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Idylls from Messina

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Friedrich Nietzsche

Original English edition

Translated from the German by Blue Energy People, Inc. (SUN), with AI assistance from Claude Opus 5.5.

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Idylls from Messina

Prince Vogelfrei.

So here I hang on crooked bough
High over sea and little hill:
A bird invited me as guest —
I flew after it and rest and rest
And beat my little wings.
The white sea has fallen asleep,
Asleep in me is every woe and sigh.
Forgotten have I goal and harbour,
Forgotten fear and praise and punishments:
Now I fly after every bird.
Just step by step — that is no life!
Forever leg past leg makes weary and heavy!
I let myself be lifted by the winds,
I love to soar on wings
And go after every bird.
Reason? — that is an evil business:
Reason and tongue stumble much!
Flight gave me new strengths
And taught me lovelier business,
Song and jest and play of songs.

To think alone — that is wise.

To sing alone — that is foolish!

So hearken, then, to my tune

And sit quietly about me in a ring,

You lovely little birds, all round!

The Little Brig Called "Little Angel".

Little Angel: so they call me —

Now a ship, a maiden once,

Ah, still very much a maiden!

For it turns on love alone,

Ever, my fine little steering-wheel.

Little Angel: so they call me —

I am decked with a hundred pennants,

And the handsomest little captain

Swells himself out at my helm

As the hundred-and-first pennant.

Little Angel: so they call me —

Anywhere a little flame

Glows for me, I run, a little lamb,

On my way with longing:

Always I was such a little lamb.

Little Angel: so they call me —

Do you think, then, that like a little dog

I can bark, and that my little mouth

Hurls about it smoke and fire?

Ah, the devil's own is my little mouth!

Little Angel: so they call me —

Once I spoke a bitter, wicked little word,

So that swiftly to the last little place

My most beloved fled away:

Yes, he died of that little word!

Little Angel: so they call me —

Scarcely heard, I leapt from the little cliff

Down below and broke a little rib,

So that my dear soul fled forth:

Yes, it fled through that little rib!

Little Angel: so they call me —

My soul, just like a little kitten,

Made one, two, three, four, five little leaps,

Then swung itself into this little ship —

Yes, it has nimble little paws.

Little Angel: so they call me —

Now a ship, a maiden once,

Ah, still very much a maiden!

For it turns on love alone,

Ever, my fine little steering-wheel.

Song of the Goatherd.

(To my neighbour Theocritus of Syracuse.)

Here I lie, sick in the gut —

The bedbugs devour me.

And over there still light and din:

I hear it, they're dancing.

She meant at this very hour

To steal her way to me:

I wait like a dog —

There comes no sign!

The cross she made, when she promised!

How could she lie?

Or does she run after everyone,

Like my goats?

Whence her silken skirt? —

Ah, my proud one?

Does many another billy-goat

Dwell in this wood?

How crabbed and venomous it makes you,

This lovesick waiting!

So on a sultry night there grows

Toadstool in the garden.

Love gnaws away at me

Like seven evils —

I can scarce eat a thing,

Farewell, you onions!

The moon has gone into the sea,

Weary are all the stars,

Grey comes the day along —

I'd gladly die.

The Little Witch.

As long as my little body's pretty,
It surely pays to be pious.
We know that God loves little women,
The pretty ones above all.
He'll gladly pardon the well-mannered little monk,
Of that there's no doubt at all,
That he, like many a little monk,
So longs to be with me.
No grey Father of the Church!
No, young still and often red,
Often like the greyest tomcat
Full of jealousy and need!
I do not love the greybeards,
He does not love the old:
How wondrously and wisely
Has God arranged it so!
The Church knows how to live,
She tests both heart and face.
She's ever keen to forgive me: —
Why, who does not forgive me!

One whispers with one's little mouth,

One curtsies and goes out,

And with the new little sin

One blots the old one out.

Praised be God on earth,

Who loves pretty girls

And such afflictions of the heart

Gladly forgives himself!

As long as my little body's pretty,

It surely pays to be pious:

As a wobbly old crone

The Devil may take me to wife!

The Nocturnal Secret.

Yesternight, when all did sleep,
And the wind with faltering, faint
Sighing through the lanes would creep,
No rest gave me then the pillow,
Nor the poppy, nor what deep
Slumber else will bring — a conscience clean.
Sleep at last I cast away
From my mind and ran to the shore.
Moonbright it was and mild — I found
Man and skiff on the warm sand,
Drowsy both, the shepherd and the sheep: —
Drowsily the skiff pushed off from land.
One hour, or easily two,
Or was it a year? — then sank
Suddenly my sense and thoughts
Into an eternal sameness,
And an abyss without bounds
Opened wide: — and then it was over! —
Morning came: upon black depths
A skiff stands still and rests and rests — —

What befell? so one cried, so cried

A hundred soon — what was it? Blood? —

Nothing befell! We slept, we slept,

All of us — ah, so well! so well!

“Pia, caritatevole, amorosissima”.

(On the campo santo.)

O maiden, who the lambkin's
Soft little fleece doth stroke,
From whom both light and fire
From both your eyes look out,
You lovely thing for jesting,
You darling far and near,
So pious, so mild of heart,
Amorosissima!
What snapped the chain so early?
Who has made your heart grieve?
And if you loved, who would have
Not loved you well enough? —
You are silent — yet the tears
Are near those gentle eyes:
You kept silent — and died of longing,
Amorosissima?

Albatross Bird.

O wonder! Is he still in flight?

He rises upward and his wings are still!

What lifts and bears him, then?

What now is aim and pull and rein to him?

He flew to the highest — now

Heaven itself lifts up the one who flew in triumph:

Now he rests in stillness and hovers,

Forgetting the triumph and the triumphant one.

Like star and eternity

He lives now in heights that life itself flees,

Compassionate even toward envy —:

And high has flown whoever even sees him soar!

O Albatross Bird!

To the heights I am driven with an everlasting drive!

I thought of you: then flowed

Tear upon tear from me — yes, I love you!

A Bird's Verdict.

As I lately, to refresh me,
Sat beneath the darkling trees,
I heard ticking, softly ticking,
Dainty, as by beat and measure.
Cross I grew, and pulled wry faces,
But at last I gave way to it,
Till, just like a poet, I
Even joined the tick-tack talking.
As thus in my making verses
Syllable by syllable its hop-skip sprang,
Suddenly I had to laugh, to laugh
For a quarter of an hour.
You a poet? You a poet?
Is your head in such poor shape? —
„Yes, good sir! You are a poet!“
— Thus spoke the woodpecker bird.

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