

THE STRANGE MUSIC

AND

OTHER POEMS

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Freeeditorial 

The Strange Music

Other loves may sink and settle, other loves may loose and slack,
But I wander like a minstrel with a harp upon my back,
Though the harp be on my bosom, though I finger and I fret,
Still, my hope is all before me; for I cannot play it yet.

In your strings is hid a music that no hand hath e'er let fall,
In your soul is sealed a pleasure that you have not known at all;
Pleasure subtle as your spirit, strange and slender as your frame,
Fiercer than the pain that folds you, softer than your sorrow's name.

Not as mine, my soul's annointed, not as mine the rude and light
Easy mirth of many faces, swaggering pride of song and fight;
Something stranger, something sweeter, something waiting you afar,
Secret as your stricken senses, magic as your sorrows are.

But on this, God's harp supernal, stretched but to be stricken once,
Hoary time is a beginner, Life a bungler, Death a dunce.
But I will not fear to match them - no by God, I will not fear,
I will learn you, I will play you and the stars stand still to hear.

The Sword of Suprise

Sunder me from my bones, O sword of God
Till they stand stark and strange as do the trees;
That I whose heart goes up with the soaring woods
May marvel as much at these.

Sunder me from my blood that in the dark
I hear that red ancestral river run
Like branching buried floods that find the sea
But never see the sun.

Give me miraculous eyes to see my eyes

Those rolling mirrors made alive in me
Terrible crystals more incredible
Than all the things they see

Sunder me from my soul, that I may see
The sins like streaming wounds, the life's brave beat
Till I shall save myself as I would save
A stranger in the street.

The Towers of Time

Under what withering leprous light
The very grass as hair is grey,
Grass in the cracks of the paven courts
Of gods we graved but yesterday.
Senate, republic, empire, all
We leaned our backs on like a wall
And blessed as stron as strong and blamed as stolid--
Can it be these that waver and fall?
And what is this like a ghost returning,
A dream grown strong in the strong daylight?
The all-forsaken, the unforgotten,
The ever-behind and out of sight.
We turned our backs and our blind flesh felt it
Growing and growing, a tower in height.

Ah, not alone the evil splendour
And not the insolent arms alone
Break with the ramrod, stiff and brittle,
The sceptre of the nordic throne;
But things of manlier renown
Reel in the wreck of throne and crown,
With tyrannous tyranny, tyrannous loyalty
Tyrannous liberty, all gone down.

(There is never a crack in the ivory tower
Or a hinge to groan in the house of gold
Or a leaf of the rose in the wind to wither
And she grows young as the world grows old.
A Woman clothed with the sun returning
to clothe the sun when the sun is cold.)

Ah, who had guessed that in a moment

Great Liberty that loosed the tribes,
the Republic of the young men's battles
Grew stale and stank of old men's bribes;
And where we watched her smile in power
A statue like a starry tower
the stone face sneers as in a nightmare
Down on a world that worms devour.
(Archaic incredible dead dawns breaking
Deep in the deserts and waste and wealds,
Where the dead cry aloud on Our Lady of Victories,
Queen of the Eagles, aloft on the shields,
And the sun is gone up on the Thundering Legion
On the roads of Rome to the Battlefields.)

Ah, who had known who had not seen
How soft and sudden on the fame
Of my most noble English ships
The sunset light of Carthage came
And the thing I never had dreamed could be
In the house of my fathers came to me
Through the sea-wall cloven, the cloud and dark,
A voice divided, a doubtful sea.
(The light is bright on the Tower of David,
The evening glows with the morning star
In the skies turned back and the days returning
She walks so near who had wandered far
And in the heart of the swords, the seven times wounded,
Was never wearied as our hearts are.)

How swift as with a fall of snow
New things grow hoary with the light.
We watch the wrinkles crawl like snakes
On the new image in our sight.
The lines that sprang up taut and bold
Sag like primordial monsters old,
Sink in the bas-reliefs of fossil
And the slow earth swallows them, fold on fold,
But light are the feet on the hills of the morning
Of the lambs that leap up to the Bride of the Sun,
And swift are the birds as the butterflies flashing
And sudden as laughter the rivulets run
And sudden for ever as summer lightning
the light is bright on the world begun.

Thou wilt not break as we have broken
The towers we reared to rival Thee.
More true to England than the English

More just to freedom than the free.
O trumpet of the intolerant truth
Thou art more full of grace and ruth
For the hopes of th world than the world that made them,
The world that murdered the loves of our youth.
Thou art more kind to our dreams, Our Mother,
Than the wise that wove us the dreams for shade.
God if more good to the gods that mocked Him
Than men are good to the gods they made.
Tenderer with toys than a boy grown brutal,
Breaking the puppets with which he played.

