

The Lingonberry

I

Sadly, as in the past, we meet upon a plain
And see the state of England dry and formless
The sweeping beauty of her fields and hills
Surrounded by the dying elms and bordered
By the rush of people and of things
Will sink the hopeful spirit of our days
Who cannot bear to watch or yet depart

What rhythm now can find its way
Among the hearts and minds of England
What words in history bind this people
And bring their sense of life to life
Here, where every good thing passed
Compared to the world outside
Is now in her crowded counties
Hardly breathing, for the air she takes
The very air which thunders
And the sweet tired rain
Which falls so hopelessly upon the concrete
Does not cannot change us
As if the very oxygen itself had altered

After all this time the danger lies within
For how lucky are the Philistines
When led by greater men
But now they creep among the relics
Of our kingdom, high and low
Where is their past?
What novel lies have sported them?
They now announce themselves
Like new-plumed birds of prey
With all the confidence of modernity
To doubt the fugitive past

The landscape is bound to our ideas
Every portion of the world outside functions within
Thus if you look at Gloucester
Or Somerset, Wiltshire or Warwick
Oxford or Buckingham
The teeming roads run in
And you can stand upon the tower
To look with former pride
Across the glorious Summer scene
Now Winter landscape
You must remember as you reached the hill
Above the Golden Valley
Or any hill from any scene
And dreamed of this advantage

Entwined in all our hearts
The very springboard of our action
Securing our past, our confidence
In the cause of life,

This is not America
We are not here to extend beyond belief
Custom and habit
But to maintain with sure eyes
Past and present
Keeping forever those real days
Which in any time in any place
Endure as monuments
To our new questions

To this future the landscape
Poses before us a passion of unending scenes
The country heat and distant sea
Shimmer among the high oaks
And through the glancing lanes
Cycling we head toward the shore
Laughing and playing
Down the hill and overtaking
Across the bridge to wait and look
Upon the lovely river

While the one we love
Breathless and excited arrives
And then away racing toward
The shore of our mortality

The ancient cutter leaves the quay
Voices chatter merrily
We wind our way among the tinkling masts
Moored by long mud flats
Now covered by the purple samphire
The sea is calm and blue
The misty sun promises the day
The coast stands all in view
Where several hamlets rest
Beneath the woods and shallow hills
And perfect churches soar
Through trees of oak
The curling smoke of morning fires
From tidy radiant houses
Crowns our happy day
O gentle rising sun
O coast, O sea, O sky

The playful seals squeal and dive
We are all delighted
But in my eye cast toward the shore

A vision of harmony appears
Which can only be destroyed
By our very selves
The soft dark curves of earth
Stretch a hundred miles
In diamond folding fields
And all that travels here
At sea, on land, lives high
Among the art of life
The art of movement
Sight and living days

Evening falls and homeward
Through the Autumn lanes
Our thoughts are satisfied by peace
Not striving till liberty
And happiness are broken
But reaching beyond the minds
Disintegration and defeat
By a supreme detachment.

Thus all our future sorrows
Yield before the brave man.

II

Is the past complete
The cycle of darkness towards us
Have the glorious dead died
Only in the vortex of this spinning world
Where unknown unseen
The petals of the silent poppies
Circle the golden fields of corn
Meet unremembered the harvest?
The way of our fragile love
No longer can withstand
The complex tumult
The stroke of our lifting up
In the memory of others
Gave us a victory
O vulgar tasteless death
How dear life is to every man

This object, these people are forever
O truly fortunate
Coming in compassion to our distress
Is there one who sees, knows

But in the room shadowed by the fire
The cool glass of lingonberry
And our hot faces pressed
Our hands tight-clasped
Beside the open window
Looking into the sombre-scented valley
Where river, house and tree...
O the unimaginable
Thus looking back upon the room
In the moment of intercession
Our gaze is fixed upon the table
There reposing as a final symbol
The jug of lingonberry water.

III

The North sea glows before the window
He adjusts his wide brocaded tie
Descends the stair waits before the door
While the sky is crossed by thunder of potential war
The white cloth sits below the mulberry tree
And breakfast to the song of birds
New sunbeams, her allure
Are taken thoughtfully

Across the lawn beside the church
The cycles wait like children
Symbols of happiness
But in the heavens
The hour of our catastrophe
Beats through the lovely air
A final high-pitched chorus
The bleakest destiny of all

War is a game of chess
Useless without players
Let's concentrate on something else
For the form of death
Never surpasses the insight

Into the question of here and now
This gained we are immortal
The earth may evaporate
All trace of us depart
But we are a portion of the insight
Which like light itself
Is an eternal trajectory

This at least might be so
For in mystery and in doubt
In the dying of the young
In an impossible existence
A thousand lies may be told
Nothing can be granted
But a little security
Given by those in harness
For a final kindness
Grant then O my people
A little security to each
Are we not then bound
To a great undertaking
A great sufficiency
Do we not stand irresistibly
At a new departure
Does not age alter us
Into a coming of age
Then do you not see
Are we not free?

