

THE BLIND PROPHET
A BALLET

BY
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The scene is an ancient Egyptian temple, supported by two mighty pillars. Two rows of marble seats form a semi-circle, cut by a gap covered by a veil in the East. On the upper seats are the musicians, flutes and violins; on the lower are singers and dancers. There are doors also at the North and South.

The Prophet. Lead me to the holy place!
Trace the circle widdershins!
Light the incense! Set the pace
To the flutes and violins!

The Musicians. Kill! kill! Life is shrill!
Still! Still! word and will!
Flame! flame! speak the name!
Trill! trill! Thrill! thrill!
I acclaim the shame!
I have heard the word!
Fulfil the will!

The Prophet. Bid the virgins veil the bride!
Lead her forth, a shower of spray,
A flower of foam upon the tide,
A fleece of cloud upon the day!

So my sightless eyes may see
In the transcendental trance
The virgin of eternity
Lead the demi-gods to dance.

Has the Tree of Life its root
In the soul or in the skin?
Is it God, or is it brute,
That comes mystically in
For the doves within the flute,
The eagles on the violin?

Ah! The perfume's coiling tresses
Curl like veils upon the limbs
Of the dancer that caresses
With her flying feet the hymns
That flow and ripple in the air,
Bathing all the doves of prayer!

The Musicians. Lingerin', low, fingerin' slow,
The tingling bows of the violins go.

Trembling, twittering, dissembling,
The lips of the flute-players wander
Over the stops, fiercer and fonder
Than scorpions that writhe and curl
In the fiery breast of an Arab girl!

[*The dancers issue from beyond the veil.*]

The Prophet. Sway like the lilies, gentle girls!

Like lilies glimmer!
Furl yourselves as the lily furls
Its radiance dimmer!
Curl as the lily-petal curls,
Subtler and slimmer!

Unfold your ranks and waft yourselves apart,
That I may guess what pearl is at the heart,
What dew-drop glistens on the crown gold-wrought
Within the chalice of your coiled cohort!

The Musicians. The flutes coo.

It is the voice
Of love in spring,
At dawn, in dew;
And piercing through
Those low loves that rejoice,
Wails in the violin that supreme string
Of passion, that is more akin
To death than love, that shrieking sin
Whose teeth tear passion's tortured skin
And drink love's blood, and rage within
Black bowels of lust to win, to win
Some crown of thorns incarnadine,
Some cross whereof to fashion
Some newer, truer passion
Than even the agony of the violin!

The Prophet. Yes! like a careless breeze, the close caress
Expands with a sob; the virgins wheel; there glows
In the midst a mystical rose!

[*The dancers unfold, and their Queen appears.*]

O musical ministriss
Of the dancing violin!
In an emerald spangled skin,
Hooded with harvest hair
Close-coiled, her serpent eyes
Hold ineffable sorceries!
Slender, and full, and straight is she
As an almond tree
Blest by an hermit! Her serpent eyes
Hold ineffable sorceries!
Slow she sways; her white arms ripple
From rosy finger to rosy nipple,

Ripple and flow like the melody
Of the flutes and the violins.
And! I see! I see—she smiles on me
The heart of a million sins,
Each keener than death! Her serpent eyes
Hold ineffable sorceries.

The Musicians. Hush! Hush! the young feet flush,
The marble's ablush.
The music moves trilling,
Like wolves at the killing,
Moaning and shrilling,
And clear as the throb in the throat of a thrush!
Rustling they sway
Like a forest of rush
In the storm, and away!
Away! Blow the blossoms
Of virgin bosoms
On the sob of the wind
Of the violins,
That bind and unbind
Their scarlet sins
On the brows of the world.
Hush! they are curled
In the rapture of reaping
The flowers that unfurled
When the gardeners were sleeping
In the breeze-swayed bowers
Of the Lord of the flowers!
Hush! Hush! the young feet flush
The marble! The temple's ablaze and ablush.
Hush! Hush! softer crush
The grape on the palate, the flower on the blossom,
The dream on the sleeper, the bride on the bosom!

The Prophet. Will she not deign, being drawn
Into the blush of dawn,
To yield the promise, to unveil
The Lady of bliss and bale?

I am old and blind; my vision
Hath the seer in derision.
I would set my lips between
Those rose-tipped moons, just there
Where the deciduous green
Leaves the pearly rapture bare,
With its blue veins like rivulets
Jewelled with gentians and violets,
Wandering through fields of corn,
Under the first kiss of the morn
In still and shimmering air!

