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New Numbers

A Quarterly Publication of the Poems of

Rupert Brooke

John Drinkwater

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

Lascelles Abercrombie

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Mamua, when our laughter ends,
And hearts and bodies, brown as white,
Are dust about the doors of friends,
Or scent ablowing down the night,
Then, oh! then, the wise agree,
Comes our immortality.
Mamua, there waits a land
Hard for us to understand.
Out of time, beyond the sun,
All are one in Paradise,
You and Pupure are one,
And Taii, and the ungainly wise.
There the Eternals are, and there
The Good, the Lovely, and the True,
And Types, whose earthly copies were
The foolish broken things we knew;
There is the Face, whose ghosts we are;
The real, the never-setting Star;
And the Flower, of which we love
Faint and fading shadows here;
Never a tear, but only Grief;
Dance, but not the limbs that move.
Songs in Song shall disappear;
Instead of lovers, Love shall be;
For hearts, Immutability;
And there, on the Ideal Reef,
Thunders the Everlasting Sea!

And my laughter, and my pain,
Shall home to the Eternal Brain.
And all lovely things, they say,

Meet in Loveliness again ;
Miri's laugh, Teïpo's feet,
And the hands of Matua,
Stars and sunlight there shall meet,
Coral's hues and rainbows there,
And Teüra's braided hair ;
And with the starred *tiare's* white,
And white birds in the dark ravine,
And *flamboyants* ablaze at night,
And jewels, and evening's after-green,
And dawns of pearl and gold and red,
Mamua, your lovelier head !
And there'll no more be one who dreams
Under the ferns, of crumbling stuff,
Eyes of illusion, mouth that seems,
All time-entangled human love.
And you'll no longer swing and sway
Divinely down the scented shade,
Where feet to Ambulation fade,
And moons are lost in endless Day.
How shall we wind these wreaths of ours,
Where there are neither heads nor flowers ?
Oh, Heaven's Heaven !—but we'll be missing
The palms, and sunlight, and the south ;
And there's an end, I think, of kissing,
When our mouths are one with Mouth

Taiü here, Mamua,
Crown the hair, and come away !
Hear the calling of the moon,
And the whispering scents that stray

About the idle warm lagoon.
Hasten, hand in human hand,
Down the dark, the flowered way,
Along the whiteness of the sand,
And in the water's soft caress,
Wash the mind of foolishness,
Mamua, until the day.
Spend the glittering moonlight there
Pursuing down the soundless deep
Limbs that gleam and shadowy hair,
Or floating lazy, half-asleep.
Dive and double and follow after,
Snare in flowers, and kiss, and call,
With lips that fade, and human laughter,
And faces individual,
Well this side of Paradise!
There's little comfort in the wise.

PAPEETE,

February, 1914.

In your arms was still delight,
Quiet as a street at night ;
And thoughts of you, I do remember,
Were green leaves in a darkened chamber,
Were dark clouds in a moonless sky.
Love, in you, went passing by,
Penetrative, remote, and rare,
Like a bird in the wide air,
And, as the bird, it left no trace
In the heaven of your face.
In your stupidity I found
The sweet hush after a sweet sound.
All about you was the light
That dims the greying end of night ;
Desire was the unrisen sun,
Joy the day not yet begun,
With tree whispering to tree,
Without wind, quietly.
Wisdom slept within your hair,
And Long-Suffering was there,
And, in the flowing of your dress,
Undiscerning Tenderness.
And when you thought, it seemed to me,
Infinitely, and like a sea,
About the slight world you had known
Your vast unconsciousness was thrown.

O haven without wave or tide !
Silence, in which all songs have died !
Holy book, where hearts are still !
And home at length under the hill !

O mother quiet, breasts of peace,
Where love itself would faint and cease !
O infinite deep I never knew,
I would come back, come back to you,
Find you, as a pool unstirred,
Kneel down by you, and never a word,
Lay my head, and nothing said,
In your hands, ungarlanded ;
And a long watch you would keep ;
And I should sleep, and I should sleep !

MATAIEA,

January, 1914.

I have been so great a lover : filled my days
So proudly with the splendour of Love's praise,
The pain, the calm, and the astonishment,
Desire illimitable, and still content,
And all dear names men use, to cheat despair,
For the perplexed and viewless streams that bear
Our hearts at random down the dark of life.
Now, ere the unthinking silence on that strife
Steals down, I would cheat drowsy Death so far,
My night shall be remembered for a star
That outshone all the suns of all men's days.
Shall I not crown them with immortal praise
Whom I have loved, who have given me, dared with me
High secrets, and in darkness knelt to see
The inenarrable godhead of delight ?
Love is a flame ;—we have beaconed the world's night.
A city :—and we have built it, these and I.
An emperor :—we have taught the world to die.
So, for their sakes I loved, ere I go hence,
And the high cause of love's magnificence,
And to keep loyalties young, I'll write those names
Golden for ever, eagles, crying flames,
And set them as a banner, that men may know,
To dare the generations, burn, and blow
Out on the wind of Time, shining and streaming

These I have loved :

White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
Ringed with blue lines ; and feathery, faery dust ;
Wet roofs, beneath the lamp-light ; the strong crust
Of friendly bread ; and many-tasting food ;

Rainbows ; and the blue bitter smoke of wood ;
And radiant raindrops couching in cool flowers ;
And flowers themselves, that sway through sunny hours,
Dreaming of moths that drink them under the moon ;
Then, the cool kindness of sheets, that soon
Smooth away trouble ; and the rough male kiss
Of blankets ; grainy wood ; live hair that is
Shining and free ; blue-massing clouds ; the keen
Unpassioned beauty of a great machine ;
The benison of hot water ; furs to touch ;
The good smell of old clothes ; and other such,
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers,
Hair's fragrance, and the musty reek that lingers
About dead leaves and last year's ferns . . .

