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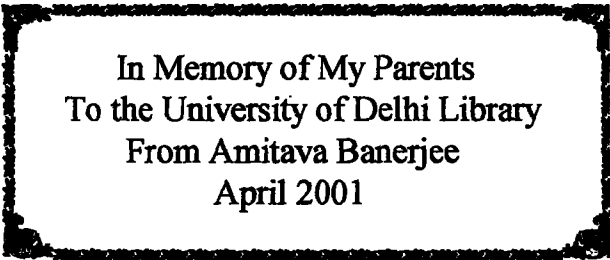


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MINOS OF CRETE

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COLLECTED POEMS



SIDNEY KEYES

Frontispiece

Sidney Keyes

MINOS OF CRETE

PLAYS AND STORIES

Edited

*with Selections from his NOTEBOOK
and LETTERS
and some early unpublished
POEMS*

by MICHAEL MEYER

ROUTLEDGE • LONDON

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PREFACE

WHEN SIDNEY KEYES left Tonbridge in July, 1940, he was still uncertain in which direction his literary talents would develop. A small grey manuscript book of juvenilia shows that he had already completed some eighty poems; but only a few¹ of these are distinguishable from the ordinary run of school magazine verse, and he had devoted at least an equal amount of energy to composing short stories and plays, including a long verse drama about Toussaint L'Ouverture in frozen decasyllabics. At Oxford—chiefly, perhaps, owing to the influence of John Heath-Stubbs—he largely abandoned prose in favour of poetry. But he remained deeply interested in the drama and the short story, and experimented with some skill, though without real consistency, in both forms. This volume contains the most interesting, in the editor's opinion, of those experiments. All were written before Keyes's twentieth birthday, from *The Albatross*, in July, 1938, when he was sixteen and a quarter, and *Minos* (eighteen and a quarter) to the autobiographical *Mexico*, which he completed in the first months of 1942. During the last year of his life, from the time that he joined the Army in April, 1942, until his death in Tunisia in April, 1943, he canalized all his creative energy into his poetry.

As a poet, Keyes had achieved something like maturity by the time of his death. The same cannot altogether be said of his prose. Mr. Tom Staveley has acutely observed that he lacked the true dramatist's ability to portray the whole spectrum of emotions; and that he had, like his

¹ See Appendix.

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master Wordsworth, no true sense of dramatic *flow*. Certainly, he could not easily dissolve one situation into another. *Hosea* is a series of tableaux; *Minos* a crumbling statuary. At the same time, he could arrest a moment and endow it with immense significance; he had a gift for conjuring himself into the mind of an uneasy genius—Pope or Wordsworth, Schiller or Gilles de Retz, Minos or Phaedra—and he wrote a hard and brilliant prose, although he himself used to complain that he was unable successfully to imitate the rhythms of human speech in the manner of Synge and Joyce. Above all, his stories everywhere reveal that searching interest in symbolism, that restless preoccupation with the irrationally significant, which is such a characteristic of his poetry.

Had he survived, he would certainly have experimented further with the drama and the short story; and would also, I feel sure, have tried his hand at the novel and the film. While sailing to Africa, he wrote, in a letter which has unfortunately been lost, that he was enjoying a deeper sense of peace than at any other time since leaving school, and that, if this serenity continued, and leisure permitted, he would settle down to attempt a novel. John Heath-Stubbs, the recipient of this letter, thinks that he may have intended to use the notebook which he had been keeping intermittently for the past nine months as the nucleus for such a work. The film attracted Keyes even more than the novel or the short story, and he would have delighted in the writing of original scenarios; the strong visual images of the early Russian and German directors considerably influenced his writing,¹ and he once told

¹ e.g., in his poem *Timoshenko*:

His bladed hand, in pity falling, mimicked
The crumpled hand lamenting the broken plow,
And the oracular metal lips in anger
Squared to the shape of the raped girl's yelling mouth.

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Renée-Jane Scott that he wondered whether he would not finish up as a dramatist or a film director.

Minos was begun, and possibly finished, during Keyes's last term at Tonbridge, in the summer of 1940. He had been reading Racine's *Phèdre* for Higher Certificate; that and James Baikie's *Sea Kings of Crete* were the starting points of the play, which has not, to date, been performed. *Hosea*, a much less serious effort, was written at about the same time, and Keyes produced it a year later in the Taylorian Institute at Oxford, being heard, though not seen, as the Voice of God. It is obviously an inferior work, half morality, half charade, but seemed worth including in this volume if only as evidence of Keyes's interest in "blues" and negro spirituals. (Vachel Lindsay and Langston Hughes, the author of *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, must be numbered among his influences.) Of the stories, *The Albatross* was written as a form task at Tonbridge, and the other four at Oxford in the order in which they appear here; the exact dates of *Judy and the General* and *Mexico* are uncertain. *The Artist in Society* was commissioned by Percy Colson as one of a collection of essays by various hands, and was completed in March, 1942, the book appearing a few months later under the title of *The Future of Faith*.

Keyes's notebook introduces itself, and is given almost in its entirety, only a few lines of personal allusions being omitted. He had previously kept a longish diary at Tonbridge, but this he seems to have destroyed; one of his school exercise books contains on the inside cover the title: *JOURNAL OF AN IDIOT* "*Idiotes: a private person, one cut off*". S.A.K.K., 1939, but the pages containing this effort have been torn out, and I have been unable to trace them.

As regards his letters: Keyes was not, in general, a spectacular nor a self-revealing correspondent. At Ton-

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bridge and Oxford, he saw his closest friends too regularly to need to write to them at any length; and in the Army, in England, he had little leisure to do so. The daily round of an infantryman in training is not an inspiring background for creative correspondence, and Keyes's letters from the Army consist mostly of rather terse accounts of the past week's routine, interspersed with complaints against the boredom and frustration of military life, brief remarks about films and plays that he had seen and books that he had read, and the usual private causerie. The most interesting sections are his notes on landscape and wild life, especially birds, and his occasional passages of introspective analysis. It seemed best, since these letters are so largely esoteric, to publish them in extracts rather than *in toto*; and I have not reprinted those passages which have already been quoted in the memoir and notes of the *Collected Poems*, except in the instance of his last letter from Tunisia.

My sincere thanks are due to Dr. Nicholas Polunin and Mr. Peter Wait, for their courtesy in bringing to my notice the only extant MS. of *Minos*, which I had supposed irretrievably lost; to Mrs. Violet Keyes, Mrs. Francis Johnson, Mr. Geoffrey Oswald, Mr. John Heath-Stubbs and Miss Milein Cosmann for permission to include selections from Keyes's letters to them; to Mrs. Johnson for the photograph of Keyes at Oxford, taken by herself; and to Mr. Heath-Stubbs and Mr. Tom Staveley for their advice and assistance.

MICHAEL MEYER.

Christ Church, Oxford.
January, 1947.

NOTE

Judy and the General first appeared in *The New Statesman and Nation*; *The Hot Street* in *Modern Reading*; *The Famous Race between the Hearse and the Steamroller* in *The Windmill*; and *The Artist in Society* in *The Future of Faith* (Hurst & Blackett, 1942).

All enquiries regarding the performing rights of *Minos of Crete* and *Hosea* should be addressed to: Margery Vosper, 32 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1.

PLAYS

MINOS OF CRETE

A Journey under Venus

Characters:

MINOS, King of Crete.

PASIPHAE, his wife.

PHAEDRA }
ARIADNE } his daughters.

THESEUS, Prince of Athens.

1ST MESSENGER.

2ND MESSENGER.

Scene: The audience chamber of Minos.

ACT ONE

Minos: Pasiphaë: Ariadne: Phaedra.

MINOS: Spring is come again, and the crying of the gulls over the palace fills my head. Spring is come, and my blood creeps in me as a serpent that might presently sting, so that I cannot sleep, or eat, or think, or have any rest at all. Also, I have bad dreams, waking . . .

PASIPHAË: Yesterday you would not see the magicians. Summon them now, for they will cure you.

MINOS: They cannot cure me; but I know my own cure. The time is here when young blood must wet the altars of the world, must wet the earth as spring rain, must be poured out as a libation to the jealous gods, and an atonement for the beauty of the spring.

ARIADNE: You mean that the youths and maidens will come from Athens . . .?

MINOS: It is time they came. The earth cries for the rain of blood. Their blood alone can ease my pain: the letting of their blood draws the poison from mine. They are my sacrifice to the dark will of the gods, their blood gluts the hungry Furies, who would otherwise devour me. They die, that I may live: for I am guilty and they innocent.

ARIADNE: Then why must they die?

MINOS: Because I command it, and I am Minos, who vanquished their fathers.

ARIADNE: But was not the victory enough?

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MINOS: Victory is never enough: tribute must follow, or the vanquished would too soon forget their shame, and challenge the victor to battle.

ARIADNE: But why tribute of blood?

MINOS: Because their blood is my libation. I live only by their death.

ARIADNE: But how . . . ?

PASIPHAË: Hush, child, there are many things which you cannot understand, and you must not question your father. There are things which you are too young to understand.

PHAEDRA: There are things which it is not wholesome to know. I know, and I would forget.

PASIPHAË (*to PHAEDRA*): Quiet! You will only frighten her, and make her more curious, if that were possible!

ARIADNE: If you are talking of the monster of the maze, I know of him, young as I am.

PHAEDRA: Little fool, so does everyone in Crete!

ARIADNE: But I have seen him . . .

(*MINOS turns back to her, recalled from a reverie. The QUEEN and PHAEDRA exchange glances.*)

PASIPHAË: You are lying.

ARIADNE: I have seen him, I say.

MINOS: When?

ARIADNE: It was on my sixteenth birthday; I had been playing all day in the palace grounds, and strayed away from my nurses. Towards dusk, I found myself outside the maze; and as it grew dark, I could hear his bellowing. I grew afraid, for I had never before been alone by the maze; but an old woman came along, and she told me not to be frightened. She said that he was frightened and hungry, and that was why he bellowed: she said if I saw him in his misery, I would pity him, and not be afraid any more, and she told me to go into the maze, giving me one end of a ball of twine, and holding the

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other herself. At first I would not, but then my fear seemed to go, and I went in. It did not seem very long before I reached the centre; or rather, not quite the centre, for I thought it would be dangerous to go too near him, and climbed upon a broken wall, from which I could see him. He rushed about bellowing and goring the walls, but I think he was lonely and starved, and crazed with loneliness and fear; he wasn't really wicked. But he was so ugly . . .

MINOS: We know.

ARIADNE: Yes, you have seen him too; but mother has not, nor Phaedra . . .

PASIPHAË: Go on, child, go on. We have heard your father's description. How did you return?

ARIADNE: I watched him for a little, and then I followed the thread backwards. But when I got out, the spool was tied to an ivy-branch, and the old woman was gone. An owl hooted in the tree behind me, making me start, and I ran back to the palace, where they were beginning to miss me.

PASIPHAË (*with undue vehemence*): You didn't tell me of this. Why not?

ARIADNE: It was a year ago.

PASIPHAË: Answer my question!

ARIADNE: You would have been angry with me.

PASIPHAË: And I am angry with you! To conceal such a thing from your own mother! You'll be having secret loves next, you ungrateful child!

ARIADNE: Well, I am seventeen, now . . .

PASIPHAË: Silence, you ungrateful baggage! Leave the room and don't come back till you are summoned!

MINOS: She has done no great wrong, wife . . .

PASIPHAË: She has flouted me! (*Looking at him with meaning.*) She must go. (*To ARIADNE.*) Get on with you!

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ARIADNE (*reluctant*): After all, it was a year ago . . .

(*Exit ARIADNE.*)

PASIPHAË (*to MINOS*): You heard that, the old woman,
the ivy branch, the owl?

MINOS: The gods pursue us.

PHAEDRA: What can it mean?

MINOS: Perhaps she, the calm wise one, meant to show us
an escape from our folly . . .

PASIPHAË: Our folly! It is the god's own doing. How
could I help the prying of my father the sun? The
wrath of Venus drove me to that filthy thing. I had no
will in it.

MINOS: Do we ever have will in love?

PASIPHAË: Love? Love? Oh, you insult me . . .

MINOS: Passion, then. Passion is always blind and mad,
bringing suffering.

PASIPHAË: This passion was not of my own destiny. It
was the hate of Venus, which made me another destiny,
as her puppet. You cannot accuse me . . .

MINOS: We are all the gods' puppets, if we fear them.

PASIPHAË: But Venus forced me to play a mad part, a
part unwritten and unrehearsed; a part not in the play
at all.

MINOS: Was it then Venus' wrath that brought you to me?

PASIPHAË: No; after the foul thing was done, she left me
to play out my own fate. Thus I came to you.

MINOS: But yet, I think it was part of Venus' vengeance.
She wanted to bring another into the net, another to
torture, on whom she would visit the sins of the Sun.
Another to bear the burden of your guilt.

PASIPHAË: So you accuse me of bringing you into my
own torments, you hate me?

MINOS: I neither accuse nor hate. Venus caused me to
share your expiation; you have no guilt. But I would
hate the gods, and rail at my destiny, if that were reason-

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able or permissible, because I am forced to bear the torment without the absolution; to cry for blood to quench fires unlit by me; to suffer for no end, for no sin of mine, but merely so that your suffering may be greater . . .

PHAEDRA: And I, too; I am but an instrument in my mother's expiation. I was born only by the will of Venus, who must have another to torment when my mother is dead. . . . Already I see before me a crime as terrible as hers, a crime human and inhuman, an unnatural, deathly passion. It is bound up in some way with your death also, my father. Why was I born to suffer and to know my fate?

MINOS: There is only Ariadne, who is pure and innocent. I thought she had escaped and now I am sure. The sign of Athene shows it.

PHAEDRA: None of us will escape altogether, but her way may be easier than ours.

PASIPHÆ: You all hate me! I tell you it was not my doing.

MINOS: Silence! I could not hate you, if I would.

PHAEDRA: We are all sufferers together, and should try to understand one another. That is the only sort of love possible for the damned.

MINOS: That is true, daughter. But be comforted, both of you, for my burden is harder to bear than either of yours. My wife, your part in the expiation of your race is played, and Venus will leave you in peace, with only memory to trouble you. Daughter, your time for the action of expiation is not yet come, though I feel already the beginnings of your torment in the restlessness of my blood. Since you were born, my daughter, I have had to bear alone the weight of a punishment not my own. When your time comes, I shall be released; but much time has passed, and there is much still to come.

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This moment is a pocket in time; as the moment in the game when the player finds himself alone, and he must act alone, or the game will cease, and the unwise be put out of course. So am I alone; so have I been for many years, and will be for a little longer. Mine is the hardest part, to bear the whole wrath of the gods, to suffer for the whole of the past, and for sins which are not my own. It is the past, it is my weakness and terror of the past that cries in the labyrinth: it is the hungry, the gaping mouth of all the old sins, that I fill with blood in the springtime. It is the load of an alien past and sins not my own, which tortures me; and blood of the young and pure alone can satisfy the old, foul past, and give me rest from the guilt within me, though it is not mine.

PASIPHAË: I do not see. . . . You were not forced into shameful crime, as I was.

MINOS: Is it not a crime to sacrifice the innocent for our own guilt?

PASIPHAË: Then you begrudge . . . ?

MINOS: No. That is the torment. Your guilt has become part of me, so that the craving for sacrifice seems natural—like hunger or thirst. But yet I know it is a crime.

PASIPHAË: Though we both suffer under the same punishment, I do not understand you; all I feel is your love for me turned bitter with suffering, become hate. (*Turns away.*)

MINOS: How can I ever explain? We speak different languages; and you have not the ache of the blood.

PHAEDRA: I understand, my father; for I am not yet blinded by my own pain, as my mother. We are very close together—you whose time is upon him, and I, whose time is about to come. I know the terror of the labyrinthine brain, and the fear of the blood when it bellows by night. Only, I cannot feel your heavy ache

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and thirst for sacrifice; but I shall, when my time is come.

MINOS: Yes, daughter, we are together in suffering. But leave me. Perhaps when we are alone, I and your mother may reach some understanding. How can I ever tell her that I do not hate her?

PHAEDRA: I will return later, for I have much to tell you.
(Exit PHAEDRA.)

MINOS (turning to PASIPHAË): Look at me, and forget your foolishness. Why, if I did not love you, should I have involved myself in your personal catastrophe? Why, if I hate you for it, do I not kill you, and so seek my escape?

PASIPHAË: Because you are Venus' puppet, as I am: the instrument of her vengeance.

MINOS: I am Minos, the king. The gods pursue and torture me, but they will not vanquish me. At the last I shall be a lord of Hades.

PASIPHAË: Fool! We are all actors in a dreary farce; we live and die and suffer but for a show. You have not yet learnt this; but I have suffered, and know its truth.

MINOS: No. They torment me because they hate and envy me.

PASIPHAË: Take care! Your pride is the cause of your suffering; your pride will bring damnation.

MINOS: I am already damned. But I am not afraid: or afraid only of the weariness, the futility of this struggle with fate and with the past.

PASIPHAË: May the gods break your pride, and give you some common sense!

MINOS: By my pride, I love you. If I were afraid, then I might hate you as the cause of my damnation. But I love you, and will always. I challenge Venus to change my love to hate!

PASIPHAË: Be quiet, you fool!

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MINOS: You will always be the prey of the gods, because you fear them. I acknowledge their power, but challenge it with my own.

PASIPHAË (*puts her hand across his mouth*): No more!

(*He seizes her by the shoulders, and stares down at her in silence for a few seconds. The gesture is a mixture of anger, desire and tenderness. Slowly he relaxes his hold, until they are half-reclining on the steps of the throne.*)

MINOS (*in a changed, tender voice*): Is it too much pain to remember . . . the past?

PASIPHAË (*her resistance has also collapsed*): It was shameful.

MINOS: Yes . . . but a thought has come to me. All passion is a little shameful, afterwards. It is our pride, that sets us above the functions of the beast. Can you speak of it?

PASIPHAË: It is too painful.

MINOS: I would like you to speak to me of it. There was beauty as well as shame and pain.

PASIPHAË: Yes, there was beauty in it. . . . But it was the mad and corrupt beauty of drunkenness.

MINOS: All bodily passion, all physical beauty, is like that. Perhaps all happiness is drunkenness. It is enough that there was beauty. You did not suffer at the time?

PASIPHAË: I suffered as no human being has suffered before, or will again.

MINOS: So say all lovers.

PASIPHAË: You mean then . . .

MINOS: Only this; that pain can be the most exquisite of all pleasures. Love is a kind of pain.

PASIPHAË: There was no love! The idea is revolting!

MINOS: But all your suffering, your aching passion, was really a pleasure too perfect to be borne. So, in a way, is my craving for sacrifice. I know it is shameful and foul, but I shudder with pleasure to see the lovely young bodies, the flashing eyes now clouded with fear, the beautiful flesh of the young, which must be torn and

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trampled in the mud. In my dreams, I am overpowered with joy; drowned in the beating of the thick red blood of the young, which must flow to satisfy my longings and glut the hungry past. That is my damnation. I questioned you because I wanted to know if your sin was like mine. . . . Since I have to bear the burden of it, I wanted to know, at least, that it had been a sweet pain.

PASIPHAË: A tearing anguish!

MINOS: An exquisite pleasure. Now I know that it was a true passion, perhaps I shall find the punishment easier to bear.

PASIPHAË: You are cruel. I wanted to forget it.

MINOS: But there is a kind of sharp joy even in remembering?

PASIPHAË: Leave me! I will not remember!

MINOS: Because that joy can never return, so poignant in its guilt?

PASIPHAË: You hate and despise me! I hate myself when I remember.

MINOS: You hate yourself for the passage of time: for having grown older: for having fulfilled the curse, so that there is no pleasure left.

(PASIPHAË buries her face in her arms and sobs; stretched on the steps of the throne.)

MINOS *(to himself)*: How can I ever reach you, my love, while you will not admit your guilt?

(He takes her head firmly in his hands and turns her face towards his own, at the same time leaning down towards her.)

MINOS *(almost savagely)*: I will not leave you till you have told me more. My love for you forces me. . . .

PASIPHAË: You frighten me: you are always so strange: and now you seem mad.

MINOS: Mad with longing for you, because you withhold yourself.

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PASIPHAË (*having mistaken his meaning, becomes suddenly falsely tender and sensuous*): I understand that, my love.

Why didn't you say that before? I am yours, by will and by destiny. I cannot escape you: and would not . . . (*her hand steals up to caress his face: he seizes it in both of his, but drops it suddenly, and remains immobile, his head bowed*).

MINOS: Oh . . . not your body, not your body. (*To himself.*) Why can nobody understand, nobody? (*Obviously disappointed, she maintains a sulky silence. There are now no signs of tears.*)

MINOS (*turning on her almost fiercely*): Tell me: what was the joy and beauty of it? Tell me!

PASIPHAË: I will not remember! (*But she is already beginning to remember, and her resistance is less decided.*)

MINOS: Tell me, or I shall hate you. Tell me.

PASIPHAË (*as if in a nightmare*): Oh, leave me . . . it was a long time ago.

MINOS: You remember.

PASIPHAË: No, I tell you!

MINOS: Do not lie! You remember.

PASIPHAË: Very well, if you will have it: I remember. I remember the growing of desire like a child within me, and my happiness, not yet knowing the end. I used to pick flowers in the fields, alone; and laugh to myself when my passion, my child, stirred blindly in me. I did not know it then for Venus' bastard.

MINOS: Go on.

PASIPHAË: And then the pure white bull, shining in the sun like sleek marble, among the long grass and the flowers. Then my desire leapt out of me, bound me umbilical to his beauty. At first I was afraid and ashamed: but the strength, the abandon, the wild joy of it! I tried to keep from the fields, but I had to return: and at last I found him again. Oh, the beauty, the pain of it, that will never return to me!

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MINOS (*has difficulty in speaking. At length, in a strangled voice*): I understand. My desire, too . . .

PASIPHAË (*frightened: as if awakening*): What have I said?

MINOS: You have told me the truth. Oh, my love, we are the same: you have given yourself to me. Now we are together in our guilt and desire!

PASIPHAË (*hysterically*): No! No! It was all a lie!

MINOS (*wearily*): Now that we understand each other, surely . . .

PASIPHAË: It was a lie! I dreamt it all! (*Bursts into hysterical tears, struggles to her feet—though he tries to detain her—and rushes out.*)

MINOS (*alone on steps of throne*): My love, my love . . .
(*Then in anger*): Fool, why are you afraid of the truth. Why do you torture me with your own fear of fate and of truth? . . . Now they have all left me, I feel the pull of the blood, the compulsion of my lust. Soon, I shall be old: it is I who am a fool, and cannot understand women . . . "Sleek marble" . . . "the strength, the abandon" . . . How can I expect a woman to bear with me? I am alone, and shall be until the end, in my guilt and torment. But I am glad to be alone: I do not fear the wrath of the gods. It is myself I fear, "the terror of the labyrinthine brain", that is my obsession; the bellowing of the past, of my guilt, in the madly involuted labyrinth of my own mind. This is the terror: that I never dare explore the labyrinth, and confront my monster, my obsession, my adopted sin. Instead, I must live on the death of the young, send the innocent to meet the monster of my own sins . . . that is my guilt: I live by death. And if youth revolted, if it challenged my right to its very life, my vampire-passion for its blood? . . . Then, I suppose, it would be the end; my sins, my suffering, my passions would be past, would drop down dried leaves from a wind-stricken tree. That would

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be death, I think . . . but a tortured death. Only by death can I escape from myself, and from this war with the gods. . . . Should I then seek my death? . . . No, that would be defeat. More punishment would follow. I, Minos the king, would squeal and twitter among the common shades, thirsting for blood as now. . . . There must be another way; there are always a million roads to the same goal, a million shades of meaning between "yes" and "no". . . . The way of Ariadne! That is it! The sign of Athens was sent to show me my escape. That is the only way, to do what I could never do before, to penetrate the labyrinth, to meet the monster—and find, perhaps, that he was really harmless, as she said. No more young blood must be spilt: my unquiet blood must find its peace in the sacrifice of spring. That is my road, into the labyrinth to confront the monster and challenge the gods.

The gods are not now my greatest enemy: by my pride and strength I am alone: I am become my own pursuer and my own damnation; and only in this sacrificial death, by my own will, shall I find peace.

I must myself go to the monster of the labyrinth, and the youths and maidens shall return to Greece.

(He remains in brooding silence for a perceptible space of time, immobile. At last, when the tension of his silence has become almost unbearable, enter MESSENGER.)

MESSENGER: My lord, the ship bringing the captives from Athens, has been sighted.

MINOS *(as if awaking)*: What?

MESSENGER: The ship from Athens . . .

MINOS: The sacrifice! *(MESSENGER nods.)* Listen *(intensely, in a tone of forced decision)*, when the ship reaches the port, you will tell the captain to turn about and sail back to Athens . . .

MESSENGER: My lord! But, the captives?

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MINOS: With the captives.

MESSENGER: But . . .

MINOS (*in hysterical rage*): Silence! Do you want to go to the labyrinth?

MESSENGER (*deferentially*): Then . . . then there will be no sacrifice this year?

MINOS: No, nor ever again.

MESSENGER (*still deferential*): But the people, my lord, if you will not think it a liberty . . .

MINOS: Silence! . . . No, go on. . . . What about the people?

MESSENGER: My lord, I wouldn't presume to speak, but I've been with you, man and boy, these thirty years . . .

MINOS: Go on.

MESSENGER: The people will say—pardon me, my lord king, that you are growing old and weakening. They might even . . . (*he hesitates*).

MINOS: Seek another king?

MESSENGER (*ashamed, looking away*): Yes. Already they murmur . . .

MINOS: If they murmur, I will cut out their tongues, and the iron-tipped flail will show them if I am weakening!

MESSENGER: But if you send the captives back . . .

MINOS: Then they shall not go back. The sacrifice shall be as usual. I am Minos the king, and they shall all fear me, all the world: my vanquished foes and my seditious subjects.

MESSENGER: The sacrifice will take place as usual? (*Prepares to go.*)

MINOS (*in an agony of indecision*): Wait! I must have a moment to think . . .

(*Enter 2nd MESSENGER.*)

2ND MESSENGER: The ship from Athens is coming into the harbour, and all the people are cheering and shouting for King Minos, who is feared from here to the world's end.

MINOS OF CRETE

1ST MESSENGER: The sacrifice?

MINOS: Bring the captives to me when they have landed, as usual. Prepare the dungeons. Quickly, both of you!

(1st and 2nd MESSENGERS run out.)

MINOS: It is true: I am my own pursuing fury. Now I know there is only the other way, the way of pain and frustration. I have broken Athene's thread: dying will be a weary business. . . .

(He remains in silence for a short interval. At last, enter PHAEDRA.)

PHAEDRA: The sacrifice is to proceed:

MINOS: Yes.

PHAEDRA: You were weak.

MINOS: I would not appear weak.

PHAEDRA: You betrayed the face for the mask; your soul is almost lost, that your body may appear glorious.

MINOS *(moved)*: Don't talk of it . . . *(as strangeness dawns on him)*. But how do you know my thoughts?

PHAEDRA: We are together in suffering, my father. Though you are old, and I am young . . .

MINOS: I am not old!

PHAEDRA: You are already old in spirit. Even so, I know your thoughts before you speak them, and I know all our actions before they arrive. I have already seen your death and mine. I have peeped at a rehearsal of the gods' play, before the first night.

MINOS: You were a strange, quiet child . . . I remember, one of my magicians said you were a changeling, and I half-believed him. But how do you know these things, which I do not:

PHAEDRA: When the player is left alone in the field, and he must act alone, or the game will cease: then the other players can watch him and know his actions and his thoughts.

MINOS: Then, when your time comes, I shall . . .

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PHAEDRA: No, you will be dead.

MINOS (*in sudden fear*): Dead? How soon?

PHAEDRA: I am no pythoness. I cannot tell the day and the hour. But I know that in time it will be very soon; but in inner progress and in suffering it is centuries away.

MINOS: Yes, I knew it would be like that.

PHAEDRA: Because you have scorned the easy path of the thread in the labyrinth, you must find your own tortuous way in the black night of fate. But you will, I think, find it.

MINOS: How can I, when I am my own enemy?

PHAEDRA: For that very reason, you will find it. Since self-immolation is now impossible, your sacrifice will be the work of another, breaking the chrysalis of your pride and cracking the walls of your tower: setting your will free to find the path. You will find it.

MINOS: Though you are young, I feel you are mother to me and not daughter. I was afraid, but have lost my fear. I am ready for the trial.

PHAEDRA: It will soon be upon you.

(*Enter ARIADNE.*)

ARIADNE: Everything was so quiet, that I came back to see if anyone was about. Are you angry, father?

MINOS: No, of course not. Come here, child?

PHAEDRA (*aside, to MINOS*): You should not be so soft with her. You undo all the good of her mother's scolding.

MINOS (*to PHAEDRA*): She is my child.

ARIADNE (*overhearing*): I'm not a child any more!

MINOS: No, you are no longer a child: you are as beautiful as the sunlight on the blue sea.

PHAEDRA: Not a child! I will leave you to prattle.

MINOS (*with authority*): Stay.

(*PHAEDRA sits as far away as possible, in silence.*)

MINOS OF CRETE

ARIADNE: Is mother very angry?

MINOS: No, she has already forgotten.

ARIADNE: Then I may stay with you?

MINOS: Of course. (*Remembering.*) For a little while . . .

I have some business to attend to soon.

PHAEDRA: The captives from Athens!

ARIADNE: Send them away, father! Send them home.

MINOS: No. I cannot.

ARIADNE: Why not?

MINOS: You would not understand.

ARIADNE: Why not?

MINOS: Please say no more. The sacrifice must be, just as the rains must come in spring, and the ache of the earth be renewed.

ARIADNE: There need be no sacrifice. The monster of the maze does not want a sacrifice.

MINOS: Not from you, perhaps: but he does from me.

ARIADNE: What difference is there?

MINOS: Please, please do not question me. It must be as long as I live, at least. Let us talk of something else. You are too young and too lovely to think of death.

ARIADNE: But my tame dove died yesterday.

MINOS: I will get you another.

