

The Purple Mandarin

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There is a purple mandarin
 With mystic madness in his eyes;
He hath deflowered the virgin Sin,
 And she hath made him overwise.
He eats, he drinks, he sleeps, he sports:
He never speaks his thoughts.

Well knoweth he the Way of Phang,
 Matching the Yang against the Yin;
He marketh Tao in God and dung,
 Seeth the secret — "soul is skin."
With power and sight behind his will
He chooseth to keep still.

For he hath dreamed: A blossom buds
 Once in a million million years,
One poppy on Time's foamless floods,
 A cup of cruelty and tears.
Its heart secretes a sacred gum
— Man's only opium.

O mystic flower! O midnight flower
 Chaste and corrupt as patchouli!
A silver saint — a porcelain tower —
 A flame of ice — a silken sea —
A taint — a vice — a swoon — a shame —
Pure Beauty is thy name!

I sought thee in Sahara's sand,
 Hunted through Himalayan snows;
Gods led me friendly by the hand —
 Me blind! where every soul-wind blows.

I was more foolish than my kin,
The purple mandarin.

He dreamed — I followed. Then the Gods
Who mock at Wisdom spun the wheel,
Reversed the incalculable odds
And flung out laughing — flint to steel —
The one impossible event:
Pure Beauty came — and went

Come back to me, my opium-flower,
Chaste and corrupt, my saint of sin,
My flame of ice, my porcelain tower
— I hate the purple mandarin
Who gurgles at me in his fall:
“Dream’s wiser, after all.”