

VIII

The Initiation

I

Lola ! now look me straight between the eyes.
Our fate is come upon us. Tell me now
Love still shall arbitrate our destinies,
And joy inform the swart Plutonic brow.
Behold ! the doom foreseen, the doom embraced,
Fastens its fang ; the gods of death and birth
Make friends to slay us, Pilate interlaced
With Herod in obscene and murderous mirth
Lola ! come close ! confront them ! Let us read
The book once sealed, now open to our gaze !
Avenge our love and vindicate our breed
With courage to the ending of the days.
Since fall we must, o arm ourselves aright,
Fall fighting in the forefront of the fight !

II

First ; let us face the foemen, number them,
 Measure their arms ! Who smiteth us ? We wove
 In grove and garden many a diadem
 Dewy with all the purity of love.
The Hermes of the orchard lets the string
 Slip from his finger, and the arrow speeds
 Striking our love beneath the flamy wing
 So that the heart of heaven breaks and bleeds.
That poisoned shaft fed with corrupting germs
 Hath stricken us to earth : the wound corrodes,
 Breeding within us all its noisome worms,
 All the black larvae of the accurst abodes : —
The virgin of our reed-shrill ecstasies
 Raped by the stinking satyr of disease !

III

I who have loved you — shall I love you now,
Your teeth dropt out, your fair flesh fallen away,
The Crown of Venus on your itching brow,
The coppery flush, the leprous scurf of grey ?
The god that rots the living flesh of man
Fills up your mouth — one ulcer — with his groans
And all our blessings choke and turn to ban
The beast that gnaws the marrow of our bones.
Caught in corrupt caresses of disease,
Shall we dispute us with his fervour, fain
Too woo with sores your turbid arteries
And kiss black ulcers in your spotted brain ?
We married close, my Lola, with a kiss : —
Now for the lifelong lover, Syphilis !

IV

Yea ! but we love. We win. The body's curse
Is bitter, but he hath not won the whole.
There's more than life in this brave universe.
Death cannot touch the secret of the soul !
Nor shall we shrink, although this further pang
Strike through the liver with its fiery dart,
The hope – the horrid hope – whose gleaming fang
Now stirs, a serpent's, underneath your heart !
For lo ! not vainly we invoked the god
That looseneth the girdle of a maid ;
Even now draws nigh the dreadful period
That maketh all the mother-world afraid.
With rotten fruit your belly is grown big
– Thanks to the bastard god that cursed the fig !

V

Your swollen neck is grown a swollen breast
Gushing with poisoned milk; your breath is caught
In quick sharp gasps ; you get nor sleep nor rest,
The monster moving in you in his sport.
Surely a monster ! some unnatural thing,
Some Minotaur of shame, no egg of pride
To hatch the miniature of love and spring
In your own image, subtly glorified.
White swan you were ! not Zeus but Cerberus
Hath ravished you ; you brood on harpy eggs –
Sweet sister ! is the wine too sour for us ?
We have drunk deep – nay ! nay ! but to the dregs !
And all their bitterness is braver brew
Than the dull syrup of the pious crew.

VI

Still we can laugh at burgesses and churls
In our excess of agony and lust.
We pity these poor prudes, insipid girls
And tepid boys, these creatures of the dust.
We pity all these meal-mouthed montebanks
That prate of Jesus, ethics, faith and reason,
These jerry-built dyspeptics, stuccoed cranks,
Their lives one dreary plain, one moist dull season
Like their grey land. O costive crapulence !
They ache and strain within the water-closet
Of church and State, their shocked bleat of offence :
" This poet's life was such a failure ". Was it ?
Fools ! our worst boredom was a loftier thrill
Than all you ever felt — or ever will.

VII

If we are weary, it is flesh that faints.
 We cannot bear such worlds of happiness.
 Even in this torture that consumes and taints,
 We writhe in bliss, one terrible caress
Of the great Gods of Hells. Ah ! surely, dear,
 Our way is wise, transcending human woe :
 We are most happy and of great good cheer.
 What do we know ? It matters not. We know.
This is enough, that we have slain the Sphinx,
 Worked out her wizardry, dissolved her doom ;
 And though her wine be death to him that drinks
 We shall carouse for ever in the tomb.
We drank bull's blood ; and all our pangs immense
 Are better than eupeptic innocence.