Dear names,

And thousand other throng to me ! Royal flames ;
Sweet water's dimpling laugh from tap or spring ;
Holes in the ground ; and voices that do sing ;
Voices in laughter, too ; and body's pain,
Soon turned to peace ; and the deep-panting train ;
Firm sands ; the little dulling edge of foam
That browns and dwindles as the wave goes home ;
And washen stones, gay for an hour ; the cold
Graveness of iron ; moist black earthen mould ;
Sleep ; and high places ; footprints in the dew ;
And oaks ; and brown horse-chestnuts, glossy-new ;
And new-pealed sticks ; and shining pools on grass ;—
All these have been my loves. And these shall pass,
Whatever passes not, in the great hour,
Nor all my passion, all my prayers, have power
To hold them with me through the gate of Death.

They'll play deserter, turn with the traitor breath,
 Break the high bond we made, and sell Love's trust
 And sacramented covenant to the dust.
 —Oh, never a doubt but, somewhere, I shall wake,
 And give what's left of love again, and make
 New friends, now strangers

But the best I've known,
 Stays here, and changes, breaks, grows old, is blown
 About the winds of the world, and fades from brains
 Of living men, and dies.

Nothing remains.

O dear my loves, O faithless, once again
 This one last gift I give: that after men
 Shall know, and later lovers, far-removed,
 Praise you, "All these were lovely"; say, "He loved."

MATAIEA,

1914.

Warm perfumes like a breath from vine and tree
Drift down the darkness. Plangent, hidden from eyes,
Somewhere an *eukaleli* thrills and cries
And stabs with pain the night's brown savagery.
And dark scents whisper; and dim waves creep to me,
Gleam like a woman's hair, stretch out, and rise;
And new stars burn into the ancient skies,
Over the murmurous soft Hawaiian sea.

And I recall, lose, grasp, forget again,
And still remember, a tale I have heard, or known,
An empty tale, of idleness and pain,
Of two that loved—or did not love—and one
Whose perplexed heart did evil, foolishly,
A long while since, and by some other sea.

WAIKIKI,

1913.

In the grey tumult of these after years
Oft silence falls; the incessant wranglers part;
And less-than-echoes of remembered tears
Hush all the loud confusion of the heart;
And a shade, through the toss'd ranks of mirth and crying,
Hungers, and pains, and each dull passionate mood,—
Quite lost, and all but all forgot, undying,
Comes back the ecstasy of your quietude.

So a poor ghost, beside his misty streams,
Is haunted by strange doubts, evasive dreams,
Hints of a pre-Lethean life, of men,
Stars, rocks, and flesh, things unintelligible,
And light on waving grass, he knows not when,
And feet that ran, but where, he cannot tell.

THE PACIFIC,

1914.

(To B.V.J.)

The Characters are—

ALICE.

JOAN, her young Sister.

SARAH.

AN OLD MAN.

A YOUNG STRANGER.

A mountain cottage. It is a midwinter night. Outside a snowstorm rages.

ALICE is looking through the window. JOAN, her young sister, and SARAH, an old neighbour woman, are sitting over the fire.

Alice : It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,
Nor lanterns in a blackness like to that.
How can they find him out? It isn't fair.

Sarah : God is for prayers. You'll anger Him speaking so.

Alice : I have prayed these hours, and now I'm tired of it.
He is caught in some grip of the rocks, and crying out,
And crying and crying, and none can hear him cry,
Because of this great beastliness of noise.

Sarah : Past crying now, I think.

Joan : There, take no heed
Of what she says—it's a rusty mind she has,
Being old, and wizened with bad luck on the hills.

Sarah : Rusty or no, I've a thought the man is dead.
No news has been growing apace from nightfall on
Into bad news, and now it's as though one stood
At the door and said,—we found him lying cold.

Alice : Whist! you old bitter woman. Will it never stay

In its wicked fury, . . . and the snow's like a black rain
Whipping the crying wind. If it would rest awhile
I could think and mind me what were best to do
To help my man. But a savagery like this
Beats at the wits till they have no tidiness.

Sarah : We'll sit and wait till they come.

Alice : And I a woman
Would never let him ask for anything,
Because of the daily thought I took for him,—
And against this spite now I've no strength at all.

Sarah : For all you would bake his bread to a proper turn
And remember always the day for his clean shift,
There was many a scolding word for him to bear.

Joan : Hush—

Alice : Let her talk. What does she know at all,—
Thinking crossed words between a man and a woman
Have anything to do with the heart? We have,
My man and I, more than a fretful mood
Can thieve or touch. My man—I must go myself.

Joan : There is nothing you could do.

Sarah : 'Tis men
Should carry the dead man in.

Alice : My man
Is alive I say—surely my man's not dead—
Surely, I say—old woman, your croaking talk
Teases my brain like the pestilence out there
Till I doubt the thing I know. There's not a crag
Or a cleft of the hills but is natural to him

As the stairs beyond the door there—surely, surely—
Yet nothing is sure.

Sarah : Death has a way with him,
A confident way.

Alice : You know that he's not dead—
I know that too—if only that dark rage
Howling out there would leave tormenting me,
And let me reason it out in peace a little,
I could be quite, quite sure that he's not dead.

Sarah : Age is a quiet place where you can watch
The world bent with its pain and still be patient,
And warm your hands by the fire because you know
That the newest sorrow and the oldest sorrow are one.
They will bring him and put him down upon the floor :
Be ready for that, girl. There are times when hope is cruel
As a fancy-man that goes without good-bye.

Alice : I have a brain that is known in three shire-towns
For a level bargain. It is strange that I should be
Listening now to a cracked old woman's clatter
When my own thoughts for him should be so clear
That I shouldn't heed the words of another body.
I want no hope—only an easy space
To remember the skill of my man among the hills
And how he would surely match their cunning with his,—
Or else to count the hours that he's been gone
And see that his chance is whittled quite away.
To have a living thought against this fear
Is all I want—but those screaming devils there
Beat in my mind like the drums in Carnarvon streets

That they use when they want to cheat folk into thinking
That death is a handsome trade.—And so
I let a woman with none but leaky wits
Tell me the way I should be,—when most I need
To ride no borrowed sense.

