

REDFEATHER.

I have drunk to all I know of, To every leaf on the tree, To the highest bird of the heavens, To the lowest fish of the sea. What toast, what toast remaineth, Drunk down in the same good wine, By the tippler's cup in the tavern, And the priest's cup at the shrine?

[A Priest comes out, stick in hand, and looks right and left.]

VOICES WITHIN.

The brawler ...

PRIEST.

He has vanished

REDFEATHER.

To the stars.

[The Priest looks up.]

PRIEST [angrily].

What would you there, sir?

REDFEATHER.

Give you all a toast.

[Lifts his flagon. More priests come out.]

I see my life behind me: bad enough-- Drink, duels, madness, beggary, and pride, The life of the unfit: yet ere I drop On Nature's rubbish heap, I weigh it all, And give you all a toast--

[Reels to his feet and stands.]

The health of God!

[They all recoil from him.]

Let's give the Devil of the Heavens His due! He that made grass so green,
and wine so red, Is not so black as you have painted him.

[Drinks.]

PRIEST.

Blaspheming profligate!

REDFEATHER [hurls the flagon among them.]

How! ye dumb dogs, I named your King--let me have one great shout,
Flutter the seraphim like startled birds; Make God recall the good days of
His youth Ere saints had saddened Him: when He came back Conqueror of
Chaos in a six days' war, With all the sons of God shouting for joy ...

PRIEST.

And you--what is your right, and who are you, To praise God?

REDFEATHER.

A lost soul. In earth or heaven What has a better right?

PRIEST.

Go, pagan, go! Drink, dice, and dance: take no more thought than
blind Beasts of the field....

REDFEATHER.

Or ... lilies of the field, To quote a pagan sage. I go my way.

PRIEST [solemnly].

And when Death comes....

REDFEATHER.

He shall not find me dead.

[Puts on his plumed hat. The priests go out.]

REDFEATHER.

These frozen fools....

[The Lady Olive comes out of the chapel. He sees her.]

Oh, they were right enough. Where shall I hide my carrion from the sun?

[Buries his face. His hat drops to the ground.]

OLIVE [looking up.]

Captain, are you from church? I saw you not.

REDFEATHER.

No, I am here.

[Lays his hand on a gargoyle.]

I, too, am a grotesque, And dance with all the devils on the roof.

OLIVE [with a strange smile.]

For Satan, also, I have often prayed.

REDFEATHER [roughly].

Satan may worry women if he will, For he was but an angel ere he fell, But I-
-before I fell--I was a man.

OLIVE.

He too, my Master, was a man: too strong To fear a strong man's sins: 'tis
written He Descended into hell.

REDFEATHER.

Write, then, that I

[Leaps to the ground before her.]

Descended into heaven.... You are ill?

OLIVE.

No, well....

REDFEATHER.

You speak the truth--you are the Truth-- Lady, say once again then, 'I am well.'

OLIVE.

I--ah! God give me grace--I am nigh dead.

REDFEATHER [quietly.]

Lord Orm?

OLIVE.

Yes--yes.

REDFEATHER.

Is in your father's house-- Having the title-deeds--would drive you forth. Homeless, and with your father sick to death, Into this winter, save on a condition Named....

OLIVE.

And unnameable. Even so; Lord Orm-- Ah! do you know him?

REDFEATHER.

Ay, I saw him once. The sun shone on his face, that smiled and smiled, A sight not wholesome to the eyes of man.

OLIVE.

Captain, I tell you God once fell asleep. And in that hour the world went as it would; Dogs brought forth cats, and poison grew in grapes, And Orm was

born....

REDFEATHER.

Why, curse him! can he not Be kicked or paid?

OLIVE [feverishly].

Hush! He is just behind There in the house--see how the great house glares, Glares like an ogre's mask--the whole dead house Possessed with bestial meaning....

[Screams]

Ah! the face! The whole great grinning house--his face! his face! His face!

REDFEATHER [in a voice of thunder, pointing away from the house].

Look there--look there!

OLIVE.

What is it? What?

REDFEATHER.

I think it was a bird.

OLIVE.

What thought you, truly?

REDFEATHER.

I think a mighty thought is drawing near.

[Enter THE WILD KNIGHT.]

THE WILD KNIGHT.

That house....

[Points.]

OLIVE.

Ah Christ! [Shudders.] I had forgotten it.

THE WILD KNIGHT [still pointing].

That house! the house at last, the house of God, Wherein God makes an evening feast for me. The house at last: I know the twisted path Under the twisted pear-tree: this I saw In the first dream I had ere I was born. It is the house of God. He welcomes me.

[Strides forward.]

REDFEATHER.

That house. God's blood!

OLIVE [hysterically].

Is not this hell's own wit?

THE WILD KNIGHT.

God grows impatient, and His wine is poured, His bread is broken.

[Rushes forward.]

REDFEATHER [leaps between].

Stand away, great fool, There is a devil there!

THE WILD KNIGHT [draws his sword, and waves it as he rushes].

