DIRECTION

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WILLIAM SAROYAN:
With a Hey Nonny Nonny

Within the Sunday night silence of the place he moved along the sleeping street toward the house where Maria lived, feeling through his movement the sharp certainty of his life. He was glad about this, which was private, and it was a gladness of inward smiling, but deeper within than his smiling was his bitterness about his people, laboring in the valley, and still deeper was his violent hatred for that in life which made his people suffer, and he said to himself, repeating Agunaga's words, Tomorrow we will make a beginning. All of us will go from the fields to our houses and we will not pick their cotton and we will not harvest their crops of melons and peaches and grapes, and we will stand idle in our houses, waiting for anything. We will go from the fields and stand in our houses.

Agunaga was the orator, the organizer.

Walking, he felt himself reaching fully the moment of his mortality, the clear and clean moment of his movement, to Maria, of his thoughts and remembrance, and he breathed deeply, breathing the name and the substance of the girl, grateful to God for the quiet and strong life within himself, and breathing, he prayed, using the vocabulary of simple souls, the wordless language of being, and each intake of breath was the equivalent of a pious exclamation, devotion to God.

From a distance he heard faintly the jangling of a player-piano that stood in the entrance way to the Hollywood Picture House. The music came to him through the quietness of the night as a universal sadness in the heart of man, a strange yearning for the precise and ineffable, a melancholy longing for the grace of a solid and more precise life, for love and truth and dignity, and even if the music itself was nervous, fidgety as men had been made fidgety by the feverishness of the time, it was still somehow glorious.

He paused in the darkness of the street, listening, feeling that his own life was related to the abstract life of the jangling music, seeking

to understand the meaning of himself in the street and the strange music with him there. Somewhere it seemed that he had heard the music before, only then the music had been wholly beautiful, rising from the earth itself, from the warm earth before his coming from plants growing and streams flowing and men singing and women dancing, coming up from the truth of the earth to the warmth of the heart of man, flowing there, and now, years afterwards, returning again to the weary silence of the street as a jangling of a player-piano, and American song, the way Americans made their songs, the music nervous and the words foolish: *with a hey nonny nonny and a ha-cha-cha.*

Agunaga was sad and he was angry, and he said, we must do this. We must make this beginning. No matter what happens, no matter what they do to us, we must do it. In the morning, from the fields to our houses.

He walked on, thinking, I am now almost seventeen and I have lived all these years upon the earth, thinking, no matter what happens, I shall be somewhere upon this earth forever, thinking, it is because of Maria, because I love her and am now walking to her, thinking, tomorrow all of us will turn away from the fields, our earth, and go to our houses, waiting for their ugly wrath.

As a small boy, going with his mother and father and his sisters and brothers from one place of laboring to another, he had dreamed Maria, feeling that she must be alive somewhere upon the earth since the thought of her was in him, of itself, as if it had been born there always, time and time again, through many births and many deaths, a timelessness of heart, and on long afternoons, deep beneath the heat of a summer universe, he had seen her rising from some bright plain like a splendid flower, suddenly whole with the sun's love and miraculously mortal, of face and form, able to move and talk and laugh and sing and be silent, and he had leapt inwardly with joy and awe at the knowledge that he would someday surely find her, fully formed and mortal and breathing, and himself of a sufficient strength and piety to go to her, though his heart died in him with adoration, and speak to her or merely stand in her presence, saying no word, but somehow carrying with him the truth of his love, of his timeless need of her, his ancient seeking after her.

He walked on, feeling the strange rhythm in his blood: *with a hey nonny nonny.*

On the front porch of her house he spoke to the girl. Tomorrow, he said. Agunaga says that we must not work to make them rich.

He told her all that Agunaga had said, and the girl listened but did not speak.

She was a year younger than Rivas and lovelier, more perfect even than his dream of her, being real, and although he had known her only a

month it seemed to him that he had known her always, from the first, that he had always been near her, beside her, within her, the fulfillment of herself and himself, the completion of themselves, their truth and reality, the finality of all mortality, of each as each and of each as one.

Speaking to her, he saw himself with the girl in the good house, in a quiet place of the good earth, beneath the sun, their lives quiet and timeless, and he wondered if they would let him earn enough to buy the house and a small part of the earth and be alive with her there. Would they let him live this life he wanted so much?

He remembered with bitterness the inevitable events of tomorrow: the going from the fields to the houses, the cessation of his labor on the earth, the singing of his body there, and he said again this time almost sadly, tomorrow all of us are going to leave the fields and go to the houses, and while he spoke he could see the consequent ugliness of the performance, the rich ones angry and the poor ones angry, and then bitter hate, and then perhaps running and shouting and killing: and his blood sang *with a hey nonny nonny.*

Going from the girl, he felt himself remaining beside her, her shadow, the fullness of her being, emerging from life with her to sleep, the good sleep of the innocent and poor, his inward shape moving with her over the hidden earth, the place where he was timeless with her, where ugliness could not exist.

