

On Hearing “The Girl with the Flaxen Hair” by Nikki Giovanni¹

He has a girl who has flaxen hair
My woman has hair of gray
I have a woman who wakes up at dawn
His girl can sleep through the day 4

His girl has hands soothed with perfumes sweet
She has lips soft and pink
My woman’s lips burn in midday sun
My woman’s hands—black like ink 8

He can make music to please his girl
Night comes I’m tired and beat
He can make notes, make her heart beat fast
Night comes I want off my feet 12

Maybe if I don’t pick cotton so fast
Maybe I’d sing pretty too
Sing to my woman with hair of gray
Croon softly, Baby it’s you 16

¹ Giovanni, Nikki. *The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*. William Morrow and Company, Inc. New York: 1996.

La fille aux cheveux de lin

Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle

Sur la luzerne en fleur assise,
Qui chante dès le frais matin?
C'est la fille aux cheveux de lin,
La belle aux lèvres de cerise.

L'amour, au clair soleil d'été,
Avec l'alouette a chanté.

Ta bouche a des couleurs divines,
Ma chère, et tente le baiser!
Sur l'herbe en fleur veux-tu causer,
Fille aux cils longs, aux boucles fines?

L'amour, au clair soleil d'été,
Avec l'alouette a chanté.

Ne dis pas non, fille cruelle!
Ne dis pas oui! J'entendrai mieux
Le long regard de tes grands yeux
Et ta lèvre rose, ô ma belle!

Adieu les daims, adieu les lièvres
Et les rouges perdrix! Je veux
Baiser le lin de tes cheveux,
Presser la pourpre de tes lèvres!

L'amour, au clair soleil d'été,
Avec l'alouette a chanté.

The girl with the flaxen hair

English Translation © Richard Stokes

Seated among the flowering alfalfa,
who is singing in the cool morning?
It is the girl with the flaxen hair,
the beauty with the cherry lips.

Love, in the clear summer sun,
has sung with the lark.

Your mouth has heavenly colours,
my love, and invites kisses!
Would you like to converse on the flowering grass,
O long-lashed girl with the delicate curls?

Love, in the clear summer sun,
has sung with the lark.

Do not say no, cruel girl!
Do not say yes! I would sooner listen
to the long look of your wide-open eyes
and your delicate mouth, O my love!

Farewell to the deer, farewell to the hares
and the russet partridges! I want
to kiss your blonde hair,
press the purple of your lips!

Love, in the clear summer sun,
has sung with the lark.

Translation © Richard Stokes, author of *A French Song Companion* (Oxford, 2000)