God's house!--God's house!

REDFEATHER [plucks out his own sword].

Better my hand than his.

[The blades clash.]

God alone knows What That within might do to you, poor fool, I can
but kill you.

[They fight. OLIVE tries to part them.]

REDFEATHER.

Olive, stand away!

OLIVE.

I will not stand away!

[Steps between the swords.]

Stranger, a word, Yes--you are right--God is within that house.

REDFEATHER.

Olive!

OLIVE.

But He is all too beautiful For us who only know of stars and flowers. The
thing within is all too pure and fair,

[Shudders.]

Too awful in its ancient innocence, For men to look upon it and not die;
Ourselves would fade into those still white fires Of peace and mercy.

[Struggles with her voice.]

There ... enough ... the law-- No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

REDFEATHER [sticking his sword in the ground].

You are the bravest lady in the world.

THE WILD KNIGHT [dazed].

May I not go within?

REDFEATHER.

Keep you the law-- No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

THE WILD KNIGHT [sadly].

Then I will go and lay me in the flowers, For He may haply, as in ancient time, Walk in the garden in the cool of day.

[He goes out.]

[OLIVE reels. REDFEATHER catches her.]

You are the strongest woman upon earth. The weakest woman than the strongest man Is stronger in her hour: this is the law. When the hour passes--then may we be strong.

OLIVE [wildly.]

The House ... the Face.

REDFEATHER [fiercely].

I love you. Look at me!

OLIVE [turns her face to him.]

I hear six birds sing in that little tree, Say, is the old earth laughing at my fears? I think I love you also....

REDFEATHER.

What I am You know. But I will never curse a man, Even in a mirror.

OLIVE [smiling at him].

And the Devil's dance?

REDFEATHER.

The Devil plotted since the world was young With alchemies of fire and witches' oils And magic. But he never made a man.

OLIVE.

No; not a man.

REDFEATHER.

Not even my Lord Orm. Look at the house now--

[She starts and looks.]

Honest brick and tiles.

OLIVE.

You have a strange strength in this hour.

REDFEATHER.

This hour I see with mortal eye as in one flash
The whole divine democracy of things,
And dare the stars to scorn a scavenge-heap. Olive, I
tell you every soul is great. Weave we green crowns--how noble and how
high; Fling we white flowers--how radiant and how pure
Is he, whoe'er he be, who next shall cross
This scrap of grass....

[Enter LORD ORM.]

OLIVE [screams].

Ah!

REDFEATHER [pointing to the chapel].

Olive, go and pray for a man soon to die. Good-day, my Lord.

[She goes in.]

LORD ORM.

Good-day.

REDFEATHER.

I am a friend to Lady Olive.

LORD ORM.

Sir, you are fortunate.

REDFEATHER.

Most fortunate In finding, sword on thigh and ready, one Who is a villain and a gentleman.

LORD ORM [picks up the flagon].

Empty, I see.

REDFEATHER.

Oh sir, you never drink. You dread to lose yourself before the stars--
Do you not dread to sleep?

LORD ORM [violently].

What would you here?

REDFEATHER.

Receive from you the title-deeds you hold.

LORD ORM.

You entertain me.

REDFEATHER.

With a bout at foils?

LORD ORM.

I will not fight.

REDFEATHER.

I know you better, then. I have seen men grow mangier than the
beasts, Eat bread with blood upon their fingers, grin While women burned:

but one last law they served. When I say 'Coward,' is the law awake?

LORD ORM.

Hear me, then, too: I have seen robbers rule, And thieves go clad in gold--
age after age-- Because, though sordid, ragged, rude, and mean, They saw,
like gods, no law above their heads. But when they fell--then for this cause
they fell, This last mean cobweb of the fairy tales Of good and ill: that they
must stand and fight When a man bade, though they had chose to stand
And fight not. I am stronger than the world.

[Folds his arms.]

REDFEATHER [lifts his hand].

If in your body be the blood of man,

[Strikes him.]

Now let it rush to the face-- God! Have you sunk Lower than anger?

LORD ORM.

How I triumph now.

REDFEATHER [stamps wildly].

Damned, whimpering dog! vile, snivelling, sick poltroon! Are you alive?

LORD ORM.

Evil, be thou my good; Let the sun blacken and the moon be blood: I
have said the words.

REDFEATHER [studying him].

And if I struck you dead, You would turn to daisies!

LORD ORM.

And you do not strike.

REDFEATHER [dreamily].

Indeed, poor soul, such magic would be kind And full of pity as a fairy-tale:
One touch of this bright wand [Lifts his sword] and down would drop The
dark abortive blunder that is you. And you would change, forgiven, into
flowers.

LORD ORM.

And yet--and yet you do not strike me dead. I do not draw: the sword is in
your hand-- Drive the blade through me where I stand.

REDFEATHER.

Lord Orm, You asked the Lady Olive (I can speak As to a toad to you,
my lord)--you asked Olive to be your paramour: and she--

LORD ORM.