Sarah : It is not wind,
For all it is louder than any flood on the hills,
Nor the crazy snow that maddens you till your brain
Is like three cats howling upon a wall,
But the darkness that comes creeping on a woman
When she knows of grief before it is spoken out.
And the sooner grieved is grief the sooner gone.
Be ready to make him decent for the grave.

Joan : If he should walk in now you will not forget
The trouble you are putting in the house with your talk.

Sarah : The trouble is here.

Alice : If he should walk in now—
Yes, that's the way to think. I'll work it out,
Slowly, his doings from when he left the door
Until he comes again. You stood at the oven
With cakes half-browned against his tea. And I
Stood here beside my man and strapped his coat
Under his chin. He looked across your way—
He is fond of you, child—he calls you Father Joan
Because—but that's not it—I told him then
To-morrow would be time to bring the slates,
And let him only mend the wire to-day—
He thought so too and said—it is like a beast
Greater than half the world and crushed in a trap,
Shrieking against the pain—what did he say?—

I have forgotten now, and I had begun
To follow it all quite clearly—what did he say ?

Joan : That an hour would see him back, and hungry too.

Alice : An hour would bring him back—but that is nothing—
I know it now : he went to the broken wire
And mended it—three quarters of an hour—
And then he would think that after all the slates
Were best bespoke now—six miles to go :
He would be about a mile when this began—
This wrath that will surely last till the Judgment Day—
And that would make two hours till he reached the quarry—
But he went on, and the neighbours up and down
Were scared and went out searching with their lanterns,
Like lighted gnats searching the mines of hell.
Isn't it queer to see them out there dancing
When all the time he has gone a twelve mile journey—
And then this old woman came with her neighbour duty—
It's odd folk are,—

Sarah : It's a poor thing, spinning tales
When there's no faith in them.

Alice : Hush, I have it all
Quite clearly now, in spite of that monster baying,—
Two hours to the quarry, hindered by the night,
Then half an hour to bargain, then two hours
For beating back, his boots heavy with snow,
Or a little longer—five hours and more all told—
It is nine o'clock—he went five hours ago,
Or a little more, so that's just how it works—
He should be coming now along the road,
Tired—we must warm the cakes again.

Sarah : Ay, warm them,
A dead man's heavy bearing.

The clock strikes nine.

Alice : That's the time
To bring him back, and we'll call the lanterns in—
He must be near by now—

*A man is heard outside, kicking the
snow off his boots. ALICE opens the
door, and AN OLD MAN comes in, carrying
an unlit lantern.*

The Old Man : My candle is spent.

*JOAN takes the lantern and fits a new
candle while they speak.*

Alice : And you are going out again?
They have not found him?

The Old Man : No. It's not easy there.

Alice : Then he didn't go to the quarry after all.

Joan : Because they hav'n't found him? That's no sign.
They couldn't if he went.

Alice : Ah yes—how is it?—
He went, and they've been looking on the hills—
But have not found him. Yes—he must have gone.
He should be back. You should have found him for me.

Sarah : She is strange because of the trouble in the house.
I am old, and that is something.

Alice : It is not that—
I am caught away from myself by the screaming thing
That scourges the hills. And yet in spite of that
I had reckoned all his doings since he went

Until his time for coming—but you came—
You came instead. That is not right.

The Old Man (taking the lantern and lighting it) : We'll send
Across to the quarry now—

Alice : It is no use—
He'll not have gone.

The Old Man : The night is full of tricks,
But another hour will have ferreted all the hill.

He goes out.

Sarah : Simon who took his money down to market
And wouldn't change for a good sound fact of cattle,
Fingered his earnings till a hole was worn
And came to the house again with an empty bag.
Leave making tales, my girl, poor tales—they bring no profit,
Keeping the truth outside, and breaking away
To a thimbleful of ash themselves. He is dead.
Think hard on that. When the old king of the world
With the scourge and flail turns his strokes from the wheat
On the goodman's floor and scars the goodman's back,
It is no time to wince. Your man is dead.
And a day and a day make Adam's fall a story.

Alice : Not down to the quarry—then—my little Joan,
Do you know at all what a man becomes to a woman?
How should you though? If a man should take
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands,
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall
Till strangers with money to travel came to praise it,

And, when he had dug and hewn and spent his years
To make it a wonder, should go, and be remembered
No more than an onion-pedlar in the street
By the gaping travellers, yet he might be glad,
If his heart was as big as a woman's, for the thing he'd made,
The strong and lovely thing, knowing it risen
Out of his thought into the talk of the world.
That's how it is. A woman takes a mate,
And like the patient builder governs him
Into the goodman known through a countryside,
Or the wise friend that the neighbours will seek out,
And he, for all his love, may never know
How she has nourished the dear fine mastery
That bids him daily down the busy road
And leaves her by the hearth. And when he is dead
It comes to her that the strength she has given him
To make him a gallant figure among them all
Has been the thing that has filled her, and she lonely,
Or gossiping with the folk, or about the house.

Sarah : When he is dead.

Alice : Why should I think of that ?
I am crazed, I say, because of the madness loosed
And beating against the panes. He is not dead—
You know it woman— Joan, it would be a lie
To say my man is dead ?

Joan : There, sister, wait—
It is all we can do—there is nothing else to do.

Sarah : When he is dead. Let the thought that comes unbidden
Be welcome, for it's the best thought. When he is dead.

Alice : There is treachery against us—my man—my dear—
My brave love—they are trying to part us now !
But we must be too strong when when he is dead

*There is a knock at the door. She
makes a half movement towards it.*

He would not knock. See who it is.

JOAN opens the door and a YOUNG
TRAVELLER, buffeted and breathless, comes
in.

The Stranger : By Thor !
There's beauty trampling men like crumpled leaves.
May I come in till it's gone ?

Joan : Surely.

The Stranger : I set
Every sinew taut against this power,
This supple torrent of might that suddenly rose
Out of the fallen dusk and sang and leapt
Like an athlete of the gods frenzied with wine.
It seemed to rear challenging against me,
As though the master from Valhalla's tables,
Grown heady in his revels, had cried out—
Behold me now crashing across the earth
To shake the colonies of antic men
Into a fear shall be a jest, my fellows !
And I measured myself against this bragging pride,
Climbing step by step through the blinding riot
Of frozen flakes swung on the cataract wind,
My veins praising the tyranny that was matched
Against this poor ambitious body of mine.

