

At the Feet of Our Lady of Darkness

*Translated by Aleister Crowley
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Sullen and peevish, the weather steals their form from my desires! I turn over the leaves of my Verlaine; for "in my heart are tears as, in the city, rain." Devoutly I read him once more, and I burn incense to appease the mystic longing of my soul. And now, after a little, my spirit takes wing.

Deserted, my eyes follow the coral verses; my fingers unconsciously turn the pages, while poems, other than these, engrave themselves upon my brain. Poems sacred or poems accurst? Does it matter so long as they are beautiful, so long as they make me quiver?

It rains!

The raindrops strum their melody upon the casements. Upon my heart, upon my skull they seem rhythmically to drive furrows whence my sensibility, and my thought, may germinate. "For weary heart, o the song of the rain."

I have closed my Verlaine.

I will go and wake softly the silent psaltery, with its sorrowful and sacred voice. It sings to me the pious poems of long since. They are yet more poignant when heard in a place unconsecrated. For this Temple of mine is the Temple of my own Goddess, Our Lady of Darkness, kind to initiates. This Temple of mine is concentrated. It is robed in old silks of China; rich rugs from the East; skins torn from the tawny terrors of the jungle; cushions soft as the marrow of a baby's bones. Sage is the smile of my gilded idols, and the ever-burning lamp which is cooking the essence destined to evoke my dreams, starred all over with strange butter-

flies, which lattice its lucidity, makes itself the tireless accomplice of my vice.

The web of rushes, so hard, and yet so kind, lures me beyond resistance. My blood runs slow and cold within my veins. My eyes are overcast. My temples drone.

"Quick, Nam, a pipe! Opium is so kindly when the heart is dying." And with his spindle fingers of amber, the boy cooks the drug. Eagerly I fill my lungs.

"Now sing to me."

Softly, with the very voice of prayer, her psalms the ancient airs of over-yonder. It seems as if a breeze laden with the enervating fragrance of the plains of An-nam entered with it.

He sings. I smoke.

Little by little reality slips away.

Now it is blue of twilight amid the rustle of leaves. The birds, weary of flying, send their complaints leaping to heaven, before they put their heads beneath their wings, and the sea, the great savage, with long groans, crushes against the rocks her lofty prancing waves.

The sun has hidden himself, staining the horizon with bloody weft. It is the hour of the mirage!

Melancholy and slow, wrapped in a thousand sombre veils, I pass to and fro upon the bank, and listen to the eternal moan of the waters, and the light song of the breeze. The full fledged grass of the little wood near by, washed by the dew (and o so softly green!), asks me to trample it with my bare feet.

Briskly I take off my sandals, and so, upright in the wet greensward, wrapped closely in my veils, I think myself a great black lily, born from a magic wand.

And now I sway like the flowers on their stalks. I sway because the breeze is soft; because the sea and the leaves make music together. I sway because the dance is in myself, and because the rhythm of the waters cries to me, "Dance!"

Slowly, in cadence, I open my arms, because the branches do the same; my eyes half closed; my head keeps time with the Universe; my legs shudder; my feet irresistibly tear themselves from the ground to dance. I am going to dance until I lose breath; to dance for myself; to dance for the stars. Drunk with the fragrance of damp earth, and pine, I twist and wheel till my veils fall; until the dew covers my naked body with its dissolving kiss, until my hair falls free, and lends a lovelier veil to my dance.

I dance like one hypnotized. I clasp my hair in my hands. I bound and writhe in one immense desire for pleasure.

Now the breeze, light and warm, flits by as if the captive of my madness. The stars glint like the eyes of perverts. The sea herself has ceased its moan. It seems as if nature herself was dumb in order to admire me, and now, tiptoe, with all my body soaring, I feel myself deliciously seduced by pride.

Shining like emerald, and as green, a beautiful serpent stands before me. His little fascinating eyes fix me, and his body, still more shining in the moonlight, sways, as subtle and as strong as myself.

I dance again. I dance continually because his eyes have told me, "It is not harm that I would do you."

Slowly he sinks to the ground. He curls in upon himself, but his gaze never leaves mine — and I dance; I dance continually — .

From the abyss of the deep awaken squids. They cling to each other with their tentacles. Joyfully and lightly they run towards me, with little leaps upon the small white waves. O beautiful dancers!

Here they are; they surround me; they dance with me —

Strange lights afloat that blind me!

With my eyes closed I wheel upon myself; and, as I bend, my hair kisses the grass, and seems to wish to melt in it. Lively I leap up to break the spell; to feel

running over my whole body the electric shudder that they unleash.

Strange floating perfumes intoxicate me. Strange floating sounds tear me away, and deafen me. I dance; I dance, but I no longer know it, and my hair is now so heavy that it drags me down. Now I relax beyond reaction, for in the earth my hair is rooted like the grass. O dread!

Now I am riveted to the earth. My heart bounds in my breast, that sobs so strongly that I think it will kill me; and of all that surrounds me I know no more.

Slowly the serpent crawls over my body. Softly he presses me with his rings, as a timid lover might have done. Then still more softly his teeth nibble at my breast. And now he has gone away as if afraid of his own boldness.

And now, mastering me, they only, the squids, dance a mad saraband around my body, whose impotent leaps revolt the vain.

Strange sneering laughter floats around me. O to be able to tear myself from the damp soil! O to be able to cut off this hair that has betrayed me!

What would be the good? I am weary, weary. And now the squids, bended over me, fix me with their vast phosphorescent eyes, with eyes such as I never knew, and a long shudder of terror ripples my skin.

Now they resume their maniac gallop. . . . But whence prowl these sinister sneers of laughter?

O if I could only fly!

One of them leaves the dance, reaches towards me his horrible arms. I shut my eyes in the hope of losing consciousness, and I suffer the rape of his thousand mouths, which one after the other kiss me, and leave me, like fingers playing on a piano.

Now another advances; now another, and yet a third. Now every one of them plays upon my body, living keyboard, the most maddening sonata of sensuality.

the dream. It flies. I find myself once more still stretched on the accustomed web of rushes amid the little Indian gods with their riddling smiles.

It is Nam, the faithful Nam, the epicene boy; himself the image of an idol that softly psalms the antique airs of his forsaken fatherland.

His sure instinct warns him of the end of the dream, and like a jeweller with a pearl beyond price, with his long limpid fingers he kneads the cone of miracle that makes man equal to the gods.