

Edward J. Quinn.

OTHERS

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OTHERS

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Grantwood, N. J.

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

“Thou hast committed—”

*“Fornication: but that was in another country,
And besides, the wench is dead.”*

The Jew of Malta.

I

Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon
You have the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do—
With “I have saved this afternoon for you”
And four wax candles in the darkened room
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead
An atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb
Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.

We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole
Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and finger-tips.
“So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
Should be resurrected only among friends
Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room.”
—And so the conversation slips
Among velleities and carefully caught regrets
Through attenuated tones of violins
Mingled with remote cornets
And begins

“ You do not know how much they mean to me,
my friends,
And how, how rare and strange it is, to find
In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends
(For indeed I do not love it . . . you knew? you are
not blind!

How keen you are!)

To find a friend who has these qualities,
Who has, and gives
Those qualities upon which friendship lives.
How much it means that I say this to you—
Without these friendships—life, what *cauchemar!*”

Among the windings of the violins
And the ariettes
Of cracked cornets
Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins
Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,
Capricious monotone
That is at least one definite “false note”.
—Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,
Admire the monuments,
Discuss the late events,
Correct our watches by the public clocks.
Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks.

II

Now that lilacs are in bloom
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
And twists one in her fingers while she talks.
“Ah my friend, you do not know, you do not know
What life is, you who hold it in your hands;—”
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
“You let it flow from you, you let it flow,
And youth is cruel, and has no remorse
And smiles at situations which it cannot see.”
I smile, of course,
And go on drinking tea.
“Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall
My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,
I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world
To be wonderful and youthful, after all.”

The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune
Of a broken violin on an August afternoon:
“I am always sure that you understand
My feelings, always sure that you feel,
Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand.

You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel.
You will go on, and when you have prevailed
You can say: at this point many a one has failed.

But what have I, but what have I, my friend,
To give you, what can you receive from me?
Only the friendship and the sympathy
Of one about to reach her journey's end.

I shall sit here, serving tea to friends . . .”

I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends
For what she has said to me?

You will see me any morning in the park
Reading the comics and the sporting page.
Particularly I remark
An English countess goes upon the stage.
A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
Another bank defaulter has confessed.
I keep my countenance,
I remain self-possessed
Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired
Reiterates some worn-out common song
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
Recalling things that other people have desired.
Are these ideas right or wrong?

III

The October night comes down ; returning as before
Except for a slight sensation of being ill at ease
I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door
And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees.

“And so you are going abroad ; and when do you return ?
But that’s a useless question.
You hardly know when you are coming back,
You will find so much to learn.”
My smile falls heavily among the bric-a-brac.

“Perhaps you can write to me.”
My self-possession flares up for a second ;
This is as I had reckoned.
“I have been wondering frequently of late
(But our beginnings never know our ends!)
Why we have not developed into friends.”
I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark
Suddenly, his expression in a glass.
My self-possession gutters ; we are really in the dark.

“For everybody said so, all our friends,
They all were sure our feelings would relate
So closely ! I myself can hardly understand.

We must leave it now to fate.
You will write, at any rate.
Perhaps it is not too late.
I shall sit here, serving tea to friends.”

And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression . . . dance, dance
Like a dancing bear,
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.
Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance—

Well! and what if she should die some afternoon,
Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;
Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand
With the smoke coming down above the house tops;
Doubtful, for quite a while
Not knowing what to feel or if I understand
Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon. . .
Would she not have the advantage, after all?
This music is successful with a “dying fall”
Now that we talk of dying—
And should I have the right to smile?

SONGS OF THE ARKANSAS

INVOCATION

Eastward, House where the Sun is kindled :
Northward, Cave where the Wind sleeps in darkness :
Southward, Swamp where the Snake-Mist rises :
Westward, Plain where the Ghost-Trail goes :

Hear my prayer !

I bow myself to the quarters :
I salute Sun, and Earth, my parents :
Let my brother and sister, Wind and Water,
Carry my cry to Him Who Dwells Beyond.

Many things have I to say unto You :
Spirit who will not listen !
Many things have I and my people on our hearts,
Many great griefs.

Many chiefs ! Many warriors ! Many young men !
Many women ! Many dogs ! Many weapons !
Are You but a thieving Shawnee
To take these things from our tribe ?

Wherefore do You so long abandon us?
Came we out of the deadly land of darkness,
Out of the land of cold long nights and winters,
Only to die in this place?