Alice : The storm is drenched with treachery and sin—
It is not good to praise it.

The Stranger : You on the hills
Grow dulled, maybe, to the royalty that finds
In your crooked world a thousand splendid hours,
And a storm to you is but a hindered task
Or a wall for mending or a gap in the flock.
But I was strange among this gaiety
Plying black looms in a black firmament,
This joy that was spilt out of the iron heavens
Where pity is not bidden to the hearts
Of the immaculate gods. I was a dream,
A cold monotony suddenly thrust
Into a waking world of lusty change,
A wizened death elected from the waste
To strive and mate with eager lords of tumult.
Beauty was winged about me, darkling speed
Took pressure of earth and smote against my face ;
I rode upon the front of heroic hours,
And once was on the crest of the world's tide,
Unseared as the elements.—But he mastered me,
That god striking a star for holiday,
And filled himself with great barbaric laughter
To see me slink away.

Alice : It is no god,
But a brainless anger, a gaunt and evil thing
That blame can't reach.

The Stranger : Not all have eyes to see.—
I'm harsh with my words, but I come from a harsh quarrel
With larger thews than man's.

Alice : Stranger, I'd give
Comely words to any who knocks at the door.
You are welcome—but leave your praising of this blight.
You safely gabbing of sly and cruel furies,
Like a child laughing before a cage of tigers.
You with your fancy talk of lords and gods
And your hero-veins—young man, do you know this night
Is eating through my bones into the marrow,
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,
And making my heart the oldest thing of any ?
Do you see those lights ?

The Stranger : They seemed odd moving there,
In a storm like this.

Alice : A man is lost on the hills.

The Stranger : That's bad. But who ?

Alice : My man is lost on the hills.

Sarah : She has it now ; her man is dead on the hills.

The Stranger : I talked amiss, not knowing of trouble here.
But why should he be dead ?

Alice : The woman is worn,
Her mind is worn, and she lives out of the world.
You ask at once as any wise man would.
I have told her and told and told that he's not dead,
And my young sister, too, though but a girl,
Says it, and she has a head beyond her years.
He is lost for an hour, or maybe for a night,
But never dead. That is the way you think ?
It is waiting that steals your proper sense away ;
And then, although you know, you let in fear

Blaspheming the thing you know—it is waiting to-night
 In the midst of an idiot wrath drumming and drumming
 Like a plague of bees in swarm above your eyes.
 I do not know—I have not any strength
 To fathom it now, and there is none to tell me.

Sarah : She knows it all, though the thing is hard to say.

Alice : Have done ! Young stranger, you have travelled the world
 I think, or have grown learned in great cities,
 And can tell the way things go—is it not wrong
 To say that a man because of an ugly night
 Should perish on his home-ground ? He would find a road
 Out of a danger such as that, because
 That is the way things happen—tell me now ?

The Stranger : It is likely that he would.

Alice : You hear that, Joan—
 A traveller who has been in foreign dangers
 And comes a scholar from a hundred cities
 Says it is well, and that we must be patient.

The Stranger : No, I've not travelled, and I only say a man
 Knowing the hills would likely weather a storm.

Alice : There, there—you must not take it back again,
 Because you know, and you have said it is well.

Sarah : They cut a stone that is like a small church window,
 And they carve a name and a line out of the book,
 And when that's done there is nothing then to doubt.

*The storm has suddenly cleared. The
 silence falls upon them strangely, and there
 is a pause.*

Alice : It is spent at last. He will come from his shelter now.

My dear—come soon. Set the kettle again.

JOAN does so. There is another pause.

I have my thought again. It is an end.

I am broken. There is no pity anywhere.

The Stranger : The lights are coming.

Sarah : The anger never bates,
But scourges us till time betrays the limbs,
And strikes the tongue, and puts pence on the eyes,
And leaves the latch for stranger hands to lift.

*The blackness beyond the window has
given place to clear starlight on the hills.
A NUMBER OF MEN with lanterns pass by.
There is a knock : ALICE opens the door,
and THE OLD MAN stands there with his
lighted lantern. She looks at him, and
neither speaks. She turns away to the
table.*

Alice : Why have we waited all this time to know

Her sorrow breaks over her.

THE END

To safety of the kerb he thrust the crone :
When a shaft took him in the back, and prone
He tumbled heavily, but all unheard
Amid the scurry of wheels that crashed and whirred
About his senseless head—his helmet crushed
Like crumpled paper by a car that rushed
Upon him unaware. And as he lay
He heard again the wheels he'd heard all day
About him on point-duty . . . only now
Each red-hot wheel ran searing over his brow—
A sizzling star with hub and spokes and tyre
One monstrous Catherine-wheel of sparking fire
Whirring down windy tunnels of the night . . .
That Catherine-wheel, somehow it will not light—
Fixed to the broken paling ; and the pin
Pricks the boy's finger as he jabs it in :
He sucks the salty blood—the spiteful thing
Fires, whizzing, sputtering sparks : he feels them sting
His wincing cheek ; and, on the damp night-air,
The stench of burnt saltpetre and singed hair . . .
While still he lies and listens without fear
To the loud traffic rumbling in his ear—
Wheels rumbling in his ear, and through his brain
For evermore, a never-ending train
Of scarlet postal-vans that whirl one red
Perpetual hot procession through his head—
His head that's just a clanking, clattering mill
Of grinding wheels . . . and down an endless hill
After his hoop he runs, a little lad,
Barefooted 'neath the stars, in nightshirt clad—
And stumbles into bed, the stars all gone,

