

A Song of the Gates of Heaven

OH, SHINE, shine, Sun
Let me warm my hands
Let me drive away torment and horrors!

In vain.

In vain do I knock at Heavens's Gate
From this dense fog
In vain do I beat with my hands of air
Begging for a golden ray to be freed.

When the skies over Silesia close
Not even a hundred of the Sun's keys
Will be able to opet them
Will consent to open them.

In vain do I knock.

Zagan, 20th May, 1941.

Translated By Nada Curčija-Prodanović

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ALEKSANDAR VUČO

Invitation to Day — Dreaming

»Let's go and lie in the grass behind The Rampart with not a Soul Near.«

»But we hardly know each other. First we must sit on a bench and talk.«

»What about?«

»Ourselves — you about yourself, me about myself.«

»Then you start...«

The Test

A FAIR PART of the day had wasted away. The strollers ambled along the main avenue in the direction of the town. The suburban district crumbles and melts. The procession of barges breaks away, the tug from the peninsula hugs the mainland. A dredger erodes the edge of the shore, inhales the sandy folds. The North-East silos, unstitched, let their breasts fall slowly onto their knees. The willows on the left bank drink their shadows through little straws. How all is half-broken, half-confused, half-melted. Over the slow centrifuge falls the ceiling of the sun. Now both rivers begin to boil, clutch their throats, behind the Rampart with not a Soul near the grass stretches and contracts. The first lovers press it down. The stumbling waters smile upside-down, full of experience and secrets. Then the two-humped hillock hurries to cover the blocks of flats with sursequins. That other (thin) one fixes his stomach to his spine. Behind the rooves, far on the open horizon, there is something which is unrecognizable at first. It is necessary to make some expressive gestures with the eyes and hands to

discover the waves of red-hot muscles. Lava on the steppe? Steppe on lava?

The landscape becomes heliocentric.

And Sidra is the solar centre on the Terrace of Centrifugal Glances. Uninflammable? Insusceptible to love?

»Why are you shivering? — The sun is still...«

»The bottom of the air is cold...«

»Are you going?«

»Why do you say that?«

»Your eyes say you are moving away.«

»It's cold in my eyes...«

»Do you want me to go?«

»No, don't. Talk. Then everything becomes somehow strange, begins to slide, to run in all directions... I say to myself: get over these mad corners in yourself, and I just can't grasp what things you like...«

»And you? You say first.«

»I like... I don't know... Nothing special. Climbing hills when I get sick of everything... Always swimming to the other side... Listening to juke-boxes (one night I put in seventy eight twenty dinar pieces.) I like... I like... I like chewing-gum. Watching thrillers and westerns... He's crazy about them...«

I like to move onto the screen. Then I am conscious of myself only as the hero I like...«

»And which one do you most like to become?«

»The one who loves and kisses at the end... or kills himself for love...«

»Ooof, what kind of a boy are you! He only likes negative heroes. He adores orgies of solitude. And do you like stopping in front of shop windows where there are weapons displayed?«

»No. Why?«

»He's crazy about looking at revolvers and rifles. There's one that can pierce through pillboxes... And do you like fighting...? People challenge him even when they mind their own business...«

»No, I don't.«

»And do you attack girls in the street? Any girl... Just like that... He dragged one into a hut and tore out a whole fistful of her hair...«

»Not for the world!«

»And pinching something in shops. Any old thing. A pencil, one stocking, a spoon, part of a pipe... He says it is art for art's sake. 'If I were a gangster, I'd break only empty safes' he says. And you. Would you?...«

»It would never occur to me.«

»What perfection! Astonishing! But what do you do then when you aren't doing anything?«

»I think and I feel.«

»What about? What?«

»I have a file of special thoughts and feelings from which I take out which one I want. It's a substitute for life... Or rather... another life beside this... ordinary one.«

»Have you got everything written down? Arranged in a drawer?«

»No, I've got nothing written down. I haven't even got a drawer. Thoughts remember themselves. Feelings keep themselves...«

»Are they selfish?«

»No, on the contrary. They can hardly wait for me to think and feel them. Verses are particularly impatient...«

»Verses? How do you make them?«

»With words that come to me or that I invent myself...«

»And then?«

»Then they become uncontrolled: they rush to belong to sentences. They become obstinate... But... The very next day I have to start from the beginning again.«

»One might say then a perpendicular moon that lights itself... Pull that funny curl on to your forehead and sing me one.«

»I can't sing.«

»You don't mean it! He sings when it's early and when it's late. He sings even when he's eating. He sings even without words. One might say a howling in a forest or sobbing in a hospital. Perhaps he has something animal in his heart, and it is like a stormy sea with no water. Then I am calm... Or a tongue which, black and dumb, just hangs... hangs... and troubles no one.«

