

The boatman

by Nguyễn Bính

Those previous years, by this very boat, in the afternoon
I rowed you girl to collect the jute stalks from the sand dunes
Watching you work, I dwelt in my deep daydreaming:
“The jute stalks are to weave into roofed hammocks for our going

I would participate in the exam held by the emperor jubilantly
And I would rank first in the doctorate exam, coming home exuberantly
My roofed hammock would proceed before yours on the same road
And both roofed hammocks would cross the river in the same boat.”

It is rumoured that her wedding would be very great;
That the groom’s side would hire nine boats for the bride and bridesmaids;
That the bride’s side would ask for nine thousand areca nuts;
And that the marriage levy and cost be about nine thousand; that much...

Then I go wandering about, intending to offer the boat for sale
Despite the offer of nine old francs, the sale is to no avail!
Letting go of the pushing pole and let the boat go with the stream
Seeing a glimpse of the jute banks, I sit and let myself daydream

Oh, there is a girl who is in her prime time of her day
Wanting to go to the jute banks, showing by her wave
Girl, why did you not call me prior to this time;
Before my boat is already full of dreams at prime

Fact is, the river has two banks each on either side
I have not passed the doctorate exam, so please walk to the house of mine.

*Translated from Vietnamese into English by Hương Cau Thomas TN Cao
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Anh lái đò

Năm xưa chở chiếc thuyền này
Cho cô sang bãi tước đay chiều chiều
Để tôi mơ mãi, mơ nhiều:
"Tước đay se võng nhuộm điều ta đi

Tưng bừng vua mở khoa thi,
Tôi đỗ quan trạng vinh quy về làng
Võng anh đi trước võng nàng
Cả hai chiếc võng cùng sang một đò."

Đồn rằng đám cưới cô to
Nhà trai thuê chín chiếc đò đón dâu
Nhà gái ăn chín nghìn cau
Tiền cheo, tiền cưới chừng đâu chín nghìn...

Lang thang tôi dạm bán thuyền
Có người trả chín quan tiền lại thôi!
Buông sào cho nước sông trôi
Bãi đay thấp thoáng, tôi ngồi tôi mơ

Có người con gái đang tơ
Vẫy tay ý muốn sang nhờ bãi đay
Sao cô không gọi sáng ngày
Giờ thuyền tôi đã chở đầy thuyền mơ

Con sông nó có hai bờ
Tôi chưa đỗ trạng, thôi cô lại nhà.

Nguyễn Bính