ARIADNE: But it won't be the same. Nothing will be the same as it used to be, now. Something has happened, and things have lost their old meaning, taking on a new one, which I cannot understand. It is like learning a new language.

MINOS: It is the end of childhood.

ARIADNE: That is what I thought it must mean. . . . I have been thinking about what my mother said, "You will be having secret lovers. . . ." I have never had a lover. Has Phaedra?

PHAEDRA (*who hasn't*): That's my business.

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MINOS (*to ARIADNE*): Don't worry about that, child. You will have no need to look for lovers.

ARIADNE: Will it be soon?

MINOS: How should I know? You are very young.

PHAEDRA: Love does not understand time. Love comes sometimes to the very young or to the old, out of season. (*Bitterly.*) To some it does not come at all.

ARIADNE: Then it may not come to me?

MINOS: Don't think about it. Love is like sleep, it comes on you unawares; it never comes at all if you worry. It will come to you soon enough.

ARIADNE: I hope it comes soon! The shepherd boys whistle after me when I walk alone in the fields, not knowing I am the princess. They play me thin, yearning tunes on their pipes, like water running over stones, and they look at me the while, trying to speak with their eyes. But I cannot answer, even if I would: I have not learnt the language.

MINOS (*to himself*): Always this loneliness of the soul! One inner language learnt, there are so many more . . .

ARIADNE: Will it be hard to learn?

PHAEDRA: Too easy. And too hard to forget.

MINOS: No one who has loved really wants to forget.

ARIADNE: Even when I have learnt the language, that will not be love. I am afraid of the idea of love; it is too beautiful. Do you think anyone would really want me?

MINOS: Silly child! Think of something else: you will know all these things soon enough. When it comes, it will be like a sickness at first; but a sickness of which you would not be cured for the world. It will come, all too soon.

ARIADNE: Am I pretty?

MINOS (*bursts out laughing, his sombreness forgotten*): Pretty? You are the loveliest girl in Crete . . . in the world. Why, when I look at you, I am in love with you myself.

MINOS OF CRETE

My own youth is in you, and the freshness of the spring.
(*Takes her in his arms and kisses her. PHAEDRA draws away from them. MINOS strokes ARIADNE'S hair and whispers to her; he is nothing more than a doting father.*)

MINOS: The spring is in you, without the ache of the blood; you are the flower without the blind and twisted bulb, the blossom without the dark pulse of the sap; the laughing child without the pains of the womb; the spring . . .

(*Enter 1st MESSENGER.*)

MESSENGER (*clearing his throat*): My lord, the Athenian captives are ready . . .

MINOS (*pushing ARIADNE violently from him*): The spring sacrifice! The young for the old. . . I had forgotten. Bring them to me.

(*MESSENGER bows and exits.*)

MINOS (*to ARIADNE*): You must go now.

ARIADNE: Let me stay with you.

MINOS: No: it is better . . .

PHAEDRA (*rising*): Come, Ariadne. We must leave father alone.

MINOS: Stay with me, Phaedra.

PHAEDRA (*deliberately cruel*): If you don't want Ariadne . . .

ARIADNE: Let me stay, father.

MINOS (*reluctantly*): Very well, you shall both stay with me.
(*They mount the throne beside him.*)

(*Enter 1st MESSENGER.*)

MESSENGER: There is one of the captives who would speak to you alone, my lord.

MINOS: How does he presume. . . What is his name?

MESSENGER: Theseus, prince of Athens.

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SCENE I

*The same scene.
No time has elapsed.*

MESSENGER: There is one of the captives who would speak to you, my lord.

MINOS: How does he presume. . . . What is his name?

MESSENGER: Theseus, prince of Athens.

MINOS: A prince? The prince shall meet the King. Bring him to me.

(Exit MESSENGER.)

ARIADNE: A real prince from over the sea! Perhaps I shall fall in love with him.

PHAEDRA: Be quiet, you silly girl.

(ARIADNE fidgets with excitement. MINOS is immobile. Suddenly there are signs of a struggle outside. THESEUS staggers into the room, followed by the MESSENGER, who tries to restrain him. THESEUS shakes him off, strides into the centre of stage, and stands, staring insolently at MINOS.)

MESSENGER: My lord, he broke away from me. Shall I call the guards.

MINOS *(looks carefully at THESEUS)*: No, leave us.

(Exit MESSENGER.)

THESEUS: Minos, your time has come!

(MINOS regards him steadily and contemptuously.)

THESEUS *(a little nonplussed)*: Your time has come, tyrant!

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MINOS (*quietly*): I heard you. Yours will come first.

THESEUS (*hollowly*): Haw, haw!

MINOS: Silence! You are before a king.

THESEUS (*spits. Bombastically*): You won't be a king much longer, for I have come to overturn your throne and wipe out your insult to Athens! I am Theseus, trained up from childhood to end your tyranny, you madman!

ARIADNE (*to PHAEDRA*): He's brave!

PHAEDRA: Be quiet.

MINOS: Is that all?

THESEUS (*taken back*): What do you mean?

MINOS: Is that all you have come for, to wipe out an old insult?

THESEUS: That is enough!

MINOS (*relieved*): It is enough, for a youth like you. Do you know how you will die?

THESEUS: It is you who will die, you old dodderer, and not in bed!

MINOS (*more serious*): Death will come, and by devious ways. Your death will be easier than mine, though sooner.

THESEUS (*at a loss*): Sooner and easier? Easier, perhaps. I should like to flay you alive, you filth, for your senile wickedness!

MINOS: But you will not.

THESEUS: Because you are surrounded by guards, because you are afraid of me!

MINOS: Silence!

THESEUS: Because you are afraid of me!

(MINOS *laughs softly and bitterly*.)

THESEUS: Lunatic! Murderer! (*Pulls out a short sword, and leaps at MINOS. ARIADNE screams. He stabs, but misses, and the sword clatters to the ground.*)

MINOS: You could not kill me. I wish it were as easy as that.

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THESEUS (*shaken. With hollow defiance*): I'm not afraid of you!

MINOS: You should be. You, who are young and strong, should fear me, who am an old and shattered ruin. I might blight you with my own diseases.

THESEUS: I will kill you another time.

(MINOS is silent. THESEUS draws away, but makes no attempt to recover the sword. Suddenly he sees ARIADNE, and looks rather brazenly at her. She blushes and turns away. PHAEDRA has a small and enigmatic smile.)

MINOS (*to THESEUS, almost tenderly*): Come closer, prince.

(THESEUS almost involuntarily moves to the foot of the throne, but will not look at MINOS.)

MINOS (*looking long at him*): I was like you, when I was young. I was beautiful and unafraid.

THESEUS (*violently*): I hate you!

MINOS: No, you hate what I stand for, and that is a different matter. You cannot hate *me*, for I am as impersonal to you as death.

THESEUS: You cannot kill me.

MINOS: That is true. It is not death who kills, but the arrow, or the poisoned cup, or the cancer . . . or the tired soul.

THESEUS: I don't understand you.

MINOS: You could not understand. You believe in things—in insults, and honour, and retribution.

THESEUS: You have no honour.

MINOS: My honour, my name is not I; it is an iron mask upon the shrinking face. You have not learnt the difference between seeming and being . . . and you never will, now.

THESEUS: Why do you speak like this? I am your enemy.

MINOS: No, you are only another one caught up in the mesh of my curse. I could love you. I feel that you are my son.

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THESEUS: No! You profane my father's name.

MINOS: You will never understand how I love you. . . .

You are a part of myself, my own blood soon to be let,
for the relief of my body and soul. You are my youth,
going to be devoured by the hungry past.

THESEUS: You talk riddles. You are not the man I imagined
. . . You are softer.

MINOS: But I am stubborn in my suffering. I am a dead
tree that still points its arms at the sky.

THESEUS: You must be mad.

MINOS: I am mad. You should fear me: you should keep
away from me, for I might infect you.

THESEUS: I despise you. You are a crackbrained old
tyrant.

MINOS: Yes . . . Yes, that is how I must seem. You are
right to despise me: the young should despise the old,
and the sane despise the mad.

THESEUS: I thought I should meet a strong tyrant, a great
king, with whom I could contend: but all I find is a
pitiful, senile old idiot. I do not hate you: I shall not
kill you after all, but leave you to rot.

MINOS (*bitterly*): That will take a long time. (*To himself.*)
I thought this might be an escape, but it is futile, it leads
nowhere. (*To THESEUS.*) Now we understand each other
a little better. I am all you say, but I am still Minos the
king. You fear me a little.

THESEUS: No!

MINOS: Why, then, do you not pick up your sword? I
shall not call my guards: I am ready to die.

THESEUS (*with sudden honesty*): I have no wish to kill you. . . .
Yes, I do fear you a little. You are mad and proud and
. . . strange. Your cruelty must have turned your
brain.

MINOS: Yes, that must be it. But if you will not try to kill
me, how will you wipe off the insult?

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THESEUS: By living you will suffer worse than by death. Besides, your death was not my whole object, but only part of it.

MINOS: Then what . . . ?

THESEUS: When I was a child, my mother used to tell me stories of the frightful monster of the maze; how you extorted a yearly tribute of youths and maidens for your foul sacrifices. I used to dream of him; at first I was afraid, but I grew out of that. Every day I performed a harder task—lifting a boulder, wielding a great sword . . .

MINOS (*desperately*): To kill me?

THESEUS: Partly, but not wholly. When I became a man, I was filled with hate for you and for your monster. I heard him bellowing in dreams, and said to myself, "Soon you will bellow in pain, when I smite you!" Procrustes was your monster in another shape: so were the other robbers, and the great boar. And all through the voyage I have sharpened my sword, every day, and practised my strokes. I shall not spare him.

MINOS: You hope to kill the monster?

THESEUS: I shall kill him. For that purpose alone I was reared.

MINOS (*agitated*): No, you will never kill him! You would never escape from the maze.

THESEUS: That would not prevent me.

MINOS (*hysterically angry*): But I shall! You will go to the maze unarmed and naked, too, if need be. You will die like the others! You shall go first of all: this very night you shall meet the monster. See if you can wrestle with him in the darkness of the maze, see if you can kill him!

THESEUS: The gods would not have brought me so far for nothing.

MINOS (*struck by a new thought*): The gods? But the gods

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will not help you. You will die because I need your death, because this is the season of sacrifice.

THESEUS: It is the season of sacrifice, but of a new sacrifice.

MINOS (*frenziedly*): What do you mean?

THESEUS: Now I understand my mission—it is to release youth from the tyranny of age and of the past.

MINOS: No, no. You cannot force me to this. You gods, I defy you, I hate you! I am still strong, and you shall not break me by a mere boy's boast. I challenge you, prince Theseus, to overcome my strength of despair!

THESEUS: I do not understand . . . it is not you whom I wish to kill.

MINOS: You are the blind instrument of the gods' vengeance upon me! You are the sword in the hand of my own traitorous youth! But you will not break me.

THESEUS: Nor you me. I am protected. My destiny crosses yours, and mine is triumphant.

MINOS: No! (*He snatches up the sword from the steps of the throne, and hurls it at THESEUS, who makes no attempt to evade it. It misses and clatters to the floor.*)

THESEUS: The positions have changed, King Minos! Now it is I who am unafraid. You cannot kill me. The gods are on my side.

(*MINOS utters a strangled cry, and leaps to his feet, stretching his arms wide as one crucified, an expression of agony on his face.*)

MINOS (*hysterically shouting*): You will not kill me, you will not kill my mind, my past, my monster! I am stronger than you, stronger than the gods who sent you, stronger than myself. Take him away, take him away from me, kill him! (*PHAEDRA gently forces him down, until he is half-lying in the throne, a dazed expression on his face.*)

THESEUS: I am going now; you need not call your guards. I have accomplished part of my task. I pity you and

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despise you, and leave you to your death. (*Aside, under his breath, and in a very different tone.*) Oh, you gods, what have I done?

(*Exit THESEUS.*)

(*MINOS does not move or speak. He is rigid, and his breath comes stertorously, as in a fit. PHAEDRA crouches beside him. ARIADNE emerges from behind the throne, frightened and her face tear-stained. She stares raptly for a few seconds after THESEUS, then turns with forced solicitude to PHAEDRA.*)

ARIADNE: What is wrong with father? Why doesn't he speak? Will he die?

PHAEDRA (*exasperated*): Leave us, you little fool!

ARIADNE: Shall I fetch mother, or can I get . . .

PHAEDRA (*sharply*): You can do nothing. Go.

(*Exit ARIADNE.*)

MINOS (*with difficulty raising his head*): What struck me? What have I done?

PHAEDRA: Your time has come upon you. The torment of your self-chosen end has begun. . . .

MINOS: The young prince . . . he is going to the maze: he will meet the monster in the dark, and then, and then . . . Youth has risen against me; my own youth has betrayed me.

PHAEDRA: Not yet. I do not yet see how the end will come, but I know, as you do, that it must come.

MINOS: No! This is not the end, this is not my time. I still have the advantage over him, and he will not escape me.

PHAEDRA: Your destiny decrees his triumph.

MINOS: I have no destiny: I am unconquered.

PHAEDRA: You have made your own destiny, and you will not escape.

MINOS: I defied destiny, and have my free will.

PHAEDRA: The freedom of the individual will is only another sort of destiny.

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MINOS: He is my prisoner, and I shall destroy him. There is still time to avert the catastrophe.

PHAEDRA: Why should you try to avert it? You will only increase your own pain.

MINOS: I did not think it would come in this way; I thought it would be a long and creeping pain, a rot in the soul. There was a bitter joy in the idea of my slow putrescence. But this is too much for me, this attack on the citadel of my soul . . .

PHAEDRA: On your pride.

MINOS: If you will. But I cannot bear this kind of torment, this unexpected agony. I will fight against it. He shall not conquer! He shall be gored like the rest, he shall be afraid of the bellowing in the night, he shall ask for mercy with none to hear him. His blood shall appease my own unrest.

PHAEDRA: Do what you wish. I cannot help you now.

(MINOS tries to rise, but sinks back. He tries again, with stubborn determination. He totters a few steps, but cannot keep his balance.)

MINOS *(anger and self-pity are mixed in his voice)*: Take my arm, daughter, I feel weak. Why am I so weak, suddenly? This has never happened before. I am really as strong as ever . . . Why do I feel so ill? I must speak to the guards, and then I shall rest a little, and perhaps even sleep.

(PHAEDRA takes his arm, and supports him towards the exit.)

MINOS: I shall be better in the morning, when he is dead: I shall be strong again.

(Exeunt.)

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SCENE 2.

The same scene.

Several hours have elapsed. The stage is in complete darkness. Enter ARIADNE, carrying a torch. She moves furtively across the stage.

ARIADNE: I know this is wrong, but I must go to him. . . . How good-looking he was, and how brave before my father. He is how I always imagined a foreign prince, quite different from the boys of Crete. Father will be angry, but I must save him. . . . The funny little creases beside his eyes when he smiled at me. . . . How good-looking he was!

(She trips on the steps of the throne, and utters a little cry.)

ARIADNE: O-oh! I hope no one heard me.

(Enter PHAEDRA, behind her.)

PHAEDRA: What are you doing here at this hour?

ARIADNE: Oh! *(Turns round.)* It's you, Phaedra. You made me jump.

PHAEDRA: What are you doing here?

ARIADNE: I . . . I couldn't sleep, and I thought . . .

PHAEDRA: Don't lie.

(ARIADNE, shifting from foot to foot, nearly drops the torch.

PHAEDRA takes it from her roughly, and places it in a socket on left of throne.)

PHAEDRA: Now tell me the truth.

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ARIADNE: You know.

PHAEDRA: Yes. You can't lie to me.

ARIADNE (*frightened*): Let me go, please let me go! I don't mean any harm, but I must save him. Don't tell father, he would die of anger. Please, Phaedra!

PHAEDRA: Save him from what?

ARIADNE: From the monster in the maze.

PHAEDRA (*scornfully*): But the monster is harmless. *You* know that well enough.

ARIADNE: Really harmless, yes: but not for him: not harmless when father fears him and the prince hates him and wants to kill him. . . . Oh, how can I explain?

PHAEDRA: You are talking nonsense. You don't know yourself what you mean. One moment you say that the monster is harmless, and the next, that he is not.

ARIADNE: I can't explain, but . . .

PHAEDRA: Then don't try. (*A pause.*)

ARIADNE: Let me go, Phaedra. I mean no harm. Only I couldn't bear him to be killed, he is so brave and strong. I only want to save him . . . it wouldn't really matter if he escaped.

PHAEDRA: You saw your father, and how he is set upon the prince's death.

ARIADNE: Yes, but that was his anger. He isn't really cruel, you know that. But the prince had insulted him, and he was stricken with rage. When he knows that the prince is gone for ever, he will forget.

PHAEDRA: He will never forget. This is something which *you* cannot understand: our father needs the prince's death.

ARIADNE: I cannot see how the prince's death would help his sickness. . . . Unless it was by healing the wound in his pride.

PHAEDRA: Is that how you talk of your father the king?

ARIADNE: I don't mean that . . . (*as if something is dawning*)

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on her.) The prince said he was mad and proud and strange. I love him, but I see now how strange he has always been. . . . Phaëdra, is he mad?

PHAEDRA: Mad? How dare you speak thus of your father? (*Then, changing her tone.*) No, he is not mad, but he soon may be. He has been always too much alone. If the prince escapes, he will assuredly go mad.

ARIADNE: Such a little thing could not make him mad if he were ordinary. . . . Surely it couldn't?

PHAEDRA: He is neither sane nor mad, but in the dark borderland between. He is lying on his couch of ivory and leopard-skins, alone, waiting for the dawn, waiting for the death of his youth and the past risen against him. He is rapt in a trance, neither asleep nor awake, neither sane nor mad.

ARIADNE: Will he die?

PHAEDRA: We cannot tell. That lies in his fate, which he has woven for himself like an old spinning woman her shroud.

ARIADNE (*frightened*): Do *you* think he will die?

PHAEDRA: Not until the dawn: not until the dice has been cast from the urn, and the wheel turned full circle. Not even then, perhaps. . . . But his destiny is closing round him swiftly. The end will not be long.

ARIADNE: I cannot understand your strange talk . . . but you mean that, if I let the prince escape, my father will die?

PHAEDRA: You love Theseus?

ARIADNE: As soon as I saw him I . . .

PHAEDRA: Yes, you must love him. (*Rather bitterly.*) You are young and beautiful and ready for love. You are not afraid?

ARIADNE (*intensely*): No.

PHAEDRA: Not of the dark, nor of the bellowing in the maze, nor of your father's anger?

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ARIADNE: No.

PHAEDRA: Nor of the possibility that he may not love you?

ARIADNE (*does not answer at once. She has not considered this before. At last, very quietly*): No, not even of that. I only want to save him.

PHAEDRA (*wearily*): Then I cannot prevent you. . . . Do what you wish, and do it quickly. . . . The gods could not prevent you.

ARIADNE: But my father?

PHAEDRA (*in a different tone, seeing another possible way out*): It will kill him, as I have said. But you love Theseus, so what does it matter? The King is old, and will soon be dead, whether through you or not. Do what you wish.

ARIADNE: But I cannot. . . . Oh, it is dreadful. I must save the prince, yet I cannot cause my father suffering. Are you sure?

PHAEDRA: There is no middle way.

(*ARIADNE is silent, considering the problem.*)

PHAEDRA: You must choose, and you must choose now. Your father or your . . . lover. (*She pronounces the last word with meticulous distaste.*)

ARIADNE (*almost in tears*): I will not choose!

PHAEDRA: You cannot help but choose. This moment is a cross-road of destiny. (*Aside.*) But who can tell that the signpost points truly? (*To ARIADNE.*) Come, child: either go back to bed, or go out into the night, to face the terror of the labyrinth and your father's anger and suffering.

ARIADNE: I love them both!

PHAEDRA (*losing her caution with exasperation*): What is this petty prince, this loud-mouthed boy, to you?

ARIADNE (*her indecision turned to anger*): I love him, I tell you! You may not be able to understand my love, you who are dark and bitter like a cracked mirror in a tomb

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(PHAEDRA *winces*), who have never had a lover, and never will, but I love the prince with all my being. I must save him, whatever the consequences: even if he does not love me, or if my father dies. You cannot prevent me, the gods cannot prevent me, as you said yourself. I am going to save the prince. Call the guards if you dare!

PHAEDRA (*her cup is full to the brim*): Then go. I will try to forget this moment. . . . Go. I was a fool to stand in the way of youth. You need fear nothing from me.

ARIADNE: I hate you all! Except my father, and he is mad. I shall ask the prince to take me away with him to Greece.

PHAEDRA: Go, and stop your chattering. (*Almost hysterically.*) Go, I tell you!

ARIADNE: Tell father why . . . he will understand.

(*Exit ARIADNE.*)

(PHAEDRA *stares wildly after her, then sinks upon the steps of the throne, her hands in her hair, her face strained into a mask.*)

PHAEDRA (*in a choked voice*): Youth, youth is our enemy. But I am young too . . . there is only ten years between us . . . or not much more. But that is a lifetime. I am cursed like Minos. . . . I am standing between youth and age, between impulse and wisdom. I am young like her. . . . I saw how handsome he was, I desired him, it could not have been love. My desire burns in me, and will give me no peace. I despise him, the loud-mouthed fool: but my body, my rebellious flesh, needs him. . . . How his eyes flashed when he challenged Minos. Oh, I must not say such things, I must not think them even, I despise him, I despise blind infatuation. I must overcome the dull ache of the flesh. Jealous of her . . . oh, no, no, that cannot be; it is foul and shameful. Flesh is the lesser part: and my soul is as old as the world. I can see too much, and too clearly. . . . My task should

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be easier than my father's . . . (*Slowly gaining control of herself, rises to her feet. Coldly, with terrifying self-control.*)

What a fool I am: a miserable fool like the rest, beating my head against the cage of fate. This is all part of the pattern, of Minos' punishment and of my own. The fate he has woven for himself, the fate my ancestors forced on me, must be fulfilled. There is no need to fear the flesh . . . it will be my downfall and my torment, but its urge shall be satisfied. My time will come, for pleasure as well as pain. Young love destroys itself. . . . Ariadne will suffer, but will be happier than I. Her way is easier, more direct. But my time must come, as Minos' is already upon him. The rebellion of youth and of the past is complete. But the prince will return, because I need him. Why did I not think of that before? So, my visions comfort me.

(*She takes the torch from the bracket, and moves towards the door, as if sleep-walking. Enter PASIPHAË, in agitation.*)

PASIPHAË: Is something wrong? Why are you up, Phaëdra?

PHAEDRA: It is nothing. I was troubled by bad dreams.

PASIPHAË: You too? I had a dream: a great curved horn rose out of the labyrinth, bellowing, and it had faces, the face of a strange man, and of Ariadne, weeping. It grew and grew, and everything vanished but the horn and the bellowing: and then the King impaled upon it, and blood on his pale face. But he never made a sound.

PHAEDRA: It meant nothing. You were thinking of the King's sickness.

PASIPHAË: All dreams have a meaning. I am afraid. I went to the King, thinking he was dead. He was white as death. He groaned and cried out, "My brain is dead, the monster is dead", and then, "Blood of the prince, blood has been spilt, he has stolen my blood". What can have happened?

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PHAEDRA: Nothing, I tell you. Go back to bed.

PASIPHAË: Where is Ariadne?

PHAEDRA: Safely asleep.

PASIPHAË: Are you sure?

PHAEDRA: When I passed her bedchamber, I looked in at her. She was quietly sleeping like a little child.

PASIPHAË: It is unnatural. There is some evil in Crete. We are all in danger.

PHAEDRA: Come, and forget your dream.

(She walks on impassively towards the door, with the torch.

PASIPHAË hesitates, but, as the light is taken from her, suddenly turns after PHAEDRA.)

PASIPHAË: Give me the light! Wait for me! I will not be left alone. There is some evil abroad.

PHAEDRA: There is no need for fear. I will stay with you till dawn.

(Exeunt together, PHAEDRA holding torch.)

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

The same scene, just after dawn.

MINOS is on the throne, and PASIPHAË is seated on the steps.
The lighting is grey and chilly.

MINOS: The cry of the gulls fills my head, draws out my thoughts in thin shreds of sound. I have not slept, I cannot rest. I am haunted by my dreams, though I cannot remember them. The terror and sickness of the night will not leave me.

PASIPHAË: Why are you so sick and distraught: the sacrifice will soon be consummated?

MINOS (*hysterically*): Don't say that! Don't speak of it!

PASIPHAË: But surely that will ease you? You said yourself that their blood would cure you.

MINOS: When?

PASIPHAË: Yesterday, towards evening, before the captives arrived.

MINOS: Not yesterday, but in my last existence. . . . I was a great king then.

PASIPHAË: And are still. . . . A great king in sickness.

MINOS: A corpse moving and speaking.

PASIPHAË (*after a pause*): What happened when you were with that young prince? It was after that that you became so strange.

MINOS: You could not understand. Don't speak of it.

PASIPHAË (*sulky*): Oh, I shall not. I would not presume to pry into your state business. But what has become of the prince?

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MINOS (*vehemently*): He is dead!

PASIPHAË: You sent him alone into the labyrinth?

MINOS: Yes. He is dead. I am only awaiting the news of his death. Then, perhaps, I shall be what I was before all this. . . .

(*Enter 1st MESSENGER.*)

MINOS (*to MESSENGER*): When did he die? Did you listen to the noise and the bellowing, and for his cries, as I told you?

MESSENGER: My lord . . .

MINOS (*eagerly, not giving him time to continue*): Did he ask for mercy? Was he afraid when you took him to the labyrinth?

MESSENGER: But, my lord . . .

MINOS: Yes, he must have been afraid, for all his brazenness. He must have screamed like a frightened child. Was he very pale?

MESSENGER: My lord, the prince . . .

MINOS: Yes, I know he is dead. I feel it. I am strong again. His blood has saved me.

MESSENGER: My lord, the prince . . . is not dead.

MINOS (*stupefied*): Is . . . not dead?

MESSENGER: No, my lord. He has escaped, and sailed for Greece. . . . My lord, it was not my fault, nor that of the guards. We naturally thought at first it was your command. . . .

MINOS: What do you mean?

MESSENGER: The princess Ariadne. She came to the dungeon, and released him and . . .

MINOS: Yes?

MESSENGER: She has fled with him, my lord. But how were we to know?

MINOS: There is something more.

MESSENGER: The prince entered the maze—how he got out again I cannot tell—and killed the monster.

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(MINOS shudders all over, as if he had been struck.)

MINOS (dazedly): He . . . escaped?

MESSENGER: He killed the monster, and escaped with the princess. We did not know till an hour ago that they were gone. It was no fault of ours, my lord, we were not to know . . .

(MINOS has collapsed in the throne. He sits hunched up, staring before him, immobile. The MESSENGER shifts awkwardly from foot to foot, not knowing whether to go or stay.)

MESSENGER: My lord, do not blame us. . . . Shall I give orders to the captains of the fleet to prepare to pursue?

(MINOS is silent. MESSENGER continues, after a pause.)

There is still time to capture them: they will not yet be in sight of Athens. The pursuit will be easy. Will you lead the fleet? (Still no answer.) My lord, I beseech you, let us pursue them: thus will the insult to your person be wiped away . . . and our guilt. There is no time to lose. Let us pursue them. (A long pause.) My lord . . .

MINOS: Leave me.

(MESSENGER hesitates, but PASIPHAË makes a sign to him to go. Exit, with obvious reluctance.)

PASIPHAË: What has happened? He said Ariadne has gone? What does it mean?

MINOS (half to himself): Youth's rebellion is complete. I was a fool to pit myself against youth. This is my punishment.

PASIPHAË: What has happened to Ariadne?

MINOS: She has fled with her lover.

PASIPHAË: The prince?

MINOS (wearily): You heard.

PASIPHAË: Oh, it is our punishment! (Bursts into sobs, burying her face in her hands. MINOS is silent. After a few seconds, PASIPHAË peeps out, and, seeing that MINOS ignores her, staring straight before him, uncovers her face.)

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PASIPHAË (*dramatically*): What will become of her?

MINOS: She will be happy and unhappy: wrung with pain, and soothed with pleasure, like all lovers.

PASIPHAË: Is that all you care?

MINOS: For her sake, I am glad. Her life was never bright enough here, under the shadow of our curse.

PASIPHAË: You care more for the monster.

(MINOS groans and shudders with pain.)

PASIPHAË: You must pursue them, and bring her back.

MINOS: No.

PASIPHAË: She is your daughter. . . . (MINOS does not answer.)

Well, if you do not care what happens to *her*, remember this: You are a great king, and you cannot let this insult remain unavenged. The people would laugh.

MINOS: Let them laugh. I am matter for laughter: a skeleton on the throne; a madman who has cut his own throat, and bleeds to death.

PASIPHAË: And if they lose patience, and seek another king?

MINOS: They will soon have to seek another king. I am dying.

PASIPHAË: Nonsense, you are as strong as ever!

MINOS: My soul is already dead. My body will not be long dying.

PASIPHAË: You are foolish to talk of death when there is no need. This business has preyed too much on your mind; there is nothing irreparable about it—only an insult which can be wiped out.

MINOS: I tell you, I will not pursue them. I care no longer about insults. I shall wait for death.

PASIPHAË (*changing her method of attack*): Then if you do not care about the insult, I can forget it, too. Perhaps, after all, that is the best way.

MINOS: It is the only way left to me.

PASIPHAË: No, not . . . that. But think, for a moment: what has this thing done to you? After all, the harm is

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not so very great. Our daughter has run off with this young man: we may never see her again.

MINOS: I do not wish to see her.

PASIPHAË: Oh, you are callous . . . is that all you feel?

MINOS (*wearily*): You were about to say something else.

PASIPHAË: Yes. Even though we have lost her, things could be worse. The boy *is* a prince . . . and he must have been very handsome. Perhaps one day our daughter will be a queen. . . .

MINOS: I did not intend her to be less.

PASIPHAË: So that her fate is not utterly unthinkable. I only hope he takes her for his wife: but even if he does not, he is still a prince. Perhaps he really loves her.

MINOS: She will be happy and unhappy, that is certain.