Did the great river that Your Finger traced
Then deceive us in its current?
Did the wildgoose and the heron
Fly southward but to mock us?

You who baited this trap with enemies,
Tell us, where may we wander,
We weary, we footsore, we lost, we forsaken,
Where is our changeless Home?

Men with white faces and lying hearts,
Have You now sent out amongst us:
We received them—we believed it was Your will—
Lo, what they have done to us

We know that Thou art our Father:
We know that all might and craft are in Thee:
Save the fire that Thou hast kindled,
We have no other light.

Help the sick: comfort the aged:
Give victory to our warriors:
Rob not the mothers of children,
Send not famine upon us!

The green corn that waves in the sunlight,
Is Thine : the grey forest also :
Without the sun Thou hast kindled,
The trail would be lost in darkness.

Thou hast breathed into our nostrils
The fire, then wherefore fails it?
Thou wilt not let it perish,
All that Thou dost is good.

To the East, birds' song uprising ;
To the North, the rustle of forests ;
To the South, the brown of rivers ;
To the West, the sigh of grass.

Hear our prayer !

We bow ourselves to the Quarters :
We salute Sun and Earth, our parents :
Once more the song has gone forth amidst us,
Like smoke it has vanished into the sunlight.

WOMEN'S SONG AT THE TIME OF THE
GREEN-CORN DANCE

Sprout, green corn, on the bosom of earth, your mother,
Thrust out your thin green spears to the warm grey
rain :
Grow, green corn, the deer shall not trample near you,
Leap, green corn, for the winter of earth is past.

Shake, green corn, for the deer on the trails are leaping,
Blush, green corn, pink tassels among the leaves :
Ripple and rustle and quiver, start and flutter,
Grow, green corn, for it is your grains they would eat.

Smile, green corn, gold ornaments in the sunlight :
Dew-beads of silver glistening in twisted hair :
Bend to the wind and draw the deer closer to you,
Go on your way—your sorrows will soon be great.

Wither, O corn, under the heat of the summer,
Watch, O corn, the deer feeding far away ;
Struggle, O corn, break your slender silken sheathing,
Rejoice, O corn, for the burden of golden ears.

Break your stalk, for it is the time of the harvest :
 The swift-footed deer are stealing the ripening grain,
 Weep in the wind, let it tear into ribbons your beauty,
 The life you brought from the earth is taken again.

Creak, old corn, rustle your aching body :
 Crack, old corn, spill out your decaying seeds.
 The young deer are far away fighting together,
 The old deer, sick and feeble, crouch in your shade.

Perish, old corn, in the bosom of earth, your mother,
 Thrust back into her silence the thin roots of your pain ;
 Let the snow and the ice of the winter heap on you
 where you are hidden,
 Soon enough you will come back to the selfsame
 sorrow again.

WAR SONG

It is the seventh day of vigil :
 Silent, haggard, and sleepless,
 We wait for the news of our trackers
 To learn if the omens are good.

Wherefore has the Sun-Spirit
Put trouble into our hearts?
Like the dark clouds that fly upwards bringing the
thunder,
War comes stalking near our home.

The burden of hunger and death
Weighs on our hearts and rifles.
No word from out the restless heavens,
No smoke from the beacon-fires.

The yellow-faces have stolen out silently,
Broken by the ordeal.
Shunned by the women,
They slink away to the woods.

The chief lifts up his voice in prayer.

“Eagle! War-Eagle!
Sailing, wheeling over us!
Spirit that shrieks in the air,
Spirit that fights the wind,
Spirit that looks from the mountain-top towards the sun,
Put courage in our hearts!

“Long ago our fathers
Like eagles after the deer,
Pursued the Chickasaw.

“That they might have chance to battle,
In silence they offered their own powder,
With looks and gestures of scorn.

“The enemy accepted.
They loaded, made ready to battle.

“One flash from out the muskets:
One volley of red death.
Then, wheeling, screaming eagles,
We charged home with the hatchet.

“Eagle! War-Eagle!
The Plumes are stained with crimson death.
Spirit that dares the lightning,
Spirit that flies all day unwearied,
Spirit that knows the constellations,
Put courage into our hearts!”

The trackers have returned
With weary eyes.

Silently we paint our faces,
Silently we sharpen the hatchets,
Silently to every warrior,
Is handed the eagle-plume.

