

SHE LOOKS BACK

THE pale bubbles

The lovely pale-gold bubbles of the globe-flowers

In a great swarm clotted and single

Went rolling in the dusk towards the river

To where the sunset hung its wan gold cloths;

And you stood alone, watching them go,

And that mother-love like a demon drew you

from me

Towards England.

Along the road, after nightfall,

Along the glamorous birch-tree avenue

Across the river levels

We went in silence, and you staring to England.

So then there shone within the jungle darkness

Of the long, lush under-grass, a glow-worm's

sudden

Green lantern of pure light, a little, intense, fusing

triumph,

White and haloed with fire-mist, down in the

tangled darkness.

Then you put your hand in mine again, kissed me,

and we struggled to be together.
And the little electric flashes went with us, in the
grass,
Tiny lighthouses, little souls of lanterns, courage
burst into an explosion of green light
Everywhere down in the grass, where darkness was
ravelled in darkness.

Still, the kiss was a touch of bitterness on my mouth
Like salt, burning in.
And my hand withered in your hand.
For you were straining with a wild heart, back,
back again,
Back to those children you had left behind, to all
the æons of the past.
And I was here in the under-dusk of the Isar.

At home, we leaned in the bedroom window
Of the old Bavarian Gasthaus,
And the frogs in the pool beyond thrilled with
exuberance,
Like a boiling pot the pond crackled with happiness,
Like a rattle a child spins round for joy, the night
rattled
With the extravagance of the frogs,
And you leaned your cheek on mine,

And I suffered it, wanting to sympathise.

At last, as you stood, your white gown falling from
your breasts,

You looked into my eyes, and said: "But this is
joy!"

I acquiesced again.

But the shadow of lying was in your eyes,

The mother in you, fierce as a murderess, glaring
to England,

Yearning towards England, towards your young
children,

Insisting upon your motherhood, devastating.

Still, the joy was there also, you spoke truly,

The joy was not to be driven off so easily;

Stronger than fear or destructive mother-love, it
stood flickering;

The frogs helped also, whirring away.

Yet how I have learned to know that look in your
eyes

Of horrid sorrow!

How I know that glitter of salt, dry, sterile,
sharp, corrosive salt!

Not tears, but white sharp brine

Making hideous your eyes.

I have seen it, felt it in my mouth, my throat, my
chest, my belly,
Burning of powerful salt, burning, eating through
my defenceless nakedness.
I have been thrust into white, sharp crystals,
Writhing, twisting, superpenetrated.

Ah, Lot's Wife, Lot's Wife!
The pillar of salt, the whirling, horrible column
of salt, like a waterspout
That has enveloped me!
Snow of salt, white, burning, eating salt
In which I have writhed.

Lot's Wife!--Not Wife, but Mother.
I have learned to curse your motherhood,
You pillar of salt accursed.
I have cursed motherhood because of you,
Accursed, base motherhood!

I long for the time to come, when the curse against
you will have gone out of my heart.
But it has not gone yet.
Nevertheless, once, the frogs, the globe-flowers of
Bavaria, the glow-worms

Gave me sweet lymph against the salt-burns,
There is a kindness in the very rain.

Therefore, even in the hour of my deepest, pas-
sionate malediction

I try to remember it is also well between us.

That you are with me in the end.

That you never look quite back; nine-tenths, ah,
more

You look round over your shoulder;

But never quite back.

Nevertheless the curse against you is still in my
heart

Like a deep, deep burn.

The curse against all mothers.

All mothers who fortify themselves in motherhood,
devastating the vision.

They are accursed, and the curse is not taken off

It burns within me like a deep, old burn,

And oh, I wish it was better.

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