PASIPHAË: Well, you must admit that worse things might have befallen her. . . .

MINOS: She followed her own will: or her destiny. Both mean the same. That is enough. Her way was easy: do you remember the sign of Pallas?

PASIPHAË: What has that to do with it?

MINOS: No matter. She is fortunate.

PASIPHAË: Well, as it is not the fate of your daughter that is worrying you, nor the insult, what is it? No other harm has been done.

MINOS: Please be quiet. You talk too much.

PASIPHAË: There is no need to insult me. I was only trying to reason you out of your morbid brooding.

MINOS: Leave me alone. I am sick.

PASIPHAË: Another thing: the prince has actually done us some good. He has slain the monster, and all the guilt of our past with it. We can forget. The maze is empty and clean to the sky: we need sacrifice no more captives but can keep them for slaves. That will be much better. We will never again be awakened in the night by the bellowing, and lie sleepless remembering our sin. We are free.

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MINOS: No. We are in worse bondage.

PASIPHAË: I do not understand you. The end of the monster is a blessing to all. We can be happy again, we can pretend that the past never happened.

MINOS: Be quiet.

PASIPHAË (*edging nearer to him, till she clasps his knees and looks rather archly up at him*): Don't you see what this means? We can love each other without guilt. (MINOS *does not answer, or look at her. Sulkily.*) Of course, I had forgotten: it is a long time since we were in love. You have forgotten. . . . You have forgotten how you took me in the heat of my sin, flying from the god's wrath, and promised to uphold and protect me, if the skies should split. You were a man then. . . . You defied the gods for my sake, even though I warned you. Until now, you were never beaten. I was afraid of your pride, but I loved you for it. And now, you are shattered by an accident that is really very fortunate.

MINOS (*wearily*): Go. It is always the same: we are of different races in the spirit.

PASIPHAË (*sobbing*): Yes, you have forgotten it all. You do not love me. You do not understand the meaning of love at all. Before, you spoke bitterly of fleshy passion, and now you are cold, and cruel to me. (MINOS' *hand strays down and caresses her hair. This time she is really miserable, and does not cease sobbing.*)

MINOS (*tenderly and sadly*): No, I have not forgotten. But you must forget. You cannot love a corpse.

PASIPHAË (*still sobbing*): You frighten me. There is something in this that I cannot understand.

MINOS: Do not weep for me, nor for yourself. You will be happy enough.

PASIPHAË: I am afraid. There is something evil upon us. . . . The fulfilment of the old curse.

MINOS: You need not fear.

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PASIPHAË (*now really afraid*): Oh, my dream . . . it is coming true. I knew there was something evil abroad. My awful dream. . . .

MINOS: What dream?

PASIPHAË: I cannot tell you. Last night I had a terrible dream . . . but it may mean nothing.

MINOS: All dreams have meaning: actions and waking life alone can be meaningless. But do not be afraid. I have many bad dreams. . . .

PASIPHAË: Forget your dreams! You must not die! Help me, save me from the curse: don't leave me!

MINOS (*trying to quieten her by stroking her hair*): It is better for me to leave you. I am only a burden to you, not your protector. Your sin is expiated, and you must not share my suffering. It is I who bring you your bad dreams.

PASIPHAË: Don't say that! We shall be safe together. I want to help you. We can help each other.

MINOS: That is impossible.

PASIPHAË (*suddenly quiet, stupefied with the terror of his decision*): Is that . . . the end?

MINOS: Yes, my love.

PASIPHAË: You cannot leave me!

MINOS: Listen: I have loved you, and helped you to bear your burden. You are free now, but my time of sacrifice is come: I cannot let you suffer for me. I must leave you, in death. This is the end of all we have said and done together: the end of love and suffering. Please go. I must be alone.

(*He raises her face to his, and kisses her, rather stiffly, on*

Now . . . go. (*She backs slowly away from him, eyes wide and full of tears, all her movements entranced. Exit thus.*)

(*MINOS remains immobile for a few seconds. Then he slowly rises, and descends from the throne. He stands motionless*

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for a moment at foot of throne: then sees THESEUS' sword, which is still lying where it was dropped. Slowly he picks it up, and feels the blade, and the point on his palm. He raises it hesitatingly in his right hand like a dagger, following it with his eyes: but suddenly lets his arm fall to his side, and stands quivering, his breathing stertorous.)

MINOS (*in a choked voice, after a long pause*): The gods have conquered me. This is the sword of my own fate, forged in my soul. O Zeus, you who spoke to me on the holy mountain, you whose priest I have been, have mercy on me. You alone are the King. Give me peace in Hades. (*He raises the sword again, his face twisted, and rather clumsily strikes at himself. He staggers with the force of the blow, but it glances off. Panting, he strikes again, convulsively: then raises the sword in both hands above his chest, and is about to stab himself when PHAEDRA enters, behind him.*)

PHAEDRA: You fool!

(*MINOS, with a choked cry, drops the sword, and staggers backwards, collapsing on the steps of the throne. PHAEDRA comes to his side.*)

PHAEDRA: That is no way of escape. You might have known that you could not die so easily, when you had refused the easy way.

MINOS (*pitifully*): The sword . . . was blunt.

PHAEDRA: No sword can cut the knot of destiny.

MINOS: Why will they not let me die? Theseus could not kill me. . . . I thought then, it was because I had a high and terrible destiny to accomplish. But it is only the gods' worst torture, this slow inner rotting. . . .

PHAEDRA: Release will be soon: but you have not accomplished the ends you have set yourself. The gods do not punish you . . . it is all your own doing.

MINOS: Yes, I understand that. I have woven my own destiny, and it is a shroud. But my punishment is from the gods as well, for my pride.

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PHAEDRA: Now you understand all. "Destiny" means many things: the simple think that it means a pattern of our lives drawn by the fates, and gradually revealed to us, as a frieze on a turning jar. They think we must drift through joy and suffering, having no power over ourselves.

MINOS: That is a lie.

PHAEDRA: Not entirely. Those who believe that, live accordingly. Thus they become the creatures of wind and tide, like floating seaweeds.

MINOS: But I have made my own destiny.

PHAEDRA: Others there are, who defy the fates, and think they are without destiny. That is also a lie. Every action, every thought, every dream, is a part of our individual destiny. We weave a design out of ourselves, which becomes our destiny. There comes at last a time when the nature of the design is fixed: after that, we have no more free will. The pattern we have created we must complete. At the last, we must leave a perfect design.

MINOS: Then I have reached the point when I must fulfil the pattern of the past?

PHAEDRA: Yes. You have no choice.

MINOS: Yes, I understand. That is my own belief, but I could never fix it in words. Our destiny is all in ourselves: we are our own fates: but we are not free. We are the puppets of the past.

PHAEDRA: Now you realise that, it will be easier for you. You see that it takes more than a sword to complete the pattern.

MINOS: Yes . . . but yet I do not know what the end is to be. Surely I cannot drift on the tide of my fate: what must I do?

PHAEDRA: How could I know? Your own soul should tell you.

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MINOS: But it does not. I only feel my pain, and know that I am dying.

PHAEDRA: We are all dying, from the moment we are born. I tell you, there is still more to do before you escape: more to achieve, and more to suffer.

MINOS: And yet I may not kill myself. . . .

PHAEDRA: Because that would be too easy.

MINOS: What then?

PHAEDRA: This is a cross-road in our destiny: a time in the game when the player must act or be destroyed, and must act alone.

MINOS: Those are my own words.

PHAEDRA: But they mean something different.

MINOS: Yes, I see there is still much that I did not understand. My death is not only a negative end of all suffering . . .

PHAEDRA: It is the consummation of your life.

MINOS: That is it. Now I begin to see the whole pattern of my destiny. By this terrible blow to my pride and my secret lust, I am freed . . . I am *freed* to die.

PHAEDRA: The gods have not conquered you. You are still your own destiny. Your fate is in your own hands. If you can bear your burden to the last, you will be victorious over the past and all the old evils.

MINOS: And if I break . . .

PHAEDRA: That will be your own damnation.

MINOS: You have saved me!

PHAEDRA: Perhaps that was part of your destiny, too.

MINOS: Still . . . I do not know what to do. . . . I am sick and tired. I am afraid.

PHAEDRA: You cannot stay here. You would go mad.

MINOS: Then where . . .

PHAEDRA (*going to the window*): Think, think of your own pride! Think of the fleets riding in the harbours, and

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the cleanness of the sea: the sharp horizon on the waters
and nothing else: the peace of the sea.

MINOS: I have loved the sea . . .

PHAEDRA: The sea can heal you.

(The idea gradually dawns on MINOS. His face becomes transfigured from sullen misery to radiant hope and eagerness. His movements become more brisk. He seems to have grown in stature, physically as well as spiritually.)

MINOS: Why, why did I not think of that before? In my mother the sea is my salvation. My tears would seem futile among the great waters: my groans among the hoarse, complaining winds. I could not be unclean with the pure sea! *(Another thought strikes him.)* That would be a glorious end . . . but . . .

PHAEDRA: What?

MINOS: Death in the sea is only better than death by the sword. It is not different. I would not be allowed . . .

PHAEDRA: No, that is not what I mean. You cannot kill yourself; neither by water nor by the sword. There is no need. You must not seek death from the sea, but life.

MINOS: Life . . . the sea is life.

PHAEDRA: That is the answer to your problem: you have been seeking death in life, you must find life before you are fit to die.

MINOS: Then I must pursue them across the narrow seas.

PHAEDRA: Pursue your own soul across the seas of the world, and find it and death together.

MINOS: I am not afraid of living now. . . . The ships are trembling to be gone, and the lonely wind singing in the rigging. Thersites!

(Enter MESSENGER.)

Go to the captains of the fleet, and tell them to make ready. We go to sea in an hour.

MESSENGER *(overjoyed)*: My lord!

MINOS: Go, go! We have no time to waste. You shall

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come with me. (*Exit MESSENGER.*) (MINOS *turns to PHAEDRA, and takes her by the shoulders, trembling with joy.*)

MINOS: Daughter, you have saved me from myself! You . . . almost frighten me. You are too wise.

PHAEDRA (*bitterly*): Oh, I am mortal. But those born of a curse are wise from the cradle.

MINOS: And so, my curse has saved me.

PHAEDRA: The solution was in yourself, all the time. My chance words made you realise it.

MINOS: The captains cannot be ready for at least an hour. . . . There are thirty ships in the Great Fleet. . . . They could not do it sooner. I wonder if my father's old ship is still seaworthy, the one I sailed in when I was a boy. I should like to sail in her again, though the mainmast was too pliant, I remember, and she could never keep a course. . . . It is five years since I saw the Fleet at sea. Too long . . . (*Suddenly turning to PHAEDRA.*) You have never sailed with me: why not now?

PHAEDRA: No, that is impossible. It would be against the pattern. My destiny is here . . . (*half aside*) Until I am taken away. (*To MINOS.*) You must be alone.

MINOS: Yes, that is what I felt. I must go to the ships. (*Prepares to exit, but enter PASIPHAË to him.*)

PASIPHAË (*frightened*): What is happening? They tell me the fleet is preparing to go to sea.

MINOS: It is.

PASIPHAË: Then you are going to pursue?

MINOS: My own soul.

PASIPHAË (*despairingly, to PHAEDRA*): He is mad! I knew it would come.

PHAEDRA: No, he has found his sanity.

PASIPHAË (*to MINOS*): Where is your destination?

MINOS: There is none.

PASIPHAË: Then . . . when will you return?

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MINOS (*reluctantly*): I shall not return. I had prepared you for that.

PASIPHAË: You must not go! Oh, you must not leave me alone. I am afraid of being alone.

MINOS: Phaedra will be with you. . . . You must not be afraid. I was afraid, but I have thrown off my fear.

(*PASIPHAË makes a movement towards him, but PHAEDRA restrains her almost roughly. She collapses, weeping, into PHAEDRA'S arms.*)

PHAEDRA (*to MINOS*): Now go. This is your moment.

MINOS (*looks wildly round him, as if for a way of escape. Then his face lights up, and takes on an expression of rapt ecstasy*): The cry of the gulls. . . . It used to torture me, but now it is the voice of freedom. I have been a hard master to myself, but the torment is over. In the peace of the sea I shall find my soul and my death. I shall be drowned in peace, rolled in peace among the waving seaweeds, and my poor rotten flesh turned into bright coral for a memorial. The cry of the gulls. . . . So they cried off Umbros in the straits, when I was young. Past Umbros, through the maze of the islands and the quiet waters, then back again across the open sea towards the Pillars of Hercules, with the tide whispering, the mist in the shrouds at night, the cry of gulls, and the long swinging song of sailors and sirens. . . . By the sea I have lived: by the sea I shall die at last, and find my peace.

(*Enter MESSENGER.*)

MESSENGER: My lord, the sailors are shouting for you. The captains are ready; they have been waiting your orders since dawn.

MINOS: The king is ready. (*Exeunt. PASIPHAË is still weeping.*)

CURTAIN.

EPILOGUE

(To follow without any interval. The same scene. More than a year later. PASIPHAË, PHAEDRA.)

PASIPHAË (*wearily*): I am tired of waiting . . . the people want another king, and have forgotten Minos. Phaedra, do you think he will return?

PHAEDRA: You ask that question twenty times a day. I know that he will never return.

PASIPHAË: But some news must come. . . I will not believe that he is dead.

PHAEDRA: The Great Fleet will return, but the King will not return. We must await the coming of the Fleet.

PASIPHAË: And, until then, Minos is still the King.

PHAEDRA: Even in Hades.

(PASIPHAË rises from the steps of the throne, where she has been sitting, and goes to the window. She stands, looking out at the sea, in silence, for several seconds. Then, almost to herself, she prays.)

PASIPHAË: Venus, you have pursued and tortured me long enough. I have expiated my sin, and I am tired. Let me die now. . . You also, great Zeus, whose servant Minos was my lover, hear my prayer, and give me rest. My father the Sun, hide your face from me, and give me refuge in darkness . . . but first, let me know that my husband, my mad, bitter lover, is dead.

PHAEDRA: And give me rest from the ache of the flesh, Artemis, the pure one. Give me strength to fulfil the curse.

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PASIPHAË (*turning back from the window*): They will not listen to us! We are of an accursed race. But I know that Minos is still alive. I shall see him again.

PHAEDRA: We shall all meet again in the underworld, and recognise our lovers; but with no speech but a bat's shriek, and with no kisses nor touching of hands; but only a dumb, blind yearning.

PASIPHAË: No! No! There must be something more.

PHAEDRA: Nothing more, but the scents and echoes of old passions ringing in our dead heads, drifting through the long corridors of the empty soul.

PASIPHAË: That is not peace!

PHAEDRA: There is no peace, no solitude, no escape from self, either here or hereafter.

PASIPHAË: Then why . . . ?

PHAEDRA: We may not ask.

PASIPHAË (*turning abruptly back to the window, and stretching her arms wide: almost hysterically*): Send him back to me, or let me know that he is dead!

(*She remains thus, immobile, for a few seconds. Then her whole body tautens. She drops her arms, and peers intently out. Suddenly she whispers, as if sceptical even now*): The Fleet! The Fleet is coming into the harbour. My prayer has been answered.

PHAEDRA (*rising to her feet*): This, then, is the end.

PASIPHAË (*excitedly*): I must go down to the harbour! I cannot wait for him.

PHAEDRA: No, you must remain here. They will bring you news soon enough. It would not be becoming for the Queen to rush to the quayside like any sailor's wife. (PASIPHAË *quivers with hysterical excitement, clenching and unclenching her hands, smoothing her hair. PHAEDRA remains at the window. Suddenly a sound of wailing comes faintly up.*)

PASIPHAË: What is that? What can it mean?

(*The sound grows louder, as if approaching.*)

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PASIPHAË: They are disembarking. I do not see the King's ship. Phaëdra, do you see it, the old ship with a prow carved like a beaked monster?

PHAEDRA: It is not there.

PASIPHAË: Oh, why do they not send word to me?

(After a short pause, enter MESSENGER, panting and obviously agitated.)

PASIPHAË: What is the news from the fleet?

MESSENGER: They have come safely home, my lady, having sailed from Pontus beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

PASIPHAË: And the King?

MESSENGER: The King . . .

PHAEDRA: He is dead.

PASIPHAË: No! I will not believe it. *(To MESSENGER.)* He is not dead.

MESSENGER: They say he was drowned . . . nearly a year ago. *(PASIPHAË bursts into tears.)* They say the Fleet had passed the Pillar of Hercules, and were sailing into the great ocean, for the King had some plan of finding Aiaia, the enchanted island in the West: but after three days, a fog came down on them, and they were becalmed for many days; and when it cleared, the King's ship was gone. The captains turned at once, and sailed for home . . . the wreckage of the King's ship was washed past them one day by the tide: they recognised the beaked figurehead. So they knew that the King was dead. After many adventures, they have at last come home.

(PASIPHAË is in a paroxysm of tears, her face in her hands, rocking back and forth. The MESSENGER makes a movement as if to go, but suddenly approaches her deferentially.)

MESSENGER *(clearing his throat awkwardly)*: Forgive me, my lady, but . . . I loved the King . . . *(Exit hurriedly, as if ashamed of his impertinence. The wailing grows louder and louder, until it fills the whole room as a background to*

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PHAEDRA's words. *It is swelling rhythmical, like the sea. PHAEDRA takes the centre of the stage. PASIPHAË sinks down to the steps of the throne, and remains motionless, her head in her hands.*)

PHAEDRA: Now the last thread of the shroud is woven, and the pattern is complete. He has found his soul at last, and is at peace, rolled in the slow swell of the middle deep. He has not broken under suffering, but has triumphed over himself and over the gods, fulfilling the curse and bringing his own absolution. Thus must it always be with those who are their own destiny: by long and devious ways, by suffering, passion and despair, they reach absolution and peace: but only if they are strong enough to bear the burden of their own pride. All action brings reaction, all sin retribution, all strength and sacrifice peace: for nothing is without cause. Order produces order, and chaos produces chaos: but both are equally part of the pattern. Let no one mourn for Minos: he has found the way at last to the centre of the labyrinth, and is at peace. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things; prudent, and he shall know them:

Rest quiet, my flesh: your time will come only too soon, for pleasure and for pain. The curse still runs in our blood, and must be fulfilled in lust and anger, since it was born in lust and anger, for all is justice. He who hath ears to hear, let him hear!

CURTAIN.

THE END

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Several points in this play need elucidation; and it seemed to me that a short analysis of my motives in writing it would not be out of place, and would greatly assist understanding of the characters and their significance. I shall attempt here to explain the salient points.

THE MINOS LEGEND.

My version of the legend of Theseus and Minos is original: since there are so many conflicting versions that any attempt to crystallise the story into a significant whole *must* involve a good deal of personal invention. For instance, we shall never know whether Minos was a name or a Cretan word for "King": nor have we any reliable authority for his character. The old legends make him appear such an extraordinary mixture of greatness, petty cunning, bravery, tenderness, pride, and weakness, that many authorities consider that two actual kings of Crete have been confused—the great and just monarch who was murdered in Sicily, whither he had pursued Daedalus, and the cruel and probably mad tyrant overthrown by Theseus. As will be seen from the play, I have steered a middle course between the two, and have provided a personal solution to the problem as to why Minos did not pursue Theseus and Ariadne.

I should, perhaps, apologise for deviating from the legends where they are unanimous: that is, in their version of the story of Pasiphaë and the white bull. My own

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version (i.e. that Pasiphaë went to Minos *after* this incident for protection spiritual and physical), seemed to serve my purpose better than the official story (that the bull was sent by Poseidon to Minos for sacrifice, but that Minos was so taken with its beauty, that he would not kill it and was punished for his presumption), because it was essential that Minos should be himself guiltless of any actual crime.

Apart from these points, my version is self-explanatory. For a picturesque account of Minos legends, see Baikie's *Sea Kings of Crete* (also for photographs of Minos' throne and other antiquities).

THE CHARACTERS.

Minos is a character who is never seen in his full strength, like Hamlet. His perversion is already far gone when the play commences. He is rather a strong and deep man than a great or noble one: his soul had always, even in strength, been too sick for that of a great man. He has hitherto found a palliative in outward action: but now, for the first time, this action is denied him. The play is concerned with the devious ways by which he eventually finds himself again, passing from neurotic brooding to real breakdown, and thence to spiritual exaltation. He has all the while to reckon with the perversity of his own soul, which forces him to reject the "easy" but terrifyingly straightforward way of Ariadne and the clue of thread.

I realise the criticism which will be brought against this character: that he is neither noble nor tragic, and that the play is thus merely an exhibition of suffering painful to both audience and reader. I deny this: Minos is a typically modern character, and my aim is to show his progress from barren suffering to fruitful inner struggle—from the vicarious sacrifice to death in the sea.

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The other characters are grouped about him in two classes: those who live on two planes, physical and spiritual (Minos and Phaedra) and those who live merely on the physical plane (Theseus, Pasiphaë). Ariadne provides the necessary link between the two.

Phaedra is an (attempted) subtlety. She provides the link between the tortured Minos, lost in the labyrinth of his own mind, and real inner truth: this is one side of her character—the Sybil. The other side is that of an elder sister jealous of Ariadne's happiness and beauty, a woman who feels herself passing from youth, and possessed with all the bitterness which this difficult age brings. The two sides of her nature are brought into conflict in Act 2, Scene 2; and she finds the final escape in a reconciling of the two—her inner vision prophesies the fulfilment of the needs of the flesh. She is the child of a curse.

Theseus is deliberately drawn with less subtlety than the others: for if it were otherwise, Minos would lose our sympathy. However, Theseus is not unsympathetic. His bombast covers a real sense of his destiny. He does not realise the dreadful change which he has wrought in Minos, but feels that some terrible convulsion has taken place.

Pasiphaë is the one entirely sensual character in the play. She is, by her standards, a good wife. She is consumed with a terror of destiny and a sense of her own guilt, seen in terms of physical crime and punishment. Her love for Minos is real, though physical: through it, she attains a sort of dignity in the Epilogue.

Ariadne provides the necessary link between the inner and the outer life. She is so entirely a child of nature that she is equally at home in the "imperial palace whence she came", and in that of Minos. She is not insensitive, but has youth's inevitable selfishness. She is much nearer to Minos than is the sensual Pasiphaë.

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THE OBJECT OF THE PLAY.

This play was not intended to be a tragedy. Its object is really twofold: firstly, as a frame for several ideas, particularly for that of a particular conception of destiny: and secondly, as a psychological study of perversion and obsession. I have risked the accusation of bad taste in the more unpleasant and painful scenes (e.g., Minos' attempted suicide, which is so horrible as to border on farce). I am aware that the play is unpleasant: but the legend of Minos and Pasiphaë is itself based upon erotic motives (the curse of Venus). I have thus sought, at the risk of unpleasantness, to work out my play largely in erotic terms. I do not see any other possible course.

These few notes will perhaps help the reader to understand the object of this play, "short, brutish and nasty" though it is.

S. K.

HOSEA

A Modern Morality

NOTE. This is intended as a modern morality play: the characters are therefore to some extent types. It is very important that the stage directions should be followed exactly; the film-like continuity of short sequences separated by black-out is essential, as is the final picture. The stage should be quite bare, and should mount at the back in three steps. These provide a basis for the final tableau, a seat for the Hobo, etc.

The play was dressed, when first performed, in variations of black and white: HOSEA only in a symbolic costume based on the designs of Blake: the rest in contemporary clothing. A backcloth may be used, but should be unobtrusive.

S. K.

PROLOGUE

(Enter HOB0. Sings.)

HOB0: Hosea was a holy man, Hosea was a saint,
His thoughts were pure, his life without a taint,
He loved the Lord and he wanted peace:
But the folk would do nothing but dance and feast.
Oh, Hosea!
Hosea he prayed and fasted too.
The land was wicked—but what could he do?
He prayed all night and wept all day,
But the Lord wouldn't take his sorrow away.
Oh, Hosea!
So he went on truckin' round about town
And he saw the sights—and did he frown!
Then he met a tart by the name of Gomer
And picked her up and took her homer—
Oh, Hosea!
If you want to know what happened then,
The play will tell you, and it's gonna begin.
(Exit.)

PART ONE

SCENE I

The curtain rises.

HOSEA is disclosed, lit by a spot, left back. He is praying.

HOSEA: *Why* won't He tell me what He wants me to do? Five hours have I prayed, and never a word of answer. It is disheartening. I'm afraid He's forsaken us for our wickedness: we deserve it, but I cannot believe . . . *(with a sudden gesture, almost of defiance)*: Speak to me, Lord. I love you and pray to you and you won't speak to me. I am Hosea, your servant. Have you forgotten?

VOICE: I never forget anything: that is my sorrow.

HOSEA *(falling on his knees)*: Lord! what shall I do?

VOICE: Go forth and see the wickedness of the land, Hosea.

HOSEA: But Lord . . . *(Silence.)* Always the same, nothing explained, no plans. . . . So I must walk about the streets and see the land's wickedness. . . . First I will pray. *(HOSEA gets up from his knees.)* I am tired of seeing so much wickedness. One day I shall curse them, and forget they are only weak and deluded. Lord, you are a hard master.

(Exit. Blackout. Lights go up straight away on same stage. Chorus lining back. Enter HOSEA.)

CHORUS: Go back home, Hosca, you snivelling man of God:
We don't want you nosing round here.
You've all the day to preach in, haven't you?
Then get back home, and let us be.
You think you're God almighty, don't you?

HOSEA

Get back home. We want our fun,
We're only human, we aren't saints.
We don't bother you, you stinking prig,
So why must you come bothering us?
If you don't like to see people enjoying them-
selves

Get back home and let us be.

Human nature being what it is, and the flesh so
weak,

You can't stop a man sowing his wild oats,

You can't make us all plaster saints:

What's the good of a God anyway?

You can't prove there's a God, can you?

Then why worry? Live and let live,

Why not try that motto?

Mind your own business, and go back home.

HOSEA: My business is you, turn from your sin,

Open your eyes, and let the light in.

God loves you all, and will go on loving

Whatever happens, and as far as proving . . .

CHORUS: Go home, Hosea, you mad old fool,

We don't like prophets as a rule.

We've stood your preaching long enough

And if you don't soon shut your mouth

Someone'll come and bump you off.

HOSEA: You don't know what you're saying.

You don't know anything;

You're all crazy, and my praying

Won't save you from death's sting. . . .

CHORUS: Oh, Hosea! Come along and swing!

If you won't go home, then hitch up with us;

Swing along, string along, forget all the fuss!

We're only human, and so are you:

You're crazy with moping, you don't know
what to do.

HOSEA

You ain't got rhythm, that's what's wrong,
You ain't got swing, and you ain't got a song:
So pack up your troubles and truck along,
Come on, Hosea, and truck along!

HOSEA: God, strike them dead!

VOICE: No.

HOSEA: What have I said?

CHORUS: Was that lightning or the voice of the Lord?

LEADER OF CHORUS: A clap of thunder, that's all it was.

HOSEA: Get on your knees to hear His word!

CHORUS: You hellfire preacher, you can't frighten us!

Run home quick, or you'll miss the bus!

We've got rhythm, and we're gonna have fun.

(Exeunt.)

HOSEA: Lord, what have I done?

(He sits down, his head in his hands. Enter MR. X. He is like a caricature of the Man-About-Town, circa 1890. He has a cane and monocle, and walks jauntily. He comes up to HOSEA and looks him over, then clears his throat and straightens his tie.)

MR. X: Er, good evening. Have you . . . er . . . lost anything?

HOSEA *(starts up, and mutters confusedly)*: No, no, thank you. It's quite all right.

MR. X: Can I help you in any way?

HOSEA: No, thank you. I'm very grateful for your kindness, but really there is nothing wrong.

MR. X: Are you quite sure?

HOSEA: Oh, quite. I was merely resting.

MR. X *(moving away, twisting his cane)*: It's a subject of never-failing wonder to me . . .

HOSEA: I beg your pardon?

MR. X: Oh, nothing. I was merely thinking of the incredible obtuseness of the . . . er . . . common herd. The mob that passed me just now, for instance. Quite

HOSEA

thoughtless, and bent solely upon their own pleasure.
Don't you agree?

HOSEA (*eagerly*): If they would only repent . . .

MR. X: Repent? No, not till it's too late. The mob has no common sense: it cannot be made to see reason. . . . Er . . . is your name by any chance Hosea?

HOSEA: Yes, but . . .

MR. X: Ah, yes. They were singing a bawdy song about you, I am afraid. . . . But, as I was saying: they won't see reason. . . . There's only one way to gain them . . .

HOSEA: How?

MR. X: By . . . er . . . manipulation. A piece of well-timed oratory, for instance.

HOSEA: I have preached to them, but they will not heed.

MR. X: Ah, but some influence, if I may say so . . . some powers of persuasion are necessary: and of course (*steps closer in and, in a stage whisper*) money! That's what you need. The sinews of war. Otherwise they won't listen.

HOSEA: I am a poor man. I have only the love of God.

MR. X: Supposing I were to offer you my services? I have a certain amount of influence, I flatter myself, and a competence of this world's goods. I could be a good deal of use to you. . . .

HOSEA: You want to help the Lord's work?

MR. X: I want to help you.

HOSEA: To spread the news of God's love?

MR. X: If you will only put yourself in my hands, your task will be made so much easier. All you have to do is to leave things to me, and the . . . er . . . hoi polloi will be cheering you and coming in their thousands to hear you preach.

HOSEA: You can make them repent?

MR. X: You can place complete confidence in me.

(HOSEA *thinks for a moment.*)

HOSEA

HOSEA (*decisively*): No, I'm afraid I cannot accept your offer.

MR. X: But, my dear sir . . .

HOSEA: I know you, cease your tempting.

MR. X: Really, your manners. . . .

(*Enter a POLICEMAN. MR. X sees him out of the corner of his eye, and makes a profound bow to HOSEA.*)

MR. X: Well, if you insist. But I must say that I think you very unwise. If you should ever reconsider your decision, I shall be only too pleased to oblige. Good day, my dear sir.

(*Exit. The POLICEMAN regards HOSEA with a puzzled expression, then marches up to him.*)

POLICEMAN: Can't loiter round here, you know. Better be moving on, guv'nor.