Far away from England
I sat on a metal bed
Talked in low tones to students
How good this case
Far from his desert home
How perfectly the signs were here
Muttering in chosen phrases
One by one we touched the gentle body
Already beyond our grasp
He placed his palm in mine
How pale unwell it seemed
I looked into his eyes
Where the moment of recognition
Passed into the slightest smile
That evening the medicine began
He trembled violently in the night
In the morning as I drove
Unconcerned, immersed in my own fears
He entered into the past alone
The deserted past
And still I see him disappearing
Into the folds of time
O premature death look on look on
Never to see the sea
O never for love is gone
Where is the candle to burn
All our breaking

Then the oak will uphold us
Old spirited warrior time defeater
The elms are destroyed
Our romances go with them
The houses are falling
The flowers encircled
The air over-burdened
We have loved these fields so much

Two hundred years of beauty
Surrounded the meadow
You cannot see the flowers
For the broken elms, nature's damnation
Yet she will not defeat us
Destroyer of our image
We have taken our weapons
Determined, against odds
To have new romances
How could it be in the scale of things
We have loved so much

Nevertheless there is a transition
Which if words are useless
The bonds which hold us here
Speak loud and clear
For who in the moment of surrender

In the moment of complete love
Has not believed in an eternal wish
Sanctified by action
Through a perfect remembrance
That feeling these things
Moving without gravity to the end
He becomes as in the moment of the carol
An all-gathering truth
The coldness of his past
In the coldness of his age
Is now a movement in time
As in a Greek statue
He comes to our eternity
By his human love
For we are the figures in the snow
Beside the leafless trees
We are the song of life.

IV

Praise is so difficult now
We have been so badly shaken
The promises have deceived us
Nature in her polar ice
Lies with the frozen gods
The magic tunes fade away
The fairy tales wither
But the face which turns to you
With all the growing fear of love
The loss of love
Is now the sun, the shade
This is the only necessity
As the fire dies away
Not only this love either
But the resolution
That this is our end
The only noble path
And this is no virtue, no perfection
It is only the way through
To the brink of oblivion
From where we return to offer
In a perfect form
The experience of an insight
Grasped by a total release

Held in the highest hope of our imagination
We are granted a blessing
Not indeed by the gods
For has it not been said
It lies beyond the gods

Forward, enter into the Winter
The bleak mid-Winter
As the great wind moans
The lashing storm sings
O snow on snow
Can we now resist you
Your tidings of great joy
Will you melt and sing
You are beyond the gods

The struggle for normality
Through the seasons of time
Is a continual task,
To move as he said
From some sort of artist
To some sort of man
Gives us little laughter
These ends enclose us
In the burden of humanity
If we are not the same thing

Moving to the same mountain top
And if we are not spirit
We advance to a void
Where laughter and sentiment
And universal truth
Disappear into the darkness
Of the echoing cave
Look then again at Norfolk
Or Dorset or Shropshire
Scotland or Normandy
The conviction of harmony
Enters into every stone
These are the solitary proofs
Of a coherent continuum
Not a desperate battle for nothing
But an affirmation in silence
A quiet living which is not imbecility
But an unchanging craft
In the aeons of time
Where we are submerged playing
On the wings of insight

Can we then be happy
Not being fit for these things
Full of intention
Yet lacking any resolution

If resolution leads to nothing,
O happy wanderer across the seas
Careless indifferent life
To live and flower and die
Free from their needs
The wailing of the world,
It will never be those garland days
And who resolves in concentration
As the sense departs
To shackle on their needs
Until knowledge and effort
Bow you down to death

I see him now far off
That solitary unblinkered mind
Whose arm and bearing sway them
He moves among the hills
Defies all feeling
Yet he speaks a louder voice
And you can see on every side
The best are gone or going
Who now resists
But jumps into the void

St George's flag still flies
Among those ancient Norfolk towers

Beckoning a final effort
The oaks stand down and on their crests
Bravely upon the breeze
The great badge waves
Surrounded by the friendly trees
After all we face
In this doubtful hectic time
Why is this a heart's delight
It contains an idea
Fair, kind and true
We are its servants
The world's servants
St George and England

Yet Science breeds her greatest bombs
And the armorial shields
Cigar-shaped point our destiny
We, the inheritors
Carry forward the dogs day
Strangely the people are gone
The landscape is clear
Only this we believed in
For strangers in other lands
Often are warmer, closer
Worst are the cleverer men
Ever colder more rotten
In their predictable ways

Whatever our mistakes here and abroad
It has been a tea-party
Compared to our successors

Nor can it be said directly
Enter then into the Kingdom
Of our dear land and sky
The dark sea bathes us
The hill-tops raise our hearts
Trees shelter shade us
While the open houses
Welcome the free spirit
The labour of our love
Responds to the great task
The earth gives up her secret
And your passage meets
The wide white sails
Beside the silent plain
Faster now and faster
Into the green and misty sea
The sun sets in perfect majesty
And you have listed to eternity
Ever beyond the gods.

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