

Excerpt from **Moonlight Sonata (1956)**

BY YANNIS RITSOS

Let me come with you.

The moon is good – it doesn't show my  
gray hair. The moon will turn my hair golden again.

You won't see the difference.

Let me come with you.

We shall sit on the ledge of the knoll for a while,  
And as the spring breeze blows on us,  
we may imagine we shall fly because  
many times, even now, I hear my dress rustling  
like the sound of two powerful wings flapping,  
and when you enclose yourself in this sound of flying,  
you feel firmness in your neck, your ribs, your flesh,  
and thus firmly put, within the muscles of the blue wind,  
within the vigorous nerves of the height,  
it doesn't matter that your hair has turned gray,  
(this is not my sorrow - my sorrow  
Is that my heart hasn't turned white).

Let me come with you.

I know that everyone marches to love alone,  
Alone to glory and death.

I know it. I tried it. It's of no use.

Let me come with you.

## Excerpt from **Epitaphios (1936)**

BY YANNIS RITSOS



### VI

One day in May I lost you, one day in May you left,  
In springtime, when you would go up to the terrace and look out,

And with our eyes you'd gaze and milk, until the final drop,  
The light of all the universe and never take your fill.

And, with your finger pointed, you would show me one-by-one  
All that was sweet, all that was good, all rosy-hued and soft.

You'd show the shining distant sea, as smooth and sleek as oil,  
And all the mountains and the trees behind the azure veil,

The tiny humble creatures: all the birds, the ants, the shrubs,  
Those damned stones of water beading on the nearby jug.

But even as you showed me, son, the vastness of the stars,  
I'd see them shine more brightly in the blue light of your eyes.

And in a voice so sweet, so warm, so manly you would speak  
Of all the world's loveliness, like countless grains of sand,

And say that all this beauty that you saw was ours to keep.

And now you're dead. Your glow is gone. Our light has turned to dark.

# The Crane Dance

BY YANNIS RITSOS

The clew paying out through his fingers, a deftness that would bring him back to her, its softness the softness of skin, as if drawn from herself directly, the faint labial smell, guiding him up and out, as some dampness on the air might lead a stone-blind man to the light.

Asterios dead for sure, his crumpled horn, his muzzle thick with blood, so at Delos they stopped, Theseus and the young Athenians, and stepped up to the "altar of horns" to dance a puzzle-dance, its moves unreadable except to those who'd walked the blank meanders of the labyrinth.

And this was midday: a fierce sun, the blaze of their nakedness, the glitter of repetitions, a dazzle rising off the sea, the scents of pine and hyacinth. . .

Well, things change: new passions, new threats, new fears. New consequences, too. Nowadays, we don't think much about Theseus, the Minotaur, Ariadne on the beach at Naxos, staring out at the coming years.

But people still dance that dance: just common folk, those criss-cross steps that no one had to teach, at weddings and wakes, in bars or parks, as if hope and heart could meet, as if they might even now, somehow, dance themselves out of the dark.

## Repossession of Rights

The motorcycle in lightning speed passed by. It was love.  
Fluttering of hair. Radiance of the sea. At the Agora  
loads of cactus pears sunbathed in insolence  
in baskets made of cane – primeval testicles,  
light strikes like a spark in their blond hairs.

The girls laugh

before the doors. They slit open the thick rind of  
the cactus pears with small knives. Their laughter  
conceals a secret erotic murder. Perhaps for that reason  
the slightest snow white cloud shadows one yard of the opposite  
blue mountain at the far end of the horizon.

What a beautiful day,

beautiful, more beautiful, protecting again,  
somewhat late, a certain right of ours in admiration,  
a certain right of ours in the eternal youth of the world.

# Transparent Things

Transparent things – they exist, they don't exist – among them  
other things are discerned, windows, glass, flower vases,  
the inside, the outside, the in-between, the farther away – like when  
you wear  
a glass mask and you see the sea floor. Next to you the naked divers,  
given to the water, slide along the fish, they don't pay attention to you,  
they don't belong to anything, given with all their bodies  
to their lightness. And when they go out to the shore, they hold a broken  
triumph or a cross or a pitcher, their glance with a bit more sky blue,  
they place them on the rocks, take off their masks, they look  
round as though blind,  
wipe themselves with a small towel, get dressed, and suddenly they  
throw their findings again to the bottom of the sea and get on their  
bicycles.