HOSEA: Yes, I must see the wickedness of the land.

POLICEMAN: What's that?

HOSEA: It is my duty to regard the wickedness of this land, and to pray for the redemption of its people.

POLICEMAN: How much?

HOSEA: It is the will of God.

POLICEMAN: Who are you, anyway?

HOSEA: I am God's servant.

POLICEMAN: Where's your 'ome?

HOSEA: I have no dwelling, and no refuge but my God.

POLICEMAN (*looking closely at him*): You'd better come along o' me.

HOSEA: What crime have I committed?

POLICEMAN: By the look of you, you're soused.

HOSEA: I am full of sorrow.

POLICEMAN: Full o' something else, too. Come along.

HOSEA: Are you a servant of the Lord?

POLICEMAN: Lord Chief Justice, you mean? Haw, haw!

HOSEA: You are a fool.

HOSEA

POLICEMAN: 'Ere, not so much o' that! You'd better come along quiet. . . .

(Enter GOMER. She is an obvious tart, walking with swinging hips, and a brazen smile on her face. She looks meaningly at HOSEA and the POLICEMAN. The latter forgets about HOSEA, and turns on her.)

POLICEMAN: Oh, so it's you, is it? You sheer off, or I'll take you in custody, I will! Wonder you've got the face to come gallavantiing along, when you know I'm on me beat.

GOMER: Take it easy, brother. Who's your pal?

POLICEMAN: 'E's soused.

HOSEA: I am Hosea.

POLICEMAN: 'Osea what?

GOMER *(to HOSEA)*: Don't you listen to him. He's only a bloody cop. He don't know better.

POLICEMAN: Shut your mouth!

GOMER *(provokingly, to HOSEA)*: Looking for a sweetie, fella?

POLICEMAN *(enraged)*: You're coming along o' me. You're worse than 'im. I'll have you locked up, I will. *(Seizes her arm. To HOSEA.)* You move along, and don't let me see no more of you!

HOSEA: You cannot assault this woman.

POLICEMAN: You cut off!

GOMER: Go it, parson!

(The POLICEMAN tries to blow his whistle. He gets purple in the face, but no sound will come. He is paralysed with rage. GOMER seizes HOSEA's arm, and drags him along.)

GOMER: Cut and run, preacher.

(Exeunt.)

POLICEMAN: Blast 'em, where 'ave they got to? Slippery bastards!

(The whistle suddenly begins to work, and he blows piercing blasts. Blackout. The lights go up after a momentary pause, revealing HOSEA and GOMER.)

HOSEA

GOMER: That was lucky. He was proper het up, he'd have put us in clink for sure. What happened to 'is whistle, anyway?

HOSEA: It was a miracle.

GOMER: I'll say! (*Moves nearer to HOSEA.*) What's your name, dearie?

HOSEA: I am Hosea. God's servant.

GOMER: I thought you looked like a preacher. (*Smells his breath.*) You ain't soused, are you?

HOSEA: I have been sent by the Lord, to regard the wickedness of the land. Who are you, woman?

GOMER: Don't you know me, dearie? I'm Gomer. I've been on this beat for five years, since me old man died.

HOSEA (*recoiling in horror*): A whore!

GOMER (*angry*): Keep your hair on, parson! What about it? I've got to earn my living somehow.

HOSEA: Repent, woman, and turn to God!

GOMER: What's God ever done for me? Why should He want to take my living away?

HOSEA: Whoring is a sin, repent or you will be damned.

GOMER: Quit preaching. Suppose I did repent, now: how d'you think I'd earn me bread?

HOSEA: Take a husband and live in honourable matrimony.

GOMER: I'm telling you, me old man died five years back. There was I, without a dime. What could I do? Me starving and not knowing any job? P'raps you'd have had me jump in the river? I know you and your sort; always preaching to the poor folk that can't help themselves. It's you who ought to be ashamed, not me, standing there and shooting your mouth off about God, when girls like me have to go on the streets or starve. It's your sort that says "Be content with your station" to the workers—don't open your mouth, you can't deny it—and then blesses the bloody capitalists for grinding them. Garn with you, you stinking hypocrite!

HOSEA

(HOSEA is taken aback by this outburst. He raises his eyes to heaven, murmuring.)

HOSEA: Lord, show this poor woman her error!

GOMER: The face of you! (*Spits and turns away.*) You're all the same. What you want's a kick up the backside.

HOSEA: Lord, give her your light. Her heart is set towards the truth.

GOMER: Oh, so you admit it, do you?

HOSEA: For ten years I have preached to the people of this land, and they have not heeded. I have gone about the streets, and seen the wickedness of the land, until I am weary to death. You are the first honest person I have met. Your heart is right. Repent of your sins, and all will be well.

GOMER: Thanks for the bouquets! But how am I going to earn my keep if I do repent? No one's going to marry me now.

HOSEA: There must be some way. . . .

GOMER: That's what you think! You haven't been on the streets like me.

HOSEA (*looking despairingly upwards*): Lord, why is everything so difficult? Why can't you make things come out right?

GOMER: You can pray all night and God won't help you. He won't tell you what to do. He don't care.

HOSEA: Don't blaspheme.

GOMER: Blaspheme! That's funny! (*Laughs raucously. HOSEA seems lost in prayer. He has sunk to his knees. She glances at him contemptuously, turns her back, and begins to walk away, hips swinging disdainfully.*) Well, I hope he tells you more than he ever told me! I can't waste my time with you—I've got to earn my breakfast.

(*She is almost offstage, when she stops, and begins powdering her nose, reluctant to go. HOSEA does not see her.*)

HOSEA: Lord, what is this woman's crime that she is so

HOSEA

persecuted? She is not wicked, but has been made so. O Lord, I am afraid. What shall I do?

VOICE: You must take this woman for your wife, as a sign that the land has gone a-whoring after strangers, yet cannot escape my love.

(GOMER starts, and comes back to HOSEA's side.)

GOMER: What did you say?

HOSEA: Nothing. Did you hear anything?

GOMER: Must have been thunder. It's getting sultry—bad for business. Well, I must get moving.

HOSEA: Wait!

GOMER: Why? You haven't got no more sermons to preach, have you?

HOSEA: Have you ever thought . . . there is a way out?

GOMER: What's eating you?

HOSEA: I know your trouble. I've tramped the streets, and I've starved too. Only I am God's servant, and you are the servant of men's lust.

GOMER: What's eating you, preacher?

HOSEA: I mean . . . we are alike, really. Couldn't you be God's servant too?

GOMER: Don't talk like a damned mission-priest. I've heard too much of that talk.

HOSEA: No, no. What I want to say . . .

GOMER: For Christ's sake get it off your chest.

HOSEA: If we worked together . . . that is . . . I mean, it would be easier. . . .

GOMER: You're nuts. (*Turns away.*)

HOSEA (*despairingly*): Will you be my wife? (*She bursts out laughing. He continues quickly and ashamedly.*) Then you wouldn't have to walk the streets any more. You'd be God's servant. . . .

GOMER: If that ain't rich!

HOSEA: Besides, I . . . You are the first honest woman I have ever known, I . . .

HOSEA

GOMER (*more seriously*): You ain't kidding?

HOSEA: I love you; I mean, I love God, but this is quite different. . . . I want you.

GOMER: You're not the first one to say that.

HOSEA: Don't laugh at me. Please listen. Lord, make her listen to me.

GOMER: You ain't a hypocrite after all. You're the first preacher I ever met meant what he said; you . . .

HOSEA: You will? (GOMER begins to say something, but bites her lips and turns away.)

GOMER: It ain't no good. I'm not fit for any man's wife.

(HOSEA takes her by the shoulders from behind, almost roughly.)

HOSEA: You shall be my wife. It is the Lord's will.

(GOMER falls weeping into his arms. He looks very embarrassed, smoothing her hair roughly, and holding her awkwardly.)

HOSEA: There is no time for weeping, my bride. We must rejoice in the great benefits of the Lord. Let us look for a priest, and he shall marry us.

(GOMER wipes her eyes and tidies her disordered hair. She is very timid, and does not look at HOSEA. Suddenly she steals a glance at him, and throws her arms round his neck, kissing him on both cheeks.)

GOMER: You're a peach. You ain't going to leave me, are you? But how're we going to live, anyway?

HOSEA: The Lord will provide.

GOMER: There you go again. How will he provide, that's what I want to know?

HOSEA: We must leave that to him.

GOMER: And starve, that's what it will be!

HOSEA: Then we shall starve together.

GOMER: All right, then. It's better than the streets.

HOSEA: We will be the Lord's servants. (*Exeunt, his arm round her waist. She prattles excitedly.*)

HOSEA

GOMER: We'll go round and talk to the poor girls what don't know no better, and we'll help the men that live on the dole, and you can blast the bloody capitalists in your sermons; and your God'll help us; and we'll teach the workers. . . .

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

(The curtain rises after a very short interval. Enter CHORUS.)

CHORUS: Hosea's got his girl, because God told him to;
But what we want to know, is what the parson's
going to do:

We mind our own business as a rule, but Hosea's
acting like a lovestruck fool.

He'll be a laughing stock all over town
If he don't get sense and leave Gomer alone.

VOICE IN CHORUS: Look, they're coming—arm in arm!

CHORUS: Of course, we don't wish the preacher no harm
But we don't like to see him acting mad—
Of course, if it makes him happy, we're glad;
But all the same, it isn't right.
Let's get hidden before he comes in sight.

(Enter HOSEA and GOMER.)

HOSEA *(pointing off stage)*: Here is a priest. He will marry
us.

(Enter PARSON. He takes off his hat when he sees them, but hastily puts it on again when he recognizes GOMER, and tries to make off.)

HOSEA: Excuse me, sir. I want to speak to you.

PARSON: Good evening. I have not the pleasure of your
acquaintance.

HOSEA

HOSEA: I am Hosea, God's servant.

PARSON: Oh, yes . . . (*trying to escape*). You must excuse me, I have to hurry.

HOSEA: We need your services, if you can spare a moment.

GOMER (*maliciously*): We want to be married.

PARSON: What?

HOSEA: Yes, if you would be so obliging. . . .

PARSON: I cannot stop just now. (*Plucking HOSEA's sleeve nervously.*) A word with you, Mr. . . . Hosea. (*Takes him aside.*) How long have you known this woman?

HOSEA: What has that to do with our wedding?

PARSON (*fidgeting*): You cannot be aware. . . . Do you know what she is?

HOSEA: She is Gomer. She was a whore.

PARSON: Sir! How can you contemplate . . . ?

HOSEA: *It is the Lord's will.*

PARSON: Do not blaspheme.

HOSEA: Blaspheme! Do you dare, in your blindness, to question the purposes of God?

(*GOMER has been edging gradually nearer, and now overhears their conversation.*)

GOMER: Are you going to marry us or not?

PARSON: Certainly I could never think of performing such a ceremony. It is outrageous. A loose woman. . . .

(*To HOSEA.*) I must say, sir, I think you are misguided. I advise you . . .

HOSEA: Hold your tongue, you hypocrite!

GOMER: Garn out of it! (*Kicks retreating PARSON. He makes as dignified an exit as possible.*)

PARSON: You shall hear more of this. Both of you! (*Exit.*)

GOMER: There's a parson for you! Filthy prig.

HOSEA: But how are we to be married?

GOMER: Can't we . . . do without?

HOSEA: That would be deadly sin. (*They stand for a moment, undecided, his arm around her waist.*)

HOSEA

VOICE: I will marry you.

GOMER (*clinging to HOSEA*): What was that?

HOSEA (*kneeling*): It was the Lord's voice.

(GOMER *sinks to her knees beside him, but some distance apart.*)

VOICE: That my will be accomplished and my purpose made plain, I will join you man and wife.

HOSEA (*in awe*): Lord!

VOICE: Hosea my servant, do you take this woman for your wife?

HOSEA: Yes, Lord.

VOICE: Gomer, my handmaid, do you take this man for your husband?

(GOMER *has risen, and looks about her in terror and misery. She makes a movement towards HOSEA, but draws back.*)

GOMER (*in a strangled voice, as if in spite of herself*): I do!
(*She bursts into tears and rushes out.*)

VOICE: Then you are man and wife.

(HOSEA *rises from his knees, and realizes that GOMER has gone. He looks about him, bewildered, then runs and looks after her, right. Then he looks left, and seeing nothing, comes back centre, and raises his arms.*)

HOSEA: What has happened? Oh, God, what has happened? Where is she gone? Make her come back! Oh, why have you let her leave me?

(*He collapses in an attitude of despair. Enter CHORUS.*)

CHORUS: Now, Hosea, you'll learn some sense.

You've been a fool—don't take offence,

We're only telling you for your good.

Now you know what we've always understood.

Get back to preaching, that's all you can do:

Your God has made a fool of you.

HOSEA: Leave me alone, or bring her back.

Leave me alone, or my mind will crack.

HOSEA

CHORUS: Now, Hosea, she's back at her trade
And laughing to think what a fool she made
Of a holy prophet. You were easy game
For a slut like her, without fear or shame.
Go home, Hosea, you've had your fun,
And we hope you're ashamed of what you've
done.

HOSEA: God's purpose never goes astray.

CHORUS: You've had your fun, and it's time to pay.
God's fooled you to bring down your pride.

HOSEA: God will surely restore my bride.

CHORUS: Better for you if you'd come along
When we asked you to; there's nothing wrong
In a spot of swing and a hotcha song:
But when preachers like you go on the razz
Is there or is there some red-hot jazz?
Now let this teach you not to fall
For dames who aren't your sort at all.
Now we'll leave you to think it out
And wonder what your God's about.

(Exeunt. HOSEA remains immobile. Enter MR. X.)

MR. X: You seem to be in trouble, if I may say so. *(HOSEA does not answer.)* Now, if you had taken my advice in the first place, all this would not have happened. I never allow my friends to make fools of themselves.

HOSEA: Go away.

MR. X: Still, it's no good crying over spilt milk, is it? Cheer up! Come along with me and have a scotch and splash, what?

HOSEA: Leave me alone.

MR. X: What you need is taking out of yourself, my lad. Your conscience is too sharp. You've had your bit of fun, and it hasn't turned out as you expected, that's all. When you've been knocking around as long as I have, you'll know this: *(Leaning over HOSEA as if imparting a*

HOSEA

truth of cosmic importance.) There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, eh? *(He waits for an answer, but HOSEA says nothing. MR. X comes closer, and speaks into HOSEA's ear.)* Yes, and I'll lead you to come pretty good ones, too. What about it? For heaven's sake, cheer up old man. After all, what's wrong? She hasn't pinched your wallet, has she? You're well rid of her. Believe me, I know. You can pick that sort up a penny a dozen any day. So why be so sore?

HOSEA: She was my bride.

MR. X: Ha, ha. Excuse my laughter, you are so refreshingly naïve. . . . But that reminds me. Have you heard the one about the bride who didn't know . . . *(whispers in HOSEA's ear.)* Ha, ha. Damn funny, what? Or wasn't it? *(Walks away, then turns, as if struck by an afterthought.)* You know, you aren't even logical, old chap. If you're so sick of life, why don't you end it and all that? There's not much point in *trainant une mourante vie*, as it were, is there? You might at least act like a disappointed lover.

HOSEA: I am not listening.

MR. X: Oh, I was only muttering to myself. I must be getting on. There's business to attend to. *(He walks away, but pauses just before going off.)* I recommend the gas oven. Slow, but quite painless. Cheerio!
(Exit. HOSEA does not move, while all lights dim, until the stage is in darkness except for a white spotlight on the prophet.)

CURTAIN.

PART TWO

(Still darkness, except for spotlight on HOSEA.)

HOSEA: Be patient with me, Lord, remember that I am but dust, and pardon these words. Lord, I have served you forty years, man and boy. I have never known the pleasures of this world; but of course I have not missed them. I was never young, never drunken with youth any more than with wine; I never understood what the spring meant, nor what lovers talked about. My only joy has been your service. I have fasted, and mortified the flesh, and proclaimed your word to the sinful; I have been mocked and provoked to anger, until I have wished for true martyrdom as my only escape. Sometimes I have been near to despair, and would have fainted, had you not upheld me. You have been my father and my mother, my sister and my wife. You have been my food and drink. Your word has been my only learning, your service my only glory: for I am a simple man. But now, Lord, I can no more help myself; you have brought me low, and I cannot rise again, unless you support me. You have made me love a being of dust, when before I loved only you. This burden is too heavy for a weak man such as I. Have mercy on me, Lord.

(A short pause.)

VOICE: Do not fear, Hosea. I never burden a man with a load which he cannot bear.

HOSEA

HOSEA: But Lord . . .

VOICE: Do not presume to doubt my purposes.

HOSEA (*petulantly*): You have led me into temptation.

VOICE: Of what?

HOSEA: Of fleshly sin.

VOICE: Your love is no sin. It is part of my purpose.

HOSEA: Is it your will to restore my bride?

VOICE: If you will, Hosea.

HOSEA: Lord!

VOICE: Go seek her, Hosea. I have not forbidden you.
(*HOSEA rises to his feet.*)

HOSEA: Praise to the Lord!

VOICE: If you don't get on, you'll lose her. (*HOSEA looks around, bewildered.*)

HOSEA: Which way . . . ? (*As there is no reply, he confusedly looks right and left, chooses right, and goes out hurriedly. Blackout. When lights go up, CHORUS is on stage. Enter HOSEA. He does not at first see them.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Say, Hosea, what's the hurry?
She's gone for good, you needn't
worry!

HOSEA: Have you seen her pass this way?

LEADER: Not a chance, Hosea: go home and pray!

HOSEA: Where can I go to find my bride?

CHORUS: Down Piccadilly: over East Side:
Look for her down by Limehouse Wall,
You'll find her there if you find her at all.
Look for her in Jermyn Street,
You'll find her on her regular beat.
You might see her on Rügen Island:
Perhaps you'd find her out at Mile End.
She's in Panama, someone said
Or in the ruins of Madrid.
She's bad as poison, only more so.
I saw her strolling down the Corso!

HOSEA

I'm sure her mother never meant her
To walk the boulevard Magenta!
She's gone for good, you'll never find her.
Be thankful she left your cash behind her.

HOSEA: I think she loved me, but was afraid
Of the voice of the Lord, and the words He said.

CHORUS: Why not go and tell the police?

HOSEA: Will your mocking never cease?

CHORUS: Surely your cunning God must know.

HOSEA: I must seek her myself: He told me so.

CHORUS: Another of her sort will do just as well
To smooth the path that leads to Hell.

After all, what's in a name?

All her sort are just the same.

Take our advice, and go home to bed:

Sleep alone, and you'll sleep like the dead.

(Blackout. Lights remain dimmed long enough to show a change of both scene and time. They go up on GOMER alone.)

GOMER: I couldn't go through with it. . . . Christ, he'll be mad. But I done right. Sure I done right. There wasn't nothing else to do. . . . He was too good, it wouldn't have worked: things would have gone on like I've seen before—he loving me and not thinking any wrong, then finding out all of a sudden what sort of a poloney he'd tied up with. Sure I done right . . . it would only have been worse for him in the end.

But was it really God, that voice like the wind? Oh hell, things don't happen that way. That crazy preacher must have fooled me . . . he must have made me hear what wasn't there. They're all the same fooling the masses what don't know better. He sounded all right, but they're all the same under the skin, bloody prigs!

He wanted me bad, though. . . . But that's nothing new. First time, I guess. It's always holy ones that are

HOSEA

worst when you get them between the sheets: he was just like any other man. I'm well shot of him. And now I've been fooling round and haven't earned my breakfast. Better get a move on.

(Exit. Lights dim and come up again almost at once. GOMER left, and HOBO right. GOMER approaches him from behind, as he crouches on some steps, asleep.)

GOMER *(touching his shoulder)*: Hello, dearie.

HOBO *(starting up with a cry)*: Leggo of me! I ain't done nothing! *(Seeing GOMER.)* What the hell are you at?

GOMER: You looked kinda lonely.

HOBO: So what? I ain't looking for none of your sort.

GOMER: You needn't fly off the handle, dearie.

HOBO *(in a futile paroxysm of rage)*: You get to hell out of here! I don't want you pestering round. I ain't got nothing to give you, all I want is to be left alone.

GOMER *(with desperate persistence)*: Wouldn't you like me around, honey?

HOBO: I ain't no good to you. I can't pay you. Do you hear that? I can't pay you, you bleeding tart! Get to hell out of here and try someone who's got money, and let me alone. *(Ends in a fit of coughing.)*

GOMER *(on the edge of tears)*: For God's sake, I didn't mean...

HOBO: Well then, shut your face. Don't stand there making me want what I can't have.

GOMER: I wasn't asking you to pay, honest I wasn't. I'll stay with you. I ain't what you think I am.

HOBO *(looking at her intently)*: Well, if you ain't a proper tart, I haven't been on me bum six years come November.

GOMER: I'll do whatever you want, I'll stay with you if you're lonely. I ain't bad.

HOBO *(pushing his face up towards her)*: I'll tell you another thing too, as you're so bloody matey. You heard me coughing just then, didn't you? Well, I got it *(pauses*

HOSEA

for effect), yeah, I got consumption. That's what I got. You'd better keep away from me, or you'll get more'n you want.

GOMER: Can't nobody do anything? Can't you go into one of the clinics?

HOB0: Sure they could cure me, but I ain't got the money, see. They won't look at you if you haven't got money. They think you ain't got no right to live if you ain't got money. They won't cure you, and they won't treat you like a man, and they won't let you have a woman or kids, and they won't bury you when you're dead. That's what they keep cops for, so you can't get mad and go for them and show them you're a man like they are.

GOMER: Now you're talking, brother. Christ, I wish the preacher was here: you'd teach him a thing or two.

HOB0: What preacher?

GOMER: Just a preacher I knew.

HOB0: Don't you go listening to no preachers, sister. They don't mean what they say.

GOMER: I guess this one did.

HOB0: They're like cops, sister. They're paid to keep us quiet with their hellfire and their mortal sins! (*Spits, and this makes him cough again.*) You keep away from preachers. They ain't no good.

GOMER: I reckon this one was. But I wasn't no good to him. I wasn't his sort.

HOB0: Say, what's all this?

GOMER: I nearly married him.

HOB0 (*bursting into husky guffaws, soon overcome by a fit of coughing*): Oh Christ, if that ain't rich! A tart and a preacher! Jumping Moses, I ain't never heard anything like it. A tart and a preacher!

(*GOMER can bear no more. She turns away while he is still coughing. Then she feels in her shiny satin bag and brings*

HOSEA

out three pennies. She places the money carefully on the step behind his head.)

GOMER: It ain't much, but if you're wanting a cup of coffee.

HOB0: Oh, Christ if that ain't rich!

(GOMER turns away with a strangled sob. Blackout. Lights go up on MR. X.)

MR. X: Well, things seem to be proceeding according to plan. Very pleasing. Perhaps this will teach Hosea not to be such a prig, and as for the girl . . . well, she must realise that one can't suddenly change one's way of life. I've had experience of these sudden *volte-faces* before, and I've generally been able to persuade the backsliders to return. That thief at Jerusalem, for instance: I got him back in the end, even from paradise. Very interesting from the psychological point of view

(Enter GOMER. MR. X straightens his tie, shoots his cuffs and advances to meet her.)

MR. X *(raising hat ostentatiously)*: Ah, here you are. I have been waiting quite a long time for you.

GOMER: What do you want?

MR. X: Come, is that the way to address a possible client?

GOMER *(bitterly)*: So that's what it is.

MR. X: No, not entirely. I have a proposition to place before you.

GOMER: Who are you anyway?

MR. X: My name, though perhaps familiar enough, would convey little of my purpose. You and I have been associated for many years.

GOMER: I don't remember you.

MR. X: Possibly you are not familiar with my appearance. But I have, I may say with just pride, been the inspiration; nay, the guiding star, of your career.

GOMER: Talk sense. You know my terms.

MR. X: Terms? My dear child, you are in no position to make terms with me. I wish to offer you *my* terms. . . .

HOSEA

GOMER: What terms?

MR. X: My terms for taking you back into my employ.

Our collaboration has in the past proved most fruitful.

GOMER (*beginning to see light*): You mean you're... you're the boss...?

MR. X: Precisely. I am the President of your Union. I was also, up till a very short time ago, your employer.

It was I who protected your interests. It was I who watched over your activities. It was I...

GOMER: You swine!

MR. X: My dear, please don't use such words. True, I have thus been designated before now. The vulgar have also called me a white slaver... oh, and a devil too! But you must remember that, without my help, you would long ago have ceased to exist.

GOMER: Get away from me!

MR. X: Now don't deceive yourself. You have been looking for me ever since you left that ridiculous fanatic. Haven't you? (GOMER *does not answer*.) Haven't you? You know you have. Well then, you have found me. I am at your service.

GOMER: You can't make me do anything!

MR. X: Of course not. But your common sense should show you the proper line of conduct.

GOMER (*turning away*): I'm going. You can't stop me.

MR. X: Very well, go back on the streets or starve. You won't get far without me.

GOMER: I don't need you. I'm not going back on the streets.

MR. X: Then go back to your preacher.

GOMER: I'm not afraid of you!

MR. X: Then go back to your preacher.

GOMER: No!

MR. X: Then starve. You won't need me when you're dead. You won't need him, either.

HOSEA

(GOMER turns on him, as if to attack him. She slaps him on the face. It has no effect on his equilibrium.)

MR. X: That's very silly of you. I can take any amount of that. I'm used to it. But you don't want to starve.

(GOMER suddenly bursts into convulsive sobs.)

GOMER (in a strangled voice): What are your terms?

MR. X (patting her on the shoulder): That's better. Now you're reasonable. Dry your eyes, my dear. Here's a handkerchief. (Produces a large, brightly coloured silk handkerchief.) Come along, pull yourself together.

GOMER: What do you want?

MR. X (producing a typewritten sheet from his pocket): Here is my contract. You have only to sign. I don't consider my terms by any means steep, but . . .

(GOMER snatches the paper from him.)

MR. X: Allow me (produces his fountain-pen, hands it to her. She signs without reading the paper, and crams it into his hands.) My dear, it is most unwise to sign a document without having read it. Why, you might have been . . . pawning your soul, for all you know.

GOMER: For Christ's sake leave me alone. You've got all you want.

MR. X: All I ask is that you fulfil your side of the bargain. You have agreed to contribute to me one half of your gross takings. I have, in return, agreed to protect you from starvation.

GOMER: A hell of a lot you're taking on yourself!

MR. X: I quite agree. A generous bargain. But I am deservedly famous as a good employer. Rest assured that I shall look after your interests. But you, in turn, must accommodate yourself to my few serious demands.

GOMER: Go on, tell me what I've got to do.

MR. X (turning away): Your job.

GOMER (hysterically): I won't go back on the streets. You can't make me! I'll kill myself, and you can't stop me!

HOSEA

MR. X: That contingency is fully provided for in the contract.

(GOMER looks wildly about her, and looks as if she may break down. But her face suddenly goes hard: she turns on MR. X and spits noisily in his face.)

GOMER: You filthy little rat! You think you're bloody clever, but you aren't worth the dirt you are standing on!

(She turns to go out, leaving MR. X in possession of the stage, smiling tolerantly; but HOSEA enters to her. She falls into his arms sobbing.)

HOSEA: My bride! God has brought you back to me.

(GOMER realises the situation, and tears herself free.)

GOMER: It's no good, preacher. You ain't no good here.

MR. X: How touching! The lovers united. The prophet and the whore. Quite romantic.

HOSEA *(bitterly)*: So it's you again. You've caused all the trouble, you child of darkness: beware of the Lord's wrath.

MR. X: I had a dose of that several million years ago. But he's left me alone since. Anyway, it's stupid to abuse me like a schoolboy.

HOSEA: The Lord's will is that this woman should be my wife. He has made us one. You cannot part us.

MR. X: Unfortunately, the lady appears unwilling.

GOMER *(crouching behind HOSEA)*: I tell you it's no good. I couldn't do it. You'd better get out of here.

HOSEA *(to GOMER, sternly)*: What have you done?

MR. X: She has re-entered my employ. It was the only course left open to her.

GOMER: It's true, preacher. He's got me where he wants me. You can't do a thing.

MR. X: She has signed a contract.

HOSEA *(to GOMER)*: Had you so little faith?

GOMER *(sullenly)*: I wasn't good enough.

HOSEA

MR. X: She has no illusions, you see.

HOSEA: You seduced her.

MR. X: She came to me of her own free will, rather than carry out the Lord's will by satisfying your own desires.

HOSEA: You are lying.

MR. X: Ask her.

(HOSEA turns dumbly to GOMER.)

GOMER: I'm not good enough.

HOSEA: Is that all?

GOMER: You can't understand, you and your God.

HOSEA: I tried . . .

GOMER: I'm not your sort.

MR. X: So you see. . . .

HOSEA (*taking a step towards him*): Nevertheless, you cannot oppose the Lord's will.

MR. X: True enough. But I have never found that fact a handicap. If people come to me of their own free will, even God cannot prevent them.

HOSEA: You cannot oppose God.

MR. X: No, but *she* can. And that is just what she has done. Nothing can control a wilful woman, not even the laws of God.

GOMER: He's right. You can't do anything for me. I've signed the contract.

MR. X: Neither you nor your God can help her.

(HOSEA confronts MR. X and raises his fist to strike him; but realises his folly, and lets his arm fall to his side.)

VOICE: Not by strength nor by might, servant Hosea.

(MR. X recoils, and HOSEA stands rigid. MR. X quickly recovers himself.)

MR. X: Ha, thunder about. You'd better take shelter, Hosea.

HOSEA (*restraining his anger*): You will release this woman.

MR. X: You can have her for the usual trifling fee.

HOSEA: She is my wife.

HOSEA

MR. X: Come, come. Don't let us dispute over the possession of a prostitute. It isn't dignified.

HOSEA: You will let her go?

MR. X: I cannot break the contract any more than she can.
(HOSEA turns in exasperated despair to GOMER.)

HOSEA: Why did you do this?

GOMER: Can't you see? I wasn't good enough.