VIII

Ah ! if flesh fails, may we not also fail ?
 May not the vulture liars gather round
 Our death-beds, and drone out their dismal tale
 With drawl and whine, the Galilean sound
Of snuffle and twang ? May not their stinking souls
 Interpret our last sighs as penitence
 When we close up the coruscating scrolls
 Of our life's joy, seal up the jar of sense
To broach the starry flagon – splendid spilth ?
 These creeping cravens shall be circumvented ;
 They shall not belch their flatulence and filth
 On us, or tell the world that we repented.
Come, as we strained it, let us break the tether
 In the last luxury – to die together !

IX

Let Death steal softly through the gate of sleep
On tiptoe ! win away the maiden life
On velvet pinions to his azure steep ;
At ease, at peace, to woo her for a wife !
His white horse waiting quietly without
Let him push gently the delicious door
And take us. We have lived. How should we doubt
Or fear ? we have lived well. For ever more
We must be well. The cypress cannot daunt,
Nor the acacia thrill ; we are content
To wonder in the shadowy groves, to haunt
The dark delight of our own element ;
Or – could we send a messenger – to tell
Our brothers of the happiness of Hell !

X

Are not the poppy-fields one snowy flame ?
Come, let us wander hand in hand therein,
Straining with joyous juice our lips of shame,
Draining their bitter draught of sterile sin !
Are not the eyes of sleep already dull,
The lashes drooping over their desire ?
Are not the gods awaiting to annul
With Lethe the last flicker of the fire ?
Ay, let us kiss, my darling ; let us twitch
For the last time the flesh against the flesh,
Before the coming of the lovely witch
That shall excite our sleepy souls afresh,
Anointing us with subtle drugs and suave,
Fit for the grave, for love beyond the grave !

XI

For the last time, my Lola ! Still the name
 Fills me with music, echoing afar
 Faint, like the rapture of some ghostly flame
 Rejoicing in some lone secreted star
Beyond the visible heaven. Come to me !
 Come closer ! Is not this as close as death ?
 Are we not one to all eternity
 Jewelled with joy ? Mix me your subtle breath
Into the words well-known and never worn,
 Into the kiss well-kissed and never tired,
 Into the love well-loved and not forlorn,
 The love beyond all that ever was desired ?
Ay ! all the cloudy must of life is strained
 To clearer liquor that our souls attained.

XII

How the yahoos will rage and rave about
Our sloughs ! " Appalling double suicide !
" 'Orrible detiles ". In the world without
We never yet consented to abide.
What should we care, within this cave of bliss,
This ocean of content, wherein we dive
And play like dolphins, for the horrid hiss
Of blow-flies ? Nay, they never were alive !
O the sweet sleep that fastens on these brows !
O the enchantment of this dreamy god,
My mystic sister, my mellific spouse,
That shepherds us with his hermetic rod
Into the flowery folds of love and sleep
Where we have strayed — O never yet so deep !

XIII

Lola, dear Lola, how the stillness grows !
 How drowsy is the world, that folds her wings
 Over us, folding like a sunset rose
 Her crimson raptures to the night of things !
How all the voices and the visions fail
 As we pass through into the silent hall
 Beyond the vapours and beyond the veil,
 Beyond the Nothing as beyond the All !
Ah ! then, our voice must also fail in this ;
 Our symbols are but shadows in the sun ;
 Love's self springs from the shadow of the kiss ;
 Our bliss ! O, that was hardly half begun !
We fight the Fate as we have fought the foemen.
 The poison takes us. — Χαίρετε νιχώμεν.

XIV

Farewell ! O passionate world of changeful hours !
Come, Lola, let us sleep ! Elysian groves
Await us and the beatific bowers
Where Love is ours at last — as we were Love's.
Come, with our mouths still kissing, with our limbs
Still twined, relax the ecstasy ! pass by
To the abyss of night where no star swims !
On to the end beyond the prophecy !
Ah Lola mine ! " No happy end is this " —
I love you — ah ! you love me — you love me !
For we have passed beyond imagined bliss
Into the kingdom of reality,
Where we are crowned with flowers — yet closer creep !
Sleep, Lola, now ! I love you — sleep — ah, sleep !