

# A MONUMENT TO MY DARLING VAHRAM

*Posted on September 13, 2013 by Keghart*



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***Excerpts from A MONUMENT TO MY DARLING VAHRAM, by Vahé-Vahian, selected and translated by Hovhanness I. Pilikian in such a way that together they constitute a whole, and give the reader a sense of the whole book of 29 poems.***

***For the stanza numbers, a small typeface is chosen, as unobtrusive as possible, so that the totality of the text may be read as one long poem, even though the extracts are from different poems (numbered correctly from the original text, although never translated in their totality).***

My heart; a volcano, my eyes; fountains of lava...  
Do not approach me, friends, lest you burn.

That I may not turn to clouds and rain, O you people,  
Do not touch me, not even with your glances.

He was my son, dawning upon my darkness,  
How he went down so early and so soon.

My soul; a censer, his memory – noble incense –  
Turns in me blue fumes and perfume.

When shall, when will, the path be clear,  
That with no more interruptions,  
I may reach him, never to part again, in eternal union,

XVI

And now already a whole year  
Has gone by, slipped away,  
From the sweet moment of our last meeting ...

Tell me, my sweet son, how may I bear it,  
When I long for everything by you,  
Your shy smile, the shadow of your eyelashes,  
The breadth of your shoulders, the thick hair on your chest,

I long for your words, and for those still unsaid.

From Cleveland to New York and from there to London,  
I arrived then, why, my heart

O my heart, the door of your desolation,  
Sometimes strong now breathless, half-dead,

My eyes frozen and my arms dangling,  
I do not know how, O my bursting heart,

In the thick crowd at the airport,

I saw your elder sister standing,  
In a black dress, like a black pillar,  
Standing there as if turned to stone.

What happened then and how did it happen?  
Only Koko your in-law knows best;  
Shogher in black wrapped herself around me tightly.

"Papa, do not ask about Vahram",  
She said and sobbed silently so,  
Her whole body, pressed to mine,  
Was all a-shiver!

The shocks of an electrical current,  
That I shall feel run through me,  
Every time my thoughts go  
To that black instant,  
When a couple of black flames,  
Invisibly but with the same heat,

Were burning in an embrace...

Your brother Tsolak,  
My only one now left upon this earth,  
Sparkling once in appearance like flint-stone,  
Now he is soggy, like honey-bread...

And repeats the same words,  
Each time he comes home and finds me immersed  
In the depths of my thoughts flooded by tears,

"Papa, you cannot, by blackening your days,  
By chipping away at your life bring Vahram back...  
You must be reconciled, we must be reconciled,  
At least we must pretend we are reconciled  
When amongst other people ...

"Must I tell you what you surely know, Papa,  
Whether we exist or not,  
One more Vahram or one Vahram less  
Nobody cares in this world.

"They will not feel our grief,

An insult in itself,

They will perhaps even snigger to themselves,

Think us weak, unworthy of life,

Even the sanctity of our pain, they will desecrate".

Your brother, without a doubt, is right,

I will not argue,

But when has the heart heard the words of the mind?

This is how we live since your departure...

Our lives have become a sky without sun.

My son, the grief of my heart, and hearth

The flames burn fiercer

Whenever the thought passes through my mind,

That you too may burn by the same flame.

XVII

The black accident snatched you,

Whisked you away

From my very own hands,

From the golden palace of my dreams,

My pride, the Ararat of my hope,

Orphaned once again this orphaned man,

Since that black accident,

I am transformed, Vahram,

I am transformed so much so

That in every victim I see

A rebel or a servile particle of you,

From every drop of spilt blood

I smell the sharp bitter smell of your own blood,

Son, and my heart burns!

I am so changed; I am changed so much...

And, know it, Vahram,

You are the maker of this transformation.

I burnt with you, I became ashes,

And with you again, by higher strength,  
I was re-born once again from my own ashes,  
With the wings of my mind stronger than ever,  
And under my chest a heart so large,  
That I can contain within it  
The mountainous grief of all mankind ...

This, my growth, son,  
I owe it to you with all my being.

Blessed be you  
Today and for all days,  
And let the flame of your memory  
Let it never die out under my breath,

Let it not pass away without a trace  
From a forgetful mind of this our earth.

XVIII

I confess again and again,  
My sweet son, my very sweet Vahram,

My re-birth this of grief's fire  
I owe it to you and you alone.

Whatever I shall give to men, noble and kind,  
To the end of my life already near its end,  
It shall be born of you; it will belong to you,

As if we were,  
You; a symphony of light,  
I; a receptacle of sound,

That gives to the world by ceaseless self-consumption  
What it receives from you as waves born of light.

XIX

My voice, does it reach you,  
Or does it sink in the desolate darkness?

Who could inform me and how?

I only know that as an answer to my calls  
Since your separation till this very grim moment

Not a whisper has reached me,

And I am struck ill by your unheard voice.

Now sitting in the bosom of the yawning night,  
When with the torches of my mind  
I search out the path you and I have taken,

I mourn twin deaths in a single person,  
One in yours, Vahram my soul,  
The other, my own...

Whoever has wept his very own death!

XXII

Vahram, my darling, my dream child,  
I saw you frozen in the house of death,  
Your height collapsed under a cover,  
Like a mummy,

And on your face,  
An unworldly veil of light,  
Which through my eyes  
Carried a cold wind down my veins...

The chill of that wind stays in me  
Still, until now.

XXV

A rocket the other day  
Knocked down fifteen people at once ...  
Five of them returned to life no more...

One of them was Vahé,  
Our neighbor, your old playmate ...

I did not follow his coffin,  
It seemed to me that with Vahé  
People were burying ... you all over again.

XXVII

Not having you,  
Not seeing you,

The deprivation of not hearing you,  
Son, let's say I could endure,  
With my soul squeezed between my teeth,  
And my eyes shut.

But how shall I look in the face  
At the sweet, sweet world,  
How can I henceforth  
Greet a summer,

Without fearing the terror of a burning hot furnace  
At every summer's threshold,

Where the treacherous fate leads you,  
To burn you alive as a wholesome sacrifice ...