HOSEA: You have defied the will of God. You, a weak woman, have questioned his wisdom. How could you imagine you understood his purposes?

GOMER: All I knew was that I couldn't go through with it.

HOSEA: Then you meant none of the things you said to me?

GOMER: Yes, I meant it all, I wanted you. Honest I did. But I couldn't do it.

HOSEA: Why couldn't you have had more faith; if not in God then . . . in myself. I loved you. You are my wife; we are one flesh and one spirit. You can shut yourself away from God, but you cannot escape from me. I am your husband.

GOMER: I didn't mean to say it.

HOSEA: Nevertheless, you did say it. You took me as your husband.

GOMER: It wouldn't work. You know it wouldn't. You'd soon find out what I'm really like, then you'd hate me and hate your God too for getting you into the mess. You stay away from me, I'm no good to any preachers; I'm for dockers and drunks and sailors with a night on shore. I'm not for your sort.

HOSEA: You cannot be pledged to both. . . . Which is stronger, your marriage or your contract?

MR. X: Both are of equal force, if indeed a legal marriage *did* take place. The woman remains my employee as well as your wife.

GOMER: I've got to do what he tells me: it's no good arguing.
(She attempts to go out, but HOSEA restrains her.)

HOSEA

MR. X: You had better get used to the idea of your wife's profession. I'm afraid she cannot escape her obligations.

(He mounts the stage right back, so that he is standing above HOSEA and GOMER. The lights dim, except for spots on MR. X and HOSEA and GOMER. She clings, half-ashamed, half-frightened, to her husband. They remain motionless, while the CHORUS enters, taking its place below MR. X and facing the man and woman.)

(This movement should not be masked or glossed over in any way: the characters should take their symbolic positions just as if they were making a gymnastic tableau—quickly and precisely.)

LEADER: Now, Hosea, it's no good saying

We didn't warn you to keep to praying.

If you'd listened to us, you wouldn't be here . . .

MR. X: Resign yourself. You need not fear

I'll ask of her more than she's used to giving . . .

HOSEA: Such a life is not worth living.

CHORUS: Hosea thought he was mighty smart

So we let him be. We hadn't the heart

To spoil his fun; but now he's sore

He'll be sorry he didn't go home before.

There's no way out, Hosea: you're tied

To this man's whore for your holy bride.

GOMER: Quit nagging him, and let us be:

I love Hosea and he wants me.

HOSEA: Whatever she is, she's still my wife.

MR. X: Then let us abandon this foolish strife.

CHORUS: For Hosea's wife is a licensed whore

She loves Hosea, but money more.

MR. X: She married him, but she signed my terms.

CHORUS: Her soul may be in Hosea's keeping;

But when he makes his date with the worms

We won't hear Gomer weeping.

HOSEA: None of you may defy the Lord.

MR. X: Oracular speeches are always broad

HOSEA

Of interpretation; how do you know
You haven't exceeded God's desire?

HOSEA: I have only done what he told me to.

CHORUS: 1. You judgement preacher, beware of the fire!
2. You like a girl as much as we do:
But we get what we want, and give no heed to
The traps of God and theology.
3. You hellfire preacher, don't you see
God's fooling you; he only wants
To test your faith . . .

HOSEA: You sycophants!
You run with the wind and drift with the tide;
You don't belong to either side.

MR. X: Hosea, it's time you swallowed your pride.

HOSEA: My will is God's, and to him I confide
My cause, no matter who deride.

CHORUS: You wouldn't listen to us at first
And it's too late now . . .

MR. X: That's always the worst
Of saints who trust in their righteousness;
They always get themselves into a mess.

CHORUS: 1. Hosea, you should have trusted us
Instead of following your lust.
2. For we're the Voice of the People, you see:
The parliamentary majority:
1. We are the happy mean, the quorum
Of educated voices in the forum.
2. We are the voice of sanity
Deploring your excess of charity.
1. We're the boys who know how to swing.
We play cricket and golf and everything,
2. We're plain men, our deeds effectual
Above our words. We're not intellectual.
Why worry? We're content to share
Our women with others. We don't care.

HOSEA

HOSEA: Your talk is wind and vanity.

VOICE FROM CHORUS: The voice of the people is the voice
of the sea.

The voice of the people is the voice
of God.

HOSEA: It shall be stilled in the days of blood.

MR. X: Public opinion supports my right. . . .

HOSEA: Lord, give them light.

GOMER: The law's on their side, we can't fight. . . .

MR. X: For in spite of all your piety
The whore's the pillar of society.

CHORUS: Of public servants she is not the least:
Good as a lawyer; better than a priest.

MR. X: So when you want her, come to me
Like a man, and pay your fee.

(There is a marked pause, as if the picture were revealed in a flash of lightning. This is the climax, and the weakness of the enemy stands revealed.)

HOSEA: Very well, I will pay.

(The CHORUS begins to whisper, and point derisively at HOSEA. He steps up and towards MR. X, so that he is on the same level.)

HOSEA: What is your price?

MR. X: That depends on the length of the engagement.

HOSEA: Forever.

MR. X: The contract is absolutely rigid on that point.
You cannot buy her off.

HOSEA: She cannot be worth that much to you.

MR. X *(succumbing to temptation)*: How much?

HOSEA: All I have.

MR. X: That cannot be very much. Prophets are proverbially poor.

HOSEA *(with an effort)*: You can have everything. I will give you my clothing, for what it is worth; my few books; and I have here *(producing a bag)* a little money. That is all I possess.

HOSEA

MR. X: A mere nothing. (*Cupidity overcomes him.*) But you have something much more precious.

HOSEA: You are mistaken.

MR. X: Yourself.

HOSEA (*horrified*): You want . . . ?

MR. X: All you have. That includes your goods, spiritual as well as physical: your gifts of prophecy, your hopes, your beliefs and your loyalty. In brief, are you ready to become my servant?

VOICE FROM CHORUS: Hosea betrays his holy trust
And sells his God to buy his lust.

HOSEA (*after a second's hesitation*): Yes, if you will release this woman.

MR. X: Nothing easier. Servant Hosea, tear up this paper.
(*Passes him the contract. GOMER tries to snatch it from him, but HOSEA tears it into pieces and scatters it.*)

MR. X: Now repeat these words: "I, Hosea, bind myself henceforth to serve in thought and deed my master . . ."
(*The lights suddenly go up, bathing the stage in a dazzling radiance. MR. X starts back, the chorus shield their eyes with their hands. GOMER screams. HOSEA alone remains motionless.*)

VOICE: Servant Hosea!

HOSEA (*humbly*): Yes, Lord.

VOICE: Would you have betrayed me for this woman?

(*HOSEA is at first stricken with shame, and fidgets nervously like a schoolboy before his headmaster. Then he suddenly tenses himself, and speaks deliberately, looking straight before him.*)

HOSEA: Yes, Lord, I would have left your service. But you have been a hard master, you have made me bow before evil; you have humiliated me. I was born a man, and you have made me your puppet. You have driven me, nagged me and have made me a laughing stock. You have shamed my manhood. You brought me to this woman, so that I loved her; and now you blame me for my love. I cannot bear it. I will be submissive no more.

HOSEA

No man can serve you: for you play on us like pipes and crack us when the wrong note comes; you dance us like puppets, and when you are tired, you break us. There is no room for love in your service; therefore I renounce you. (*He remains motionless, as if expecting to be thunder-struck. But the VOICE speaks on.*)

VOICE: So you have found the truth at last, Hosea. No man may serve me in fear alone, and you have failed.

HOSEA: Lord, I have sinned.

VOICE: No. Hosea. Just now you spoke like a man, and you spoke truly. You have learnt the lesson of love, and evil cannot prevail against you.

HOSEA: Punish me, Lord.

VOICE: I have tested you, and you have stood the test. In your love for Gomer, for whom you would have renounced your immortal soul, see the image of my love for men.

HOSEA: Lord, I am unworthy. . . .

VOICE: Come to me, my son Hosea. (*HOSEA falls on his knees. MR. X is recovering a little from his shock.*)

MR. X: Then I may keep the woman, your Majesty?

VOICE: Give him the money, Hosea.

(*HOSEA hands the bag containing the money to MR. X, who seizes it avidly. Then he thinks of another idea.*)

MR. X: But, your Majesty, you agreed in the beginning that unless a sinner repent, he cannot be saved. Please excuse my temerity in pointing it out, but I do not think she repents of her sins.

GOMER (*defiantly*): No, I don't repent! You drove me to it! You're the God of bosses, you don't care about us!

CHORUS: Shame! Shame! Throw her out!

How dare a woman rail and shout?

Woman was appointed on the first day

To serve her husband and obey.

HOSEA: Trust in God's mercy, my bride.

GOMER: Why should I repent?

HOSEA

VOICE: My daughter, you are right. Love is all. If you have loved, and done any act of charity, it is enough.

CHORUS: Great is the Lord in his mantle of glory,
Great is his justice, but greater his mercy.

VOICE: Who will speak for this woman?

(There is a pause. Then enter HOBBO, reeling and obviously drunk. He stands swaying in the centre of the stage.)

HOBBO: I'm drunk, but I'm not afraid to talk to you.

HOSEA: Who are you?

HOBBO: Shut your mouth. I'm talking to God.

MR. X: Throw him out! It's shameful.

VOICE: I am listening.

CHORUS: Throw him out, throw him out!

VOICE: Silence.

HOBBO: Thanks, boss. I'm only a poor drunk. That's what I am—a poor bum, that's all. I oughtn't to talk to you, but I'm not scared. . . . You want me to tell you about this tart. . . . O.K. I'll tell you. *(He begins to cough, but chokes it back.)* I've got a pint of rye in me, that's what I got. I ain't 'shamed. She gives me the money. She gives it to me after I told her I didn't want no tarts hanging round; I tell her to get to hell out of it, see? But she gives me the cash, see? So I goes and gets a skin full of rye. I ain't 'shamed of it; that's all I got left—sleeping under bridges and a skinful of rye when I got cash. She gives it me, and it's all she's got, see? I ain't 'shamed, you'd a done the same if you was a poor bum like me. *(The coughing masters him, and he doubles up choking and retching.)*

VOICE: This testimony is enough.

MR. X: But your Majesty . . .

VOICE: Take your money.

(MR. X clutches the bag to him, and scuttles down left. He crouches there, opposite CHORUS. HOSEA and GOMER, clasped together, mount to the top right. The HOBBO clumsily

HOSEA

stumbles towards them, and falls sprawling just below them. The CHORUS groups itself about the base of the pyramid, looking upwards to HOSEA and GOMER. Enter POLICEMAN and PARSON, left. They stand on either side of MR. X, who is absorbed in checking over the money.)

VOICE: Behold the image of my love!

HOB0 (*whispering to GOMER*): Thanks for the rye, sister.

CHORUS, HOSEA, GOMER: Lord, we have been foolish,
Lord, we have been wicked,
Lord, have mercy upon us.

HOSEA: Lord, I was too proud,
Lord, I was blind
I could not see your love.
Lord, I have blasphemed
I have insulted love's purity
My faith was weak, Lord.

CHORUS: Lord, we are too sure:
We trusted in our wisdom,
We have despised your love.

ALL: Ours is the worst sin of all,
The sin of loving too little.
This is the only hell,
The only lasting pain,
The only terror and sickness:
Lord, have mercy on us for our sins,
Christ have mercy on us.
Lord have mercy.

HOB0 (*suddenly singing in a raucous tenor*):
Hosea loved the Lord and Gomer too,
The land was wicked but he knew what to do:
He served his master, till one day
The Lord came and took his sorrow away.
Oh Hosea! Hallelujah!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

STORIES

THE ALBATROSS

IN THE blue and aching world nothing moved. Sky and sea were parts of one dazzling metallic symphony which stunned the mind with its elemental intensity of colour. Even when he shut his eyes, Hendryk was tormented by the throbbing glare. He rolled over with a groan, so that his face was pressed in the lukewarm, oily bilge. He could hardly prevent himself from sucking up the foul liquid; his cracked lips writhed mutinously though his will forbade. The coolness was heavenly. Faintly he heard Peters sobbing, and felt a sudden, ineffectual contempt for him, mixed with self-pity. What right had the fellow to let himself go, like that? If it had not been for his own courage, the creature would have been dead at that moment.

With the thought came the confused impressions of the typhoon . . . screaming wind, that lashed the crests of sea-mountains into boiling foam; the crash of the falling masts, infinitesimal in the uproar; white streaming faces; the nauseating moment when he slipped, spinning, off the tilted deck; the icy water chuckling over his head. And then, miraculously, he had come up within a few feet of a drifting dinghy. He had crawled, after much buffeting, over its gunwale, and lain inside; terrified, exhausted, and almost dead. When the clammy hand of Peters had appeared out of the heaving abyss he had pulled the limp body to safety before he fainted.

So here they were, out of sight of any trade-route,

THE ALBATROSS

suspended in a dead calm without oars, even if they could have used them, waiting for death. He could not bear to pursue the thought any further.

After an eternity, in which he must have lost consciousness, he heard the tantalizing, self-satisfied "glug, glug" of water. He turned on his side and painfully opened his eyes. Peters, sprawled in the stern-sheets, was pouring a mug full down his throat. The thing that annoyed Hendryk was not the fact that there was only enough water for another day, but the ridiculous *writhing* of Peter's Adam's apple. He cursed bitterly, but somehow his words turned into a dry, crackling sound. Peter's hand shook, and the mug fell into the bottom of the boat with a startling clatter. Peters looked away.

The passing of the hours was only marked by the imperceptible movement of the blazing sun. Neither of the two men moved. They might as well have been dead. But at last the sun became coppery, then scarlet, and the heavy indigo pall of the night, spangled with sparkling crystals, was spread over the sea. Caressed by the soft, cool breath of night, the two men slept fitfully.

At that magic hour a great white bird came swooping from the stars and sailed to rest on the phosphorescent waters beside the boat, its dangling legs drawing a furrow of dancing fire behind it. It slept, its head beneath its wing, in peace.

Soon the air became bitterly cold and the humans awoke. The night was treacherous: she gave an hour or two of false bliss and then tortured as cruelly as the day. They lay awake, shuddering, their perceptions sharpened by the cold. Hendryk looked straight up into space, millions of empty miles, at a coldly blazing star. He fixed his whole being on it, so as to forget his pain. Peters huddled, quivering, in the stern-sheets, where he had lain all day.

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In the mind of Hendryk a monstrous thing was slowly germinating. It grew and grew through the dark chill hours. It broke into blossom with the yellow dawn. It was hate of Peters; the blackest, most illogical hatred of all—that of the strong for the weak. He remembered with loathing all Peters' contemptible little acts—his sobbing; the way he guzzled the water; still more, the stupid way in which he had dropped the mug and wasted its contents. Such a creature ought not to be alive. Why had he saved it from the clean death of the sea? He lay still, passively consumed with his hatred.

The sun, staring unwinkingly into his eyes, made him throw his arm across his face and roll over on to his side. He remembered that this was the last day. There would barely be a mouthful of water for each of them after Peters' theft of yesterday. It didn't matter. There was tomorrow, and the day after . . . arid, racking days of torture. A little sip now would only make the coming torment sharper. He hoped he could not last another day. Peters would be released before him, being so soft . . . God! He didn't deserve it. Jealousy added to the fire within him.

He drew back his swollen eyelids and the searing light rushed into his brain. It cleared and he saw, mistily, white in blue; black, motionless gunwale dividing. The picture came into focus: the great bird resting on the water, its hooked beak straw-yellow. At first he thought it was a dream, but the albatross snapped its beak with an unmistakably real sound. The thought suddenly came to him, that he and Peters were not alone. He resented the presence of the bird; he wished it would go. Unconsciously he made a pathetically ineffective movement at it with his hand. It took no notice whatever. He closed his eyes and mercifully fainted.

Half-formed thoughts swam about his brain like secret

THE ALBATROSS

fish in muddy water. Hate waved its black fins in the gloom, its gaping mouth muttered terrible things to him. The blazing heat of noon brought him to his senses with infinite pain. He lay quite still for a little while, his eyes closed. His swollen tongue filled his mouth like a great parched stone. The idea of drinking came to him. This would be his last drink. The sooner he enjoyed it the sooner his final agony would be past.

Slowly he drew up his stiff and unresponsive knees beneath him. The effort of crawling was almost too much for him, but his stiffened limbs gained strength with progress. He managed to open his eyes, though the lids seemed gummed together. At first he could not take in the foulness of what he saw. Then gradually its meaning clarified in his brain. Peters, disdaining the mug this time, was lying sprawled on the bottom-boards, his neck stretched horribly forward, his mouth at the water-cask. When he saw Hendryk he drew back, writhing like some obscene reptile. Fear made his watery eyes roll and his flabby face shudder. Not a drop came from the open bung. He had sucked the cask dry.

The smouldering fire of hatred blazed up within Hendryk's soul. It was not the creature's selfishness that infuriated him, but its beastly wriggling. He had no clear impression of *doing* anything: yet his hands were battering at the soft, fat face; his fingers felt the gulping throat and kneaded it like dough. Strange clucking noises came from the sagging mouth. Then his brain went black and he lay quite still for a long time, panting drily. No thought came into his mind of what he had done.

When he looked out Peters had not moved, but was still sprawled untidily by the cask. He moved forward on uncertain hands and knees, lifted the hanging head a few inches, then let it drop again. It rolled back heavily, and

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the mouth dropped inanely open. No more proof was needed. He felt suddenly sick. Peters was dead. Again hatred and contempt flared up: what right had Peters to die? Why should he take the easy way out? He had died so easily, with hardly a struggle. It was not right that anyone should die so easily. He was sorry he had killed him; it was more than the thing deserved. There was, however, nothing more to be done but to wait for death. He lay down, as far from the body as possible, and closed his eyes. A few moments later something compelled him to look again.

The albatross was perched, balanced by flapping wings, on the corpse's head. The sight was disgusting. He shouted at the bird, but succeeded only in whispering hoarsely. He had not the strength to act, so he lay still, trying to forget, but the swishing wings tormented him. Presently they ceased. He wanted aching to look again, but dared not.

Actually the bird leapt into the air and wheeled round the boat twice, high in the burning blue. Then it swooped down to the water and settled itself for sleep, head under wing. Gradually the silence, and his exhaustion, overcame Hendryk's pain, and he slid into darkness, either of sleep or of unconsciousness. Both states were very near together in his condition. All sorts of fantasies wove a mad web in his brain, none clear enough to be called dreams, but unmistakably there. They did not go when he awoke. Rolling sideways he fell against the gunwale, and looked into the soulless golden eye of the albatross, floating within a few feet of him. For a second he had a horrible impression: the eye, so outwardly different, yet resembled the watery blue eye of Peters. Then it swivelled disconcertingly. It was the bird's after all.

Yet the impression remained. Hendryk looked as little as possible towards either bird or body, for one reminded

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him of the other. As the long afternoon passed his whole body throbbed with agony; pain played on his nerves like the wind in wires. Thinking was impossible. His brain was no longer his own; anything could invade its fire-shot darkness. His only clear feeling was a blind longing for death. The cooler evening, generally his opportunity to snatch a little sleep, brought some ease, but nothing more. Long rambling trains of memory, over which he had no control, flowed through his consciousness. Some seemed significant, some meaningless. One was ugly and pregnant with an awful realization, as yet obscure.

The albatross led him to wheeling clouds of gulls, which babbled in the wake of the ship. The last voyage. Confused memories of all his many voyages, with a thread of birds, of gulls, running through. Mother Carcy's chickens. . . . Stab of searing pain in the temple, with a rain of purple fire at the back of his forehead. . . . Every sailor has his seagull, his guardian spirit. . . . Where was his? Near him when he's going to die. After it's over he wheels free in the open sky. He's a gull. . . . Peters must be free now. Peters a gull. . . . He giggled weakly. The image was ridiculous. Yet the albatross was near Peters before he died. The wicked golden eye . . . flapping on the corpse's dead head. Cruel hooked beak of Peters, become bird, safe now, strong and angry, to live for ever. Fear welled up sickly and drowned his being in its icy waters. He groaned.

The bird, sleeping peacefully on the glittering water beside him, made no movement. The stars burned bright, and a sickle moon threw an ethereal glimmer on the green, smouldering water. The stillness was almost unbearable. Somehow the night passed; the stars paled; the moon was engulfed in flying veils of cloud. Then the dawn cracked open the secretive sky with yellow fissures, and the watery

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sun rolled above the rim of the blue bowl of sea. The heat grew. Little waves of tortured air began to dance above the serene swell of the waters. Day had returned, not like the bridegroom coming forth from his chamber but as a dreaded tyrant.

The bird looked at the sun, blinked its round yellow eyes, and began, with infinite pain, to preen its feathers. The man blinked, too, and laboriously lifted his head a few inches. Then, remembering that this was the day of final and most terrible torture, he fell back with a hoarse snort that might have been a groan. The corpse lay still and inhuman. Its eyes stared unflinchingly at the sun. It was hard to believe that it had ever been alive.

The morning seemed unending. The skin of Hendryk's face was black and cracked, like leather. Every few minutes it twitched with a spasm of agony; then his body would roll feebly from side to side until the paroxysm passed. He was conscious of nothing external. The heat of noon seemed somehow to be the expected hour of release. What feeling he still had was straining to bear the agony till then, and the effort needed all his energies. At such times a man's life is said to pass before him in review. Nothing of the kind happened. He was merely aware of one lucid impression, illuminated, as it were, with the force of its own significance. He had killed Peters; Peters had become the albatross; that was why it was there. Peters had always been the albatross—then the impression faded into a terrifying chaos of thought—the albatross always Peters. Which had he killed? It had looked like a man but it might have been a bird. The two were interchangeable. . . . No, they were one. . . . There was no real Peters at all. If he looked he would see a broken bird-corpse. Perhaps Peters floating quietly on the sea. Peters dropping, swooping across the blue dome above . . . the

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screaming and beating wings . . . the slackly hanging mouth of an albatross, which was dead.

Then, returning for a space of clarity, he was perversely glad that the Peters-bird could have no revenge on him. He was paying now and in full—with his life. The thought was comforting.

At noon the sun was dulled by a great coppery cloud, which spread gradually across the whole sky, from the West. The heat became breathless. The livid shadow veiled the face of the sea. Between sky and water was a humid vacuum. Hendryk did not die; the relief, little as it was, from the beating sun even revived him a little. The sky thickened to lowering purple. There was a strange tautness in the atmosphere. Suddenly Hendryk thought: "Rain". His groping mind expanded the thought. Rain and wind. Rain to save his life, to bathe his body, to fill every possible container with sweet water. Wind to blow him somewhere. His mind revived at the idea. When the ship had gone down they had been five hundred miles south-east of Ontong Java. If the typhoon had blown him in any but the opposite direction he might still make it, with a good wind. In any case, he might strike a trade route. He lay rigid, tense with expectation.

The albatross cocked its head on one side and looked at the sky. It watched the gathering storm clouds for a long time, apparently deliberating. Then it flapped up from the water and perched on the side of the boat. It sat there for a little longer, observing the man. The clouds filled the whole of the sky now. It hopped clumsily on to his head, keeping its balance there with flapping wings, as it had done before. He beat at it, ineffectually, with frenzied hands. Slowly and deliberately, it picked out his eyes with its wicked, straw-yellow beak. His spasmodic struggles ceased. A flash crumpled and tore the heavens, and the quivering rain blotted out everything until the

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wind swept it away. The albatross was snatched into the chaos above like a scrap of white paper. A runnel of rain-water dribbled into the gaping, unresponsive mouth of the corpse.

July, 1938.

(Written a few weeks after the author's sixteenth birthday.)

JUDY AND THE GENERAL

THIS THING I cannot forget because I was young then and it made me afraid. Soon after I got my commission, I was attached to the staff of the old general, then campaigning among mountains in the South, perhaps because I was a cousin of the general's. This was the best thing that had ever happened to me; my mother thought that I would soon be commander of all the armies in the South, and I used to tell girls that I was an aide of the great general. This nearly always worked. I was indeed only a kind of uniformed clerk; but we must forgive the young, they have nothing but dreams. Now I am old and can only tell you stories that you will not believe.

It was a dark country down there, always dark under a wet sky. For months we held a ridge covered with little oak trees; it was usually raining, and I will not forget the noise of rain among the leaves, and of the river down below us in the wooded valley. The enemy were beyond the river. A village of poor mud houses was down there; at the beginning we bombarded it, and after the first week nothing was left but blackened beams and rubble. The people had gone, and the old stubborn ones must have been killed in our bombardment, but sometimes you saw a mangy dog nosing round the ruins, or crows fighting over someone's bones most likely. The enemy held the ridge opposite, like ours damp and covered with oak trees. Sometimes they sent patrols across the river, and sometimes we sent patrols over to them, but nobody ever came

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back, and I could never see what good it did. We were just waiting to advance, but the old general was cunning. He wasn't the death-or-glory kind. He knew they could hold that ridge as long as they liked, and he wasn't going to hurry. One day, another sector of their front would cave in; then he'd move and catch them on the run. Too wise he was for glory and that stuff; I think he hated blood.

He was very old and wise, and everyone was afraid of him. They say he was a peasant's son who had fought for the right side in '48, but I reckon that was so long ago he had forgotten. He knew every man in the division by name, I've heard tell; but these tales grow round all old men, and he had plenty. One way he was strange—for a republican general, that is: he believed in God. On Sundays he used to preach to the men, always those old Jewy stories about battles and whores and blowing down the walls of Jericho—you know what I mean. And then, at night, he used to sit reading a big black Bible in his tent. I do not think he slept at all. Sometimes you could hear him praying in the night, and once I listened to part of his prayer when I was green and curious. "O Lord," he said "Who delivered Sisera into the hand of Jael, and who broke Saul's pride on Gilboa, give us victory over our enemies and let there be no more blood and bless my children. Amen."

In the spring when the snows melted up the valley and the river was flooding, the enemy's front broke away to the east, and we began to advance. For several days they kept up a barrage, but we knew their rearguard would soon have to withdraw. We crossed the river and took the next ridge. They went on retreating, and we followed them through thick woods full of violets where blue jays screamed at us. They left their dead in the woods behind them, and once we saw the corpse of one of our patrols hanging from an oak. The general left a party behind, I

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remember, to cut it down and bury it. I think he was a good man, but even now that I am old and he is dead, I still fear him. So we came one evening about dusk into the village where the thing happened.

The general set up his headquarters at the inn. The enemy had only left that village an hour or two before, and we took much of their gear and food, and even some horses. The village was quite empty, as we thought, except for an old deaf man who would say nothing but "Swine"; I do not know if he was cursing us or if he meant pigs, but I remember a sergeant got angry and killed him with his bayonet. The general had the sergeant hanged where we could all see him, beside the well.

We stayed there three days, because the general would not advance without word from the other divisions east and west. The first night, a foraging party brought back a girl they had found hiding under straw in a barn. Little white-faced thing she was, black hair like silk that you'd want to stroke and big eyes. We hadn't seen a woman for weeks, and you'll know the way the men were looking at her; but they brought her right in to the old general because they feared him and remembered the sergeant, hanging by the well. I was there when they brought her in. The general was writing and she didn't interest him. Not in the same way as us, I mean. He sent away the N.C.O. who brought her, and said:

"Where are your people, child?" not really wanting an answer.

"Dead," says she.

He goes on writing, but she isn't afraid of him, and comes closer.

"I can tell you something, general," she says. "In the third house past the church there are two men waiting to kill you."

He looks at her sideways, suspicious.

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"Why do you tell me this?"

Then her face goes hard like the general's, and she says.

"I hate this place. They beat me. I hate them all."

The general sent some men to the house. Presently we heard firing, and the N.C.O. came in to say that there had been two men with rifles hiding in the cellar. The general looked at the girl.

"How old are you," he asked her.

"Sixteen."

"What is your name?"

"They call me Judy, but my people are dead."

That was the only time I ever saw any pity in the general, perhaps because she was so young.

"Do you love your country?" he said at last.

"I love my country and I hate you, but I hated them more because they beat me." She said it exactly, like something learnt by heart. The general smiled, and he was not used to smiling.

He knew as well as we did what the soldiers were thinking, so he kept her at the inn that night. She was locked in one of the upper rooms and I heard her crying most of the time. I wanted to go and help her; but then I was a young man without wisdom, and could still feel pity. Now I have learnt that love and pity are not wise, that is perhaps all I have learnt, but it has not made me happier, now that I am old.

The next day we thought the general would send her away; but instead he had her released from the room telling her only not to leave the inn. She brought us food and flirted with the young lieutenant, my friend, who was killed later in another war. To the general she bought a bunch of wild flowers. She must have gone outside the inn to pick them, but he was not angry. He did not speak nor look at her, but I think he was moved; perhaps she

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made him think of his children, now grown up or dead. That night he sent us all away, and she stayed with him in the downstairs room. My friend the lieutenant laughed and said what anyone would have done, but I didn't think it was that at all. I felt worried even then, and knew something was not right. Of course, we listened at the door for a bit. We couldn't hear much; but once he was telling about his daughter who had died in childbirth, and I thought another time I heard him praying or reading his Bible.

It soon got about among the soldiers, of course. They did not mention it openly, because they were so afraid of him, but I kept hearing bits of their talk, and dirty laughter. It was a fine story for them.

That last day was very clear, clouds lying along the ridge and little coloured birds dancing and mating in the woods. Judy kept by the general all day, even when he went on a tour of inspection. If you had been there, you would have known something was wrong; old men and soldiers cannot feel love and pity like others, it is too dangerous. He was loving and pitying her like his own child, and it was not right. But when the lieutenant made another dirty joke, I hated him for it. My youth it was that made me so soft and foolish. Again in the evening she went in with him and they were alone. Nobody listened this time, because the joke was getting thin by then. I was uneasy, I may say afraid already, though I could not know why. I sat writing, and the candle began to smoke; it had a shroud in it, as the peasants say, but not pointing at me—a small shroud as I thought for a child or an old man. At last I got up and went to find the lieutenant, and we sat talking about our homes and about girls, as young men do when they are yet silly and ignorant. He was a fine young man, though I can't recall his name. Stephen, I think. Good looking he was and girls liked

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him, but later I saw him dead and bleeding, no sight for a girl at all.

