

Robert Desnos

Poems from

The Secret Book For Youki

Translated by Todd Sanders

The eight poems featured here were written by Desnos in a period of two weeks in November, 1932. He bound the poetry in a handmade book (entitled The Secret Book For Youki) illustrated with gouaches he painted.

With the dawn of a day, a throw of the dice
he stops at the edge of the fountains of his life
where he seeks a mirage promised to him
he cools his head, quenches his thirst
And pronounces this word: chérie
which resounds through the dreams of a sleeping city
cradling it in its last vision.
There will not be one less day
in his love and in yours.
And his echoes of sleep multiply
this word alone: chérie.

12 November 1932

3 o'clock in the morning

With the siren queen
there is a cabaret where I am sitting down for a meal
this evening
among tables empty and naked as tombs.
Black tie waiters
Busy around chairs without occupants:
In their suits of ravens
They appear to celebrate
the marriage of solitude and night

and me I wait.

Sometimes the telephone rings and no one answers
and perhaps it is she at the end of the line,
far from here, calling me
but no one answers
and I do not know what force forbids me
to go over to take the receiver in my hands and say:
"It is me, alcohol shines in bottles
come, come rapidly,
we will drink all night if you desire it
If you want to sleep, you will sleep in my arms
while waiting for the morning of crystal dew and wet sheets
that fall as a wave on the city."

Over there, the house is empty
I run from room to room calling
I cry on your pillow
I sob your name
because no year passing after another year
will be able to distract my thought from your thought
my desire from your desire
and my mouth from your mouth.

Sheets will dirty without being crumpled
on the bed where you liked to sleep
and I, heartbroken to be alone, call your name, imagining
what insults you submit to
foul, filthy worms that destiny
has set upon our path.

13-11-32

incantation

Let nothing reach them nor anything separate them
Let nothing separate the seahorse from the siren
the siren from the seahorse,

120 Janus Head

Robert from Youki,
Youki from Robert.

Let anyone who would try it
be put to death, be punished,
suffer a thousand evils

By their embraces and their kisses
by their words their confidences
their common secrets, their flesh
and let nothing reach her but that which is
in its beauty in its youth
in its health in its fortune
in its happiness and in its life
and let them be united soon.

a dream of days passed

I love you Youki - before I even knew you I loved you -
I waited for you - I searched for you - I will love you always -
She is my daughter - She is my woman - I am loved the best
She is who I alone love - We will be united soon
my child - my chérie - my daughter - my pain - my peace -
my joy - my luxury - my treasure.

13-11-32

youki, light of my nights

Do you remember - the nights when you appeared
At the window of my door?
When you rose up in the darkness of my house
When you fell down in a heap on my bed like a great bird
Tired of passing the oceans and the plains and the forests.
Do you remember - your words of greeting, of salvation
Do you remember - my words of welcome

my words of love?
 No, you do not remember,
 No one remembers the present, no one...
 Now, it is night,
 You appear, you arrive, you fall in a heap on my bed
 I am your servant and your submissive defender obedient
 to your law as you are to my love.
 It is midnight it is noon
 It is quarter past midnight
 It is half past midnight
 It is midnight to come or noon just passed
 It is midday ringing
 It is always midday ringing for my love
 For our love
 All sounds all sighs and your lips
 And on my bed you fall in a heap between midnight
 and four in the morning like a great albatross
 Escaping storms.

27-11-32

The city formerly the city at one time the last city
 O sky black as a widow
 snow star tower comet ramparts
 at Villeneuve and at Chaville
 at Deauville and at Trouville
 at Tancarville at Vieuville
 The city formerly the city at one time the last city
 A fire rises from a roof as a pigeon
 and the rose of midnight bursts skyward
 at Villeneuve and at Chaville
 at Villevieille at Ville l'Évêque
 at Melleville at Villeville
 let the rose lose its petals
 the leaves of the book will survive
 The city formerly the city at one time the last city
 The sky of the rose at midnight

And the book will open to the page where love
resounds like a porcelain universe
collapsing abysses in abysses
with the sparkling of constellations
the whiteness of the snow
and perfumes of the grand flower gardens
where every hour your hand will come to gather roses.

28-11-32

A funny little red fellow
meets a funny little green fellow
And that is what ends
A dream of beautiful eyes
resulting from a bouquet of worries
And we run off and chase one another.
We passed by here
We will pass by there again
And we run
And we laugh
None of this is a joke
It is love it is life
It is your beautiful eyes my darling.

1. My dear my dear my Youki
2. I love and will none but you
3. And you will love me when I call you Youki
4. Return my dear
5. Hours flow waiting for you
6. I think only of you
7. Remember your words of hope Youki
8. Do not prepare me for one more great disappointment
9. My chérie
10. You and no other than you
11. And no other than me
12. Is this not my love