

Quotes from Zorba the Greek
By Nikos Kazantzakis

Chapter 10, final paragraphs

I remembered one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of the tree, just as the butterfly was making a hole in the case and preparing to come out. I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath. In vain. It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear, all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand.

That little body, I do believe is the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the

great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the rhythm of people and things.

From Chapter 24

You've soon forgotten poor Bouboulina, Zorba," I said, in a tone which was somewhat brutal for me.

Zorba was piqued and raised his voice.

"A fresh road, and fresh plans!" he cried. "I've stopped thinking all the time of what's going to happen tomorrow. What's happening today, this minute, that's what I care about. I say: 'What are you doing at this moment, Zorba?' 'I'm sleeping.' 'Well, sleep well.' 'What are you doing at this moment, Zorba?' 'I'm working.' 'Well, work well.' 'What are you doing at this moment, Zorba?' 'I'm kissing a woman.' 'Well, kiss her well, Zorba! And forget all the rest while you're doing it; there's nothing else on earth, only you and her! Get on with it!'"

From Chapter 26

“No, you’re not free,” he said. “The string you’re tied to is perhaps no longer than other people’s. That’s all. You’re on a long piece of string, boss; you come and go, and you think you’re free, but you never cut the string in two. And when people don’t cut that string...”
“I’ll cut it some day!” I said defiantly, because Zorba’s words had touched an open wound in me and hurt.

“It’s difficult, boss, very difficult. You need a touch of folly to do that; folly d’you see? You have to risk everything! But you’ve got such a strong head, it’ll always get the better of you. A man’s head is like a grocer; it keeps accounts: I’ve paid so much and earned so much and that means a profit of this much or a loss of that much! The head’s a careful little shopkeeper; it never risks all it has, always keeps something in reserve. It never breaks the string. Ah no! It hangs on tight to it, the bastard! If the string slips out of its grasp, the head, poor devil, is lost, finished! But if a man doesn’t break the string, tell me, what flavor is left in life? The flavor of chamomile, weak chamomile tea! Nothing like rum – that makes you see life inside out!”