He was with the men in the morning, working in the field, sensing the quiet sullenness of everyone there, feeling remotely within himself that the inevitable ugliness of the event would mar his dream, perhaps destroy it, change the course of his blood and thought, and unconsciously he began to think, as if he or she were dead, of Maria saying her name over and over again, breathing the bitterness of a ghastly and violent and unknown frustration, his blood foolishly remarking *with a hey nonny nonny,* doing it in English, while the rest of it, more deeply inward, spoke in Mexican, saying the name, his anger coming up to his mouth because it was known in him that the event of the morning would end monstrously, in some stupid frustration, smashing the good house to pieces, annihilating the good earth, effacing the good sun, stifling his speech, stopping his laughter, mangling the inward form of Maria, killing him.

He could feel all this within himself deeply, and it was so much of an ugly truth to him that he wanted to stand tall on the earth, as tall as a great tree, and shout at all who brought about such things: no you fools, no. But he could do nothing and in desperation he turned to the man beside him.

Suddenly it was known among all the men that the time had come. Rivas, moving helplessly, walked with the men from the field his heart crying out against the performance, saying that it was evil, that they should labor because of the goodness of labor.

If they speak to you, said an old man, say that you know nothing. Tell them to see Agunaga.

Yes, said the boy.

From the dirt road he turned and saw the desolating scene, his heart sickening within him, the endless field empty of man, all the cotton ready for the picking, everyone sullen and angry, and the good sun, quietly in the sky, unaware of them, and far down the road hundreds of them walking away from their labor, silently turning from the earth, refusing any longer to be of it, wanting more, wanting all, each man nourishing within himself the ugly passion of greed, of hatred and defiance, and his own heart violent with despair and bewilderment, crying out that it was wrong, knowing that the whole thing would end monstrously, in some ghastly frustration.

He saw Agunaga, slim and quiet and sorrowful, leading his people from the earth, and the man on the horse hurrying to him, dust rising from the places where the horse had run, hurrying. He turned suddenly and ran down the road to Agunaga, wanting to hear what he would say, and he heard someone shout, *Rivas, come back here,* but he did not even pause or turn around, and he reached Agunaga just as the man on the horse reached him. The man's face hideous with amazement and anger; monstrously, his blood said, *with a hey nonny nonny.*

What do you call this? said the man on the horse, the horse stamping down the soft hot dust, the dust rising.

Agunaga answered quietly. We planted the cotton, he said. We led water to it. We killed the weeds. Now it is ready for picking and we will pick it, but we must be paid for our labor. We are going to our houses.

The man began to swear and he said he would have other workers in the field in less than an hour, and he said Agunaga and his people would have to get out of the company's houses. Or else, said the man, we will force you out.

Agunaga said nothing and the man turned on the horse and went away. Then Agunaga said, stay in your houses, and from the quiet way in which he said this Rivas knew how bitter and angry Agunaga was, and he knew the whole thing would end monstrously.

Agunaga said that each man was to stay near his own house, no matter what happened, and go nowhere else, and in the afternoon, when the real trouble began, Rivas was sitting on the porch of his house, his two younger brothers and his younger sister inside with his mother. He could feel that the whole thing would turn out foolishly, something almost glorious, but like the American music foolish, and he did not know what to do or what to think because he could feel himself being torn from all that he wanted of life, and it seemed to him that he was losing Maria and that the consequence of their performance would be a ghastly frustration.

The real trouble began when workers were brought from Bakersfield, from the pool rooms and the gambling joints, men who were not really of the earth, who were not really workers, and the trouble grew when these men, carrying shovels and knives and guns, and urged by the company to do so, came to the houses of the Mexicans and told them to get out, many men, low and vicious and wanting to do vicious things, and the Mexicans would not get out.

The houses were simple and they weren't worth fighting about, but the Mexicans had lived in them many months, and Agunaga had told them not to leave the houses, and when the men from Bakersfield swore at the Mexicans and threatened to kill them, the big trouble began and there was running, and Rivas, knowing that the whole thing would end monstrously, but angry because his brothers and his sisters and his mother were inside the house, frightened and weeping, ran with the others, against the men from Bakersfield, and running his blood sprang upward bitterly and he knew they would surely kill him because he was fearless, and he struck them and they knocked him down, and he jumped to his feet, swearing sullenly with his blood, aching with it for Maria, knowing that his dream would be marred forever, and there was one man with a shovel and Rivas knocked this man down and began swinging it at them, and he could hear the player-piano of the Hollywood Picture House jangling out the sad and weary music of the heart of man, *with a hey nonny nonny,* and he stumbled and fell and he got up insane with bitterness, and just before he was shot he heard his mother shout from the porch of his house, Juan JUAN JUAN, and as he fell into the blackness he knew that she had fainted and that it was mangled, all of it, the whole earth effaced, and his body sank into the dust, blood spurting from his head, and the sun ended, and Maria perished, and he had no thought and no dream, but his blood was still angry and still warm and it kept leaping upward, high as a tree, shouting her name, *Maria, Maria,* and it was all foolish, and he knew it would be stupid like the American music, *with a hey nonny nonny,* the whole thing ending pathetically with his body mangled and his spirit destroyed, as a ghastly frustration, his blood wanting Maria and the good house and the good earth and the warm sun, and saying over and over again, Maria, Maria, and humming to him, as he turned to rock, *with a hey nonny nonny, with a hey nonny nonny.*