

# **PAUL VERLAINE**

**FORGOTTEN LITTLE ARIAS**

**TRANSLATED BY KEITH WALDROP**

I

A breeze over the plain  
Holds its breath.  
—Favart

Ecstasy's half-heart,  
Loves that tire;  
Woods shudder and start  
Caressed by the breeze,  
Above turning leaves  
A chirping choir.

Faint murmured bustle,  
Twitter and buzz,  
From wind-ruffled grass  
The hint of a gasp...  
The way, under a stream,  
Mute pebbles rustle.

That soul in pain  
On this sluggish plain,  
It is, isn't it, our own?  
Mine, yes, and yours,  
Breathing meek hymns  
Through tepid twilight hours.

## II

I sense, amid murmurs, some  
Subtle vein of voices gone  
And, with glimmers of music,  
Wan love and a coming dawn.

And my soul, my heart, delirious,  
Become a kind of double eye,  
Across a troubled day grinds out  
A little air, alas, the common cry.

O my frightened Love, I'd like  
To die my death alone, my way,  
Balance the then and the now,  
Teeter-totter away my day.

III

It rains gently on the town<sup>1</sup>  
—Arthur Rimbaud

Tears in my heart  
Like rain on rooftops.  
What pining is this  
That razes my heart?

Mild ringing of rain  
On pavement, on tile.  
In a heavy heart  
How it sings, the rain.

Tears without cause  
In this disheartened heart.  
What! Unbetrayed?  
Mourning for no cause?

The deepest pain's  
Not to know why,  
Empty of love, of hate,  
My heart holds such pain.

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<sup>1</sup> There seems no reason to doubt the authenticity of this line, though the poem is lost.

## IV

We must, as you can see, forgive ourselves things  
So as to let ourselves be happy, and whether  
Or not our life has morose moments  
At least, don't you agree? we can weep together.

Oh that we might, we sister souls,  
Mix with our vows the childish art  
Of avoiding equally women and men,  
Forgetting frankly what sets us apart.

Let us be two children, let's be two girls  
Stuck on nothing—by each thing stunned—even  
Beneath chaste arbors paling,  
Unaware how all's forgiven.

## V

Joyful irritating sound from a  
harpsichord

—Pétrus Borel

The piano, kissed by a delicate touch,  
Glowing vaguely in the gray and pinkish dusk,  
While with a wing's light whir  
An old and faint and quite charming air  
Prowls, a bit frightened, in the boudoir  
Scented by Her long presence there.

What is this unexpected cradle  
Slowly swaddling my soul in pain?  
What do you want of me, sweet playful song?  
What have you come for, subtle abrupt refrain  
Decaying where that window, unlatched,  
Opens out across a garden patch?

## VII

Sad was my soul, oh sad enough to cry.  
And a woman, I tell you, a woman is why.

And my heart has found no consolation,  
Not even through renunciation,

Although my heart, my soul as well,  
From that woman fled like hell.

But my heart, it found no consolation,  
Nothing through renunciation.

And my heart, that feels so much,  
Said to my soul, Could it be such?

Could it be — was it in fact —  
Really a proud exile, this sad act?

My soul answered my heart: How do we  
Know but what in store for you and me

Is exile, but still this same location,  
At once presence and renunciation?

## VIII

In the evermore  
Ennui of the plain  
Uncertain snow shimmers  
Like sand on a shore.

The sky is copper  
That's lost its sheen.  
The moon's life and death  
Can perhaps be seen.

Like clouds in the sky  
Float great gray oaks  
Obscured by fog  
In the woods near-by.

The sky is copper  
That's lost its sheen.  
The moon's life and death  
Can probably be seen.

Rasping crows  
And you lean wolves,  
In this arctic wind, what  
Now, do you propose?  
In the evermore  
Ennui of the plain



Uncertain snow shimmering  
Like sand on the shore.

## IX

The nightingale, perched high and  
seeing his image below, thinks himself  
fallen into the river. On the top limb of  
an oak he fears he will drown.

—Cyrano de Bergerac

Shadows of trees on the mist-covered river  
Die like smoke blown  
While in the air, in actual branches  
Mourning doves mourn.

How this pale landscape, traveler, will mirror  
Paleness of your own  
And how sadly, in the high foliage, your hopes  
Weep as they drown!