What are the flowers the garden guards not
And how but here should dreams return?
And how on hearths made cold with ruin
the wide wind-scattered ashes burn--
What is the home of the heart set free,
And where is the nesting of liberty,
And where from the world shall the world take shelter
And man be matter, and not with Thee?
Wisdom is set in her throne of thunder,
The Mirror of Justice blinds the day--
Where are the towers that are not of the City,
Trophies and trumpeting, where are they?
Where over the maze of the world returning
The bye-ways bend to the King's highway.

The Unpardonable Sin

I do not cry, beloved, neither curse.
Silence and strength, these two at least are good.
He gave me sun and start and aught He could,
But not a woman's love; for that is hers.

He sealed her heart from sage and questioner --
Yea, with seven seals, as he has sealed the grave.
And if she give it to a drunken slave,
The Day of Judgment shall not challenge her.

Only this much: if one, deserving well,
Touching your thin young hands and making suit,
Feel not himself a crawling thing, a brute,
Buried and bricked in a forgotten hell;

Prophet and poet be he over sod,
Prince among angels in the highest place,
God help me, I will smite him on the face,
Before the glory of the face of God.

The Wife of Flanders

Low and brown barns, thatched and repatched and tattered,
Where I had seven sons until to-day,
A little hill of hay your spur has scattered. . . .
This is not Paris. You have lost your way.

You, staring at your sword to find it brittle,
Surprised at the surprise that was your plan,
Who, shaking and breaking barriers not a little,
Find never more the death-door of Sedan --

Must I for more than carnage call you claimant,
Paying you a penny for each son you slay?
Man, the whole globe in gold were no repayment
For what you have lost. And how shall I repay?

What is the price of that red spark that caught me
From a kind farm that never had a name?
What is the price of that dead man they brought me?
For other dead men do not look the same.

How should I pay for one poor graven steeple
Whereon you shattered what you shall not know?
How should I pay you, miserable people?
How should I pay you everything you owe?

Unhappy, can I give you back your honour?
Though I forgave, would any man forget?
While all the great green land has trampled on her
The treason and terror of the night we met.

Not any more in vengeance or in pardon
An old wife bargains for a bean that's hers.
You have no word to break: no heart to harden.
Ride on and prosper. You have lost your spurs.

The Wise Men

Step softly, under snow or rain,
To find the place where men can pray;
The way is all so very plain
That we may lose the way.

Oh, we have learnt to peer and pore
On tortured puzzles from our youth,
We know all the labyrinthine lore,
We are the three wise men of yore,
And we know all things but truth.

We have gone round and round the hill
And lost the wood among the trees,
And learnt long names for every ill,
And serve the made gods, naming still
The furies the Eumenides.

The gods of violence took the veil
Of vision and philosophy,
The Serpent that brought all men bale,
He bites his own accursed tail,
And calls himself Eternity.

Go humbly ... it has hailed and snowed...
With voices low and lanterns lit;
So very simple is the road,
That we may stray from it.

The world grows terrible and white,
And blinding white the breaking day;
We walk bewildered in the light,
For something is too large for sight,
And something much too plain to say.

The Child that was ere worlds begun
(... We need but walk a little way,
We need but see a latch undone...)
The Child that played with moon and sun
Is playing with a little hay.

The house from which the heavens are fed,

The old strange house that is our own,
Where trick of words are never said,
And Mercy is as plain as bread,
And Honour is as hard as stone.

Go humbly, humble are the skies,
And low and large and fierce the Star;
So very near the Manger lies
That we may travel far.

Hark! Laughter like a lion wakes
To roar to the resounding plain.
And the whole heaven shouts and shakes,
For God Himself is born again,
And we are little children walking
Through the snow and rain.

Wine and Water

Old Noah he had an ostrich farm and fowls on the largest scale,
He ate his egg with a ladle in a egg-cup big as a pail,
And the soup he took was Elephant Soup and fish he took was
Whale,
But they all were small to the cellar he took when he set out to
sail,
And Noah he often said to his wife when he sat down to dine,
"I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the
wine."

The cataract of the cliff of heaven fell blinding off the brink
As if it would wash the stars away as suds go down a sink,
The seven heavens came roaring down for the throats of hell to
drink,
And Noah he cocked his eye and said, "It looks like rain, I
think,
The water has drowned the Matterhorn as deep as a Mendip mine,
But I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the
wine."

But Noah he sinned, and we have sinned; on tipsy feet we trod,
Till a great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod,
And you can't get wine at a P.S.A., or chapel, or Eisteddfod,
For the Curse of Water has come again because of the wrath of

God,
And water is on the Bishop's board and the Higher Thinker's
shrine,
But I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the
wine.

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