Refused.

REDFEATHER.

And yet her father was at stake, And she is soft and kind. Now look at me,
Ragged and ruined, soaked in bestial sins: My lord, I too have my virginity--
Turn the thing round, my lord, and topside down, You cannot spell it. Be
the fact enough, I use no sword upon a swordless man.

LORD ORM.

For her?

REDFEATHER.

I too have my virginity.

LORD ORM.

Now look on me: I am the lord of earth, For I have broken the last bond of
man. I stand erect, crowned with the stars--and why? Because I stand a
coward--because you Have mercy--on a coward. Do I win?

REDFEATHER.

Though there you stand with moving mouth and eyes, I think, my lord, you are not possible-- God keep you from my dreams.

[Goes out.]

LORD ORM.

Alone and free. Since first in flowery meads a child I ran, My one long thirst--to be alone and free. Free of all laws, creeds, codes, and common tests, Shameless, anarchic, infinite. Why, then, I might have done in that dark liberty-- If I should say 'a good deed,' men would laugh, But here are none to laugh. The godless world Be thanked there is no God to spy on me, Catch me and crown me with a vulgar crown For what I do: if I should once believe The horror of that ancient Eavesdropper Behind the starry arras of the skies, I should--well, well, enough of menaces-- should not do the thing I come to do. What do I come to do? Let me but try To spell it to my soul. Suppose a man Perfectly free and utterly alone, Free of all love of law, equally free Of all the love of mutiny it breeds, Free of the love of heaven, and also free Of all the love of hell it drives us to; Not merely void of rules, unconscious of them; So strong that naught alive could do him hurt, So wise that he knew all things, and so great That none knew what he was or what he did-- A lawless giant.

[A pause: then in a low voice.]

Would he not be good? Hate is the weakness of a thwarted thing, Pride is the weakness of a thing unpraised. But he, this man.... He would be like a child Girt with the tomes of some vast library, Who reads romance after romance, and smiles When every tale ends well: impersonal As God he grows--melted in suns and stars; So would this boundless man, whom none could spy, Taunt him with virtue, censure him with vice, Rejoice in all men's joys; with golden pen Write all the live romances of the earth To a triumphant close.... Alone and free-- In this grey, cool, clean garden, washed with winds, What do I come to do among the grass, The daisies, and the dews? An awful thing, To prove I am that man. That while these saints Taunt me with trembling, dare me to revenge, I breathe an upper air of ancient good And strong eternal laughter; send my sun And rain upon the evil and the just, Turn my left cheek unto the smiter. He That told me, sword in hand, that I had fallen Lower than anger, knew not I had risen Higher than pride.... Enough, the deeds are mine.

[Takes out the title-deeds.]

I come to write the end of a romance. A good romance: the characters--Lord Orm. Type of the starvéd heart and storéd brain, Who strives to hate and cannot; fronting him-- Redfeather, rake in process of reform, At root a poet: I have hopes of him: He can love virtue, for he still loves vice. He is not all burnt out. He beats me there (How I beat him in owning it!); in love He is still young, and has the joy of shame. And for the Lady Olive--who shall speak? A man may weigh the courage of a man, But if there be a bottomless abyss It is a woman's valour: such as I Can only bow the knee and hide the face (Thank God there is no God to spy on me And bring his curséd crowns). No, there is none: The old incurable hunger of the world Surges in wolfish wars, age after age. There was no God before me: none sees where, Between the brute-womb and the deaf, dead grave, Unhoping, unrecorded, unrepaid, I make with smoke, fire, and burnt-offering This sacrifice to Chaos. [Lights the papers.] None behold Me write in fire the end of the romance. Burn! I am God, and crown myself with stars. Upon creation day: before was night And chaos of a blind and cruel world. I am the first God; I will trample hell, Fight, conquer, make the story of the stars, Like this poor story, end like a romance:

[The paper burns.]

Before was brainless night: but I am God In this black world I rend. Let there be light!

[The paper blazes up, illuminating the garden.]

I, God ...

THE WILD KNIGHT [rushes forward].

God's Light! God's Voice; yes, it is He Walking in Eden in the cool of the day!

LORD ORM [screams].

Tricked! Caught! Damned screeching rat in a hole!

[Stabs him again and again with his sword; stamps on his face.]

THE WILD KNIGHT [faintly].

Earth grows too beautiful around me: shapes And colours fearfully wax fair and clear, For I have heard, as thro' a door ajar, Scraps of the huge soliloquy

of God That moveth as a mask the lips of man, If man be very silent: they were right, No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

[Dies.]

LORD ORM [staggers back laughing].

Saved, saved, my secret.

REDFEATHER [rushing in, sword in hand].

The drawn sword at last! Guard, son of hell!

[They fight. ORM falls. OLIVE comes in.]

He too can die. Keep back! Olive, keep back from him! I did not fear Him living, and he fell before my sword; But dead I fear him. All is ended now; A man's whole life tied in a bundle there, And no good deed. I fear him. Come away.