

The Mother's Prayer

by

ADA LINDEN

Stanza I

With lights flashing while a signal calls
In the train station's vast halls,
The iron horse begins to snort and groan.
Wrapped in smoke and wreathed in steam,
The young engineer waits high up and supreme
For the signal for departure to be blown.

Stanza II

And he sees a young woman decked out in jewelry and rings,
Who on her husband's arm clings:
Stepping out of the shadowy station,
Coquettishly, she boards the train, her beauty casting a spell;
Her youthful body seems to swell,
As she nestles into the compartment's cushioned accommodation.

Stanza III

Roaring o'er hill and stream,
On the mighty wings of steam,
Through the night the train races;
Thundering o'er bridges it flies —
The engineer, with sullen eyes,
Puts the iron steed through its paces.

Stanza IV

About him, coils of steam rise from every side
Mixing into wild contortions, unsanctified,
Feverish and like a demonic host.
From the boiler flues droning,
They rush, swell and hiss in moaning
As if from the blanched lips of a ghost.

Stanza V

“You, whose heart must suffer so much woe,
Behind you, laughing, on a velvet pillow
Sits the girl who told you lies!
You saw her caressing another like a courtesan
While poking fun at the dismal man
To whom she had sworn love and fidelity with deceiving eyes.

Stanza VI

A flick of the wrist, the slightest change,
Is all you need to rearrange
The hurt you feel from such a slight.
Set us free, in a wild nocturnal race;
Our full powers, unleashed in this place,
Will unite two hearts in death on the selfsame night.

Stanza VII

Do not hesitate to abbreviate pain!
Unshackle us! Let the derailed train
Tumble into the darkest hole;
At the rocky bottom of an apocalypse,
Death will kiss those painted lips,
And you will be released from the torment of your soul!”

Stanza VIII

“What you say, wild spirits, is no doubt true;
Lord and master, I shall no longer give his due,
Today my allegiance shall forever cease!”
Shaking, he is about to raise a hand in spite;
Suddenly the gentle rays of a tiny light
Cause his quivering to increase.

Stanza IX

(Schrattenthal's anthology - 1888)	(Ada Linden's <i>Aus der Stille</i> - 1896)
Through the storm's black night A lamp twinkles bright In the cabin where the signalman lives. It is late at night; a chamber is illuminated, An old woman sits praying and supplicated By the light it peacefully gives.	Low-set window panes send a signal In the night with a peaceful twinkle, And a quick glance shows A cozy room, small and plain, An old woman whispering a prayer's refrain Where a lamp in silence glows.

Stanza X

As quick as a flash, the scene is gone;
Yet the wild yearning for revenge has withdrawn,
The power of a prayer can render
Demons for what they are – and make them fly.
Majestically, from the firmament on high,
A star sends a greeting in radiant splendor.

Stanza XI
[Deleted in the 1896 Version]

The engineer is homeward-bound;
In his thoughts his mother stands out profound
In the darkness of the night;
A mother — and she is his —
Prays that her son is well and lives,
Just as this one did by a lamp's gentle light.

Stanza XII

(Schrattenthal's anthology - 1888)	(Ada Linden's <i>Aus der Stille</i> - 1896)
And he feels her pious blessing Even in the dark of night his path caressing, Guarding over him and taking him by the arm. Even should darkness engulf his soul, Like a guardian angel, its wings the young man will enfold, His mother's prayer shielding him from all harm.	And the engineer gives praise To the blessing which his spirits raise, In his darkest hour, taking him by the arm. Even if he should be devoured by hell, Like a guardian angel, its wings those fires will quell, His mother's prayer shielding him from all harm.

Stanza XIII
[Deleted in the 1896 Version]

Now the battle has been clearly won
Her son has now courageously undone
The temptations of a heart run wild.
With head held high and freed from wrath,
He stands composed as the train steams down its path.
Then looking upwards, he gives thanks for heaven's mercy mild.

Stanza XIV

Roaring o'er hill and stream,
On the mighty wings of steam,
Through the night the train races;
Safely o'er bridges it flies —
Guiding the iron steed, with watchful eyes,
Stands a good man whose duty he embraces.

Translated by Norman Barry (May 2008)