All the while we were talking, I was afraid. Something was not right. It was like a story I had read before, now beginning to happen, and I could not see the end. Once the general sent for more wine, we heard the orderly pass outside in the passage. The wine was not good at that inn, raw and sour, with sediment. But the general was tough. Nothing could make him drunk or give him pain. No one could overcome him or make him afraid.

We knew we should be advancing the next day, our flanks having caught us up, and were wondering what the general would do with the girl. Leave her, said the lieutenant, leave her with his blessing, old hypocrite! But for some reason that made me angry. "There's something between those two we can't understand," I said, "he isn't like us. He doesn't want girls like we do. They know something we won't ever understand." The lieutenant began to laugh; but suddenly the walls jarred with a revolver-shot. A bit of plaster fell to the floor by my foot. The lieutenant jumped up. Just then I knew what my fear was, I knew what all this was about. Someone shouted. We rushed down the passage, and threw open the door of the general's room.

I will never forget it. It makes me afraid even now. He was standing behind the table. On the floor lay his long sword, half drawn from the sheath, by it the girl's body twitching; and on the table in front of him the big Bible with his revolver laid across the open page.

"Take that away," he said, and if ever I saw a man full of grief and anger it was he. As I passed him to pick up the sword, I looked at the Bible. Under the revolver my eye caught the words:

And Judith struck off Holofernes' head.

What could the child have done with that great sword,

JUDY AND THE GENERAL

though she must have been waiting her chance for two days? We buried her and left the village next day. I could not have told you this when I was young, but now that I am old without love or pity, an old soldier whose comrades are dead, I tell you to be afraid of love and pity and of old men.

THE HOT STREET

SUN STRUCK at his eyes through the slatted blinds as he lay beside her. It was full scorching summer and they both were so young that anyone would have pitied them, lying so breathless in the heat. They had thrown off the cotton counterpane, and it lay on the floor with its red flowers and faces twisted like stones under water; beside it a half-empty bottle of beer. He reached down painfully *for the beer, but it was flat and meaty-tasting with the* heat. There was no noise, no clock, no talking between them or sounds from the street; only the sun battering at the blinds and the room heavy with their thoughts. She turned and flung her arm across his face and murmured something. He put the arm away. She trembled and slept on. Her round face like a doll's was unnaturally damp with sweat; as if, he thought, the wax was melting and soon would start through it the bones, the eyes on wire stalks. And her soft black hair being spread out on the pillow behind her, made the face rounder and paler, his discomfort somehow much worse, and he wondered if she was too young and would suffer. He was also in pain because of his youth and the heat. He reached for a cigarette under the bed; but then, knowing he could not bear its acrid warmth, let his arm hang. It swung a little, deadily, its fingers trailing on the dirty carpet. He thought: *We shall never get out of this. It will always be this way with us. We're damned like Romeo and Juliet. Like Frankie and Johnnie rather. God-damned. With the sweat trick-*

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ling out of her hair. He looked, and it was indeed: sticky as glycerine tears in a film.

Why did we have to do this in a summer foreign city where I cannot stay? Now she will never be separated from the damp sweat and the sun through wooden blinds; and it is, I suppose, about three o'clock; and the night will soon come and stifle us again. That will be the second night. We who were so full of pleasure are now dry and separate, but the summer will not stop for us, or even moderate its frenzy. Either I get out now, he thought, or this will be my life and I shall be dead and finished in a dark, sour room before I'm thirty. I've got to get out of here. He moved indecisively; his hand clenched; but he only rubbed his left eye and lay back beside her.

In the street outside it was blinding hot, the asphalt oozing between the pavement-stones, yet people were still passing up and down. They passed under the high window with its green shutters, and never looked up nor thought about it, nor about the boy and girl. Their little shadows were tangled in their feet. Once a sparrow perched fluttering against the window, then dropped to the shady gutter to pick for food. Around the corner where it was a little cooler, an old bearded man in dungarees was repairing the road by himself. He worked slowly and ineffectually, an unlighted cigarette hanging from his mouth. When he had spread the wet black pitch, he smoothed it with a shovel, then threw pebbles on to it. He made very little noise. On the other side of the road, three children were watching him from the dark doorway of a shop. They only did this because they had no money for sweets and it was too hot to play, and they knew the man was called Joe. They looked on without much interest, and sometimes rubbed their grubby noses. A white cat, stretched out on a window-ledge above them, was also watching with half-closed eyes. Once the man dropped

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the pebbles all in a heap, a little grey mound in the sticky tar, and grumbled quietly. The windows were all shuttered and dark in that street; and back in the main street where people were still passing, the sun still smote the green high shutters.

Her eyes flickered, and just glimpsed the side of his face, pale and dissatisfied. Cool rain of May, cool rain falling on me, she thought, over me all with a touch like hands. The smell of rain earthy and damp like hands. He will never go now and I need never wonder why kisses in archways are not enough. He is peevish and bony, but he comes on me like rain to a field in summer, and with him I am not frightened and I could bear anything. She thought of herself thus, first as a field, then as the bed they lay on, wishing she could be that bed and so embrace both their bodies; then she knew she was the air all around him, that he took in every second to his blood. She knew, too, that as the air she wished to remain passive yet inescapable; she would be all around him, and at the same time possess him and control him. How can I prevent his actions, she thought, how can I make him part of me so that he shall never grow tired nor speak hardly to me, nor die? This has never happened before; it has never happened in all history, and how should I, so young, know what to do or what it means? She stirred a little, and liked to feel the weight of her body limp and impersonal as a sack. Behind her eyelids danced an intricate design of purple spots; and when she pressed them tighter, long snaky lines hovered before her. Her hair pressed close about her forehead. Cool rain of May even now, even in this furnace. She reached out her hand for him, but his head was not there. She did not wonder at that, however, and the sticky brown hand lay quiet on the pillow.

He sat on the edge of the bed, staring vacantly. I must get out of this, he thought. If once she wakes I shall never

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get away. He reached for his shoes under the bed, but felt nothing. He got down on his hands and knees to look for them. Then he sat on the bed again, to put them on. He noticed for the first time the shoddy counterpane, become a heap of twisted faces; and also a black stain on the carpet, shaped like South America. He could just hear her breathing; it was all he could do to stop panting himself, with fear and the effort of leaving. It isn't that I don't want her, he thought, it is just that I cannot bear this room any more, and wish it had never happened. Perhaps I shall come back when I have walked in the shade a little and had a drink. But he knew that was a lie.

He stood up, swaying a little on his feet. Her eyes were still closed. Her hand lay on the pillow where his head had been. The sweat still glittered under her hair. He thought for a moment she was watching him, and was afraid to move. Then he went round the bed to her side, and looked down at her. She was certainly sleeping. He wondered whether to leave a note; but he didn't know what to write it on, or what to say. So he just mumbled, I've got to do this. It isn't that I don't want you. I'm scared of you, that's what it is. That's all. He picked up the coloured counterpane, and covered her with it gently. It looked less sinister that way; but still the red unnatural faces gaped below her own. He went quietly out, not looking back. Before her closed eyes glimmered a green field, cool and full of bright orange flowers.

When he emerged into the street, he could not see for several seconds. His face was very pale, and dark under the eyes. The main street was quite empty, though the heat was fading. He blinked once or twice, then walked towards the corner. In the distance a bell swung heavily. He looked down, stepping between the cracks of the pavement and observing the bits of paper, matches, and dried horse-dung. Round the corner, the old man was still spreading

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pitch, the children still watching him; but the cat had gone inside the house, and an old woman was giving it milk in a saucer. The road-mender was sucking the same dirty cigarette. His shadow danced behind him, longer and paler now. The boy stopped to watch him. He doesn't seem hot or even tired at all, thought the boy. I wonder if he ever thinks? The old man's face was dry and expressionless, but he was thinking about his tea with sausages and a pipe afterwards, and goddamn *them* who wear out roads and make you spread pitch on a hot summer afternoon. The cat crept out on to the window ledge once more, and lay thinking much the same kind of thoughts. The boy looked across at the three children; then he turned quickly and walked away. They all had the face of that girl who lay behind green high shutters, out of time and motionless in a green field of pleasure. A bar of sunlight lay across her open hand, on the pillow where he was not.

May, 1941.

THE FAMOUS RACE BETWEEN THE HEARSE AND THE STEAMROLLER

STORY of the hearse and steamroller is one you won't believe, no, nor thank me for telling likely. And it was a long time back, so maybe I'd best leave it quiet now, and let you all think what you like; but I can still see them, racing over those wide roads a winter day, and hear the loud cheering by the Sad Man's Rest. So I've writ it down here for you to judge of.

There was nothing that November but black rain, and the paths all turned to clay, and great wads of dead leaves in the gutters so you could hear the rain talking in the spout. Nothing to speak of at all, except Ramsden shooting Mere's dog for worrying, round Michaelmas; and the young girl from Blackdale got in trouble, silly bitch. We'd sit evenings in the Sad Man's Rest, and say a word now and then, mostly yes and no; and perhaps a dirty tale. But after a while they gave out, and there wasn't anything then to say: no talk but swearing, or that London man Tom speaking of the way women smell in summer, and other things not right for the decent. But then the steamroller came down from Slidd. We didn't mind it first day; only I knew because Biddle told me how it was pumping along the Slidd road breaking stones, and the driver of it was called Sam Mort, a Denge man. Then one night we were in Sad Man's Rest (they call it that for the tramp who cut his throat, and was buried at the Cross a long time back. There's a stone in the wall says "Pity

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Ned Ruddle, died here 1751", or some such); but we were sitting there, me and Biddle and Tom and Wormold who drives the hearse, when in comes Sam the steamroller chap. "Howdy," he says, all perky (he was a Denge man). We get him a drink, and then he starts talking. We listen, all but Wormold. He can't hear much. "My name's Sam Mort," he says.

"I knew," says Biddle.

"I'm breaking up the Slidd road," says Sam, "me and my mates come over from Slidd with the roller."

"Seen it," says Biddle.

"How's Slidd?" I ask.

"Flooded," says Sam. "Ruddy swimming-bath."

Nobody says anything for a bit.

"You been driving roller long?" I ask, just to make him feel at home.

"Ten year," says Sam, "and now I've got a new roller. Council bought her last week. She's a hummer."

"Roller," says Wormold, snotty because he couldn't hear.

"She's a hummer," says Sam, "Mick the Miller I call her. Does five mile an hour."

"Roller," says Wormold. "What's the fun driving a roller?"

Sam kept quiet a long time, just mumbling in his beer and saying how Slidd was flooded. Then suddenly he turned round at Wormold and said proper mad, "What the hell do you drive, anyway?"

"Eh?" says Wormold.

"Who do you think you are, saying *roller* at me that way?"

"I drive hearse," says Wormold.

Sam laughed out loud, and Tom slipped in so there wouldn't be hard words, "Yes, Wormold's the hearse-driver. Been on it thirty year. Don't you mind old Wormold."

"You haven't been driving thirty year," says Wormold sudden, to Sam. And then Sam says nothing for a long time more; but I could see him watching of old Wormold, and wishing he had him under that roller, I'll lay. Sam keeps drinking, and buying us all drinks, so we must have been all pretty full up. Then, round about ten, Wormold starts to go. Sam saw him at the door, and shouted out, "What's your top speed, Wormold?"

None of us liked that much though Tom laughed a bit, to be matey. But it wasn't decent.

"It's the dead I carry," says Wormold.

"It's stones I break and what's the difference," says Mort in a thick voice. Wormold opens the door, but Mort's up behind him and grabs his shoulder from behind.

"I said, what's your top speed?" he growls. And when Wormold doesn't answer, "Mine's five mile an hour. You couldn't beat that."

We all knew how proud old Wormold was of his two black horses; and the way he'd tell us, "They might have been racers, those nags of mine." But Wormold didn't answer Sam Mort; he just mumbled and ground his teeth.

"No," says Sam, "you couldn't beat that. So what the hell do you mean by '*Roller*'?"

"What I say," says Wormold, "it's nothing fine to drive roller. Two black horses I have, as good as any in the county, and that's more than you could say."

"And I've got steam," shouts Sam, "I've got steam and a boy to stoke the fire and three mates. And breaking stones is better than carrying the dead. You're all out of date," he says, "it's roads we want, not dead men. Burn *them*, that's what we ought, burn them and good riddance."

"Lay off," says Biddle, shocked.

"You couldn't beat my nags," Wormold says, scared Sam's going to hit him. "Nags were afore rollers." Then he ducks, and Tom gets up to stop Sam. But Sam just

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says, very quiet, "We'll see that. We'll see. What's to-morrow, Tom?"

"Sunday it be."

"You working, Wormold?"

"Not Sunday. Nags rest Sunday."

"Listen, Wormold," says Sam, "I'm not working neither. And this is what we'll do, Wormold. You'll get your hearse, and I'll get Micky, and we'll meet outside this Sad Man's Rest; and then we'll race from here to Slidd, over Wheelbarrow."

Nobody says a word after that, because we thought Sam didn't mean it, being fuddled the way he was. Then Wormold laughed nervous. "Nags are tired, Sam. Nags are old. With this rain and wind they get enough work and to spare carrying people down to churchyard. Nags ought to rest Sunday. They're not like roller."

"You mean, roller's better?" says Sam.

"Tisn't right," mumbles Biddle.

"Come and have another, Sam," says Tom.

Then Wormold, very sharp and angry: "That's not what I mean, Sam Mort. No, it's not that. By God, I'll race you, Sam Mort, and we'll see nags are better than roller. We'll see what happens when they're racing over Wheelbarrow. We'll see."

"Then it's to-morrow," says Sam. "That's it," cries Wormold. And they shake hands, and that's how the famous race I'm telling you of started; though at that time, we thought it would never come about. But Sam couldn't go back, and old Wormold was angry because of his nags being insulted. So we all waited to see what they'd do in the morning; all knowing it wasn't right, and that it meant more than we could guess at the time. I don't mind saying, I didn't sleep much that night, nor did most others; and Wormold must have been polishing of his harness and brass lamps, and seeing to things till dawn.

Sam lay in a ditch. I know because I saw him there as I was going home, with his heels up in the air like some kind of ugly marsh-weed, and his head down there, snoring on the moss.

Sunday we woke early, those who knew of the race. Clear morning it was, with long grey clouds like herring-bones across the sky, and a thin wind coming over Wheelbarrow shaking the leaves of the hollies. Near ten o'clock a big black cloud stood up on Wheelbarrow, looking like snow; and as I went up to the Sad Man's Rest I saw the leaves and gossamers of the hedges were frozen, and in the ditches the cow-parsley stiff as lacework. Before I got to the Rest, I knew Sam was there, and likely Wormold too; there was shouting on the wind and the snorting of the roller. When I got past Huggins' I saw a puff of steam rising against that pale sky, then broken and driven aside by the wind, and lost. A big voice was shouting, "Go it, Wormold! Pull that girth, Wormold, and the off trace tighter." That was Kester from Crouch, I knew, come to the race. And when I came out of Bag Wood I saw the whole set-up, as you'd say; all of them shouting themselves sick and waving flags on top of the hill, by the Sad Man's Rest.

It was a sight for a man to die thinking of. The great cloud standing on Wheelbarrow; the wind, colder now, singing in the telegraph wires and searching the white hair of Old Man Miller, who was up shouting on a bench outside the Rest; men from Slidd and Denge even, a good forty or fifty, slapping Sam Mort on the back and cheering; and old Wormold beside the big black horses, talking secret to his carpenter-chap Bane and sometimes patting the nags; all that I saw as I came out of the wood. And as I got nearer, the roller puffing and rumbling in the middle of the crowd, tricked out with green branches and

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coloured paper (Mrs. Wadham's stock of Christmas paper it was); with Sam's three mates standing up inside, cheering; and the flag boy prancing round on the roof, waving both flags, red and green. I heard, too, what Old Man Miller was shouting; it was his old talk about hellfire and blood. "It be against the Lord," he was yelling. "Bitterly shall ye repent the desecration of this Sabbath. Yea, though now ye be a-gaming and exulting in your lewdness, the day shall come when ye shall beg mercy of the Lord and receive damnation; beg right of way or a reaper's loan from Joe Miller and get a hard answer. . . ." But the crowd didn't listen. The wind went on playing in his hair, and he went on shouting, but everyone knew he'd been cracked since his old woman died.

I went to old Wormold. He was holding the nags. "Quiet, boys," he was saying, "quiet, my bonnies. We'll show 'em. Our turn's a coming, my beauties." And Bane with his long pale face like a nicked razor biting at his pipe, and mumbling, "Tidden right, Dan. Tidden right. Hearse and nags be for the poor dead, not running races like any trap or gig." But there was a hard glare in old Wormold's eye, and he was shaking as he talked to the nags. The hearse was rubbed up and scrubbed up like I'd never seen it; not even for Mr. Fleet's funeral, young Fleet's father whose horse threw him year before last; the lamps shining brassy, and the black woodwork washed, and the big plate staring out like an eye, that said, "*D. Wormold, Undertaker, Upholsterer, Joiner, Crouch*". No one was cheering of Wormold much, but he didn't care. He was thinking of that race.

"How are you feeling, Wormold?" I asked matey.

"I'm all right," says Wormold. "I'm all right. Nags are in fine fettle, Ned. We'll leave that roller on Wheelbarrow right enough. He don't know my Nags."

Sam Mort jumped up into his seat then, and began to

make a speech. Everyone listened except Old Man Miller and Wormold and Bane. Sam said how he'd laid a challenge to Wormold in the Rest, and how Wormold had said *Roller* so nasty, and his nags were better.

"He's been driving hearse thirty year," said Sam, "and I've been on roller ten. But that don't matter. That's not the point . . ."

"Thirty-two," shouts Wormold sudden. All the Denge and Slidd men started booing, so me and Bane had to shout, "Go it, Wormold", until it stopped. But old Wormold wasn't listening. Now Sam began to speak like a parliament candidate at elections; he'd learnt it likely from Major Styforth, who's stood Conservative for Slidd these ten years. I've always liked that kind of talk, it's fine-sounding but queer from Sam.

"The new and the old, that's what it is," cries Sam. "It's progress against all these old-fangled ideas about funerals and black horses and whatnot. I'm for progress, I've got a new roller given me by Slidd council. I break stones to make the roads better: he only carries dead corpses to bury. So I couldn't have him insulting my roller, could I, mates?" The Slidd men cheered then. "I've got to show that hearse stuff is all out of date, that's what. I got power here. I got steam. He don't know what steam is, likely. This roller's a big invention. It's a friend of man, that's what I'd call it. A friend of man." He stopped so they'd cheer, but they didn't that time. But they liked that bit about the Friend of Man, you could see.

"I break things down with my roller," goes on Sam, "so there'll be Progress. That's what Progress is, breaking down and building up. Making things quicker: roads, trains, motor-cars it is now. That's Progress. Why, one day I reckon there'll be a better kind of roller, a Greyhound Roller if you get me, fast and heavy and big as a

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house, and driving itself. Then I'll be out of date. But not now, see. Hearse is out of date now—they've been trundling the dead that way ever since . . . well, Battle of Hastings or some such, I shouldn't wonder. It's time they found a better way. It's time there was a steam Hearse, if you get me. Something new, not Mr. Wormold here and his nags. Times are moving, that's what it is. And that's why I'm in this race here with Mr. Wormold. To show how they're moving, and one day we'll be able to stop people dying if we go on progressing this way. But not until we're all mechanical-minded, not until we think rollers instead of hearses."

All the Slidd men cheered then, good and rowdy: and I yelled out, "Go it, Wormold" again. Bane said, "Quit that blather" very sharp. Then it was quiet just for a moment, dead quiet so I looked up and saw the big cloud slowly turning on Wheelbarrow, like a joint over a fire. Old Man Miller was quiet now, too. Tom had got him a drink from the Rest, and he just sat there on the bench looking at it, frozen as you might say, the wind not in his hair any more, much older than I'd ever seen him. Then Kester gets up, the butcher from Crouch, always in any fun there was, though a rich man with a nagging wife and two kids.

"Thank you, Mr. Mort," he says. He spoke always deep down as if he had gut-ache, "Thank you. And now it is nearly eleven o'clock, three minutes to, in fact, this great race is due to begin. But first we must ask Mr. Wormold to say a word or two."

Wormold was still talking to nags, and not listening; so Bane poked him with his pipe. "Get up, Wormold," he said. Wormold jumps up into driver's seat sudden, and everyone cheers in a silly way, and the Slidd men shout "Speech!" Wormold looks round, angry and scared, and then he yells out, "You're all right for talking, Sam Mort,

but you haven't got my nags. Nags are old and they know what's what. Nags are wise. Your roller don't know things, do it? Nags know. We haven't got steam, but we've got sense; and you'll be glad enough of us one day." Then he grabs the reins and Bane hands him up a cart-whip. The Slidd men cheer and laugh. Kester shouts. "Course is from this Sad Man's Rest over Wheelbarrow by the Old Road to Slidd, eight mile. My brother Steve's waiting at the George in Slidd to see you in. Good luck, gentleman, good luck. And I reckon this'll be a famous day for one and all."

After Kester stopped, I couldn't see much; only the Slidd men cheering round the roller and Wormold getting his nags up in line with Sam. The road was wide over Wheelbarrow, without any ditch. That was why they chose it. Bane said, "Be crazy. Nags can't go any gait but walk. Too old they are." "We'll see," I said. Even then, I knew it was a great thing, that race: You won't see why, likely. But a great thing for all of us it was. Funny how it's that way sometimes: you just *know* things matter and mean something, even when they seem silly. The wind came colder, a flake or two of sleet on it. Very quiet it was, so I could hear the sign of the Sad Man's Rest swinging and creaking; and then Kester shouts, "All ready, gentlemen? Steady. Go!" Sam's mates jump off roller, Wormold cries, "Git up" to his horses, and away they are, with a lot of cheering. The flag boy ran behind, capering in the road with his flags, but Sam's mates called him back. The road dips behind the Rest, and then you can see it right away climbing over Wheelbarrow. That's maybe six mile, and Slidd's just over the top, in a hole. Sam and Wormold went over the dip dead level, not in any rush, the nags prancing a bit and the roller grinding along. "They won't stop me!" Sam shouted back. I ran after, so I could see them from behind the Rest; and

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as I passed, Old Man Miller was sitting very quiet talking to himself. "Agin God," he said, "agin God. He'll see. He'll make them sorry. It's all this ramping and blasphemy that made Him take my Bessie, it is"; and then he began to blubber and I ran on to see the race.

Now, if there's one thing I'd wish, it would be to have seen the finish of that famous race, that last run over Wheelbarrow. As things were, I only saw a bit of it, and that not the best part. I went behind the Rest and climbed up the hill a good way, so there wasn't anyone with me and I could see right over to the ridge above Slidd. I could see the crowd down by the Rest. They weren't chcering any more, just watching. Not a furlong off they were, but the cold wind took their words away from me. I couldn't hear anything, only the wind rattling in the thorn-tree I was leaning against, and buzzing in the telegraph wires on the Slidd road. It was like seeing a picture, not the kinema I mean, but a big picture in a book which meant something different, like the pictures in my grandpa's bible, say. I saw the roller and the hearse crawling downhill like a couple of leatherjackets, both black and slow and dead level. The steam of the roller puffed up into the air and blew away. The nags were going on at a brisk walk, maybe a bit faster. It was their funeral speed. They'd never gone any faster for years, and I reckon they didn't know they could run. Not then. Nor did Wormold ever think of it, I'm sure, whatever some said after. They went on like that, down into the bottom, and then began to come up the other side. I thought it was all pretty crazy, that the roller would just keep on pumping and the hearse at a walk, and neither of them would win. Just a put-up show, as you might say, just to take the insult off Wormold's nags, and give Sam Mort a good tale to tell.

The wind blew colder, and more clouds came up over

Wheelbarrow till it was quite dark: but I could just see them, creeping up the hill away over against me. Some of the men down below had got sick of it, and gone into the Rest. But Old Man Miller was still sitting there by himself, and Bane was watching with Tom and Biddle. My ears were getting raw, and my nose dripping like a tap. I'd half a mind to get home, then. The roller and the hearse crept on, till they were half-way up the hill. An old crow blew over me, a hoodie I thought, his flight-feathers all broken, and croaking away as he flew. I thought it was getting dinner time, and parson would be wondering why people hadn't been in church. I had a last look at the race—and "Race," I thought, "more like a funeral", before going down; and as I looked it all happened together. The wind came tearing over Wheelbarrow full of sleet, and before it hit me I saw the hearse, that I could tell by the black dots of nags in front, give a kind of jump, the way a frog does when you touch it behind; and off it starts in front of the roller, swaying and jiggling about the road and the nags going like racers. Rattling and squaking and shaking itself to bits, too, if I could have heard. It never was what you'd call steady. "Jesus," I thought, "that's a runaway. Hearse has run away with old Wormold." Then the wind and the sleet hit me, and the last I saw was the hearse just swinging over the skyline, and Sam's roller right back behind. I knew then, Wormold wouldn't stop at Slidd. Dear Christ knows where he did stop. I got down off the ridge, and by the Rest there was Old Man Miller standing in the sleet with his young daughter hanging on his arm, trying to make him come home. Bane and Tom and Biddle had gone in.

"They're away now," I said to Old Man Miller just to quiet him.

"Away, ay," he muttered, all white and glaring, "away

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on the journey no man returns from. The Lord's punishment it is, on their pride and folly. To Hell they'll ride, and no man to stop them, to Hell they'll run like the bad servant Gehazi."

It's stuck with me, that saying, and I still think of Old Man Miller standing there, with Emmie tugging at his sleeve. Then I went into the Rest, and told them what I'd seen. There was a good big crowd, like there'd been the night of the challenge; and most of them were drinking though it was Sunday dinner time.

"That hearse won't be stopping this side Denge," says Tom.

"Not before the sea, I reckon," says Biddle.

"Kingdom Come," says Bane, "but it's their funeral."

Then they all laughed, but I didn't think it was that funny, and I went back to dinner. I didn't hear about Wormold till Monday morning, with the postman coming over from Slidd.

And this was the end of the famous race of the hearse and steamroller, which you're likely wondering about: Old Wormold didn't stop at Slidd, nor yet at Denge; and whether at the place Gehazi ran to in the end, I leave you to judge. Sam Mort's roller broke down on the road, over beyond Wheelbarrow top, and he came walking into Slidd Sunday night, angry and tired, thinking Wormold had got there before. But Wormold never got there Sunday night nor any other night of the living season. It was a shepherd from Bignor Top found him, and the poor black nags, and the bright polished hearse all smashed up in a stone quarry, smashed up and cold with the crows sitting round them. They didn't put much in Slidd papers; parson, I reckon, kept it out as not godly. And Sam Mort lost his job for that race, and went North somewhere. We talked a lot of Wormold's death and

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what he'd been thinking of never to stop before that quarry; and he'd a big funeral in Crouch we all went to. Bane took to driving hearse and had a lad in to prentice for the carpentry, and it was them drove Wormold's coffin to graveyard. And that was the end of the famous race that happened long back a winter time. Now I'm an old man, I can only see some things very clear, and some I can't see at all or know what they mean; but perhaps you'll know better, you with a bad world of steam and weapons and all this silly talk and unkindness in it and killing. But that Monday, after I'd heard how the race finished, I went up to the Rest and looked over to Wheelbarrow; 'twas cold and clear after the stormy night, the downs patched with snow and the sky washed thin. I thought on old Wormold, smashed up in the quarry; but mostly of the speech Sam Mort made. Maybe he had new ideas, Sam, I thought: but Wormold it was won the race. I wondered if he'd thought to whip up the nags, or if they'd run away. He'd always driven the dead, the nags had always drawn them—how should they know, any of them, it was a race this time, how should they know! Yet maybe they had, after all. They'd found out what they could do, and it had smashed them. They'd won the famous race and won their own fine funeral: and the crows sitting round about them had known, sure enough. I'm telling you only what I have seen. There's madness in the world now, that there wasn't that black November. I'd counsel you think of this matter, of the famous race between the Hearse and the Steamroller: I'd say, think of it in what way you would and have patience with my awkward turn of speech.

December, 1941.

MEXICO

A CHILD, I lived in Mexico; but it was not those ceremonious cacti, nor bleached faces of cathedrals, nor wide-hatted horsemen that I remember; nor even the throaty songs with drum and guitar that you can buy even now on gramophone records. None of these film properties, nor even the plumed stone gods with their frightful shrill inhumanity, stay in my mind; but two little pictures, which are more important.

Childhood is not a period in time, it is a state of mind. If everyone admitted this (and they all *know* it), we should have done with that empty talk about intellectuals and normal people. "Normal people" means those who have lost their childhood; "intellectuals" means usually the ones who never had any; but the true man is neither. He will know the futility of thought and despise the double-crossing slippery world of everyday things. Childhood sees through this world and isn't intellectual; but even so, childhood is not wise. It is beyond wisdom and thought. It lives in images; and I think if there is a god, he lives the same way. Childhood lives in images, and my childhood was in three men playing pool and a cow's horned skull. These things were Mexico, and they still mean a country which I have lost, which I fear, and which I hope not to find again when I am dead.

Once I was coming from market in our farm cart with Pablo, an old man who looked after the cart and fed the animals, being too weak for other jobs. Once a week he

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used to go down from our mountain to the market village, and I would go with him. This day it was very hot, the round explosive sun almost overhead. You have heard people talking about the sun "beating down", and you think it's a cliché. It may be, but that's what the sun was doing, it hit me between the eyes every time I looked up from the dark well of the cart. One cannot get used to such a sun: as well talk about getting used to being slugged by a mallet. Even now, the thought of Mexico gives me a pain behind the eyes. There was also a smell of dust and dried dung, very tiresome and cough-making; but that you can get used to if you live in Mexico.