Out of doors the women cry:

“ Snake ! Rattle-snake !

Coiling, creeping near us ;
Spirit that knows the hidden ways of earth,
Spirit that holds the fluttering bird with its eyes,
Spirit that strikes but once, and glides away,
Give craftiness to our souls !

“ Forget not, how the Osage
Would have slain you.

“ They led you forth to the forest
And when the night fell,
Swearing with many oaths
That the enemy were near,
They crept to their secret ambush
Saying you must attack when the late moon 'gan to rise.

“ But a snake had whispered to our chief
Many cunning words.

“ With full hands the warriors piled
Branches on their fires,
And withdrew into the shadows.

“ A flash, a yell,
Out burst the traitors :
And to the fires they leapt,
Like wolves, with howling laughter.

“ But you waited.
You did not utter a sound.

“ When the astonished faces glowed clearly in the
firelight,
You gave them volley on volley.

“ Snake ! Rattle-snake !
The fangs have met in quivering flesh.
Spirit that bides its moment,
Spirit that knows the spot to strike,
Spirit that finds the secret lurking places,
Give craftiness to our souls.”

The song is silent :
Afar off into the sky there lifts a long blue plume
of smoke,
From the distant hills.

It is the great war-beacon.
We stagger forth :
The women fly with shrieks.

The seven-day vigil is broken ;
Silent, haggard, and sleepless,
We double into the forest,
Like blood-scenting wolves.

Their lives are the centers of half-cloudy days,
With now and then a noisy evening
In which they hang the crude little japanese-lanterns
of their thoughts
On the ever-swaying strings of their minds . . .

The domino-box is folded, the grapes are eaten.
Children, wheezing and limp, return.

THE REAR-PORCHES OF AN APARTMENT-BUILDING

A sky that has never known sun, moon or stars :
A sky that is like a dead, kind face
Would have the color of your eyes,
O servant-girl, singing of pear-trees in the sun,
And scraping the yellow fruit you once picked
When your lavender-white eyes were alive. . .
On the porch above you are two women
Whose faces have the color of brown earth that has
never felt rain.

The still wet basins of ponds that have been drained
Are their eyes.
They knit gray rosettes and nibble cakes. . .
And on the top-porch are three children
Gravely kissing each others' foreheads—
And an ample nurse with a huge red fan. . .

The passing of the afternoon to them
Is but the lengthening of blue-black shadows on brick
walls.

THE VAGABOND IN THE PARK

They sit upon little benches, lips slack, eye-lids blinking
Like flapping white shades in the windows of empty
rooms.
The trees over them, shift their lace with rushing,
smothered laughs,
And speak of the nakedness to come.
But the straight, shining women under the trees
Have never known what it is to take off dust-painted
clothes.

AFTER WRITING POETRY

My mind is a naked child
Living in the little half-crimson garden of my soul.
I bring people to the child in the garden.
Perhaps an apple-vender whose face is like a new
wood-cut ;
A shop-girl, like the quickly-sketched princess in some
old water-color ;
Or a window-washer who seems to have been taken
From a cool swarthy fresco. . .
At night when they have gone,
I and the naked child sit beneath a red bush
And chat about them :
Half-regretting the flowers they have taken away.

VOYAGE A L'INFINI

The swan existing
Is like a song with an accompaniment
Imaginary.

Across the glassy lake,
Across the lake to the shadow of the willows,
It is accompanied by an image,
— As by Debussy's
"Reflets dans l'eau".

The swan that is
Reflects
Upon the solitary water — breast to breast
With the duplicity:
"The other one!"

And breast to breast it is confused.
O visionary wedding! O stateliness of the procession!
It is accompanied by the image of itself
Alone.

At night
The lake is a wide silence,
Without imagination.

THE VOICE OF ONE DEAD

Of the relented limbs and the braid, O lady,
Bound up in haste at parting,
The secret is kept.

JUNE

These breaking buds,
These buds in a nest of leaves . . .

What wings have covered them,
And the warmth of what brooding mother,
That the roses,
The roses themselves,
Come out?

The roses are trying their petals . . .
Fly away, roses, after the wind.

FOR FORMS THAT ARE FREE

Loosen the web, Arachne, and we will waltz.
Loosen, Arachne,
The spider-web that has ensnared
The feet in such a struggling bergamask.

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and the CHORIC SCHOOL.

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