The Queen of the Dancers. No! No! the weird is woe.
The law is this, most surely this!
That who hath seen may never kiss.
The soul is at war with the flesh and the mind.
Life is dumb, and love is blind.

The Prophet. I am the Prophet of the Gods.
I have put these eyes out to attain
To the crown of the pallid periods
That pulse in the Almighty brain!
I have striven all my life for this;
That I might see, and still might kiss!

The Musicians. Vain! Vain! Time is sane.
Fain! Fain! Space is plain.
Time passes once, and is not found.
Space divides once, not heals the wound.
Knell! Knell! the shattered shell
That could not break the word of Hell.
Whirl! Whirl! the wanton girl
(Curve, and coil, and close, and curl!)
Slips the grip as the swallow avoids
The leaps of the dog; or the moon, that sails
Abeam to God's invisible gales,
The clumsy caress of the asteroids!
Love her in memory, love her in dream,
Love her in hope, or love her in faith;
But all these loves are loves that seem;
The worst is a ghoul, the best is a wraith;
For to birth
On the earth
There is no power under, within, or above,
That can give thee love in truth and love.

The Prophet. Yet will I strive!
There is nothing but this
While I am alive
But the cancer's kiss.
If I fail in that
Let the temple be broken,
The pillars fall flat,
The word be unspoken,
The lights be extinct,
The music be dumb,
The circle unlinked,
The acolytes numb,
The altar defiled,
The sacrament trod
Under foot by the wild
Despisers of god!

The Musicians. No! No! Life is woe.
Thou dost not know

How ineffably great
Is the weight of Fate.
Uncreate!
Ultimate!
Born of Hate!
Brother of Woe!
Despair its mate!
Thou dost not know
How giant great
Is the grasp of Fate.

The Dancers, Vainly Pursuing
Impossible things,
The swamp-adder wooing
The lark with her wings!

The Queen of the Dancers. See how I glide—
Canst thou not hold me?
In thine arms, at thy side—
Why not enfold me?

Wisdom, awaken!
Never, oh never,
By wile or endeavour
Am I to be taken.

Will a wish or a word
Charm the hawk from the air?
And am I a bird
To be caught in a snare?

Will a word or a wish
Bring the trout from the brook?
And am I a fish
To snap at an hook?

The Prophet. Ye let me to the holy place.
All ye have mocked me to my face.
Now ends the age of living breath;
I am sworn henchman unto death.
Lead me to the obelisks
That support the holy Disks!
I am here; my grasp is firm,
We are come unto the term.
Temple, dancers, girls, musicians,
Augurs, acolytes, magicians ---
Ruin, ruin overwhelm us all!
Fall!

[He pulls down the pillars; but the temple was not supported on them as in his blindness he supposed; and he is himself his only victim.]

The Dancers. Twine! twine! rose and vine.

Whirl! whirl! boy and girl.
Mine! mine! maid divine.
Curl! curl! peach and pearl.
Twist! twist! the towering trances
Are not sun-kissed
Like our delicate dances.
Expanses
Of fancies,
The turn of the ankle! the wave of the wrist
Enhances
Romances!
Twine! twine! tread me a measure!
The dotard is dead that disturbed our pleasure
With his doubt
About
Souls and skins,
And the quickened shoots
Of pain that he tore
From the heart's core
Of the dreadful flutes
And the terrible violins.
Joy! joy! girl and boy!
He is dead! let us laugh! let us dance! let us love!
Leave the corpse there as it lies! we shall measure
A new true dance around and above,
And taste of the treasure,
The torrent of pleasure!
Curl! curl! peach and pearl!
Mine! mine! maid divine!
Whirl! whirl! boy and girl!
Twine! twine! rose and vine.

The Musicians. Hush! hush! the young feet flush,

The marble's ablush,
The music moves trilling—
Like wolves at the killing,
Moaning and shrilling,
And clear as the throb in the throat of a thrush!
Rustling they sway
Like a forest of rush
In the storm, and away!
Away! blow the blossoms
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The dream on the sleeper, the bride on the blossom!

*The Queen of the Dancers, in her prime pose.
(Spoken without inflection or emphasis.)*

Now do you understand the tragedy of life?