»And words?«

»He likes to talk when he is swearing. Then I'm in his power and I breathe heavily. One might say... no, neither stifling nor a pain in the breast, but something different from usual. Somehow disparate... But why have you got sad?«

»The one I am not is permeating you with his absence...«

»Forget it... Here, nestle up to me, take my hand and cough up something from your file. I shall be your absent Echo Beauty.«

The Vanity of Words

I SET OUT as if I'm falling into a deep chasm of leaves
And I marvel that my hands do not burn her dress
Why these horned mists spring up on this body
Webs of crumbled rain and banks of rotten earth
They have sat down on the edge of the rampart.
(The area is reflected glassily from them by the still unwithered
laws of geometric optics.)

She leant on his shoulder.

(A constellation of sparks in his whole body.)

She sought him with her eyes and trembled anxiously.

(Embryon of desire? The stir of emotion?)

And his words fell on both rivers, dense as earth:

»I believed: it is enough just to think and feel you. The Fallacy of I think and I feel' penetrates the cage. I want to touch you. To save you. Most of all your vulnerable breasts trouble me... So small... If they are not as I want them, I shall be unhappy...«

I shall take your breasts to the mountains

To be bathed in air
Both inside and out

Then to the coast
To have sun and sea
Both inside and out

Then to bed
For my hands and words to feed them
Both inside and out
And to teach them multiplication tables

But if nothing in them
Either inside or out
Should desire or cry
I shall be an uninvited guest at your door
With all these fins of lightning on my arms
And spears of words in my unbuttoned mouth

She took her arm from his, glanced around her as if wondering where she was and who was sitting beside her:

»You would like ... it's funny ... that I should live only for you. You would like her to lie seriously ill, with some chest disease. One evening it occurred to him that she had died. He wept, placed her on a bier. But when he appeared at a minute to midnight, She stretched, got down from the bier and fell into His arms ... It is hard to wall me in against my will ... And for a man to cry ...»

Or you would, perhaps, really like me to die with love. She drowned in a river. There was no trace except a few dry footmarks on the place she had jumped from. When they pulled out her body with hooks, the old women wept. And for a long time they washed off the mud. »How beautiful she still is!« they kept whispering. Before dawn everything was directed according to the place of death ...

What do you want from me? What would you like me to be?»

He was mad with delight: »It's a misfortune to be ashamed of oneself« and he leant his shoulder against hers:

»I would like you not to have a hundred faces
Which I encircle with seaweed
Crunch in twilight soot
Sketch in school copy-books
Carve on tree trunks
And copy out in dreams

For I do not know what to do with your hundred faces
When only one flows in a honeycomb
Of only one of my hundred faces
Of my scattered faces
Yesterday today and tomorrow without eternity
I would like you not to come in deltas
With a hundred whirlpools and streams
Which uselessly without arches
I drag through my thoughts
Let fall through my limbs

And chase through my thoughts
Let fall through my limbs
And chase through my blood vessels

For I do not know what to do
With your hundred embraces
When I have only one mouth
For the hundred of my shores
And only one pore of silence
For a single star
For you not to fall to me in any case
For you to run from me in every case
Yesterday today and tomorrow without eternity

I would like you to be nobody's
With a hundred sighs
In your concave lungs
Nor a pebble in the wind both everyone's and no one's
With a hundred regrets
In my convex lungs
Which in days without a breath of air
Direct my soles
To stone funnels of fear
For I have only one lap for my-your breathing
And only one brow for the grains of memory
If years of experience come
And the night without your presence
Becomes my only companion
Yesterday today and tomorrow without eternity

(An aeroplane rears up with the sound of tearing paper. The rivers are extinguished. The facades of the buildings blind. No foothills. The vacuum of sunset. A pagoda of clouds presses on the horizon.)

For a few minutes Sidra is silent, draws into a cocoon of meditation. The she removes her calmed shoulder from his, and her eyes become just as grey as her voice is weighed down:

»Your face beneath the mask lies, and your mask does not. You are not He! You aren't! You aren't He would seize me, kiss my lips. He would shower kisses on my face — neck — breast — arms, thirsty for the daily overflow of my blood. And I should be his as I am my own ... Leave me! Go! — Pedlar, patter with words as you would feel out with a blind man's stick the way along a wall — not even those who leave the most brilliant traces will substitute for your unrealised love.«

(On the left-lover slope of sunchine, the water-wheel of day comes to a languid halt.)

She turned round:

»You can hang me from any tree ... With words ... with dreams ... Who's stopping you! ... Go! — Leave me! ...«

Translated By Nada Čurčija-Prodanović