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Idylls from Messina

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Friedrich Nietzsche

Modern English edition

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

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Little Poems from Messina

Prince Free-as-a-Bird

So here I am, hanging on a crooked branch,

high above the sea and the little hills.

A bird invited me here as its guest.

I flew after it, and I rest, and rest some more,

and I flap my little wings.

The white sea has fallen asleep,

and every pain and every sigh of mine is asleep too.

I have forgotten where I was going and which harbor I was heading for.

I have forgotten fear, and praise, and punishment.

Now I fly after every bird I see.

Only ever one step after another — that's no way to live!

Always putting one leg in front of the other makes you tired and heavy!

I let the winds lift me up.

I love to float on my wings

and chase after every bird.

Thinking things through? That's a nasty kind of business.

Thinking things through and the tongue both trip up a lot!

Flying gave me new strength

and taught me nicer kinds of business:

singing, joking and playing with songs.

To think alone — that is wise.

To sing alone — that is stupid!

So listen to me, then, singing in my own way,

and sit quietly in a circle around me,

all of you, you pretty little birds!

The Small Sailing Ship Called "Little Angel"

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

Now I'm a ship, but once I was a girl,

Oh, and I'm still very much a girl!

Because it always turns around love,

this fine little ship's wheel of mine. In other words, love is what steers me.

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

I'm decorated with a hundred little flags,

and the most handsome cute little captain

puffs himself up proudly at my wheel,

like a hundred-and-first little flag blowing in the wind.

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

Wherever there's a little flame

burning for me, I run there like a little lamb,

full of longing as I go on my way:

I was always that kind of little lamb.

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

Do you really believe that, like a little dog,

I can bark, and that my little mouth

throws smoke and fire all around?

Oh, my little mouth belongs to the devil!

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

Once I said one little word, a nasty, wicked one,

and because of it, quickly, to the last little place of all,

my dearest love ran away. That last place was his grave:

Yes, he died of that one little word!

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

As soon as I heard it, I jumped off a little cliff

down to the bottom and broke a little rib,

so that my dear soul slipped away:

Yes, it slipped out through that little rib!

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

My soul, like a little kitten,

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

and then swung itself into this little ship —

Yes, it has quick little paws.

Little Angel, that's what they call me —

Now I'm a ship, but once I was a girl,

Oh, and I'm still very much a girl!

Because it always turns around love,

this fine little ship's wheel of mine. In other words, love is what steers me.

The Goat-Herder's Song

(To my neighbor, Theocritus of Syracuse)

Here I lie, sick to my stomach —

The bedbugs are eating me alive.

And over there, there's still light and noise:

I can hear it, they're dancing.

She said that at this very hour

She would sneak over to me:

I'm waiting like a dog —

And there's no sign of her!

She even crossed her heart when she promised!

How could she lie to me?

Or does she run after every man she sees,

Just like my goats do?

Where did she get that silk skirt? —

Oh, my proud one, is that it?

Is there some other billy goat

Living in these woods?

Waiting for the one you love

Makes you so twisted and bitter!

It's like how, on a hot, sticky night,

A poisonous mushroom grows in the garden.

Love is eating away at me

Like seven sicknesses at once —

I hardly feel like eating anything at all.

Goodbye, my onions!

The moon has already sunk into the sea,

All the stars are tired,

The day is coming on, gray and dull —

I'd be glad to die.

The Little Witch

As long as my body is still pretty,
it's worth it to be religious, good.
Everyone knows God loves pretty girls,
and the pretty ones most of all.
He will surely and gladly forgive
the sweet, well-behaved young monk
for wanting, just like many a young monk,
to spend so much time with me.
He's no gray old church father!
No, he's still young, and he often blushes red,
and often, like the grumpiest gray tomcat,
he's full of jealousy and longing!
I don't love old men,
and he doesn't love old women:
How strangely and how wisely
God has set all this up!
The Church knows how life works,
it looks closely at both your heart and your face.
It always wants to forgive me: —
Well, who doesn't forgive me!

You whisper softly with your little mouth,
you curtsy and walk out,
and with a brand-new little sin
you wipe out the old one.
Praise be to God here on earth,
who loves pretty girls
and who gladly forgives himself
for these kinds of troubles of the heart!
As long as my body is still pretty,
it's worth it to be religious, good:
Once I'm a shaky old woman,
the Devil can marry me!

The Night-Time Secret

Last night, when everyone was asleep,

and the wind, with unsure

sighs, barely moved through the narrow streets,

my pillow gave me no rest,

and neither did the poppy, the sleeping medicine, nor the thing that usually makes you sleep deeply

— a clear conscience.

In the end I gave up on sleep

and put it out of my mind, and I ran down to the beach.

The moon was bright and the night was mild. There I found

a man and a small boat lying on the warm sand,

both of them sleepy, like a shepherd and his sheep.

Sleepily the small boat pushed off from the shore.

One hour went by, or maybe two,

or was it a whole year? Then suddenly

my senses and my thoughts sank down

into an endless sameness, where everything was the same forever,

and a bottomless pit with no limits

opened up. And then it was all over!

Morning came. On the black, deep water

a small boat sits there, resting and resting.

"What happened?" someone called out, and soon

a hundred people were calling: "What was it? Was there blood?"

Nothing happened! We were sleeping, sleeping,

all of us. Oh, so well! So well!

"Pious, kind, most loving"

(In the graveyard)

Oh girl, you who gently scratch
the soft little coat of the lamb,
you who have both light and fire
shining out of both your eyes,
you lovely thing to joke and play with,
you darling of everyone, far and near,
so religious and good, so gentle in your heart,
most loving girl!
What broke your chain of life so early?
Who made your heart so sad?
And if you were in love, who could there be
who did not love you back enough?
You say nothing, but tears
are close to your gentle eyes:
Did you keep quiet, and die of longing,
most loving girl?

The Albatross

Oh, what a wonder! Is he still flying?

He climbs higher and higher, and yet his wings are resting!

So what is lifting him and carrying him?

What is his goal, drive and control now?

He flew as high as anyone can fly. Now

the sky itself lifts him up, the one who won by flying:

Now he rests quietly and floats,

forgetting the victory, and forgetting himself, the winner, too.

Like a star, like something that lasts forever,

he now lives up in heights where life itself runs away from, where nothing living can stay,

and he even feels pity for those who envy him.

And anyone who just sees him floating up there has flown high too!

Oh, you albatross!

Something inside me that never stops keeps pushing me upward, toward the heights!

I thought of you, and then

tear after tear ran down my face. Yes, I love you!

The Bird's Judgment

Not long ago, when I wanted to rest and refresh myself,

I sat down under some dark, shady trees,

And I heard a ticking, a soft, quiet ticking,

Neat and delicate, as if it were keeping time to a beat.

I got annoyed and pulled faces,

But in the end I gave in,

Until I even started, just like a poet,

To talk along with the tick-tock myself.

As I was making up verses like this,

And syllable after syllable went hopping and skipping along to the beat,

I suddenly had to laugh and laugh,

For a whole quarter of an hour.

I said to myself: "You, a poet? You, a poet?

Is your head really in such bad shape?"

"Yes, sir! You are a poet!"

That's what said the woodpecker.

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