RAE DALVEN

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*Seven Poems by YANNIS RITSOS*

THE MEANING OF SIMPLICITY

I hide myself behind simple objects so you may find me,  
if you do not find me, you will find the objects,  
you will touch those objects my hand has touched  
the traces of our hands will mingle.

The August moon gleams like a tin kitchen kettle  
(what I am telling you becomes like that),  
it lights the empty table and silence kneeling in the house  
silence is always kneeling.

Every single word is an exodus  
for a meeting, cancelled many times,  
it is a true word when it insists on the meeting.

THE ARCHITECT

A group of young girls wearing flowery dresses  
laugh again at the corner of a ramshackle house. The builders  
hang their trousers and their shirts on a nail of the new edifice,  
they take the hod-carrier, the trowel, and they climb up  
the huge, naked scaffolding as if they were climbing up to heaven.

The architect  
calculates, he remembers, he compares, he supervises,  
he appears a bit saddened, as if his blueprint had been left half-  
completed,  
as if the enormous edifice will never be completed. He takes a nail  
and he himself sinks it down into the plank. The nail goes in  
crooked.

The workers laughed. He also laughed. He took off his shirt,  
sensing that in this their general laughter, his hands,  
his blue-print and their edifice had been completed.

*Three Poems by YANNIS RITSOS*

INJUSTICE

Night. Only a single glance. A noiseless bullet.  
The metal shield of loneliness is riddled with holes.  
That fragmented rotundity.  
And pride on her knees.

Beloved night. Beloved wound.  
The road, the sky, the stars,—exist  
that they might sink once more. Only a single glance.  
Outside of the loneliness the great peril  
of loneliness is lying in wait—beloved peril  
to measure yourself with another and the right to be yours  
and the whole injustice of it that the other person is also right.



# Forgetfulness

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by Yiannis Ritsos

The house with the wooden staircase and the orange trees,  
facing the azure, big mountain. The countryside gently  
walks around inside the rooms. The two mirrors  
reflect the singing of the birds. Only  
that in the middle of the bedroom lie abandoned  
two fabric slippers for the old. So,  
when the night falls, the dead visit the house again  
in order to collect something of theirs left behind,  
a scarf, a vest, a shirt, two socks  
and then, possibly due to short memory or carelessness,  
they take along something of ours. Next day,  
the postman passes our door without stopping.

## A Little Naivety

Mild days with many trees.  
This gentle breeze around your lips goes well on you.  
This flower you are gazing at goes well on you.  
So, the sea, the tilting sun and this boat,  
which glides along the dusky rosefield  
carrying as sole passenger a girl with a sorrowful guitar  
are not a lie.  
Please let me be the one to pull the oars,  
as if I'd pull two purple beams sung into oblivion.

## Always

We start a conversation, it's stopped half way.  
We start building a wall, they don't let us  
finish it;  
and our song is cut in half.  
The horizon finishes everything.

Groups of stars pass over the tents,  
sometimes tired, other times sad, yet certainly  
to light our path, our path.

And the day, even so unjust, leaves you with  
a blue and white flag in your pocket, flag from a sea  
festival,  
it leaves you with a gulp of clear air in your mouth  
it leaves in your eyes the thank you of two eyes  
that looked at the same stone together with you,  
that shared the same pain equally, the same  
cloud, the same shadow.

We shared everything, comrades,  
the bread, the water, cigarettes, grief, hope and now  
we can live or die simply and nicely, very nicely  
as if we open a door in the morning and  
we say good morning to the sun and  
to the world.

## EVENING

Dry saliva in the mouth of day, very dry  
you can't even glue a stamp on your mother's letter  
and the dust is glued on nails and eyes  
like grief on the skin of the sea.

We went up and down the hill  
carrying rocks and death on our backs  
under the curse and the whip  
we counted the water and the stone  
life and death — we got used to it  
the longing faded  
even anger lessened  
only the resolve didn't wither.

Between the spade and the shovel of the night  
the comrades rest  
with clenched teeth,  
with their fists as pillows.