Though in his head the hoop keeps running on
And on and on : his head grown big and wide
Holds all the windy night and stars inside . . .
And still within a hair's breadth of his ear
The crunch and gride of wheels rings sharp and clear,
Huge lumbering wagons, crusted axle-deep
With country marl, their drivers half-asleep
Against green toppling mounds of cabbages
Still crisp with dewy airs, or stacks of cheese
Smelling of Arcady, till all the sky
In clouds of cheese and cabbages rolls by—
Great golden cheeses wheeling through the night,
And giant cabbages of emerald light
That tumble after, scattering crystal drops . . .
While in his ear the grinding never stops—
Wheels grinding asphalt . . . then a high-piled wain
Of mignonette in boxes . . . and again,
A baby at his father's cottage-door
He toddles, treading on his pinafore,
And tumbles headlong in a bed of bloom,
Half smothered in the deep, sweet honeyed gloom
Of crushed, wet blossom ; and the hum of bees—
Big bumble-bees that buzz through flowery trees—
Grows furious . . . changing to a roar of wheels
And honk of hooting horns : and now he feels
That all the cars in London filled with light
Are bearing down upon him through the night,
As out of hall and theatre there pour
White-shouldered women, ever more and more,
Bright-eyed, with flashing teeth, borne in a throng
Of purring, glittering cars, ten thousand strong :

Each drowsy dame and eager chattering lass
Laughing unheard within her box of glass . . .
And then great darkness, and a clanging bell—
Clanging beneath the hollow dome of hell
Aglow like burnished copper; and a roar
Of wheels and wheels and wheels for evermore,
As engine after engine crashes by
With clank and rattle under that red sky,
Dropping a trail of burning coals behind,
That scorch his eyeballs till he lies half-blind,
Smouldering to cinder in a vasty night
Of wheeling worlds and stars in whirring flight,
And suns that blaze in thunderous fury on
For ever and for ever, yet are gone
Ere he can gasp to see them . . . head to heels
Slung round a monstrous red-hot hub, that wheels
Across infinity, with spokes of fire
That dwindle slowly till the shrinking tyre
Is clamped like aching ice about his head . . .

He smells clean acid smells: and safe in bed
He wakens in a lime-washed ward, to hear
Somebody moaning almost in his ear,
And knows that it's himself that moans: and then,
Battling his way back to the world of men,
He sees with leaden eyelids opening wide,
His young wife gravely knitting by his side.

SCENE : The big tent-stable of a travelling circus. On the ground near the entrance, GENTLEMAN JOHN, stableman and general odd-job man, lies smoking beside MERRY ANDREW, the clown. GENTLEMAN JOHN is a little hunched man with a sensitive face and dreamy eyes. MERRY ANDREW, who is resting between the afternoon and evening performances, with his clown's hat lying beside him, wears a crimson wig, and a baggy suit of orange-coloured cotton, patterned with purple cats. His face is chalked dead white, and painted with a set grin, so that it is impossible to see what manner of man he is. In the background are camels and elephants feeding, dimly visible in the steamy dusk of the tent.

Gentleman John : And then consider camels : only think
Of camels long enough, and you'd go mad—
With all their humps and lumps ; their knobbly knees,
Splay feet, and straddle legs ; their sagging necks,
Flat flanks, and scraggy tails, and monstrous teeth.
I've not forgotten the first fiend I met :
'Twas in a lane in Smyrna, just a ditch
Between the shuttered houses, and so narrow
The brute's bulk blocked the road ; the huge green stack
Of dewy fodder that it slouched beneath
Brushing the yellow walls on either hand,
And shutting out the strip of burning blue :
And I'd to face that vicious bobbing head
With evil eyes, slack lips, and nightmare teeth,
And duck beneath the snaky squirming neck,
Pranked with its silly string of bright blue beads,
That seemed to wriggle every way at once,
As though it were a hydra. Allah's beard !
But I was scared, and nearly turned and ran.
I felt that muzzle take me by the scruff,
And heard those murderous teeth crunching my spine,

Before I stooped—though I dodged safely under.
I've always been afraid of ugliness :
I'm such a toad myself, I hate all toads ;
And the camel is the ugliest toad of all
To my mind ; and it's just my devil's luck
I've come to this—to be a camel's lackey,
To fetch and carry for original sin ;
For, sure enough, the camel's old evil incarnate.
Blue beads and amulets to ward off evil !
No eye's more evil than a camel's eye.
The elephant is quite a comely beast,
Compared with Satan camel,—trunk and all,
His floppy ears, and his inconsequent tail.
He's stolid, but, at least, a gentleman.
It does not hurt my pride to valet him,
And bring his shaving-water. He's a lord.
Only the bluest blood that has come down
Through generations from the mastodon
Could carry off that tail with dignity,
That tail and trunk. He cannot look absurd,
For all the monkey tricks you put him through,
Your paper hoops and popguns. He just makes
His masters look ridiculous, when his pomp's
Butchered to make a bumpkin's holiday.
He's dignity itself, and proper pride,
That stands serenely in a circus-world
Of mountebanks and monkeys. He has weight
Behind him : æons of primeval power
Have shaped that pillared bulk ; and he stands sure,
Solid, substantial on the world's foundations.
And he has form, form that's too big a thing

To be called beauty. Once, long since, I thought
To be a poet, and shape words, and mould
A poem like an elephant, huge, sublime,
To front oblivion: and because I failed,
And all my rhymes were gawky, shambling camels,
Or else obscene, blue-buttocked apes, I'm doomed
To lackey it for things such as I've made,
Till one of them crunches my back-bone with his teeth,
Or knocks my wind out with a forthright kick
Clean in the midriff: crumpling up in death
The hunched and stunted body that was me,
John, the apostle of the Perfect Form!
Jerusalem! I'm talking—like a book,
As you would say: and a bad book at that,
A maundering, kiss-mammy book—'The Hunchback's End
Or 'The Camel-Keeper's Reward—would be the title.
I froth and bubble like a new-broached cask.
No wonder you look glum, for all your grin.
What makes you mope? You've naught to growse about.
You've got no hump. Your body's brave and straight—
So shapely even that you can afford
To trick it in fantastic shapelessness,
Knowing that there's a clean-limbed man beneath
Preposterous pantaloons and purple cats.
I would have been a poet, if I could:
But better than shaping poems 'twould have been,
To have had a comely body and clean limbs
Obedient to my bidding.

