

ADVENT

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From the wide gold gardens of Darius and the great green borders of Hystaspes there ran a rumour of fire; yellow and purple in those Eastern lands heralded, even as here with us, the Advent of Birth: of the year: of the renewal of the world by love.

By the brook sides lithe white maidens watered with tears of pleasure the rainbow-anemones; and the warm air sighed and vibrated to the music of the murmured name of Adon.

He was slain in the love-chase, far, far back in the centuries, within the borders of Atlantis, so the old men said, and so he might return any year; nay, he did return in some sort in the anemones of Spring.

But one year there was a draught in the land; the rivers dried up, and no rain fell; the lean, parched earth no longer sweated out her silver dew; the furrows were stern as iron; and the few fruits that were born that year were dry and juiceless, and insipid to the taste as wool. And the old men said that Adonis had passed to another world, there to begin anew his career of love; never more until the Aeon closed, so they averred, would the earth they knew be clad in the dawn of the year in green grass and all the panoplies of young Summer.

But the old men were wrong, even as old men are wont to be; for they well enough recall events, but have scarcely any memory of the first stirrings of the pure yellow sap of youth. Recollection is truly in the mind of man; but it is in the blood of the Masters. Truly hath it been said: Whom the Gods love die young, howsoever they be waxen in years.

And lo! One day there was a great Light from the Hills; and the air grew soft as of yore, and through a vast rainbow fell warm white drops of rain. And the maidens by the brook sides looked up from their sighing by the withered anemones, for behold! Down from the mountains from the Sun-track, in the East, there rolled a car drawn by leopards held in flowery leashes by laughing girls clad only in light ornaments of gold. In the track of that car the bright green herbage sprang, and wide and shy blossoms of every hue, and queer fungi of strange shapes and unknown scents. Rolling back in the chariot lay a young, laughing God, sprawling back upon crushed purple grapes and white-veined, moist vine-leaves. He had a

flowing golden mane and light-blue eyes, and he was caressing a great wine-skin: each time he raised it to his lips, sparks of light flashed through the blue, sunny air.

All the people marveled, crowding around the car, wide-eyed, open-lipped; and he laughed at them, striking at them with his thyrsus. And when they cried out that he should speak to them, he rolled back upon his pard-skins, laughing at them still. But the God's maidens cried back to the multitude: Lo! All ye youths! Gather around him, and whom he shall touch with the rod, he shall become an artificer of beauty; and ye, ye maidens who shall feel the thyrsus, ye shall bear babies to the honour of that God whose name is Ecstasy!

Even so it came to pass; and ye, O my children who dwell in love and ecstasy, ye are sprung from those youths and those maidens.

The drought left that land for ever; and never since that day hath earth lacked at least some of the children of Ecstasy.

And for good tidings I tell ye all that that God is soon to return with new gifts for the sons of men.

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