

## At Kyrene

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### I.

I salute you, treacherous soil of Africa – earth of desire and of love! I throw away all my old creeds and my dying customs and I give myself naked to your re-generating sun

I would be as single of purpose as those early colonists who came from the North with eager faces to your new shores, filling the land with strange flowers and beautiful women.

So that altars were built under the leaves of the shade-dripping palms, and one could see the black hand of a son of Libya or Aethiopia sacrificing upon the snowy marbles of Paros.

I salute you, earth of desire, garden of the sun.

### II.

#### An Old Custom

I arrive, taken from the steamer in a little boat which lies on the water like a bird's wing. The sand is the color of oranges, and the people by the shore, bearing baskets of fruit on their heads, move with the rhythm of some ancient dance.

I cast my shoes away, following an old custom, that I may tread barefoot for the first time on this shore.

### III.

## The Land of Cleopatra

And I remember that it was in this land that Cleopatra loved. Not for long can rest in quietude as it does tonight, a country from whose soil men and women drink up such passion as hers.

The tigers creep like yellow flames over the trembling desert sand, cooling their hot tongues in the green waters of the oasis, and serpents lie in poisonous coils. In the rich slime of the Nile – mother of a myriad flowers – the crocodiles await the morning sun.

My window frames a thousand stars consuming themselves in the transparent blue.

A bitter aroma lies over the air. I am unhappy, for love is lacking to me. I aspire and I long. A bitter chagrin seizes my soul, and I become contemptible to myself. As a beautiful robe of colored silk when it is let fall upon the ground so sinks my spirit down.

### IV.

## Grave Thoughts

I do not wish to die, to taste the cup of nothingness. Oh, the millions like me who have flowered for a little while and then fallen to the rich earth!

Where are their aspirations, their longings, their cruel tears?

Here is the land of swift living and swift dying, where one does not scruple, or waste away like a bough on which the sun never shines.

Oh, it is the land for me!

I watch the golden rain of the sun into the white courtyard from behind my blind, and the fountain of water on its silver column.

## **V. An Unknown**

Someone passed me today in the corridor and gave me a sweet smile. It was a woman, dressed in white, which clung to the slim lines of her figure. Her eyes are very beautiful.

## **VI.**

The Lilies are proud, lifting their silver stems towards the sky, and their life is brief.

I salute myself in humility and my aspirations.

O love, when you are everywhere in this land, why are you not in my heart?

## **VII. A Rose**

I passed the unknown again. This time she was carrying some roses in her hand and she gave me one as she went by, without saying a word.

## **VIII.**

The beauty of those eyes has not faded from me yet.

Delicately their impress has touched me. I sift every faint memory of it. So violets perfume the fingers that hold them.

## **IX.**

I am unhappy again tonight. My youth, why do you sleep?

## X.

Tonight we watched the moon rise over the distant mosque together. When she left me and wished me good-night, I felt the faint pressure of her delicate fingers, and my heart beat madly in my breast like a wild thing trembling at some unknown fear. Upon her lips, opened in the faintest smile, there appeared (for a moment) the irresistible allure of her soul.

In her eyes old memories came to life.

O delicious hour when the night perfumes herself and puts on her garments of blue and gold!

O night! O sleepless moon! I salute you from my awakening heart.

## XI.

When the door closed after her and I was alone, there surged up in my heart a desire to run swiftly after her down the corridor.

I felt myself desolate in the amber room. Then I saw that she had left some flowers upon my pillow, and I knelt down beside the bed and pressed my face into their perfume.

## XII.

### Violet Shadows

In the woods at evening the trees are draped in violet shadows, and the golden lilies of the marshes sleep upon the tide of darkness.

But you, my heart, never sleep, and all the kisses in the world could never slake your tireless flame.

### **XIII.**

#### **Africa**

O Africa, you are cruel to all lovely things and say that they must die.

O land of desire, it was your voluptuous soil consumed the life of Greece.

O terrible land, O land without hope, what will you do with me?

### **XIV.**

"I do not know how to be happy any more," she told me. "My heart is often sad when it should rejoice. You must be gentle with me."

"Don't you love me any more?" I cried

She kissed me tenderly and I became silent.