

The Voices of a Still Night

by Mary Konopnitsky

Translated from the Polish language by V. A. H.

As a murmur of the ocean and as the rumbling of thunder, thou speakest to me, O stillness of the night! Thy stormy breath plays with the hair of my head; thou strikest into the corners of my house. My spirit hears thy call, as though of a roaring lion in the wilds, and my heart burns in me when thy voice is speaking.

As the buzzing of a golden bee, thou speakest to me, O stillness of the night! As a whisper of growing grass, as the tinkling of the sand of the desert, and as the rustling of a leaf that sways in the wind. The breath of the life of the whole earth breathes in thy sigh. . . . And my heart stops in me, when thy voice is speaking.

I.

I will tell thee what is the secret of happiness, O my heart! Die for that which has the face of death and utters a groan of pain for a passing life; and do not sow thy grain for the harvest of the grave.

I will tell thee what is the secret of happiness, O my heart! Revive for that which endures for aye above death and sorrow and above all illusion; and let thy trembling anchor fall, where is the peace of the depths, and where the silence reigns.

II.

Gain for thyself the seeing faith, O my spirit! Let not slavish fear oppress thee! Rend the veil, by the movements of which thou now surmisest that there is hidden an ever-living power. Cross the threshold of the mystery; lift thy eyes and behold the divine truth of the world!

III.

If thou hadst once been weeping over this suffering world and wast a brother to the sad ones of the earth, it is possible now that there will open for thee, through the multitudes of shadows, the gates to the paradise of hope, blooming all over with azure celestial flowers! Thy soul is there divinely calm; it breathes out the light of peace. which the Angel of the Future gathers ray by ray in its alabaster urns; and even now, above this gloomy world, a dawn of a clear day begins to shine, as a purple lustre of a morning moon.

IV.

In a robe of innocence clothe thyself, O my spirit! and in a robe of freshness. As over the virgin mountain-snow, which has not been touched by the vernal sun, are the silver-blossomed pure sasana-flowers, such aromas must thou gain, and such a snow-broidered raiment, O my spirit!

V.

The weakness of hate is this, that upon its skies it sees neither sun nor stars, neither the iris nor the purple of the dawn, neither the grand cloud of a summer storm, nor endless milky garlands of the starlit skies, – it sees naught of these but only the veil of self, – a huge and empty shadow, which so envelopes it, as the torture of an eternal night.

And the power of love is, that upon its skies it never sees itself; but in the morning or in the twilight of eve, there unfolds before its enraptured sight, worlds of endless brightness, roses of the suns, deep azure of the starry fields, white lunar asters of the garden of the skies, silver alabasters of the urns, wherein the altars of the soul burn their eternal fires . . . and upon its shadow it looks as upon a mirage.

VI.

And when thy path thou liftest from the high-ways of this earth, ascend into the clearest azures, and stop not on the threshold of a phantom-cloud!

And when thou soarest from the nests of earth take an eagle-flight towards the sun itself, and be not stayed by the fiery sand of meteoric dust.

Let thy track be towards the highest light. . . . So aims a lark its winged course towards the brightest dawn.

Scan with thy eye the farthest span of space; scorn those goals which lie too near; and leave for the weak ones of the earth the timid step into the future.

And have no fears, though there be no mileposts on the way, where thy will is set so straight and free. . . . A bird knows whereto it has to fly in its migration.

And the spirit is as the waters of the rivers: both the traveler and the path. It needs no one to lead it, it finds the current of its own.

VII.

Keep thy soul at peace, as a still and quiet lake, that the depth of the skies may find its reflection in thee; and a flower of the shore see again in

thee its vernal beauty; and that cloud-boat traveling on the blue with its taut sails and hiding at times the sun; and that sun emerging from the cloud, shining so radiant above the earth, sweet arid refreshed by the rain!

Lull thy soul into the endless harmony with the silence of the world, which seems to buzz as a golden bee. That which is divine, is reflected on thy wave; that which is earthly, lies on the bottom deep. When thou art still, the radiance of eternity is burning upon thee; but when a stone of passion falls into thy waters, the blackness of thy deeps will appear, the blackness of the soil and mud.

VIII.

Advance, O valiant soldier, and do not question whereto the dawns are leading thee through their ruby-gates, and where will thy golden-azure star emerge aflame from the gray mists into the eternal skies, shaking off her dying sparks into the ocean of the ever-silence. The path which will lead thee out of all ways of life, out of all experience of man, out of the whole horizon of the heavens and of the earth, out of thy own self through the threshold of the azure light, that path lies neither before thee nor behind, nor on any side; it is not deep, neither it is before thy sight, and it is neither near nor far.

