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The Archer

Paulo Coelho, translated by Margaret Jull Costa

Many archers complain that, despite having practiced the art of archery for many years, they still feel their heart beating anxiously, their hands shaking, their aim failing. They need to understand that a bow or an arrow can change nothing, but that the art of archery makes our mistakes more obvious.

On a day when you are out of love with life, your aim will be confused, difficult. You will find that you lack the strength to draw the string back fully, that you cannot get the bow to bend as it should.

And when you see that your aim is poor that morning, you will try to find out what could have caused such imprecision; this will mean confronting the problem that is troubling you but that, up until then, has remained hidden.

The opposite can happen too: your aim is true; the string hums like a musical instrument; the birds are singing all around. Then you realize that you are giving of your best.

Nevertheless, do not allow yourself to be carried away by how you shoot in the morning, whether well or badly. There are many more days ahead, and each arrow is a life in itself.

Use your bad moments to discover what makes you tremble. Use your good moments to find your road to inner peace.

But do not stop either out of fear or out of joy: the way of the bow has no end.