

# The Eagle and the Serpent

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"When the sun was at noon, Zarathustra suddenly looked upwards wondering—for above himself he heard the sharp cry of a bird. And lo! an eagle swept through the air in wide circles, a serpent hanging from it not like a prey, but like a friend; coiling round its neck.

" 'They are mine animals,' said Zarathustra, and rejoiced heartily. 'The proudest animal under the sun, and the wisest animal under the sun have set out to reconnoiter . . . More dangerous than among animals I found it among men. Let mine animals lead me!' "

—*Nietzsche*

The Eagle of the Dusky Wing  
Swirls and then droops in wheeling flight,  
And casts a glance unpitying  
Over the shadowed Hills of Light;  
Poised o'er the Valley of Dry Bones  
He cries in harsh unwond'ring tones.

About the Eagle's neck a Snake  
Hisses and twirls, slips slack and twines,  
His eyes as the wide sun awake,  
His breath as fierce as poisoned wine's.  
Unwinking he the Valley scans,  
His voice hushes as a pious man's.

"Return, return to early fields;  
Look back, look back to fading day:  
The mother Earth her harvest yields,  
The sun illumines the natural way.  
Give ear and turn, nor be thy breath  
Enchanted to martyrdom and death.

"The Son of Man hath fallen deep,  
The Man of Sun hath yet to rise,—  
Go! thrust from off thy brows the sleep  
That dims thine eyes, that dims thine eyes.

Return, return, and still return:  
Live in the sunlight, bask and burn.

"The wind from the high hills of Day  
Blows on thy hair and dreaming eyes;  
The sunlight floods the only way  
That gives thee power, that makes thee wise.  
Give ear, before thy race is done,  
O thou who hast blasphemed the sun!

"Be cunning, if thou be not strong,  
Be bitter, if thou be not fair,  
For Might is Right, and Right is Wrong,  
If thou would'st breathe the purer air,  
Let not thy spirit quail; be wise,  
Nor let love dazzle thy strong eyes.

"The kingdom of the setting sun  
Is thine, but we, we scan the day,  
And as we rise the night is none,  
For nought defiles the perfect Way  
Of strength and might and wisdom; we  
Dwell with the One Infinity.

"Lips locked in love, the mystic light  
Serves but for twain, should serve for all,  
Why should ye greet the coming night,  
Why should ye be the Dark's fell thrall?  
Was it for this ye strove and rose  
From primal pain, from primal foes?

"To ye hath given the wise old Nurse  
And Mother, on whose breast ye've lain,  
A respite from the primal Curse,  
A breathing-space from strife and pain.  
Will ye ungrateful bow and bend  
To alien gods, that nothing lend?

"Nothing? Aye! Less than nothing. Ye  
Are on the knees to phantom kings,  
Poor pictures of the things ye see,  
Gods with dull eyes and broken wings,  
If wings that ever knew, who creep  
Within the shades of death and sleep.

"Awake! Be wise! Ah! Not for long  
Your message to the star-course rings;  
Not ever may I cry 'Be Strong,'  
Not ever shall resound my wings.  
Cast off the lumber of the years.  
The kings, the powers, the loves, the fears.

"O Son of Man, thy fall is deep;  
Will ye not rise to wiser gods?  
Too long ye've sung of death and sleep,  
And forged your tyrant's ruling rods.  
Arise! Cast off the web ye've spun;  
Stand naked to the rising sun!"

The dark wings flap, the night draws on,  
The Eagle flies abroad to prey;  
The wonder of the song is gone  
With daylight and the love of day;  
Calm stars o'ershine the fields we ploughed,  
The laugh of peasants rises loud.

And round the board we sit and raise  
Our voices o'er the sparkling wine  
That holds the light of other days,  
That breathes of youth and hours divine,  
When the sun gave the grapes their bloom,  
When the air bore the press's fume.

The board resounds with laughter wild,  
And singing song and high and deep,  
The hours with mirth are still begulled,  
And then come weariness and sleep.  
New day shall find new fields to plough,  
Fresh sweat shall stream from each strong brow.

The winds from off the hills of day  
The Eagle sang, shall fan our brows,—  
Those hills so bright, so far away,  
Beyond the reach of feet and ploughs.  
So shall we wait in peace the night,  
When maybe stars shall give their light.

And if the summer rains fall swift,  
And if the night in clouds be veiled,  
The morning shall the clouds see drift,

Nor hath earth's harvest ever failed.  
The night our feasting shall renew,  
The morning break with golden hue.

The winds from the bright hills of day  
Have eyrie-wards the Eagle borne;  
The Snake has sought the hidden Way,  
His glittering eyes grown cold i scorn.  
Around the board we sit, and give  
Thanks to the sun whereby we live.