Advance boldly, and when thy last battle is won, thou wilt find thyself upon this shining field, walking with such ease among the globes of the world, as now, when on a morning in May thou didst walk the meadows as a child and pluck its blossoms.

IX.

Desire nothing for thyself, either in the heavens or upon the earth, O my heart! Strive not after that which can be grasped in thy hand, and is taken away from others, that it might be in thy house, O my heart! But above all the treasures of the skies and of the earth and above all actualities of life, desire that inheritance, which may be shared with thy brothers. Desire infinitely that which can be, as a flame, divided among millions and millions of fires, – and yet exist undiminished and entire. Desire that, which, as the ocean, can not be shut in a room, neither put in a box, but above which forever burns the blue light of the eternal dome of the heavens.

X.

Beware lest thy heart permit its shadow to fall upon the path, the shadow of thy own desires and trembling fear, and to cover it with a pall of

gloom; for then thy feet will be in terror rooted to that darkness. The sun of spirit will not reach thee then, neither will it disperse the shadows of thy pain and joy of earthly, carnal substance. These shadows will then grow to a giant size, obscure thy path with overhanging mists, cut it in twain and fork it in thy eyes, mislead thee, and deafen with the whispers of an evil doubt, and thou wilt fall, and thy feet not enter into the house of silence.

XI.

Though thousands of miles would part thee from thy brothers, if thou shouldst call to them, thy voice will not be lost; but over rivers, steppes and mountains it will fly with faster wings than any bird, and nothing will it stop upon its way, till by a mysterious whisper or a piercing cry it will, with thy language, speak in their hearts.

And though a message thou wouldst send with only a thought, it never will be lost; but passing o'er the oceans many a league, flying through the great spans of this wide world, as some liquid flame, it will fall at the threshold of thy brother's dwelling, as a dove sent out with a far message, and will beat there with its pinions by day and night, till his door will unclose at last.

For between thee and him throughout the heavens and the earth there is open a vibrant way for the shooting stars of thought, a road of our common mental atmosphere, sensitive to the faintest whispers, which fills all space, and penetrates all time and distance; and, by its mysterious movements, heart to heart it brings, and lips to listening ears; and though it seems to be a void, in it there calls and lives the spirit.

XII.

Seek for the moment which will make thee a sower – in the desert; free – in captivity; smiling – in pain; silent – in the storm; full of hope – even when defeated; a king – amongst the ruins; and holy – though thou failest. Thy angel shall then appear in the fires of the dawn of infinity. The divine balance leans towards thee for a moment; and as though by a miracle, thy spirit for that moment is not thine, but of the Great Soul. And it is a moment of thy cooperation with the immortal labor of the spirit of eternity! Even for a sinner there may be such a moment. And what, if he is condemned, if he has a scaffold for his bed? That one moment of his life is saved. And when his body shall have dissolved to dust, his soul as a bee upon a flower, will alight upon this single moment, and drink from it the honey-dew of divine dreams, in the morning of an undying brightness.

Do not curse, my soul, thy failures and thy errors; they are steps of the ladder which thou must climb, if thou wouldst lift thyself from the dust of earth to the sunny skies. . . . Jacob, the shepherd, had to dream a stairway for the angels!

XIV.

Dost thou fear death, as some cruel executioner? Make thy own the life of the world; tear down and destroy those walls, with which thou hast fenced thyself from the rest of nature! In the immensity of the worlds feel thyself with thy own kin, as though in thy father's home; and as thou walkest from a chamber into a chamber thus pass through the worlds, pass through existences, and say: "I step from life to life," but not: – "Death changes me."

XV.

That which thou hast loved and for which thou hast suffered, will appear to thee in new angelic robes, O my soul! The still, fragrant breeze shall bring to thee thy loves and hopes, and the mists of thought will bloom, as meadows, into a rosy tint, and into a tint of blue, O my soul!

It is thyself, in thy silent meditating eves, that breathest these bright glories, paintest these glad hues, O my soul!

Till at last extending thy arms into the air, thou wilt be carried with thy own sigh through many ages of an endless spring of May, among the flowers which were conceived and born from thee, O my soul!

XVI.

When all the threads, which were spun by the heart on earth, are broken; when the pink fingers of hope drop the wilted rose; when the night of life sits down, all veiled in a cloak of dusk, and sings a song of nothingness, – then are drawing near the white swans of day, and the ear of the wheat of light is coming to its ripeness.

XVII.

Sweet is this wisdom, which is not censured by the sorrow of the human kind, and which makes life and death to grasp their hands in the vernal joy of ideal concord.

(Universal Brotherhood, November 1898)