Merry Andrew: I missed a hoop
This afternoon.

Gentleman John : You missed a hoop ? You mean . . .

Merry Andrew : That I am done, used up, scrapped, on the shelf,
Out of the running—only that, no more.

Gentleman John : Well, I've been missing hoops my whole life
[long ;

Though, when I come to think of it, perhaps
There's little consolation to be chewed
From crumbs that I can offer.

Merry Andrew : I've not missed
A hoop since I was six. I'm forty-two.
This is the first time that my body's failed me :
But 'twill not be the last. And . . .

Gentleman John : Such is life !
You're going to say. You see I've got it pat,
Your jaded wheeze. Lord, what a wit I'd make
If I'd a set grin painted on my face.
And such is life, I'd say a hundred times,
And each time set the world aroar afresh
At my original humour. Missed a hoop !
Why, man alive, you've naught to grumble at.
I've boggled every hoop since I was six.
I'm fifty-five ; and I've run round a ring
Would make this potty circus seem a pinhole.
I wasn't born to sawdust. I'd the world
For circus . . .

Merry Andrew : It's no time for crowing now.
I know a gentleman, and take on trust
The silver spoon and all. My teeth were cut
Upon a horseshoe : and I wasn't born
To purple and fine linen—but to sawdust,

To sawdust, as you say—brought up on sawdust.
I've had to make my daily bread of sawdust :
Ay, and my children's,—children's, that's the rub,
As Shakespeare says

Gentleman John : Ah, there you go again !
What a rare wit to set the ring aroar—
As Shakespeare says ! Crowing ? A gentleman ?
Man, didn't you say you'd never missed a hoop ?
It's only gentlemen who miss no hoops,
Clean-livers, easy lords of life who take
Each obstacle at a leap, who never fail.
You are the gentleman.

Merry Andrew : Now don't you try
Being funny at my expense ; or you'll soon find
I'm not quite done for yet—not quite snuffed out.
There's still a spark of life. You may have words :
But I've a fist will be a match for them.
Words slaver feebly from a broken jaw.
I've always lived straight, as a man must do
In my profession, if he'd keep in fettle :
But I'm no gentleman, for I fail to see
There's any sport in baiting a poor man
Because he's losing grip at forty-two,
And sees his livelihood slipping from his grasp—
Ay, and his children's bread.

Gentleman John : Why, man alive,
Who's baiting you ? This winded, broken cur,
That limps through life, to bait a bull like you !
You don't want pity, man ! The beaten bull,
Even when the dogs are tearing at his gullet,

Turns no eye up for pity. I myself,
Crippled and hunched and twisted as I am,
Would make a brave fend to stand up to you
Until you swallowed your words, if you should slobber
Your pity over me. A bull! Nay, man,
You're nothing but a bear with a sore head.
A bee has stung you—you who've lived on honey.
Sawdust, forsooth! You've had the sweet of life:
You've munched the honeycomb till . . .

Merry Andrew: Ay, talk's cheap.
But you've no children. You don't understand.

Gentleman John: I have no children: I don't understand!

Merry Andrew: It's children make the difference.

Gentleman John: Man alive—
Alive and kicking, though you're shamming dead—
You've hit the truth at last. It's that, just that,
Makes all the difference. If you hadn't children,
I'd find it in my heart to pity you,
Granted you'd let me. I don't understand!
I've seen you stripped. I've seen your children stripped.
You've never seen me naked; but you can guess
The misstitched, gnarled, and crooked thing I am.
Now, do you understand? I may have words.
But you, man, do you never burn with pride
That you've begotten those six limber bodies,
Firm flesh, and supple sinew, and lithe limb—
Six nimble lads, each like young Absalom,
With red blood running lively in his veins,
Bone of your bone, your very flesh and blood?
It's you don't understand. God, what I'd give

This moment to be you, just as you are,
Preposterous pantaloons and purple cats
And painted leer and crimson curls and all,
To be you now, with only one missed hoop,
If I'd six clean-limbed children of my loins,
Born of the ecstasy of life within me,
To keep it quick and valiant in the ring
When I . . . but I . . . Man, man, you've missed a hoop :
But they'll take every hoop like blooded colts :
And 'twill be you in them that leaps through life,
And in their children, and their children's children.
God ! doesn't it make you hold your breath to think
There'll always be an Andrew in the ring,
The very spit and image of you stripped,
While life's old circus lasts ? And I . . . at least
There is no twisted thing of my begetting
To keep my shame alive : and that's the most
That I've to pride myself upon. But, God,
I'm proud, ay, proud as Lucifer, of that.
Think what it means, with all the urge and sting,
When such a lust of life runs in the veins.
You, with your six sons, and your one missed hoop,
Put that thought in your pipe, and smoke it. Well,
And how d'you like the flavour ? Something bitter ?
And burns the tongue a trifle ? That's the brand
That I must smoke while I've the breath to puff.

(*pause.*)

I've always worshipped the body, all my life—
The body quick with the perfect health which is beauty,
Lively, lissom, alert, and taking its way
Through the world with the easy gait of the early Gods.

The only moments I've lived my life to the full
And that live again in remembrance unfaded are those
When I've seen life compact in some perfect body,
The living God made manifest in man :
A diver in the Mediterranean, resting,
With sleeked black hair, and glistening salt-tanned skin,
Gripping the quivering gunwale with tense hands,
His torso lifted out of the peacock sea,
Like Neptune, carved in amber, come to life :
A stark Egyptian on the Nile's edge poised
Like a bronze Osiris against the lush, rank green :
A fisherman dancing reels, on New Year's Eve,
In a hall of shadowy rafters and flickering lights,
At St. Abbs on the Berwickshire coast, to the skirl of the pipes,
The lift of the wave in his heels, the sea in his veins :
A Cherokee Indian, as though he were one with his horse,
His coppery shoulders agleam, his feathers aflame
With the last of the sun, descending a gulch in Alaska :
A brawny Cleveland puddler, stripped to the loins,
On the cauldron's brink, stirring the molten iron
In the white-hot glow, a man of white-hot metal :
A Cornish ploughboy driving an easy share
Through the grey, light soil of a headland, against a sea
Of sapphire, gay in his new white corduroys,
Blue-eyed, dark-haired, and whistling a careless tune :
Jack Johnson, stripped for the ring, in his swarthy pride
Of sleek and rippling muscle . . .

