

PROLOGUE.

PATCHOULI.

LIKE memories of love they come,
My perfumes in the silver vase :
The fragrant root, the odorous gum,
Myrrh, aloes, or olibanum :—
Anon, like memories of love, they pass !

They pass, and all the wonder-web
Of thought and being is unrolled
Like sombre tides there flow and ebb
Wonderful things ! not to be told :
Beautiful things ! and images of gold.

The touch of brown Habiba's breast,
The brimming lip, the cheek of down,
The dainty dovelet in its nest :
These fade, as ever a palimpsest
Like autumn vanishes from gold to brown.

Zuleikha, on whose marble knees
My bearded head is lazily lain,
Shows like some stirring of the breeze
Fluctuant in the popped grain,
No more at all : the vulgar sense is slain.

Of all the world alone abides
The faint perfume of Patchouli,
That subtle death in love ; it glides
Across the opening dream, derides
The fetich folly, immortality.

Awake, O dream ! Let distant bells
And vague muezzins haunt the ear,
Gaunt camels kneel by dusky wells,
Imagination greily hear :
Allahu akbar ! Allahu kabir !

Over inhospitable sands
Let the simoom its columns spin !
In snowy vales, untrodden lands,
Let there be storm, and bearded bands
Of robbers pass around the bubbling skin !

Let there be caves of treasure rare
Deep hidden in sepulchral seas ;
And birds unheard-of darken air
With royal wings, like argosies
Sailing beneath magnific promontories !

Let Caliphs mete fantastic law
And ebon eunuchs swing the sword
So swift, so curved,—let voiceless awe
Sit on the palace dome, to draw
Some god's destruction on its smiling lord !

May many a maiden comely clad
Revolve in convoluted curls,
Till from each pliant pose I had
(By virtue of her wondrous whirls)
The illusion of a thousand dancing-girls!

Let harlots robed in gold and green
Sit slowly waving ivory plumes
And wings of palm; the while their queen
Lurks in some horror-house unseen,
Damned to be smothered in divine perfumes!

Let there be scenes of blood and pain,
Some Slav beneath the Cossack knout,
Some mother ripped, some baby slain,
Let lust move silently about:—
Soft laughter hid in all, song whispering out!

Then let these things of form decay,
Some subtler dream dissolve their form,
As I have seen a cloudlet lay
Its forehead on the sea, and pray
Some idle prayer to sunset, or the storm!

Yea! as a cloud in worship-trance
Swoons in invisible delight,
Let slave and king, let death and dance
Shake off their forms, and clothe their light
In shrouds of sepulchre, the starless night!

Let song and cry leave tune and tone,
Perish uncried and die unsung!
Nature, the monotonic moan
Roared by the river, thunder alone :—
The Hoang-Ho, its note, the monstrous Kung!

Or let Kailasha's godded peak
Summon the oread and the gnome
To leave their toils, the word to speak
That shakes its azure-splitting dome
With the reverberation—listen!—Aum!

Let olive fail, and mangostin!
O'erturn the dark forbidden draught!
Give me the taste, the taste unclean
Of human flesh and blood that mean
Some infinite horror to the light that laughed!

So let the scent of lily and rose,
Of jasmine, taggara, pass away!
Let patchouli, patchouli, repose
My nostrils with your odour gray,
Dead darlings exquisite in your decay!

So, silk and velvet, fur and skin,
Your sensuous touch shall quit me quite :
I am at swiving strain with sin—
I'll touch the stars, the blood run thin
From the torn breast of Night, my mother Night.

Nor shall the mind revoke at ease
These myriad cressets from the sun ;
Constrained in sober destinies
Thought's river shall its ripples run
Into the one, the one, the one, the one.

Bursting the universe, a grip
Girds me to God ; aha ! the bliss !
Begone, frail tortures wrung from whip,
Weak joys sucked hard from leman's lip,
Ye are naught at all, are naught at all, in this !

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But brown Habiba's fawn-wide gaze
And white Zuleikha's drowsy glance
Woo me to waking unto day's
Delight from night's unmeasured trance :—
To drink to dally, to desire, to dance.

Ah ! beautiful and firm your hips,
Habib ! ah ! coolthsome your caress,
Zuleikha ! soft your honey lips—
The tongue of pleasure subtly sips
The wine that age distils, and calls distress.

Enough ! when all is ended, when
The popped pleasure purples pain—
Death—shall I laugh or smile ? Amen !
I'll wake, one last fond cup to drain,
And then—to sleep again, to sleep again !