

III

The Hermit

I

Lonely, o life, art thou when circumstance
Occult or open keeps us twain apart !
Lamenting through the dreary day there dance
Anaemic thoughts ; the bruised and bloodless heart
Beats as if tired of life, as I am tired
Who all these days have never seen your face,
Nor touched the body that my soul desired,
Nor have inhaled the perfume of the place
That you make sweet – black dogs of doubt and fear
Howl at my heels while care plies whip and spur,
Driving me down to the dull damned dead sphere
Where is no sight or sound or scent of Her
Our Lady Dian, but where hag and witch
Hecat bestrides her broom – the bestial bitch !

II

Like to a country in the interdict
Whose folk lack all the grace of eucharist,
My heart is ; all the pangs its foes inflict
Are naught to this unutterable mist Of absence.
Where's the daily sacrament,
The glad devouring of your body and blood,
Sweet soul of Christ, my Lola ? I am rent
Even as the demons from the face of God
When they would peer into beatitude.
I am barred from the incalculable bliss,
The unutterable chrism, the soul's food,
Of you, your gaze, your word, your touch, your kiss
O Gods, Fates, Fiends – whoever plays the Pope !
Lift up your curse – leave me not without hope !

III

My soul is like the savage upland plains
Of utmost wretchedness in Tartary.
No strength of sun, no fertilizing rains !
Only a bitter wind, intense and dry,
Cuts over them. Hardly the memory stands
Of one who travels there ; his pain forgets
The golden bliss of all those other lands
Where he was happy. So the blizzard frets
Its sterile death across my soul, and chills
All hope of life even from the rare sad seeds
It blows from sunnier vales and happier hills,
Though at the best they be but worthless weeds.
I stand – I scan the infinite horizon
Of hopeless hope – yet I must travel on.

IV

When for an hour we met (to call it meeting
Barred by the bleak ice of society
From even the lover's glance, the lover's greeting.
The intonation that means ecstasy !)
One ray of saddest gladness lit the dusk :
This – that I saw you pale and suffering,
A goddess armed with myrrh instead of musk,
With lips too cold to pray, too dry to sing.
For by that sigh I knew the adorable
Truth, that you wept in secret over me.
Your silence was the dumb despair of hell ;
Who read it right read love. Strange cruelty,
That who would die for you, sweet murderess,
Should find his comfort in your bitterness !

V

For there you sat, you smiled, you chatted on,
Myself alone perceiving the keen cold
Sword at your heart, the speechless malison
That trembled on your tongue, the while it trolled
Its senseless clamour of necessary wit,
And woke the senseless necessary laughter,
The senseless necessary reply to it,
The long sad silly commonplace thereafter.
Suppose we had risen, as quick as thought, and stood
And caught and kissed – what could the storm have done
Worse than this sickening fog of solitude ?
Who can do worse than take away the sun ?
They better had take care, I think. One day
We shall go mad, and take ourselves away.

VI

Yet we may hope ; for this, and not from fear,
 We kept our counsel ; we may hope anon
 To turn the corner of the evil year
 And find a brave new springtide coming on.
Meanwhile by stealth I may invoke your shade
 And clasp you to me, though it be a dream
 Or little more, a vision from the Maid
 That rules by Phlegethon's sepulchral stream.
Nay ! it is more : by magic art compel
 (My soul !) my maiden's body to appear
 Visible, tangible, enjoyable
 Even to the senses of the amorous seer,
Whose demon ministers through the gulphs and glooms
 Convey his mistress on their meteor plumes.

VII

More, I will visit you, forlorn who lie
 Crying for lack of me ; your very flesh
 Shall tingle with the touch of me as I
 Wrap you about with the ensorcelled mesh
Of my fine body of fire : oh ! you shall feel
 My kisses on your mouth like living coals,
 And piercing like an arrow of barbed steel
 The arcane caress that shall unite our souls.
Till, when I see you next, I shall have doubt
 Whether your pallor be from love distressed
 Or from the exhaustion of the age-long bout
 Of love you had of me upon your breast
Held hard all night, with mouths that never ceased
 To engorge love's single sacramental feast.