Merry Andrew :

Jack's the boy !

Ay, he's the proper figure of a man.

But he'll grow fat and flabby and scant of breath.

He'll miss his hoop some day.

Gentleman John : But what are words
To shape the joy of form? The Greeks did best,
To cut in marble or to cast in bronze
Their ecstasy of living. I remember
A marvellous Hermes that I saw in Athens,
Fished from the very bottom of the deep
Where he had lain, two thousand years or more,
Wrecked with a galley-full of Roman pirates,
Among the white bones of his plunderers,
Whose flesh had fed the fishes as they sank—
Serene in cold, imperishable beauty,
Biding his time till he should rise again,
Exultant from the wave, for all men's worship,
The morning-spring of life, the youth of the world,
Shaped in sea-coloured bronze for everlasting.
Ay, the Greeks knew : but men have forgotten now.
Not easily do we meet beauty walking
The world to-day in all the body's pride.
That's why I'm here—a stable-boy to camels—
For in the circus-ring there's more delight
Of seemly bodies, goodly in sheer health,
Bodies trained and tuned to the perfect pitch,
Eager, blithe, debonair, from head to heel
Aglow and alive in every pulse, than elsewhere
In this machine-ridden land of grimy, glum
Round-shouldered, coughing mechanics. Once I lived
In London, in a slum called Paradise,
Sickened to see the greasy pavements crawling
With puny flabby babies, thick as maggots.
Poor brats ! I'd soon go mad, if I'd to live

In London with its stunted men and women
But little better to look on than myself.
Yet, there's an island where the men keep fit—
St. Kilda's, a stark fastness of high crag :
They must keep fit or famish : their main food
The Solan goose ; and it's a chancy job
To climb down a sheer face of slippery granite
And drop a noose over the sentinel bird
Ere he can squawk to rouse the sleeping flock.
They must keep fit—their bodies taut and trim—
To have the nerve : and they're like tempered steel,
Suppled and fined. But even they've grown slacker
Through traffic with the mainland, in these days.
A hundred years ago, the custom held
That none should take a wife, till he had stood,
His left heel on the dizziest point of crag,
His right leg and both arms stretched in mid-air,
Above the sea : three hundred feet to drop
To death, if he should fail—a Spartan test.
But any man who could have failed, would scarce
Have earned his livelihood, or his children's bread
On that bleak rock.

Merry Andrew : (*drowsily*) Ay, children—that's it, children !

Gentleman John : St. Kilda's children had a chance, at least,
With none begotten idly of weakling fathers.
A Spartan test for fatherhood ! Should they miss
Their hoop, 'twas death—and childless. You have still
Six lives to take unending hoops for you,
And you yourself are not done yet . . .

Merry Andrew (*more drowsily*) : Not yet,
And there's much comfort in the thought of children.

They're bonnie boys enough, and should do well,
If I can but keep going a little while,
A little longer till . . .

Gentleman John : Six strapping sons!
And I have naught but camels.

(*pause.*)

Yet, I've seen

A vision in this stable that puts to shame
Each ecstasy of mortal flesh and blood
That's been my eyes' delight. I never breathed
A word of it to man or woman yet:
I couldn't whisper it now to you, if you looked
Like any human thing this side of death.
'Twas on the night I stumbled on the circus.
I'd wandered all day, lost among the fells,
Over snow-smothered hills, through blinding blizzard,
Whipped by a wind that seemed to strip and skin me,
Till I was one numb ache of sodden ice.
Quite done, and drunk with cold, I'd soon have dropped
Dead in a ditch, when suddenly a lantern
Dazzled my eyes. I smelt a queer warm smell;
And felt a hot puff in my face; and blundered
Out of the flurry of snow and raking wind
Dizzily into a glowing Arabian night
Of elephants and camels having supper.
I thought that I'd gone mad, stark, staring mad:
But I was much too sleepy to mind just then—
Dropped dead-asleep upon a truss of hay;
And lay, a log, till—well, I cannot tell
How long I lay unconscious. I but know
I slept, and wakened: and that 'twas no dream.

I heard a rustle in the hay beside me ;
 And opening sleepy eyes, scarce marvelling,
 I saw her, standing naked in the lamplight,
 Beneath the huge tent's cavernous canopy,
 Against the throng of elephants and camels
 That champed unwondering in the golden dusk,
 Moon-white Diana, mettled Artemis—
 Her body quick and tense as her own bowstring—
 Her spirit, an arrow barbed and strung for flight—
 White snow-flakes melting on her night-black hair,
 And on her glistening breasts and supple thighs :
 Her red lips parted, her keen eyes alive
 With fierce, far-ranging hungers of the chase
 Over the hills of morn . . . The lantern guttered :
 And I was left alone in the outer darkness
 Among the champing elephants and camels.
 And I'll be a camel-keeper to the end :
 Though never again my eyes . . .

(*pause.*)

So, you can sleep,

You Merry Andrew, for all you missed your hoop.
 It's just as well, perhaps. Now I can hold
 My secret to the end. Ah, here they come !

*(Six lads, between the ages of three and twelve, clad in pink
 tights covered with silver spangles, tumble into the tent.)*

The Eldest Boy : Daddy, the bell's rung, and . . .

Gentleman John : He's snoozing sound.

(to the youngest boy)

You just creep quietly, and take tight hold
 Of the crimson curls, and tug, and you will hear
 The purple pussies all caterwaul at once.

