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Translation Of "Conversation Between Me And The Women" By A. P. Bunina

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◆ ANNA BUNINA ◆

Conversation between Me and the Women

(Russian text p. 403)

THE WOMEN

Our sister dear, what joy for us!
You are a poetess! your palette's able,
Holding all shades, to paint an ode, a fable;
Your heart must brim with praise for us!
A man's tongue, though... Ah, God preserve us, dear! 5
Sharp as a knife is sharp!
In Paris, London—as in Russia here—
They're all the same! On just one string they harp:
Naught but abuse—and ladies always suffer!
We wait for madrigals—it's epigrams they offer. 10
Don't expect brothers, husbands, fathers, sons
To praise you even once.
How long we've lacked a songstress of our own!
So, do you sing? Pray answer, yes or no?

ME

Yes, yes, dear sisters! Thanks be to Providence 15
I have been singing now for five years since.

THE WOMEN

And in those years, what have you sung and how?
Though few of us, in truth, have Russian educations,
And Russian verses make such complications!
Besides, you know, they aren't in fashion now. 20

ME

I sing all Nature's beauteous hues,
 Above the flood the hornèd sickle moon;
 I count the little drops of dew,
 I hymn the sun's ascension in the morn.
 Flocks gambolling in the fields enjoy my care: 25
 I give reed pipes unto the shepherdesses,
 Flowers I entwine in their companions' tresses,
 That are so flaxen-fair;
 I order them to take each other's hands,
 To caper to a dance, 30
 And as their fleet feet pass,
 To trample not a single blade of grass.
 Up to the heavens rocky crags I raise,
 I plant out branchy trees
 To rest an old man in their shady breeze 35
 On summer's sultry days;
 I search the roses for bright insects' wings,
 And, having summoned feathered birds to sing,
 I languish pale
 To the sweet warble of the nightingale. 40
 Or, all at once, freeing the horse's manes,
 I order them to race the wind;
 And with their hooves dust to the clouds they fling.
 I draw a corn-field crowned with ears of grain,
 Which, from the sun's bright rays 45
 Takes on the look of seas
 Of molten gold,
 Sways, ripples, dazzles, shines—
 Blinding the eye,
 As humble ploughmen their reward behold. 50
 In fortifying my own timid voice
 Through Nature's loveliness,
 I'm braver in a flash!

THE WOMEN

Fie! what balderdash!
 There's not one word in this for us! 55

Tell us what good such singing does?
 What use are all your livestock, polled and horned
 To us, who weren't as herdsmen born?
 So, with the beasts you feel at home?
 Well! ... if that's your topic, then, 60
 Hide in a den,
 Among the fields, pray, roam,
 And never haunt the capitals in vain!

ME

O no, dear sisters, come!
 People are also in my ken. 65

THE WOMEN

Commendable! but whom *have* you sung, then?

ME

At times I've hymned the deeds of mighty men,
 Who, when the bloody fight drew near,
 Declared for faith and Tsar; they knew no fear.
 Shaking with my lament the field of quarrels 70
 I bore them thence away with laurels,
 Dropping a tear.

At times I've left this grievous task,
 And passed to those who keep the laws,
 I've filled my soul with cheer, 75
 And rested 'neath their aegis, free from cares.

At times to poets I've inclined my ear
 And bent the knee before their thunderous lyres.
 At times
 Moved by esteem, 80
 I've made the chemist or astronomer my theme.

THE WOMEN

And here again we're missing from your rhymes!
 You do us quite a service!
 So what good *are* you? Don't you make things worse?
 Why did you bother learning to sing verse? 85

You ought to take your themes from your own circle.
'Tis only men you honour with your lays,
As if their sex alone deserved your praise.
You traitress! Give our case some thought!
 For is this what you ought? 90
Are their own founts of flattery too few,
Or can they boast of more than our virtue?

ME

It's true, my dears, you are no less,
 But understand:
With men, not you, the courts of taste are manned 95
 Where authors all must stand,
And all an author's fame is in their hands,
And none can help loving himself the best.¹

Translated by Sibelan Forrester

¹ May I be forgiven for this jest in deference to the merry Muses, who love to mix business with idleness, lies with truth, and to enliven conversation with innocent playfulness. [Author's note.]