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The Nightingale

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The Nightingale

Additional Keywords

Elizabeth Byrom

The **N**ightingale
for Ronnie

The dry sand rustles like satin curtains closing.
Listen, fishermen. It is the whisper of time.
The pine trees say it and the old one has heard it.

The emperor is dying, falling away, down
To the emerald sea, the soundless rush of it,
Absorbed in the formless green, the womb of the world.

A hoard of living silver will buy your voices,
Your brown feet stamping the wet sand, the hard rhythm
Of chanting, the ceremonial of dying.

When dusk dims the almond blossom by the window
The nightingale will pour her cataract of prayer
Into the star-strewn ocean of her master's dreams.

The blue jade sunclads among the porcelain roses
In the peacock garden have numbered his heart beats,
Each silken slipperfall, each breath of sandalwood.

Sages and saints, framed in the golden tapestry,
By the waters of paradise, watch their good lord
Drink his last cup from the fathomless well of days.

Fishermen, do you hear the copper bells beating
In the forest shrine where your fading sea-gifts lie,
The harsh lamentation of eagles on the shore?

Before the moon washes the bright picture away
The jewelled nightingale will cast her threnody
From the black branches drawn on the pale salmon sky.

The long wind hissing over the dunes has heaped up
A burial mound, a mountain of memories;
The last grain of sand has fallen in the hour glass.

Incense of aloes, the sweet smoke of sacrifice
Rises like sea mist from the altar of heaven,
From the dark temple where desolate consorts weep.

The fishing boats sail down the rivers of the moon
To seek the lost islands of immortality.
Hidden pearls beyond price in the uttermost east.

When dawn draws back the gentle curtain of the night
The nightingale will soar to the celestial realm
And sing to her master of true love for ever.

Mark Alaby

calligraphy - Elizabeth Byrom