It was about four in the afternoon, and beside the road men and women were working in the fields with great industry but no enthusiasm. That's always the way with Indians. Like some children, they have no interest in things. They work hard, they get drunk and sleep and copulate and have children, but without enthusiasm. They know nothing about what we call "happiness", so they are never miserable. I think enthusiasm is a disease of the neurotic Anglo-Saxon mind, and one should try to avoid it; but that is only what I think, and you had better not believe it, or you will not be good with girls or make a hit in society. You will become wholly sensual, just doing things and feeling sensations, but not seeing any reason why life should come to you in that way, nor any reason why it should end. I suppose even then I had some such thoughts, watching the elliptical lines of Pablo's Indian face. Like a rock it was, worn to that shape by heredity as a rock is carved by rain and wind; a face that death could not demolish as he does our brittle European faces. He never spoke, and I doubt if he had any thoughts.

We turned a corner under a high bank covered with scrub, and there I saw the sight which will not leave me. We had left the fields of the plain behind, and now it was

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bare mountain-country—rocks and scrub and a little poor pasture, almost uninhabited. Beside the road was a tall cylindrical black rock. You Freudians can interpret that as you like; looking back, I think the shape had some importance to the picture, so perhaps there's something in what you say. Anyway, in the monstrously foreshortened shadow of this tall rock, three men were sitting on their hams throwing dice. They did not look up at us. Like the workers in the fields, they were absorbed in the game but not interested. Their movements—leaning forward in turn to pick up the dice, throwing, leaning forward all together to see how it fell—were like a ritual. They were peasants, nothing strange about them; one was old and dry, one had a blue striped blanket, I cannot remember the third. It was strange, though, that they should be playing just there, in that savage place, under the tall rock and the terrible sun; but that is not why I remember them. Something important was happening there: perhaps their game was the world's life, like those pale fleshy girls the Norns who weave in the sagas. Perhaps this picture of the three men squatting round their dice in the sharp shadow of the rock was being watched by God; for I think when you suddenly see a thing in this dreadful reality, it means that God is looking at it just then from His side. They were certainly important in some way, like images from a dream. So we passed them, and though I never saw anything like it again, the picture still comes into my mind when I am drunk or scared and sometimes in sleep.

Of course, I was lucky to have seen nothing worse. One man I know saw a dead dog in this way; he cannot think of death now without sweating, and eternity to him is just the moment of death prolonged without end. I could not go to bed if I believed that. Yes, on the whole Mexico was kind to me.

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Another time I was playing on a dry river bed, near our house. I chased lizards under stones, then dug them out and killed them if they weren't too quick; but as the sun went down they became scarce. Then, right down in a crevice between boulders, I came across the horned skull. There is a great wonder in things found, whether a coin or an odd-shaped stone or even a strange impression on the grass, which may spell love or death or an old cow lying down; and most wonderful of all are bones.

I looked down into the crevice, hoping for lizards, and found that hard white face and great eyeholes staring back at me. For a second I felt sick, but then I knew what it was and tried to pull it out; but the horns were wedged. In the end it came free, and I set it up on top of the rock. Like some kind of prehistoric totem then it seemed, uncouth and bestial with its wide eyeholes and twisted horns. I felt I ought to worship it; or at least propitiate it in some way. A little younger, I might have knelt down to it or bought it flowers the way Indians do to little wayside calvaries or even Aztec carvings like those in the caves at Chihua; but now being nine I could only bury it pompously.

First I threw stones at it, until I got one into the right eyehole, and when this ritual was complete, I scraped a hole with my knife in the dry sand and rubble. It went in, all except the horns. They stuck out even when I had filled in the hole, so I built a small cairn of stones on top, to cover them. When it was all buried and hidden I was sorry to leave it, because I felt something belonging to me was stifled in the sand. The sun went down suddenly; it was cold; I went away with the loose stones rattling under my feet and never played there again. Most likely the coyotes dug it up, thinking there might still be pickings.

This business of the cow's skull is even less explicable than the dice-players; they and their Freudian rock had

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some value as symbols. The skull has no obvious meaning; but it meant quite as much in a different way. God wasn't watching the skull, as he was the players; but the skull was a part of me as those men never were. It was perhaps the last kick of that old animism of childhood which makes death a new kind of life, and dead things full of a rotten vitality undesirable yet undeniable. Children know all about the resurrection of the body, and Mexico knows too; that skull was Mexico teaching me its last lesson, though now I have almost forgotten the meaning.

Mexico is gone now, except just those two pictures. I shall never go there again, so it remains a dream country, terrifying and full of truth. All its truth seems to be concentrated in the dice-players and the skull, the ritual of life and the ritual of death. For when I say "Mexico" I mean my childhood; I created Mexico out of my dreams. There is a space called Mexico on the map, but I created another country, of which I have shown you these pictures, and lived in it ten years. Mexico. I suppose that is as good a name for childhood as any other.

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WHENEVER a practising artist is asked to write not primarily about the theory or mechanics of his own art, he produces an essay with a title rather like this. For no-one has ever satisfactorily defined the relations of the artist to the society in which he lives. More than any other class of person, except the mystic and the lunatic, the artist exists *in* but not *of* his environment: and since genuine mystics are fewer and less vocal than genuine artists, and lunatics are, rightly or wrongly, shut up, it usually falls to the artist to make the apology for an apparently irrational way of life. The artist may spontaneously attack the society in which he lives, either for moral reasons or because he thinks he is not personally being treated fairly, but such attacks have little effect, because in the one case the artist is making his attack as a political scientist (almost certainly a bad one), and in the other merely as a private person. In both cases he neglects the fact that he is essentially neither an abstract thinker nor a private individual; he is something different, not in degree but in *kind* from the rest of the public, and must accordingly take his stand on quite different ground. It is for this reason that the attacks of Shelley on contemporary society, for instance, had little or no effect. He was merely, in windy political terms, demanding that he, personally, should be left alone: and is a good example, because his attack was *both* too abstract and too personal. The artist's apologia must take a more general form, in that it is not merely a complaint against conditions: and a more particular one, because it

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is the statement of a very particular kind of man. There has always been a need, then, for such an apologia. Ever since Plato, political thinkers have been trying to exclude the artist from the State; and the public, by persistent, if understandable neglect, have been suggesting that they would care very little if he were excluded. To-day that need is stronger than ever. We are outwardly threatened by states which have literally destroyed their own artists, without apparent material loss; in our country conditions are becoming impossible for creative work. We have no canvases, no paper, no colours, no binding materials; and, above all, no *time*. We are never left in one place long enough to achieve the necessary emotional stability; we are kept too busy to register either the outward or the inward world as we should. This state of affairs is, of course, inevitable during a struggle for existence itself, and we must accept it. But there is considerable danger that we shall forget how to think, how to register impressions, how to deal with the visible world satisfactorily; in fact, how to be artists at all. If this happens we shall find ourselves quite rightly excluded from the new society which will emerge; rightly, because we shall have ceased to be of any use either to it or to ourselves. We shall die out like the dodo, through our failure to adapt ourselves to changing conditions. For these reasons, and because I am sure many young writers, painters and musicians of my own generation—the O.C.T.U. generation—feel as I do, it is perhaps permissible for me to make one more statement of what I believe is the artist's position in society. This will involve an enquiry into the nature of the artist and the value of his work to the community; and may end with a few suggestions about the sort of society in which art can flourish. I shall have to draw most of my examples from poetry, because that is the only art about which I am at all qualified to make assertions.

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A number of very odd delusions exist about the nature of the artist himself: the eighteenth century tended to think of him as a public entertainer, the nineteenth century as a moral teacher, and our own age either as a professional sugarer of the political pill, or as a crazy hermit in fancy-dress. None of these views is correct; but they all contain a suggestion of truth. The artist is human enough to be strongly affected by his environment, and so he tends actually to *become* what the public would like him to be. Thus many poets and painters of the eighteenth century were ruined by the expectation of the public that they should provide good entertainment (which excluded the unfamiliar or emotionally tiring), and of good critics like Dr. Johnson that they should, at the most, "increase our sensibility". One has only to think of some of the minor poets—Shenstone, Parnell, even Collins—of that age, and of painters like Richard Wilson, who might have been very great had he not been tied by a polite Italianate convention; even, perhaps, of Pope and Reynolds, to realize that the artist cannot be merely a titillator of the senses, and that even the "increasing of sensibility", admirable in itself, cannot carry us much beyond Cowper and Gainsborough. It cannot produce a Wordsworth or a Constable.

But as extreme sensibility became combined with a direct social message, the artist came to be regarded as a moral teacher rather than as a mere entertainer. The growth of this attitude was constant between the monstrous elegance of Dryden and the bemused grumbling of Crabbe; it was further assisted by the emergence, in Wordsworth, of one of the greatest philosophical poets in the world. It cannot be too much emphasized that Wordsworth sprang straight from the eighteenth-century tradition, and was not a "forerunner" of any sort; just as Constable was the natural development of Wilson, Crome

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and the host of obscure topographical painters who appeared during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Like all really great artists, Wordsworth re-interpreted tradition in a new and even startling way; he was a perfect example of Mr. Eliot's catalyst; but he was no innovator. It was left to the extreme Romantics, chiefly to Shelley, to suggest that the artist was a great teacher, even though his language could not easily be understood; in fact, that he was the "unacknowledged legislator of society". In justice to Shelley, it may be said that he meant nothing so simple as I have suggested; but the influence of Shelley, and less directly, of Wordsworth, coupled with the great increase of material prosperity towards the middle of the century, was enough to turn the artist into a more or less conscious moral teacher. In the comfortably materialistic world of the 1860's, when gluttony was still a deadly sin, and there seemed nothing strange in accepting religion as a supernatural insurance policy, it was imperative to account for *everything*. Thus sex became the rather unmentionable reward for propagating the species (in actual fact, for propagating more sex), and the artist a schoolmaster who might speak obscurely or harshly, but always for the moral good of the public. Hence, the trite sentiments of Tennyson; the overloaded verse of Browning; and the enormous volume of almost worthless genre-painting which appeared between Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites.

By the turn of the century, the artist was discredited as a teacher: the force of misapplied Romantic theory had spent itself, and already a revolt was apparent, among the public as well as among the artists themselves. There were—excluding such blind alleys as Pre-Raphaelitism, whether in painting or literature, and the studied decadence of Oscar Wilde—two possible ways out of this impasse. The artist could either secede entirely from society, and retire to a world of personal symbols and values; or he

could become a painstaking recorder of the physical world. Neither was a satisfactory solution: the former, largely resulting from the discovery of the subconscious, produced symbolism; the latter, influenced by the apparent omniscience of science and explicability of the universe, and by positivist philosophy, produced the naturalism of Courbet and Zola. It is clear to us, looking back, that complete withdrawal from the physical world will eventually reduce art to something as personal and devoid of wider significance as a passing mood; it will reach its ultimate expression in poetry like Mallarmé's; beyond that it cannot go. Equally, naturalism cannot produce really great art; its poetry will be, at the best, as significant as Crabbe's (I cannot find a contemporary equivalent; probably Crabbe would have been a novelist had he lived in the age of naturalism), its painting no more penetrating than that of Courbet; and its music tied to an artificial programme. Nevertheless, until quite recently, most artists were moving, more or less directly, down one of these two paths. Occasionally one greater than the rest would break free—a Yeats, a Picasso, a Rilke—and produce his own distinctive interpretation of tradition; but, on the whole, there was little except derivative or wildly experimental work. To-day we see the persistence of conventional symbolistic or naturalistic ideas in the poetry of Ezra Pound or the painting of the Euston Road group; the formulæ are camouflaged under the names of "imagism" or what you will, but they are essentially the same. They contain exactly the same amount of truth, and the same limited capacity for development, as their prototypes. Thus the artist is driven at one extreme into harmful eccentricity and exclusiveness (the common fault of Rilke, Yeats and Picasso); and at the other, into complete subservience to a political ideal (there has, as yet, emerged no considerable Marxist artist except perhaps Ribera;

but the host of minor ones, mostly of more than average competence, prove my point). Direct political influence is as harmful to art as the polite conventions of the eighteenth century, which the Marxist would be the first to decry.

What, then, is this strange being, who is neither an entertainer, nor a teacher, nor an abstract thinker, nor a mountebank, but is made up of all these? His psychological symptoms are well known; they result usually from some acute form of repression. All art is, to some extent, as Stevenson said, rather archly of literature, "a morbid secretion". But a necessary one, both for the individual and for society as a whole. The artist is a man who has visions and is able to communicate them, in a necessarily imperfect form, to a wide audience. He is rather more therefore, than a *jongleur* (Yeats's idea of the poet); and rather less than a "legislator". His visions have no direct significance to his audience, other than to show them the true nature of the world more clearly and precisely than they could have seen it for themselves; the vision has in itself no moral implication or didactic "message". Such implications may be attached to it later, but are not inherent in it. "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite"; but those doors cannot be cleansed, not completely by the artist even, unless he is as pure-minded as Blake, and it is therefore his task to convey the world in its infinite *aspect* to an audience even more obtuse than he is himself. That is in itself a difficult enough undertaking, without adding to it the impossible labour of expounding the vision in simple intellectual terms.

It is, of course, only too easy to speak of "visions", and to say less than nothing. But I think one may be more exact; the nature of an artist's vision can be defined more precisely than many people suppose. Such writers as

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Rilke and Wordsworth have gone very far towards such a definition, through a careful study of their own creative processes. The unique quality of the perceptible world is its mingling of the physical with the spiritual in such a way that one is inseparable from the other; we live, that is, at the point where eternity intersects with time. This process can *only* be observed by the human mind, and only by a particular sort of mind; it can only be expressed by human ingenuity, and therefore only by the particular sort of human being who possesses that ingenuity. The human being who can observe this process, and has the power to express it, however imperfectly, is an artist.

Hier ist des sglichen zeit, hier seine heimat.

Sprich und bekenn. Mehr als je

Fallen die dinge dahin, die erlebbaren, denn,

Was sie verdrngend ersetzt, ist ein tun ohne bild.

This world is the home of speech; nowhere else can the mingling of the spiritual and the physical be observed and expressed, since in any other kind of existence one of them would be entirely predominant; the other, perhaps, completely lacking. It is therefore the duty, as well as the task of the artist, to express his vision as clearly and as fully as the limitations of human ingenuity or understanding will allow. The work which he produces will, at the very best, bear only the same relation to his vision as shorthand does to speech; but he will have succeeded, as far as possible, if he can give to his audience some inkling of the continual fusion of finite and infinite, spiritual and physical, which is our world; if he can to some extent express the eternal meaning which resides in the physical world, and can show the relationship between the eternal and its physical counterpart. He will see not only "eternity in a grain of sand", but the grain of sand as an eternal part of eternity.

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But what, it may be asked, is the value of this vision to the rest of mankind? What *use* is the artist if his prime purpose is neither didactic nor to give pleasure? Surely the function of the artist is primarily to give information about the world? Through his work he is able to reveal to the rest of humanity important aspects of reality which otherwise they could never have known. In the process, he gives them a particular sort of pleasure—the excitement of discovery—and inevitably influences their way of life, as any access of knowledge is bound to do. To this extent he is a teacher and giver of pleasure: but neither of these is his essential function. “Art for art’s sake” is a meaningless phrase to the true artist; he is practising his art for the sake of life itself, not for any political or even personal reason. He is neither propagating a doctrine, nor “expressing himself”; rather, he is letting the world express him and giving himself entirely to something outside himself. The value of his work is therefore that it enlarges the experience of his audience in a way impossible by any other means; and only wide experience and understanding enables any human being to deal with the world in which he lives. The artist is therefore directly contributing not only to the growth of the individual spirit, but to the efficiency of society.

To most people, this is not at once apparent. What is apparent to everyone is that the artist makes a troublesome member of society, since his allegiance is, in a sense, outside it. That is why Plato expelled him from the Republic, why Hitler expelled him from Germany, and why this insular England has always felt a deep hostility towards him—the same hostility that it has felt towards the Roman Catholic Church and international organizations of all kinds. The artist with his

mind beset

With images and haunted by itself

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is only too often not alert to the needs and problems of the society in which he lives. Perhaps, at this point in history, he cannot be otherwise; just as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a Roman Catholic could not be a good citizen. One day society may be able to assimilate the artist, as it has assimilated the religious mystic. But it will be disastrous if the result of that assimilation is indifference, negative tolerance, even contempt, as it has been in the case of religion. No one could suggest that religion has ceased to be a living issue; it is, in fact, the purpose of this book to show that it has not; but I feel that the present indifference to religion has come about largely through the over-organization of the religious into a kind of closed corporation, tolerated, without much interest, by the State. I do not refer to the Anglican Church particularly; the "corporation" is a psychological attitude rather than a physical fact. The best minds in religious life to-day are trying to break through this invisible barrier of indifference, which has been strengthened by successive past generations; and their attempt will be supported wholeheartedly by my own contemporaries: who are not at all hostile to religion, but merely distrustful of the apparent exclusiveness and indifference to contemporary problems, of the religious.

It is not enough for society to tolerate the artist, any more than it is enough to tolerate religion: society must admit the reality and importance of the artist's vision, as it must admit the necessity for religion. And it must express its belief in practical terms. That brings us to the final question: In what kind of society can art best flourish?

To suggest that society should express its belief in the artist in practical terms is not to envisage a community of pensioned poets who write for subsidized papers on set subjects, of pensioned painters who produce Laureate pictures for a new and even more monstrous Royal

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Academy, and of musicians who compose patriotic pieces for free performance in the Albert Hall. The results of Erastianism in art are just as disastrous as in religion. But a few facts are at once apparent: an unplanned aristocratic society, such as that of the eighteenth century, although it may produce good art, is not an ideal one for the artist. It is necessary to say this, because some more or less responsible writers on art advocate a return to the system of patronage and sinecures; even, like Mr. Clive Bell, to helotry. No doubt the individual artist was in many ways better off when he could usually find a rich buyer for his pictures, and when a man like Wordsworth could be made Distributor of Stamps with a substantial salary and no duties. But it must be remembered that, in such a society, it is only the very great or the very lucky who can achieve their artistic aims. The fate of the others can be imagined by a study of Blake, both as a painter and a poet, and of writers like John Clare. Blake, it is true, did gain recognition by talent alone; but how much more might he have achieved if he had been in closer touch with European tradition, both in thought and technique. It was impossible for a man like Blake in that age to be in touch with tradition; for the educated were as exclusive a corporation as the religious to-day. And there is no question that Clare, a potentially fine poet, was crushed by the same society that supported the much greater but also higher-born Wordsworth.

Equally, the artist cannot demand special treatment for *himself*, even in a planned society. The results of such a demand are nearly always disastrous. But he can, and should, demand fair treatment for his audience. It is the duty of society, not to support the artist, but to assure him of freedom to practise his art to the widest possible audience. Obviously, this freedom does not exist in a society in which seven-eighths of the public is completely imper-

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vious, through upbringing and environment, to artistic expression. It is no use giving "art to the people" while the structure of society, which prevents the mass of people from appreciating good art, remains unchanged. In an insecure, unplanned society such as ours, no one has a right to complain that art is obscure or out of touch with the people; this state of affairs is inevitable, and will remain so, as long as the structure of society itself stands between the artist and his potential audience. While the mass of the people are excluded from full participation in the necessary activities of society, among which artistic appreciation is one of the most important, all Art for the People will be bad art, and nearly all good art will be obscure and exclusive. There is no space to develop further these elementary ideas about the kind of society in which the artist can work to the greatest possible advantage; but it is clear that our own society does not fulfil the requisite conditions, and has not come near to fulfilling them for a long time—perhaps not since the early part of the seventeenth century. And it will not fulfil them again without a drastic re-organization, in which the material no less than the spiritual conditions of life shall be completely changed. For there can be no general religious experience, no artistic appreciation, no possibility of peace or inner freedom for anybody, until all members of society are able to take full part in all its activities—to share equally its burdens as well as its benefits. As long as he continues to believe in the importance of his art, and works even during the struggle itself towards such a re-organization of society as I have suggested, there is no danger that the artist will be swamped by the war, or find himself impotent when peace comes at last.

March, 1942.

NOTEBOOK : 1942-43

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THIS IS not written for posterity, but for my own interest. But as I am a poet, I am not honest in writing, and must be supposed to have an eye (even though a subconscious one) on the printed page.

Dunbar.

The sky is heavy and luminous over the roofs across the street: metallic gleams of sunlight suddenly appear, but never for long. Swifts shriek as they cut the air, backwards and forwards above the housetops, chasing each other in a frenzy. Is it sex or just the heat that has worn out their wits? They are not an idiot race like the gulls, who cry so pitifully yet have such pitiless golden eyes. They are a secretive people belonging to the summer, the sight of whom, like that of an elm-tree erupting into foliage, can bring back the wonderful summers of my childhood. The stillness of the great soft lime-trees outside my window; night coming to the humped grassy field my aunts called Siberia; and even going down into the town at evening across the iron bridge and the stone bridge at the ford, where the river enters a deserted mill through a kind of portcullis, which I sometimes thought was for catching the corpses of the drowned. In those summers, it was possible to be in love without any definite forms of desire: at the mysterious beginning of puberty, the excitement and the strange *reality* of physical love could surround everything

at once, without the need for possession.¹ One could, in fact, possess the whole sensual world and something more, quite without effort or the necessity for physical affirmation. It was possible, therefore, to be a poet without all this dishonest striving with words. Later, one loses the world, and most people never try to regain it; or wish to do so, but cannot find the means. But the poet is continually seeking to enter into his old possessions, by an artificial means: he is attempting to trick words into restoring what he has lost, like a ruined squire who tries to regain by lawsuits what once came to him by right, and was a part of his own personality and a suffix to his very name.

No one can find peace, who imagines love to be merely the desire to own certain objects. Yet it is impossible not to love in this way, since all love is largely physical. To me, it cannot be otherwise. One's adult life and its whole system of thought seem to be based on the fallacy that it is possible to get possession of things—even abstract things like fame or salvation. But we cannot own these, any more than the bodies of women that were not made for us. The desire to create poems or children is only a variation of this—a child or a work of art is merely an apparently independent part of the world, which we can believe without much difficulty to be also a part of ourselves. They are a sort of Fifth Column in the individual's attack on the world. Yeats thought a child was better than a book; but there was no important difference. What he really wanted was to seize the world and possess it. But it constantly eluded him—hence his anger and frustration. Wordsworth and Rilke were not troubled by

¹ (*Marginal note.*) *Pervigilium Veneris*.

illa cantat, nos tacemus: quando ver venit meum?

Quando fiam uti chelidon, ut tacere desinam?

Cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet

(Perhaps the most pleasant line in any poem?)

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this violent need for possession: one was himself expressed in mountains, the other in a more urban imagery which embraced a whole culture. They are, for this reason, more powerful poets, though they lack Yeats' magnificent violence. Yet the more subtle revelations of Wordsworth and Rilke are less actual to us than Yeats' direct oracular statements: for Rilke's culture of carved tables and personal relationships like works of art is temporarily eclipsed, and we have come to see nature as disordered and menacing.

It is Midsummer Night, and there is no real darkness, only a brownish opacity of the air. As I walked in the fields by the sea, just after midnight, the daisies on the grass looked like stars swarming in the November sky. Somewhere I read, a long time ago, that you could make them dance a sarabande by scattering centaury upon your fire. But that would be the half legendary flower of Olympus, not the small white weed we see in the hedgerows. . . .

Who are they, and what would they say if they could speak, the tall figures with stony faces and holes for eyes, who stand by the window these summer nights? Why have I never seen them before? Because one can only become entirely sensitive by emptying the mind: then it can be filled by all kinds of uncreated archetypal images.

I phoned M. to-day. The heat was unbearably thick; I felt the same discomfort like a hard lump in the stomach, that the telephone inspired in me as a child. On the telephone, one has no defence against insincerity. The voice becomes no voice, but a mechanical contrivance for giving information. It is only information one can give; or rather, facts. The personality is lost somewhere in the wire, as

one's words are filtered through miles and miles of metal. And there is never enough time. It is less intimate than a letter. There was no contact between us at all. . . .

This is a letter I shall not write. There are some letters that one could not possibly allow to be separated from both writer and reader at the same time, since they belong so closely to both. It would be like sending one's child on a long, strange train journey. So I can never possibly post this one.

Do you ever pause, on the stairs, or walking in the fields, or when you are sitting alone very late at night, and realize that you are struggling in thick darkness without any possibility of escape? That you will never escape from it by yourself; and yet no human being can save you, because the darkness is of your own making? Because you do make darkness, although you are beautiful and living; we both of us make darkness and confusion wherever we go—you because you are so attractive and sensitive to every moment's mood, yet cold and merciless within through a kind of distraction, like the princesses in fairy tales who sit upon a glass mountain watching impassively the broken bodies of their lovers. I make darkness because I am continually asking for love, yet never find it; I have learnt to hate all the places and people in which no love was found, and to be merciless with the enemies of love and of life.

As I sit down to-night in this barren room from which the folly of soldiers has stripped all life, I think: There are only a very few people whom I continued to love and respect after I had grown to know them—you, B., R., J., T. S., and perhaps two or three others of whom I cannot be sure. It is so easy to be mistaken. One often sees people in the street, or in trains and theatres and picture-galleries, of whom one thinks one could be sure; but one

will never know. We have to catch hold of whatever people we can, as we drift: only very occasionally is the almost frenzied choice justified, still more rarely does it turn out as we had expected or hoped. But from you there is no escape or separation; there was no hesitation whatever in my coming and reaching out to you; and now you are my support. O then, why must we grope after each other in the unyielding darkness that we have created around us?

How far can I—or anyone else, because the phenomenon must be general—trust that sudden access of tenderness and pity, released abruptly inside us as if some conventional barrier had burst? It happens mostly at night: not in the heavy summer nights when I would sit at the window absorbing the scent of lilac (that essence of summer which means the Italian Mays of my childhood, not spent in any geographical Italy, but in one of my own invention, where the small green frogs crept on the lime-leaves and bright fountain-water splintered across the paved court, and the lizards, always the lizards, flicked their arrowy heads after passing flies); nor in the nights of deep winter, when the draught-riddled studio (much later, but now equally irrecoverable) was a cage where two of us crouched, besieged by the snowy winds and the impossible future, and yet couldn't ever trust each other; nor in these troubled nights by the sea. It comes rather after long days in cities, or evenings spent with very simple people. The lovers who can no longer see each others' faces; the children crying with tiredness but straining away from their beds; or the quiet people I have left behind in their lighted rooms, all become unbearably pitiful, and encroach on my own indifference until I feel their loneliness and insecurity with the force of self-pity. Perhaps it is a form of self-pity, disguised and therefore all

the stronger. But it does not appear to be a particularly sentimental feeling, though it rarely results in action, never in effective action. It is often followed by a strange way of going to sleep: a sensation of entering a tunnel, narrow-mouthed and shining as the barrel of a rifle, at terrific, shattering speed. This has happened to me several times during the year. The first was in Yorkshire this January, the night before I left for Tonbridge and—at last—for R-J. But it never happened while we were together in July: what I remember most about that time was the gunmetal light of early morning on the roofs and chimneys of Oxford. This first light is for lovers the most intimate time of all—when either doubt and fear separate them as they wake, or they realize their need for each other with a new urgency.

There are two courses open to us in this age, which is, as Thomas Mann said, primarily a political one. We can either associate ourselves with the development of the state, thus denying individual values immediately, in the hope of achieving ultimately the perfect integration of the individual with his environment: or we can dissociate ourselves from political development completely, and consider every individual, or even every situation, as a separate problem. There is no third way: and the object is in both cases the same, though the politicians would not always agree, it is to allow every individual to realize his full potentialities without prejudice to the development of others. The dilemma is really this: is it better to risk diversion into trivialities, so that a co-ordinated system of integrated personalities may eventually be achieved, or hope to increase the sensibility of the whole by extending that of individuals where and when it is possible? But the latter process is as slow as a glacier. Shall we, in fact, spend our lives in an uncertain attempt to invent electric light,

or do what we can to illuminate the room by single candles? Nearly all artists have to choose the second way; this has always been true, but now the choice is more pressing, since politics have invaded every sphere of life. Hence, the frankly anti-social attitude of so many artists to-day, the non-co-operation of the rest, the apathy of all about a war which is being fought—ultimately—to preserve our own values. We have given up hope of gaining anything except our own extinction (like the candles) from society and its expedients. (See the wartime diary of any writer, etc., for illustration of this—e.g. Spender's in 1939-40 or Cooper's in *Road to Bordeaux*. I fancy one would find something of the sort in H. Read's—if he has one, and if he'd show it!)

This evening it was unmistakably autumn. The smokiness of autumn was in the air, and the tiredness over everything as the afternoon faded. It is quite impossible to write about the feeling of autumn; and, in any case, everyone knows it. The best expressions of it are in Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, and in some poems by Rimbaud and Mallarmé; in Verlaine's poem, of course, and in Stefan George's "Komm in den tolgcsagten Park . . ." Oddly enough, I can't think of a single comparable instance in English.¹ But our spring landscapes are the best in any writing. This must go to show . . . God knows what.

How important, though, the seasons are. It is very important to know the precise time and date of any historical event; it is necessary to get the *feeling* of history, and to see things in their proper proportion. For instance, what was

¹ (*Marginal note.*) Keats' Autumn is very fine, but with a sort of Saturday-afternoon effect. Hood's is more directly impressive, with its hint of pain and fear, and the entirely true "cloudy prison".

the season of Golgotha?¹ Was it summer, and did the summer smells and the expectancy of the summer night trouble those torn hanging bodies? Or did a cold wind from the desert soothe their lips and eyes? The action of Veronica, and of (less certainly) Matthias the Wandering Jew, and Christ's fainting under the cross, suggest that it was summer. The cruellest part of the whole story is that fainting. Not only did the angels not descend to help him; not only did he die fully a man and in despair; but he was not even allowed to be a strong man, like Simon of Cyrene. His physical suffering was made apparent.

My journey to Tonbridge, which I shall begin next week, is really a kind of pilgrimage to see the autumn. The feeling of autumn is so strong that I must go where I have felt it most powerfully in the past, in the great damp woods of the Weald. It is also an escape—or I hope it will be so—from the idea which my companions here, and R-J's letters, and my own life, all force upon me: that we are all beating our heads against a wall, without purpose or result. For some, it is futile longing for a life that simply doesn't exist any more; for her, the struggle of giving herself through sheer warmth of heart, and then trying to justify it; for me, the frenzied attempt to make myself heard. Wouldn't it be better, I wonder, to stop it now, to tell her that she is wasting her time and resources, to refuse to talk about a different life, to withdraw?