VIII

One writes, and all is easy. Drop the pen,
And Paradise is blotted out ! The earth,
Fair as it seemed, becomes a hideous den,
And all life's promises of little worth.
Like to a mother whose one child is dead,
I wander, aching for the sight, the sound.
The touch – familiar, now inhibited.
The child is under ground – is under ground –
The child is under ground – who comforts her ?
The bastard fool her priest ? The useless clod
Her husband ? The accursed murderer
Her God ? – if so be that she hath a God.
Foul curses from my life's envenomed flood
Break in a vomit of black foam and blood.

IX

As one entranced by dint of cannabis,
Whose sense of time is changed past recognition,
Whether he suffer woe or taste of bliss,
He loses both his reason and volition.
He says one word – what countless ages pass !
He walks across the room – a voyage as far
As the astronomer's who turns his glass
On faintest star-webs past the farthest star
And travels thither in the spirit. So
It seems impossible to me that ever
The sands of our ill luck should run so low
That splendidly success should match endeavour ;
Yet it must be, and very soon must be :
For I believe in you, and you in me.

X

To-morrow is the day when Christ our Lord
 Rose from the dead ; therefore, the shops are shut.
 Men may get drunk, or syphilized, or bored,
 Robbed, murdered, or regenerated, — but !
But they must not get letters, be amused,
 Or do a thing they want to do till Monday ; Whence
 comes the universally-diffused
 And steady popularity of Sunday.
And yet I grumble ! any other day
 I might receive a message from my Lola :
 " The siege is raised. Meet me as usual ! " Nay !
 For me the sofa and Verlaine or Zola,
Till Christ's affair is over, and the town
 Runs a young resurrection of its own.

XI

Were you a shop-girl and myself a clerk,
Things might be better – we could surely meet
With due umbrellas in the dripping Park
And decorously spoon upon a seat.
This is the penalty one pays for rank
And fortune ! Ah, my Lola, I am dying
And mad – or would God play me such a prank
As to dictate such verse while you are crying ?
Let me too weep, weep on ! weep out my soul,
Weep till the world of sense was wept away
And, dead, I reached you at the glimmering goal
Whither you had outrun me ! Weep, I say,
Weep! It is better. Thus one earns a chrism –
Who ever gained one by cheap cynicism ?

XII

Wherefore I duly invoke the God
Of Tears that he may mingle yours and mine,
Water therewith Life's unresponsive sod,
And raise therefrom some sickly growth of vine
Whose grape shall yield a bitter draught of woe
Fit for the assuaging of a deadlier thirst
Than Attis knew or Abelard : even so
I suffer ; than some lovely nun accurst
Who beats her breast upon the convent bars,
Even so you suffer : let its draught restore
All lovers (that invoke the sad cold stars)
Unto good luck : then you and I once more
(Though still we were forbidden word and kiss)
Might find a certain happiness in this.

XIII

For truth it is, my maiden, we have had
 Already more than our fair share of pleasure.
 The good god Dionysus ivy-clad
 Hath poured us out a draught of brimming measure.
Let us then rather give the lustiest praise
 Our throats can sound than pray for further favour ;
 Even though our sorrow, eating up our days,
 Devour us also. Gods enjoy the savour
Of Man's thanksgivings ; from their holy place
 Beholding mortals, they are wroth to see
 Tears; they rejoice to see a proud glad face
 Master of itself and of eternity.
Let us, reflecting on how dear we love,
 Shew laughter and courage to the gods above !

XIV

Now then the fickle song hath changed and shifted
Round from the dirge to the primordial paean.
Lola ! my Lola ! let our voices lifted
Proclaim to all the Masters of the Aeon :
We love each other ! let them meditate
Awhile on that glad cry, and you will see
How they consult, and smile, and hint to fate
That none can mar so holy a destiny.
We love each other ! loud and glad ; let heaven
And all the gods be deafened ! Sing, O sing !
We love each other ! through the storm-cloud riven
Let the wild anthem of our triumph ring !
Hark ! the glad chorus as we drag the stars
In chains behind our mad colossal cars !