

AUGUSTE RODIN

ROSA INFERNI

H. D. CARR

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EDITION

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A POEM

BY

H. D. CARR

WITH AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION BY

AUGUSTE RODIN

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ROSA INFERNI

Ha ha ! John plucketh now at his rose
To rid himself of a sorrow at heart.
Lo,—petal on petal, fierce rays unclose ;
Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart ;
And with blood for dew, the bosom boils ;
And a gust of sulphur is all its smell.
And lo, he is horribly in the toils
Of a coal-black giant flower of hell !
BROWNING, *Heretic's Tragedy*, ix.

I

ROSE of the world ! Ay, love, in that warm hour
Wet with your kisses, the bewitching bud
Flamed in the starlight ; then our bed your bower
Heaved like the breast of some alluring flood
Whereon a man might sleep for ever, until
Death should surprise him, kiss his weary will
Into the last repose, profounder power
Than life could compass. Now I tax my skill
To find another holier name, some flower
Still red, but red with the ecstasy of blood.
Dear love, dear wife, dear mother of the child
Whose fair faint features are a match for mine,
Lurks there no secret where your body smiled,

No serpent in the generous draught of wine ?
Did I guess all, who guessed your life well given
Up to my kiss ? Aha ! the veil is riven !
Beneath the smiling mask of a young bride
Languorous, luscious, melancholy-eyed ;
Beneath the gentle raptures, hints celestial
Of holy secrets, kisses like soft dew,
Beneath the amorous mystery, I view
The surer shape, a visage grim and bestial,
A purpose sly and deadly, a black shape,
A tiger snarling, or a grinning ape
Resolved by every devilish device
Upon my murder. This I clearly see
Now you are—for an hour—away from me.
I see it once ; no need to tell me twice !

II

SOME Yankee yelled—I tag it to a rime—
“You can’t fool all the people all the time.”
So he of politics ; so I of love.
I am a-many folk (let Buddha prove !)
And many a month you fooled the lot of us—
Your spell is cracked within the ring ! Behold
How Christ with clay worth more than any gold
Cleared the man’s eyes ! So the blind amorous
Is blinded with the horror of the truth
He sees this moment. Foolish prostitute !

You slacked your kiss upon the sodden youth
In some excess of confidence, decay
Of care to hold him—can I tell you which ?
Down goes the moon—one sees the howling bitch !
The salmon you had hooked in fin and gill
You reel unskilfully—he darts away.
Alas ! you devil, but you hold me still !

III

O FIRST and fairest of Earth's darling daughters !
How could I sing you ?—you have always seemed
Unto the saucy driveller as he dreamed
Like a rich sunset seen on tropic waters—
(Your eyes effulgent from a thousand slaughters
Looked tenderly upon me !) all the red
Raving round you like a glory shed
Upon the excellent wonder of your head ;
The blue all massed within your marvellous eyes ;
The gold a curtain of their harmonies
As in a master canvas of de Ryn ;
But ever central glowed the royal sun,
A miracle cartouche upon the edge
Of the opalescent waters slantwise seen.
This oval sealed with grave magnificence
Stamped you my queen. Thus looked your lips to one
Who stood a casual on life's slippery ledge,
A blind bat hanging from the tree of sense

Head downward, gorged with sweet banana juice,
Indifferent to—incapable of—aught
Beyond these simple reflexes. Is thought,
Even the highest thought, of any use ?

IV

WE are not discussing metaphysics now.
I see below the beautiful low brow
(Low too for cunning, like enough !) your lips,
A scarlet splash of murder. From them drips
This heart's blood ; you have fed your fill on me.
I am exhaust, a pale, wan phantom floating
Aimless in air, than which I am thinner. You
I see, more brilliant, of that sanguine hue
(If anything be true that I can see)
Full fed ; you smile, a smile obscenely gloating
On the voluptuous wreck your lust hath wrought.
See the loose languor of precipitate thought
These versicles exhale ! How rude the rime !
There is no melody ; the tune and time
Are broken. Thirteen centuries ago
They would have said, “ Alas ! the youth ! We know
This devil hath from him plucked the immortal soul.”
I say : you have dulled my centres of control !

V

IF you were with me, I were blind to this :
Ready to drain my arteries for your kiss,
Feel your grasp tighten round my ribs until
You crush me in the ecstasies that kill.
Being away and breathing icy air
I am half lover, caring not to care ;
Half-man again—a mere terrestrial ball
Thus breaking up a spiritual thrall—
Eh, my philosophers ?—half-man may yet determine
To get back manhood, shake the tree from bats :
To change the trope a shade—get rid of vermin
By using William Shakespeare’s “Rough on Rats.”

VI

AH, love, dear love, sole queen of my affection,
Guess you not yet what wheel of thought is spun ?
How out of dawn’s tumultuous dejection
And not from noon springs up the splendid sun ?
Not till the house is swept and garnished well
Rises seven other devils out of hell.

VII

THIS is the circle ; as the manhood rises
And laughter and rude rhyme engage my pen ;
As I stalk forth, a Man among mere men,
The balance changes ; all my wit surprises
That I who saw the goblins in your face,
That I who cursed you for the murderous whore
Licking up life as a cat laps its milk,
Now see you for a dream of youth and grace,
Relume the magic aura that begirt you,
Bless you for purity and life—a store !
An ever-running fountain-head of virtue
To heal my soul and buckler it and harden !
Your body is like ivory and silk !
Your lips are like the poppies in the garden !
Your face is like a wreath of flowers to crown me !
Your eyes are wells wherein I long to drown me !
Your hair is like a waterfall above me,
A waterfall of sunset ! In your bosom
I hear the racing of a heart to love me.
Your blood is beating like a wind-blown blossom
With rapture that you mingle it in mine !
Your breath is fresh as foam and keen as wine !
Intoxicating glories are your glances !
Your bodily beauty grips my soul and dances

Its maddening measures in my heart and brain !
Is it that so the wheel may whirl again,
That some dull devil in my ear may show me :
“For John the Baptist’s head—so danced Salome !” ?

VIII

THEN, in God’s name forbear ! It does not matter.
Life, death, strength, weakness, are but idle chatter.
Nothing is lost or gained, we know too well.
For heaven thy balance as an equal hell.
We discard both ; an infinite Universe
Remains ; we sum it up—an infinite curse.
So—am I man ? I lack my wife’s embrace.
Am I outworn ? I see the harlot’s face.
Is the love better and the knowledge worse ?
Shall I seek knowledge and count love disgrace ?
Where is the profit in so idle a strife ?
The love of knowledge is the hate of life.



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