit and vegetables.
I had to
If I wanted to see her.
I am a poet by vocation
But even I can't think which
Words,
In the few seconds it takes
For her to serve me,
That will tell her,
Inform her,
Fill her heart with my love.
What can I say in-between
The £2.54 and
Here's your change
That might shock her
Into a split second of realisation
That I want more than her peaches
Which are only £1 a punnet?

Four days

The market is on
Four days a week
And so for three days
I miss her.
There is no point in walking
On to the empty shell of
Cold metal stall posts.
There is no sign that
She had ever been here.
No cauliflower leaves
Scattered around on the floor
And no whiff of
Fresh oranges
Or the regiments of leeks
And the call of her voice
To impatient customers.
I miss her on those cold
Windblown days of
Emptiness.

Crisps

I can see that she is flagging.
What makes a fruit and vegetable seller
Eat crisps?
She is driven to it.
She must be pining for me too
And perhaps is too shy
Or unable to break out
For a single moment
From her work
To tell me
The things I dream of telling her.
But she flashes glances at me
And must know that I only
Get served by her,
Wait until she is free,
So I can graze her palm,
With my coins.

And is it me
Or does she really touch my hand
And linger for the split second
Longer than it takes to
Give back change?

My Vegetable Girl – The Final Chapter

My mother wanted aubergines and so I hurried on to the market. I knew that everything had been a bit dodgy ever since the incident with the oversized potatoes, but my heart still sang when I thought about her. I saw her standing there and slowed down so she wouldn't think I was too eager. I looked casually at her wares and realised that she had no aubergines on her stall today.

So I casually asked her; "excuse me, but do you have any aubergines?" She locked eyes with me and replied, with more than a bit of venom in her voice; "if they're not out, it means we haven't got any."

I looked down towards the other vegetable stall and saw they had a few aubergines, and so, hurried on and grabbed two. As I held them in my hands, my eyes automatically returned to her and she stared back at me with both desperation and abandonment in her eyes. I quickly paid and putting the aubergines in my carrier bag, turned to walk past her, on my way to my mother's house.

I spied her sideways, secretly, and saw a single tear in her eye. Her look spoke to me and said that this was the last betrayal, the last time. I stopped and turned to her and told her with begging eyes that I would never have bought aubergines from anyone else, but she didn't have any. She said that I could have had anything from her stall but deliberately chose the one vegetable she didn't have.

With a last spiteful look that lasted a second too long, she turned to serve a man who was fingering her mushrooms. I sighed deeply and walked away. If only she had kept her aubergines for me.