

THE PRIESTESS OF PANORMITA

To Hilda Howard

HEAR me, Lord of the Stars!

For thee I have worshipped ever
With stains and sorrows and scars,

With joyful, joyful endeavour.

Hear me, O lilywhite goat!

O crisp as a thicket of thorns,
With a collar of gold for Thy throat

A scarlet bow for Thy horns!

Here, in the dusty air,

I build Thee a shrine to yew.

All green is the garland I wear,

But I feed it with blood for dew!

After the orange bars

That ribbed the green west dying

Are dead, O Lord of the Stars,

I come to Thee, come to Thee crying.

The ambrosial moon that arose

With breasts slow heaving in splendour

Drops wine from her infinite snows

Ineffably, utterly tender.

O moon! ambrosial moon!

Arise on my desert of sorrow

That the magical eyes of me swoon

With lust of rain to-morrow!

Ages and ages ago

I stood on the bank of a river—

Holy and holy and holy, I know,

For ever and ever and ever!

A priest in the mystical shrine,

I muttered a redeless rune,
Till the waters were redder than wine
In the blush of the harlot moon.

I and my brother priests
Worshipped a wonderful woman
With a body lithe as a beast's,
Subtly, horribly human.
Deep in the pit of her eyes
I saw the image of death,
And I drew the water of sighs
From the well of her lullaby breath.

She sitteth veiled for ever
Brooding over the waste.
She hath stirred or spoken never.
She is fiercely, manly chaste!
What madness made me awake
From the silence of utmost eld
The grey cold slime of the snake
That her poisonous body held?

By night I ravished a maid
From her father's camp to the cave.
I bared the beautiful blade;
I dipped her thrice i' the wave;
I slit her throat as a lamb's,
That the fount of blood leapt high
With my clamorous dithyrambs
Like a stain on the shield of the sky.

With blood and censer and song
I rent the mysterious veil:
My eyes gaze long and long
On the deep of that blissful bale.
My cold grey kisses awake

From the silence of utmost eld
The grey cold slime of the snake
That her beautiful body held.

But—God! I was not content
With the blasphemous secret of years,
The veil is hardly rent
While the eyes rain stones for tears.
So I clung to the lips and laughter
As the storms of death abated,
The storms of the grievous graft
By the swing of her soul unsated.

Wherefore reborn as I am
By a stream profane and foul,
In the reign of a Tortured Lamb,
In the realm of a sexless Owl,
I am set apart from the rest
By meed of the mystic rune
That reads in peril and pest
The ambrosial moon—the moon!

For under the tawny star
That shines in the Bull above
I can rein the riotous car
Of galloping, galloping Love;
And straight to the steady ray
Of the Lion-heart Lord I career,
Pointing my flaming way
With the spasm of night for a spear!

O moon! O secret sweet!
Chalcedony clouds of caresses
About the flame of our feet,
The night of our terrible tresses!
It is a wonder, then

If the people are mad with blindness,
And nothing is stranger to men
Than silence, and wisdom, and kindness?

Nay! let him fashion an arrow
Whose heart is sober and stout!
Let him pierce his God to the marrow!
Let the soul of his God flow out!
Whether a snake or a sun
In his horoscope Heaven hath cast,
It is nothing; every one
Shall win to the moon at last.

The mage hath wrought by his art
A billion shapes in the sun.
Look through to the heart of his heart,
And the many are shapes of one!
An end to the art of the mage,
And the cold grey blank of the prison!
An end to the adamant age!
The ambrosial moon is arisen.

I have bought a lilywhite goat
For the price of a crown of thorns,
A collar of gold for its throat,
A scarlet bow for its horns.
I have bought a lark in the lift
For the price of a butt of sherry:
With these, and God for a gift,
It needs no wine to be merry!

I have bought for a wafer of bread
A garden of poppies and clover;
For a water bitter and dead
A foam of fire flowing over.
From the Lamb and his prison fare

And the Owl's blind stupor arise!
Be ye wise, and strong, and fair
And the nectar afloat in your eyes!

Arise, O ambrosial moon,
By the strong immemorial spell,
By the subtle veridical rune
That is mighty in heaven and hell!
Drip thy mystical dew
On the tongues of the tender fauns
In the shade of initiate yews
Remote from the desert dawns!

Satyrs and Fauns, I call.
Bring your beauty to man!
I am the mate for ye all;
I am the passionate Pan.
Come, O come to the dance
Leaping with wonderful whips,
Life on the stroke of a glance,
Death in the stroke of the lips!

I am hidden beyond
Shed in a secret sinew
Smitten through by the fond
Folly of wisdom in you!
Come, while the moon (the moon!)
Sheds her ambrosial splendour,
Reels in the redeless rune,
Ineffably, utterly tender!

Hark! the appealing cry
Of deadly hurt in the hollow:—
Hyacinth! Hyacinth! Ay!
Smitten to death by Apollo.
Swift, O maiden moon,

Send they ray-dews after ;
Turn the dolorous tune
To soft ambiguous laughter !

Mourn, O Maenads, mourn !
Surely your comfort is over.
All we laugh at you lorn.
Ours are the poppies and clover !
O that mouth and eyes,
Mischievous, male, alluring !
O that twitch of the thighs
Dorian past enduring !

Where is wisdom now ?
Where the sage and his doubt ?
Surely the sweat of the brow
Hath driven the demon out.
Surely the scented sleep
That crowns the equal war
Is wiser than only to weep—
To weep for evermore !

Now, at the crown of the year,
The decadent days of October,
I come to thee, God, without fear ;
Pious, chaste, and sober,
I solemnly sacrifice
This first-fruit flower of wine
For a vehicle of thy vice
As I am Thine to be mine.

For five in the year gone by
I pray Thee give to me one ;
A lover stronger than I,
A moon to swallow the sun !
May he be like a lilywhite goat

Crisp as a thicket of thorns,
With a collar of gold for his throat,
A scarlet bow for his horns!