Night had squander'd over the glowing air
The thousands of her stars. A slender woman—
Sure-foot treading the path her childhood knew—
Smiled at them as she went, in haste for home
After the long day of a widow's toil ;
Her tired body loving the thought of sleep,
But her heart planning eager things. She seemed
To face the loft of splendours, as her mind
Would match itself with the exulting blue
That owns the treasures of eternal light :

“ A little piece of life that time has taken
Into his hands, and soon will have it squared
To lie still in the work he builds for ever,
As men make stones the size for masonry ;
The little life and the few years I am
Might stand beside you in your glorying,
And it would not be boldness. I can declare
A spirit of desire that has its range
Endless as you, O blue depths of the darkness,
You in whom space is perfect ; and the glee
That I can make will mock your whitest stars.
You cannot look me down, you everlasting :
Death is as measureless as you, and I
Am love that fills the greatness of death full
Of burning never to be alight, as dark
As your blue burns ; and in the midst I am
Shining love whose motion is faultless flame
Measured in starry flights of living joy—
Still kindling new radiant attendance round
My little laughing son, the life my lover

Required, when I was worshipt by his beauty.
O night, infinite room of fire rejoicing,
I know where you are equalled, I that am
Love for a lover dead and a son living ! ”

By this there should have been a golden eye
Of candlelight watching for her approach,
The gleaming window that would seem her hour
Of joy looking to take her back again.
But there was only night in front of her :
The house was dark and noiseless, a strange bulk
Of blacker night, filled with quieter silence ;
And she was nothing to it ; it had lost
All that it was in some great lonely passion
It could not share ; and would not heed aught else :
So blank it stood, a rapt thing. She was quick
To push the door wide, and stand listening
Within the walls. Instantly on her mind
The sense of outdoor darkness, with the world
Eased of its weight, alter'd to graver darkness
Pressing down as thick as deep-sea water,
A load of darkness ; yet not so quickly changed
She could not feel the mood in the noiseless house
For a tick of her heart shudder and shrink off
When the latch rapt and her movement stirred against it ;
Then settle back and close over her brain.

But joy was eager in her, and drew in
These swerving motions of her thought. She bent
To peer into the room, and held her arms
Ready to catch the boy running to her.

“ You are both very still ! Is this to be

A hiding game? Where are you, little knave?
Laugh, little deceiver: I'll track your voice
Home to its darling breast. Out with a jump,
You minim of the rogues, and frighten me!—
Mother, where is he? What's my sweetheart doing?—
Where are you, mother?—Gone? they can't be gone!”

She started forward; but her mother's voice
Came very quiet from the back of the room
And held her, as though it took her by the soul.

“Be careful. Make a light before you move,
Else you may stumble.”

“It must be near you,
The tinder-box! Has some harm come to him?
Quick, mother, strike!”

“Near me, yes; I forgot.
Do not come in: wait for the light; or else
You may trip. I have been sitting here so long,
So long, I have almost stiffen'd into an image.
But wait: the cramp's against my hurrying.
And I'm not ready for you yet; just now
I tried to make out what I ought to say.”

“He is hurt then? Have you put him to bed?”

“Wait, wait, girl; stay there, or you'll now it glows;
My hands were shivering more than I knew.
Now for the candle: eh, my fingers are
A palsy, or doddering ague. Now I hope
God will be with your heart as well as mine.”

The light grew round the flame, a golden mist
Hanging confused with darkness rather than light.
And when the room was full of it, she saw

Where her boy lay ; right at her feet he lay,
Naked, with open eyes, speared in the breast.

Her throat lockt terribly on her shrieking breath.
When her stunn'd heart felt its fearful beating,
And blacken'd mind awoke to dazzling anguish,
She heard her mother speaking, as talk sounds
Floating out of a window very high up.

“ It was the soldiers. They had made them drunk ;
And some were laughing drunk ; but most were wild,
Like men who keep a shouting fury up
For fear they'll be afraid ; and there was one
Who cried and cried like broken-hearted madness.
' I can't be doing this,' he said, ' not this ;'
And it was he that snatcht the boy from me.
And then the laughers and the swearers ran
Out of the house like men escaping fire,
Laughing and swearing still : and he alone
Stayed crying here, and looking on his work,
And saying still, ' I can't do things like this ! ' ”

“ But why ? why ? What has come to the world ? ”

“ Messiah has come. The world is to be saved. ”

“ Will you jeer at me ? A Messiah who leaves
My baby to the fiends, and saves the world ?
Is it the time for that talk ? Will the dreams
That comforted old men posed with the world
Have any quiet for me ? And were they truth
Blazed on the world, they would not alter this ! ”

“ As well as I could learn it, there's no tale
Now of the Lord riding down the heathen
Sudden as thunder among them, and the Jews

To follow singing after his amazement.
The tale is nothing of that, but of a baby
Born in Jewry, none knows where, and likely
When he is grown—they say 'tis sworn in the stars—
To pull the power of the king clattering down ;
Because his mind will be the mind of God,
And he will change men's lives, so that they break
The world about them like an evil habit,
And make a new world out of righteousness :
'Tis so my thought pieces the broken tale.
But the king will not have the world so changed,
And all the Jewish boys are to be killed.
The fool ! Let there be blood from here to Rome,
Our God will hide Messiah from his steel,
The world will be new made after God's heart."

" O be quiet ! I do not want the world
New made after God's heart ; I want my boy
Alive and laughing, my little nimble boy !
Why need the world be changed at all ? We two,
I and my boy, would have delighted in it ;
We would have stood in midst of the great world
And filled ourselves full of the sense of it :
The burning days and forces of the night,
Guarding man's living passion like a king
Taken captive and striding an endless road ;
We would have stood in midst of the great joy
And the great sorrow of being in the world
And gloried in it, like musicians standing
In midst of the sound of their own mastery.—
But she must murder him with her Messiah,

That woman ! For the sake of pampering
The brainsick lives that dare not love the world,
He must be murder'd, my happy little dancer ;
And the bright world that played with him so gay
Must turn against him in a hideous flash
Of agony, and strike him dark for ever :
O my darling, blinded and cold for ever !—
What will your world, new made after God's heart,
Offer my heart, to make this good to me ?—
It may be holiness thriving up to heaven,
'Twill not be rid of me ; I'll be its shame ;
I'll haunt it ; it shall hear me cry in its ears. . . .”

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