

SIX LITTLE POEMS IN PROSE

By Charles Baudelaire

Translated by Aleister Crowley

WHICH IS THE TRUE ONE?

ONCE knew a girl called Benedicta, who filled the atmosphere with the ideal, whose eyes shed forth the desire of greatness, beauty, glory—all that which makes a man believe in immortality.

But this miraculous girl was too lovely to live for long, and some days after I had become acquainted with her, she died. It was I myself that buried her, one day when the Spring swung its thurible even within cemeteries. It was I that buried her, well shut up in a bier of perfumed wood, incorruptible as are the coffers of India.

And as my eyes remained fastened on the place wherein was buried my treasure, I saw (on a sudden) a little person who resembled the dead woman strangely; who, stamping on the fresh earth with a strange and hysterical violence, shouted with laughter, and said, "I am the real Benedicta, and a rare jade I am, and for the punishment of your folly and blindness you shall love me!"

I, furious, answered, "No, no, no!" and to emphasize my refusal I struck the ground so firmly with my foot that my leg buried itself to the knee in the fresh-turned earth, and, like a wolf taken in a snare, I remain attached, perhaps forever, to the grave of the ideal.

INTOXICATE YOURSELF

ONE must always be drunk. Everything lies in that; it is the only question worth considering. In order not to feel the horrible burden of time which breaks your shoulders and bows you down to earth, you must intoxicate yourself without truce—but with what?

With wine, poetry, or art? As you will; but intoxicate yourself.

And if sometimes upon the steps of a palace, or upon the green grass of a moat, or in the sad solitude of your own room, you awake—intoxication already diminished or disappeared—ask of the wind, of the wave, of the star, of the bird, of the clock, of all that flies, of all that groans, of all that rolls, of all that sings, of all that speaks,—ask, what time is it? And the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, will answer you, "It is time to intoxicate yourself." In order to escape from the slavish martyrdom of time, intoxicate yourself; unceasingly intoxicate yourself; with wine, or poetry, or art—as you will.

THE MOON'S GIFT

THE moon, who is caprice itself, looked in at the window while thou didst sleep in thy cradle, and said to herself, "This child pleases me."

Softly she descended her ladder of clouds and passed noiselessly through the window-panes. Then she stretched herself upon thee with the supple tenderness of a mother, and laid her colors on thy face. From that time thy eyes are turned green, and thy cheeks are marvellous pale. It is through looking at this celestial visitant that thine eyes are grown so strangely large. She has so tenderly fastened on thy throat that thou hast therefore kept forever the desire to weep.

And yet in the overflowing of her joy the moon filled all the room with a phosphorescent

light, like a luminous poison, and all this living light was thinking and saying: "Thou shalt know eternally the influence of my kiss; thou shalt be beautiful in my fashion. Thou shalt love that which I love and that which loves me;—the Water, the Clouds, Silence, Night; the vast green Sea, the shapeless water that hath many shapes; the place where thou art not, the lover that thou knowest not, monstrous flowers, and delirious perfumes.

"And thou shalt be loved of my lovers, courted by my courtiers. Thou shalt be the queen of those men whose eyes are green and whose throats I have clutched in my nocturnal carresses: of those who love the sea, the vast, tumultuous green sea, the shapeless water that hath many shapes, the place where they are not, the women whom they know not; the sinister will; and the flowers that resemble the thuribles of an unknown religion; the perfumes that trouble the savage and voluptuous beasts that are the symbols of their madness."

And it is because of all that, spoil child, accursed and beloved, that I am crouched this moment at thy feet, seeking, in all thy being, the reflection of that fearful Divinity, that god-mother prophetic, that poisonous nurse of all the madmen-of-the-moon.

WINDOWS

WHOSO looks from without into an open window never sees so much as he who looks at a closed window. There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more fertile, more darksome, more dazzling, than a window lighted by a candle.

Beyond the waves of roof I see a woman, middle-aged, already wrinkled, poor, always bending. She never goes out. With her face, her clothing, her gesture—almost nothing—I have reconstructed the story of this woman;—or rather, her legend, and sometimes I tell it to myself, and weep.

If it had been a poor old man, I could have reconstructed his history just as easily.

And I lie down to sleep, proud of having lived and suffered in others.

Perhaps you will say to me, "Are you sure that your fairy tale is true?"

What does outside reality matter to me, if my imagination has helped me to live, to feel what I really am?

ALREADY

A HUNDRED times already the sun had sprung radiant or saddened from that vast basin of the sea whose shores scarce let themselves be seen; a hundred times already it had plunged again, sparkling or morose, into its immense evening bath. For many days we were able to contemplate the other side of the firmament and decipher the celestial Alphabet of the Antipodes, and each of the passengers grumbled and scolded.

One would have said that getting near to land increased their suffering.

"When then," they cried, "shall we cease to sleep a sleep that is shaken by the wave, disturbed by a wind that snores louder than we? When shall we be able to digest our dinners in motionless chairs?"

Some of them thought of their fireside, regretted their faithless and sullen wives, their

squalling offspring. They were all obsessed by the image of the absent land. At last we sighted the shore, and as we approached, behold, it was a land magnificent and dazzling; it seemed that all the harmonious sounds of life came from it in a vague murmur, and that from this coast, rich in every sort of greenery, there exhaled to a distance of many leagues a delicious odor of fruits and flowers.

Immediately everyone was joyful, and ill-humor departed; all quarrels were forgotten, all wrongs pardoned.

I alone was sad, inconceivably sad.

I could not without heart-breaking bitterness tear myself from this sea, so monstrously seductive, from this sea so infinitely varied in its terrifying simplicity; this sea which seems to contain in itself and to represent by its play, its enticements, its rages and its smiles, the dispositions, the agonies and the ecstasies of every soul that hath ever lived, that now lives, that ever shall live.

As I bade farewell to its incomparable beauty I felt myself smitten down, even to death, and whenever one of my companions cried "At last!" I was only able to cry "Already!"

And yet it was land; land with its noises, its passions, its conveniences, its festivals; a rich and magnificent country full of fair promise, which sent to us a mysterious perfume of rose and musk, and whence, in an amorous murmur, came to us all the music of life.

THE BAD GLAZIER

One morning I got up in a bad temper, sad, tired of idleness, and impelled, it seemed to me, to do something big, a brilliant action; and I opened the window. Alas!

The first person that I saw in the street was a glazier whose piercing and discordant cry came up to me through the heavy and contaminated atmosphere of Paris. It would be utterly impossible for me ever to tell you why I was suddenly seized with a hatred, as sudden as it was despotic, against the poor man.

"Hullo, hullo," I called to him to come up. At the same time I reflected, not without some amusement, that my room being on the sixth story, and the staircase extremely narrow, that the man was bound to find it rather difficult to make the ascent, and to catch in many a place the corners of his merchandise.

At last he appeared. Having examined all his glasses with curiosity, I said to him: "What, you have no colored glasses?—Rose glasses, red glasses, blue glasses, magic glasses, glasses of Paradise! You impudent fellow; you dare to walk about in the poor quarters of the town, and you have not even glasses which make life look beautiful!" And I pushed him vigorously towards the staircase, where he stumbled and swore.

I went to the balcony and seized a little flower-pot; and when the man reappeared in the doorway I let fall my engine of war on the back edge of his shoulder straps, and the shock overthrowing him, he broke beneath his back all his poor walking stock in trade, which uttered the crashing cry of a glass palace split by lightning.

And, drunk with my madness I cried to him furiously: "Let life look beautiful, let life look beautiful!"