

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Stranger Music

Leonard Cohen

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



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BY LEONARD COHEN

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To Adam and Lorca

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In some sections of this book, certain poem titles and texts have been altered from their original publication.

In the section taken from *Death of a Lady's Man*, some changes have been made for this edition: "A Woman's Decision" originally appeared as the commentary to "The Lover After All"; "A Different Drum" as the commentary to "The Other Village"; "A Marvellous Woman" as the commentary to "No One Watching"; the text of "Not Going Back" is from the commentary to "The Rose"; the text of "Montreal" is from the commentary to "St. Francis"; "French and English" from the commentary to "Our Government-in-Exile"; "Roshi" originally appeared as the commentary to "Formal in His Thought of Her"; "The End of My Life in Art" originally appeared under the title "My Life in Art"; "Roshi Again" originally appeared as the commentary to "My Life in Art." The poems mentioned above have been given new titles for this edition. The poems in italic have, for this edition, incorporated the word "commentary" into the title.

Poems reproduced here from *Selected Poems 1956-1968* had original publication in that edition.

Selections from *Beautiful Losers* and *Book of Mercy* were given titles for this edition. All but three of the poems selected for this edition from *The Energy of Slaves* were originally untitled.

* * *

Nancy Bacal made the selection with the assistance of Rebecca De Mornay and the author. Bill Furey came up with a selection several years ago which was consulted. Karen Lynch and Kelley Lynch prepared the manuscript. Ellen Seligman, my editor at M&S, saw it through to publication. I want to thank all those concerned.

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STRANGER MUSIC

Selected Poems and Songs

Leonard Cohen



JONATHAN CAPE

LONDON

LET US COMPARE MYTHOLOGIES

POEM

I heard of a man
who says words so beautifully
that if he only speaks their name
women give themselves to him.

If I am dumb beside your body
while silence blossoms like tumours on our lips
it is because I hear a man climb the stairs
and clear his throat outside our door.

LETTER

How you murdered your family
means nothing to me
as your mouth moves across my body

And I know your dreams
of crumbling cities and galloping horses
of the sun coming too close
and the night never ending

but these mean nothing to me
beside your body

I know that outside a war is raging
that you issue orders
that babies are smothered and generals beheaded

but blood means nothing to me
it does not disturb your flesh

tasting blood on your tongue
does not shock me
as my arms grow into your hair

Do not think I do not understand
what happens
after the troops have been massacred

and the harlots put to the sword

And I write this only to rob you
that when one morning my head
hangs dripping with the other generals
from your house gate

that all this was anticipated
and so you will know that it meant nothing to me

LOVERS

During the first pogrom they
Met behind the ruins of their homes —
Sweet merchants trading: her love
For a history-full of poems.

And at the hot ovens they
Cunningly managed a brief
Kiss before the soldier came
To knock out her golden teeth.

And in the furnace itself
As the flames flamed higher,
He tried to kiss her burning breasts
As she burned in the fire.

Later he often wondered:
Was their barter completed?
While men around him plundered
And knew he had been cheated.

PRAYER FOR MESSIAH

His blood on my arm is warm as a bird
his heart in my hand is heavy as lead
his eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love
O send out the raven ahead of the dove

His life in my mouth is less than a man
his death on my breast is harder than stone
his eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love
O send out the raven ahead of the dove

O send out the raven ahead of the dove
O sing from your chains where you're chained in a cave
your eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love
your blood in my ballad collapses the grave

O sing from your chains where you're chained in a cave
your eyes through my eyes shine brighter than love
your heart in my hand is heavy as lead
your blood on my arm is warm as a bird

O break from your branches a green branch of love
after the raven has died for the dove

WHEN THIS AMERICAN WOMAN

When this American woman,
whose thighs are bound in casual red cloth,
comes thundering past my sitting-place
like a forest-burning Mongol tribe,
the city is ravished
and brittle buildings of a hundred years
splash into the street;
and my eyes are burnt
for the embroidered Chinese girls,
already old,
and so small between the thin pines
on these enormous landscapes,
that if you turn your head
they are lost for hours.

THESE HEROICS

If I had a shining head
and people turned to stare at me
in the streetcars;
and I could stretch my body
through the bright water
and keep abreast of fish and water snakes;
if I could ruin my feathers
in flight before the sun;
do you think that I would remain in this room,
reciting poems to you,
and making outrageous dreams
with the smallest movements of your mouth?