Dovercourt.

Of that nearly perfect week, in which I found the autumn proud and sleepy as it always was in the Weald, and found R-J. for the second time, there is one moment I shall not forget. . . . It was the moment of arrival. We

¹ Keyes evidently forgot that, according to the Gospels, Christ was crucified shortly after the feast of the Passover.—J.H.S.

had got off the bus; the night was completely black; we felt our way by the hedge to T's gate. She was quite lost, and it was that moment I shall remember, the two of us quite alone in the heavy darkness, with no contacts whatever except our hold on each other. . . . She had given herself to me more decisively than by any sexual act. She said: "I can smell pine-trees all round us, and the earth." That seemed the fulfilment of something that had always been waiting in me for expression. It had more meaning even than the walk back from the *Plough* the next day, through an open and smiling countryside that seemed to absorb us illimitably, like a journey in a dream. Under the crossed leaning hop-poles we walked, that I had last seen in the hard winter morning which made this secret country into a Breughel landscape; and by the river, she with her head on my shoulder and her arm about me. This was the fulfilment of another subconscious longing; the same feeling that was aroused in me by Yeats' poem—

In a field by the river
My love and I did stand . . .

an image which, for some reason, affected me to the point almost of tears two years ago.¹ Perhaps this was not accidental. Perhaps it is a pattern in my life. But R-J. does not fit into any of the themes that I can discover, as M. did, who was the precise embodiment of all the

¹ (*Marginal note*). Another inexplicably moving moment in a poem is in Housman's *Summertime on Bredon*:

And I would turn and answer
Among the springing thyme . . .

is the precise point at which the poem affected me. Both these poems have a strong sentimental appeal: but why it should, for me, be crystallized in these two quite ordinary images, I shall never know.

physical characteristics that attract me, even when found singly. Our relationship will therefore mean either everything or nothing: I cannot yet tell which.

Walking by the sea-front to-day, I suddenly noticed one of those sea-going barges with enormous, coarse sails the colour exactly of clotted blood. It was at once familiar, though I can't have seen one for at least nine or ten years. My grandfather had a fleet of them: they carried grain for him, up the Thames. I was promised to sail up Long Reach in one of them once, but it never happened. The recurrence of all these childhood memories with their symbols, even of these faces (de Brie, Brown, Kerr) which I had almost forgotten, is terribly disturbing. I wish I had never come to this regiment. My past is neither bad enough to be destroyed by this process, nor good enough to be relived. At times I have the feeling of returning to a dreary starting-point after eight years that contain the whole of my real life—Tonbridge, Oxford, my work and every single important relationship I have. Luckily, I have myself changed into something very different, for which this past has very little meaning.

Why can Americans be very funny about sex, while we can only be obscene or pornographic? The same attitude is apparent as much in A. L.'s conversation as in the pages of *Esquire*. I have tried it myself (in writing) and succeeded only in being dirty.

Latitude of Bordeaux 19.iii.43.

The sea doesn't obsess or impress me very much; it is just a lot of water. I only wonder why so much of this planet is covered with the stuff called Water. Perhaps we are deceived, and the important life of the world goes on under the water? But I don't see much point in it,

even as a symbol; though I can still realize the power of the Drowned Man, pressed between sea and sky like a dead flower in a book—having no relation to the contents, but subtly suggestive in those surroundings.

The foam is dark blue in the ship's shadow, but tinged with pink in the sunlight.

I hate to hold a fixed position in Society, like an army rank. It means nothing, but gives me power I do not want, and others power over me which they have no right to. Perhaps I shall have to have the courage to escape. It is lonely to fight a singlehanded war against everyone, as I am forced to do.

Two days further S.E.

It is much warmer now; last night we passed the approximate place of the *Bismarck's* sinking. I have never been so little troubled with sex in my life. There are photographs of M. and R.-J. over my bed (is this vanity because they are both so beautiful?); but I never dream of them, and rarely think about them for long. The succession of days, like a dream, is infinitely soothing; I have the old feeling of being ill in bed—the delicious going to sleep and not having to trouble about the next day. For a fairly active person, it is odd how I hate *all* action, even towards my own desires. To me, every moment is a state of being *in itself*, not a way of transition into the next. So I can be satisfied with very little.¹

How significant it is that Hood's ghost in *The Haunted House* is a daylight one! The Romantics raised a spectre

¹ (*Marginal note.*) My epitaph is, oddly enough, in Joyce:

"I did me best when I was let."

This implies no judgement as to whether my best was good enough. I can honestly say that I have done my best to be a good poet and a *living* man; though it has often made me a tiresome man.

they could not lay; it was, broadly speaking, death as a part of life, conceived in terms of sensual imagery. To the Middle Ages and the Elizabethans, death was merely the Leveller; to the C.17, a metaphysical problem; to C.18 the end of life. The Romantics tried to think of it as a state of existence. By the 1840's, this had become an obsession, and had degenerated into curiosity.¹

By the later C.19, and up to our own time, it had resulted in a clearly apparent *Death Wish*, as the only solution to the problem—since the solution must come in sensual terms. It was left to necrophilous Germany, to Rilke in fact, to provide the best solution short of actually dying. That is why there had to be a "Poet of Death" in C.20; and why Rilke is the most important European poet since Goethe and Wordsworth.

Looking into Boswell, I at once realize I am in the world of J. H. S. Then I realize how far out of time he has been born, and how great a man he is. I only manage to come within his atmosphere at all, by a kind of blind flair that I cannot account for. Often I feel very self-made beside him.

I am thankful above all for my friends, for I have been undeservedly lucky in the friends I have made. Only by the closest and most sensitive personal relationships is it possible to withstand the weight of eternity that lies upon

¹ (*Marginal note*).

The vine unpruned, and the neglected Peach
Droop'd from the wall with which they used to grapple;
And on the canker'd tree, in easy reach
Rotted the golden apple.

How true a symbolic picture of the dead end of Romanticism, which had, after all, failed to pick the Golden Apple. One only needs those two capital letters to make the whole stanza plain.

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us. I am also thankful that I have been able to speak, even if I have spoken wrongly. One day I shall perhaps learn better. I am thankful that my intellect is not strong enough to master my passions, nor my passions my intellect: for this is the true condition of creation. I am thankful that I can see myself as funny and ineffective, but not my powers.

The artist must be a bad citizen, and would rightly be excluded from the ideal state. For the perpetual treason of clerks is that they are, or aspire to be, citizens not of place but of time. Hence the Pétainism of all poets.

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To Geoffrey Oswald, 24th September, 1940

The country is wonderful; this is just on the edge of Dartmoor. There are several large reservoirs on the moors fairly near, where there is good fishing, as well as hundreds of ducks of various kinds. In fact, this is the best place for birds I have ever struck. From the farmyard you can often see—and hear—buzzards wheeling round the top of the hill. It is almost impossible to go up on the moors without seeing buzzards or ravens, or both. A few days ago, I saw a fight between three buzzards and two ravens. A buzzard and a raven became locked together in the air, and rocketed down several hundred feet, nearly to the tree-tops; but they unclined just in time, and made off. The buzzards are very unpopular with the crows and rooks as well, and are nearly always mobbed by them when they come down from the moors. Yesterday I got very close to a buzzard in a fir plantation; but you rarely see them out of the air.

(From Christow, nr. Exeter.)

To John Heath-Stubbs, 8th August, 1941.

Have just returned from the bathe. There is a pair of sandpipers which live beside the stream, and only now do I realize how right Wordsworth was (once more) when he wrote of the “*glancing sandpiper*”. This is odd, because

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the epithet is not strictly speaking onomatopoeic, nor is it entirely visual. You can see it for yourself in an indifferent early poem called "Lines left on a Yew Tree Seat", or some such obviously false title. I had another rather strange natural history experience last night; a bat flying by the house made a noise quite unlike the usual brittle squeak—a hoarse sound rather more like a bark. It was, as far as I could see, a pipistrelle. Last week one of them came into the house, and I had to catch it in my handkerchief. It was a far more pleasant looking creature than I had expected.

(From *Harrogate*.)

ib. id.

When I was looking through my total output the other day, deciding what would go into collected works, several things struck me—(1) Clearly marked technical devices, especially the adjective placed at the end of a line, as above; and, in general, the buzzing and murmuring sound of nearly everything. (2) The number of poems relating to the French symbolists, either in matter, by allusion or by technique (six at least out of forty poems). This would almost justify making some translations of Rimbaud, etc., and putting the whole lot in a separate section. (3) I felt very much as you must have done, when you looked at yours; everything I have written, when seen conspectively, seems to have a vaguely bogus atmosphere—I can't explain my feeling more clearly.

To Violet Keyes, 1st November, 1941.

Last night, being All Souls, I went to a spiritualistic séance in a haunted room in one of the Colleges. It was really rather impressive, and probably genuine, I thought. If it had been faked, it would probably have been far more spectacular; as it was, the man seemed to be frightened, and said he could see a burning blue light, which came

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towards him. Then he suddenly said: "Blue and gracious", and something that sounded like "Dominie", and that was all. It seemed much too incoherent to be made up; though it didn't appear to have any significance. I did not think it was at all frightening, but extremely interesting.
(*From Oxford.*)

To Milein Cosmann, 29th December, 1941.

This morning I went for a walk by the stream; there was a hard frost and bits of ice were hanging on twigs by the water—"Like fishes' eyes" as John Clare said.
(*From Harrogate.*)

To John Heath-Stubbs, 26th April, 1942.

I have written 2 poems¹ since coming here, both slightly "misery's son", and am meditating a longish one, a kind of vision of the army as it strikes me—cold, obscenity, tiredness, an occasional sense of peace greater than any I have known before, and flashes of startling beauty. The chief fact that emerges is that people are, on the whole, good and helpful: and this in spite of the constant feeling of being surrounded by enemies—always a minor obsession of mine, but now intensified.

(*From Omagh, N.I.*).

To Milein Cosmann, 10th May, 1942.

Omagh was a steep, grey, squalid town, full of drink-shops and chemists'; the general effect was rather like the small towns in Auvergne—Thiers, perhaps, or Le Puy without the mountains and stone virgin. There were horses' skulls in the river below the bridge, where the water was always brown with peat; and once I found an old man singing the *Orange Flute*. . . . Another night we went out (my platoon I mean) in the mountains. The

¹ *The True Heart* and *Ulster Soldier*.—M.M.

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scheme was a hopeless failure as usual; but again I shall remember the square black mountains, their tops hidden in drizzle, the scarped valleys; and especially the noise of the snipe . . . as they passed in the darkness—a bleating sound with an undertone of whirring wings. One might think they were the ghosts of sheep; or the Sidhe itself—I suppose this was Yeats' "cddying cat-headed bird" . . .

(From Omagh.)

ib. id.

In the last few weeks I have dreamt 3 or 4 times of red clay—either that I was digging in it, or others. The Army hasn't yet inflicted this particular torment on me; so I wonder if there is an explanation, Freudian or otherwise. . . I dream of you continually. It isn't, apparently, Romantic nonsense that one dreams of those one loves very much. The context varies; one time I met you on a stair, and as soon as I touched you, you changed to a stranger. Another time you were with me in a big empty house. But mostly it's just you, and the rest very vague. . . .

To John Heath-Stubbs, 24th May, 1942.

It is very hard to say what I think of Dunbar. It is a small summer resort and fishing port, mostly grouped about one long main street. The country is sand-dunes, low hills, red sandstone escarpments; the houses are rose-red, or rather, a sort of baked colour. Having seen it at all times from dawn to midnight, I find it attractive and stimulating on the whole. There is an excitement about the continual movement of the sea, the cries of gulls and the thin air, that has penetrated the army apathy that was beginning to get me (thank heaven!). I read a good deal, and am beginning to write again with real pleasure. The results are enclosed, plus one Omagh poem. You will, I think, see a new vitality in the Dunbar ones. At present I'm doing a slightly longer one based on the idea of picket

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duty—the first watch, sleep, the dawn watch, etc.—which should be a convenient vehicle for some ideas I want to express. . . . I enclose also my own inept effort to translate Catullus.¹ You may wonder Why Catullus? and I can only say that there is a volume of him in the local library with crib opposite. I have also read, in the same book, a fine late Latin poem (almost mediaeval) called *Pervigilium Veneris*, which has the refrain “cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet” which is as pleasant a thought as could occur to anyone.

(From Dunbar.)

To Milein Cosmann, 25-26th May, 1942.

At the moment I am lying on a form, propped against the wall of the guardroom. Four men are asleep on tables and benches in various attitudes of exhaustion. Sometimes they cough or snore. They should not be asleep, but I can't bring myself to waken them; I am supposed

¹ CARMEN XI

O friends, my stedfast fellow-travellers—
Whether I seek the coasts of India
Pounded by hollow seas; Hyrcania
Or soft Arabia seek; or should I wander
Among the swift steppe-archers, Parthians and Saga;
Whether I'm crossing the red fields of Egypt
Dyed by the seven-headed Nile;
Walking the Alps after great Caesar's monuments;
Crossing the Gallic Rhine; still my companions
Among the savage tribes at the world's end—
O friends who'd go these ways with me, whatever
Danger or profit the high gods may send us,
Take these words to my girl, these few hard words:
“Be happy with the men you do not love,
Yet suck them dry, three hundred in a night.
And never look to me for love again—
My love's like any flower of the fallow
Cut down and wasted by the passing plow.”

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to be commanding this picket, and so must be awake all night. It is strange how like the positions of exhaustion are to those of despair and love; perhaps all our intricate structure of emotion and intellect, and the proud spirit itself, can be reduced to a few simple postures of the body or states of mind. Jung's theory of archetypal images is little more than an affirmation of this. The work of any artist can be analysed in terms of "race, milieu, moment" fairly exactly; if one could add a few imponderable and unknown factors such as the lime-trees he lay under as a child, and the pictures in his father's house, one could probably discover all the basic elements of his greatness. It is a disturbing thought!

The army does tend to bear this out, by reducing everything to an artificial type; and I am sometimes frightened by the fact that it achieves its object so easily. I am not yet reduced to the (literally) dead level and hope not to be. But already I find it necessary to think continually, "I am not a man but a voice. My only justification is my power of speaking clearly. Therefore, it doesn't matter in the least what happens to my body; in fact, the body exists to be given, not to be owned. The gift is equally valid, whether to a gun or to a lover." All of which is true enough, but dangerous if one is not watchful; it might so easily mean submission and not what I intend—the conquest of the physical world by acceptance. But you have heard all this before, and I can hear you saying "Oh, Sidney, don't talk about *acceptance*," so I will leave it Now I must sleep, even if they put me on a charge for it. . . .

I finger the steel and the steel hand creeps
Across the formal clock.
The blade is bare but the brain sleeps
And the boards knock.

Goodnight.

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That verse was part of a longish poem I'm writing based on the idea of picket duty; the watches will correspond roughly to the offices for the hours of night in the Church. This is the start of the midnight watch, which is sheer panic.

I've had an incredible day to-day. After 3½ hours sleep, I went on drill parade at 8.30, and was quickly brought out in front of the squad as a pattern of inefficiency, with two others. One of them was another undergraduate, one a repertory actor-producer. We felt like martyrs for the whole intellectual world, but were treated kindly, though with sarcasm. After lunch, I fell asleep until 3.30 during two lectures; then woke up in time for a discussion period, and delivered an anti-army (or rather anti-drill) speech lasting 25 minutes, which was received by the conscript part of the audience with enthusiasm. I feel that I shall either be thrown out of here, or do very well. Only time will show which, and I don't care one way or the other. After tea, listened to a talk by a slightly tight Colonel who stated that he knew more about India than Nehru, that he didn't want to be ruled by the mob, and that democracy was all —, though Roosevelt was probably a nice chap. This is the form Fascism takes in England. It is quite funny, but no laughing matter really. . . . Have just been drinking with a Fellow of John's, a mediaeval historian, and another awkward soldier like myself. So you can see that life here is quite Alice-in-Wonderland. If it wasn't crazy it would be heart-breaking.

(From Dunbar.)

To John Heath-Stubbs, 11th June, 1942.

My first month's report says I am "intelligent" and will make a "good leader", though "awkward on the square". I wish I could say as much for the man who wrote it!

(From Dunbar.)

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ib. id.

Tonight I am going on a patrol scheme, which will mean crawling in the sea-grass and over stone walls, never far from the sound of the sea, and the pale luminous light that always hangs over it. I find the atmosphere exciting.

To Milein Cosmann, 21st June, 1942.

Really the boredom is frightful. . . . I was never bored until I joined the Army; now I am crazy with the utter futility, destructiveness and emptiness of my life, to which I see no end. It is quite impossible to hope for the future, and the present isn't worth thinking about. . . . As you see, I'm not at all unhappy, but terribly disturbed. But I don't think you will see any change in me; the only difference is that now I am haunted by the chaos of the outer world, more than by my own personal world.

(From Dunbar.)

ib. id.

Last night we went for a patrol scheme in the woods. It was a warm night, rather damp, so that all the noises and smells of the wood were strong and distinct; the owl's cry, the scent of pine-needles and the strange clicking sound which I often hear at night in woods, without ever being able to explain it. The best thing, though, was when I suddenly came on the red stone ruins of a Restoration house, fissured and scattered by ivy and elder bushes. One arch stood by itself, wreathed in creepers but still having a slightly ribald look about it, a doorway with the figures 1685 carved over it ornately. The effect was surprisingly like a Rex Whistler drawing. The red stone fitted the colours of the wood so well, that it seemed perfectly natural for a fine house to be burst open and invaded in this way by the trees.

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ib. id.

The boredom and hopelessness to-day is crushing. Rilke says in *Malte Laurids Brigge* "to beloved is to be consumed. . . to love is to endure." But it is so hard to love, in the right sense of accepting the world without the desire for possession. At this moment, I would like to reject the whole outer world even to destroy it; another time, I feel something resembling physical desire for it, as in the second *Office*. The right way lies between these two; until I can find it, this acute unrest will continue.

ib. id.

If I didn't believe in the value and honesty of what I write, I should stop at once. If my values—or ours—conflict with those of the age, we must never doubt that the age is mistaken, not ourselves. We must not, like Galileo under torture, be forced to take back our statements or apologize for having made them. We shall probably be defeated, but at least we shall not withdraw voluntarily.

To Michael Meyer, 11th July, 1942.

The passionate need that I felt . . . for three months has suddenly stopped, as if a string had snapped on an instrument, or a muscle that gave me pain had parted. . . . It is a peaceful state; but I shall never be persuaded that it is not weakness that prevents me from going on. There is a kind of love so destructive that it cannot be borne; but I thought I was strong enough to bear it. Perhaps I shall not be able to—it is too early, after all, to tell. (*From Dunbar.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, undated (early July, 1942).

Time goes very slowly, and life is terribly boring; the heat is breathless as I sit in the same window looking over the sultry garden, the flowering tree now fallen and sun-

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dried, the sea far out and hardly moving among the big bleached rocks.
(*From Dunbar.*)

To Milein Cosmann, 15th July, 1942.

I also meant to send you a sprig of a herb with an extraordinary scent, which I found on a night-scheme yesterday evening; but the smell has quite disappeared in the daytime, and there are only a few shrivelled leaves left—a pointless and ill-omened present. (*From Dunbar.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 26th July, 1942.

It is late, and the room is full of the scent of stocks; though I smell chiefly the big white carnation in my buttonhole. After I had spoken to you, my mother noticed it was trembling with the beating of my heart. This afternoon we walked in the wide parkland of the castle and picked wild flowers, and I found a deer's skull with branching antlers and some scraps of dried skin still hanging on it.
(*From Ripley, Yorks.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 27th July, 1942.

I am writing this in a refreshment room on York station waiting for the train back to Dunbar. There is hardly enough light to see the paper, and I have to hold it sideways to get any light at all. Empty teacups and sleeping soldiers are littered all round me; every time the man nearest to me moves, I have to stop until his head is no longer between me and the two wretched bulbs at the other end of the room. I wish I could draw some of the dull and uncertain and drugged faces that surround me. Some of them move continually, even in sleep; some do not move at all, though they are awake. . . .

Railway stations are quite terrifying in the night; amongst all the metallic noises and the steam and unexpected lights, one never thinks of all the people who may

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be coming home or to some kind of fulfilment; but only of those going away so aimlessly, or against their will; and cannot imagine any destination for them.

(*From York station.*)

To John Heath-Stubbs, 25th August, 1942.

But my most exciting single experience was Helpmann's *Hamlet* ballet, which I saw twice in the same week at Edinburgh. It is an extraordinarily sinister work, with a sadistic quality which makes it really painful to watch. I was able to accept the whole thing entirely without question . . . its total effect is one of great horror and pain—all the more so, because one can well imagine that the moment of death will take such a form—though I certainly pray that it will not!

(*From Dunbar.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 14th October, 1942.

Love is to me, like everything else, a sort of battle, and one that never brings any victory, but only unrest and passion.

(*From Dovercourt, Essex.*)

To Michael Meyer, 1st November, 1942.

Last week I met a man who . . . knows Francis Scarfe and Alun Lewis. F. S. is a private at our Div. H.Q. about 15 miles away; L. is at Southend. So I have written and invited both of them to visit me one weekend. No answer yet.¹

(*From Dovercourt.*)

To John Heath-Stubbs, 24th November, 1942.

The only other thing of interest is an obviously sexual dream I had a few nights ago. I was dancing with a woman I don't know in a brightly lit circular room: it was con-

¹ Lewis had embarked for India a few days earlier; he and Keyes never met.—M.M.

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veyed to me that she was about to show me some kind of mystery, and finally we stopped, and she led me to a wide door of black stone. I understood that a sort of mystery play was going on inside; but got no further, and woke up. It was all very impressive, but not emotionally moving.
(*From Dovercourt.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 21st December, 1942.

I do pray, or would if I prayed at all except "the bone's prayer to Death its god", that there will be a time when our lives are not strung on a succession of wretched train journeys; it is like a theme in music or a dream, the same situation continually recurring—the hollow and metallic noises, the lights, the faces of people quite expressionless and masklike in the badly lit compartments, and the sliding landscapes. I always want to speak to people in trains, as one would speak to one's companions in a kind of limbo or purgatory; it is the only hope of giving meaning to an otherwise meaningless time. I do hope for all of us there may be a time when everyone can be with the person he loves, and the trains will be stopped. . . . You know how much I should like to offer you something better than all this insecurity and secrecy and unrest, but perhaps you understand, too, why I cannot: the insecurity we can't avoid, the unrest is in myself and inescapable. I was for a few seconds at the point of crying, because all this insecurity and unrest seemed too much to be borne; it was not self-pity, or pity for you, or for both of us together, but all these were in it, though my feeling was greater than any of them. . . .

There were some girls singing carols in the street to-night. I had almost forgotten such things happened. Their voices were good, but it was somehow out of place and disturbing. Apart from this, nothing; except that I have written two parts of a longish poem which has to do with

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both of us.¹ But I don't think you will like it. Write soon and do not forget—

But think that we
Are but turned aside to sleep;
They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be.

There are so many things I'd like to say; but this must be all.
(*From Dovercourt.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 21st February, 1943.

... the thought of anyone becoming my wife seems slightly farcical, even to me. It always will be so. I'm afraid it would be (for the woman) rather like being married to a stone or a tree, as I believe some kinds of Indian priestesses or Vestals are. . . . It is easy to persuade myself that I am self-sufficient; but it is, of course, completely untrue. I grow colder and dryer, not stronger; though perhaps that is a kind of strength. I look out now, in the morning, at the smoke drifting across the camp and the bare trees; and know that, for the moment, I care very little about anything. I know, too, that all I care for is inside me, waiting to be re-awakened; that it could so easily be awakened by reading some words in a book, or by the touch of a hand, or even by a smell (the smell of the river, for instance); and I wonder whether it is better to remain in this trance, or to wake. . . . What I really love, what really infatuates me, is beyond any person. One could make phrases for it, and call it an idea of perfection, or a "vision of the fair beauty", or what not; but they don't mean anything. I don't know what it is.

... my long-awaited transfer to the Intelligence Corps is—or has been—actually coming through. But I'm afraid it will take too much time, and come too late. My well-

¹*The Wilderness*—began the previous day.—M.M.

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known luck has apparently failed to function this time—
as I always feared it would, in any really important crisis!
(*From Hawick.*)

To John Heath-Stubbs, 6th March, 1943.

To-day was the first day of Spring (in fact, if not by the Calendar), and I walked over the bare green hills above Hawick, muttering Housman. I lay down under a thorn tree and thought of my past life in a rather conventional way, and decided that I had done a good number of things for one so young, and that it was all quite worth while except for the sex part. (*From Hawick.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 27th March, 1943.

Last night I had the most strange and unlucky dream. I dreamt that *we* were being married and saw the actual ceremony. That is said to be one of the most unlucky kinds of dream one can have. (*From Tunisia.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 7th April, 1943

I am writing this crouched on a hillside somewhere in North Africa not too far from the enemy. It is just getting dusk, and there are no lights, so I shall probably have to stop fairly soon. This is a country of green downland with little hidden valleys where there are farms or water-mills; on the bare hillside, the Arabs drive their primitive ox-plows which barely scratch the dirt, and everywhere the ground is covered with a tall purplish flower, like a kind of acanthus. These Arab plowmen wear hooded cloaks made of sacking or some coarse material: and as they push the plow behind two white oxen, they look blind and sinister, like figures of death or pestilence.

While I was in a large town by the sea a short time ago, I made friends with two French (or the N. African equivalent of Creole) sisters from Biskra beyond the Atlas,

and we often used to have parties in their top-floor flat. From the roof garden you could look down and see the whole city and the dark blue sea; and apart from the white walls and the sea, could imagine yourself in Paris. I had that odd feeling of being back in Paris all the time.

They tell me that André Gide is in Tunis, where he was attending a conference when this business started. It would be amusing if I were able to meet him—though hardly, likely, I suppose. I have already bought a few French post-1940 books which I only hope I shall be able to bring back; and a very good literary review containing some new poems by Aragon and translations from Dylan Thomas of all people! There is a real poetic renaissance going on in France just now: its quality I have not yet had enough opportunity to judge, but I feel it is comparable both in outlook and quality to the present movement in England (though that's saying little enough, I'm afraid!).

It is now just after dawn. A flock of goldfinches is passing through the willow trees in the valley below where I write. I know that, if I come back or get time to think, all these images (of this country) will return with greater power and never leave me, and all this will have been infinitely worth while.

Please give my love to anyone you think suitable to receive it. I began to write a poem the other day, but have not finished it yet, and am not too pleased with it. Anyway, one can't send enclosures in these things. Write to me as often as you can: I haven't had any letters yet. I only hope it will not be too long before I find you again and so find myself also: for at present I am lost.

(*From Tunisia.*)

To Renée-Jane Scott, 26th April, 1943.

At the moment I am about 100 miles behind the front, where I've just finished a course on demolitions, and

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should be going up to the front again to-night or to-morrow. I am writing in a tiny shut-in valley among the mountains, with a clear stream in the bottom, and filled with cypresses and fig-trees. I can hear the Arabs shouting to their flocks, and playing crazily like crickets on their reed pipes. The whole scene is quite perfect, like something staged. I shall have a lot to say about all this when the time for speaking returns. I cannot think that this campaign can last much longer; but after that, who knows? The only way back seems to be through armed Europe. I am not in much of a hurry, but I will get back *some time* if it's humanly possible: and I've never yet failed to do anything I set myself to do. . . .

(From Tunisia, three days before he was killed.)

APPENDIX

The following four early poems, which have come to light since the publication of the *Collected Poems* in 1945, may be of interest as a further indication of the early workings of Keyes' creative mind.

SOUTH WIND

I STAND alone amid the velvet dusk
Where she and I of old did use to meet,
Just at this time upon a Summer eve,
Here on the hill above the nodding wheat.

The wind blows softly from the South;
Ripples among the golden corn.
Oh, where is she that she comes not,
Though I wait from dusk to dawn?

Wind from the South, Summer wind,
Bring her back to me;
Bring her back to my arms again,
Just as she used to be.

She never knew I loved her so,
When on this hill we used to meet.
But now she's gone, and I am left,
Desolate, over the whispering wheat.

Oh, gentle wind from out the South,
Tell me, where is she gone,
That she comes not to meet me here,
Though I wait from dusk to dawn?

July, 1934. (*net. 12 years 2 months*).

CATHAY

A SCENTED dream; a twisted vision quaint;
Another world, of fragile symmetry.
So far away, but yet its pipes squeal faint—
It's tinkling music will not leave my ears.

I cannot help but dream of far Cathay,
And when they ask me how I know these things
I answer not, and sadly turn away—
Though I can hear the fluttering of the wings
Of golden pigeons, and their burbling din,
As they strut, jostling, puffed with jerky pride
Before a dragon-temple in Pekin.

June, 1937. (*aet.* 15).

MEDITATION OF PHLEBAS THE PHOENICIAN¹

WHICH is the path? There are too many ways;
And all entice my feet—
The palpitating dove-wings of the maze,
Or silence in the street.

What is the goal? Oh, there are many ends
Which pull my soul apart—
The terminus where lines' mad tangle blends,
Or silence in the heart.

Why must I go? I am a corpse long-drowned,
Tricked out in foamy lace:
Spindrift and terror tumble all around
The silence in your face.

January, 1939.

¹ A dream poem—it has no meaning. S.K.

RICHMOND PARK

STAG-ANTLERED oaks loom by the track;
Huge, fog hanging in their horns, they rear.
Through the crisp swish of bracken we hear
Them belling and roaring afar, but do not look back.

This park has always been misty, uncouth
And bestial, since King Henry ran the deer.
This was a place then of killing, full of fear
When he hunted the stags here in the pride of his youth.

Herne, too, haunts the thickets sere
Homeless and hanged, poor Herne—
The antlered idiot who will learn
No other wisdom but following the deer.

The bracken drips; ghosts of dead deer
Bellow by the unseen stream forlorn.
Winding the coverts of my heart, a horn
Brays and astonishes the heavy air.

1940.

