

ROSA
DECIDUA

BY

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“O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night
In the howling storm
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.”—BLAKE.

ROSE of the World!
If so, then what a world!
What worm at its red heart lay curled
From the beginning? Plucked and torn and trampled
And utterly corrupt is she
That was the queen-flower unexampl'd
In gardens goodlier than Arcady.

O Thou! whose body was my lyre, whose soul
Lay on my mouth like a live coal!
This time thou hearest not my song; thine ears
Are stopped with worse than death;
And all this wasted breath
Of mine—those songs of six most memorable years
Of ecstasy and agony—may not attain
To charm thy being into love again. . . .

This is no tragedy of little tears.
My brain is hard and cold ; there is no beat
Of its blood ; there is no heat
Of sacred fire upon my lips to sing.
My heart is dead ; I say that name thrice over ;
Rose !—Rose !—Rose !—
Even as lover should call to lover ;
There is no quickening,
No flood, no fount that flows ;
No water wells from the dead spring.
My thoughts come singly, dry, contemptuous,
Too cold for hate : all I can say is that they come
From some dead sphere without me ;
Singly they come, beats of a senseless drum
Jarred by a fool, harsh, unharmonious.

There is no sense within me or about me ;
Yet each thought is most surely known
For a catastrophe.
No climax of a well-wrought tragedy !
Single and sterile.

I am here for naught.
I have no memory of the rose-red hours.
No fragrance of those days amid the flowers
Lingers ; all's drowned in the accursed stench
Of this damned present. The past years abort
And this is found. Foul waters drench
My earth. All's filth. With what cold eye one scans
This body that was—so long since—two years ! I
wrench

My soul to say it—all a man's
Delight. Come, look at it! This leaden skin
With ochre staining its amorphous grey;
All that elastic brilliance passed away;
Minute invading wrinkles where the flesh
Is soaked away by the foul thing within
Her soul; the bloom so faint and fresh
Smudged to a smoky glow as one may see
At sunset in the Factory lands; the lips
Thinned and their colour sickened into slate;
The eyes like common glass; the hair's gloss dull;
The muscles gone, all pendulous with fat;
The breath that was more sweet than Lebanon
And all the flowers and honey and spice thereof
Ripe for my soul's kiss, eagerly to cull,
Now like a corpse three weeks drowned, swollen by
sun
And water and vermin. There she sways and stares,
And with the jaw dropped all awry—first swears,
Then lurches; then she slobbers unctuously:
“I am not old: I am quite beautiful;
How have I lost your love?”
Pitiful! Pitiful! Pitiful!

This is no tragedy of little tears.
This worm was in her blood
Lurking for thrice five years,
And now I see him—that old slime that leers
Where Bacchus smiles, that evil and averse
God that is wholly curse,

As He is wholly blessing to the wise.
This thing invertebrate, this sewer-flood,
Compact of treacheries, meannesses, and lies,
Horrible thirst, infamous beastliness,
Dirt and disease, so sottish wallowing,
Yet sensitive to pain so hideous
That sometimes he appears all pain, all fear,
All hate—so slavish, yet so fierce a king,
A tyrant to himself, insidious
And cunning as some sordid sorceress;
Incapable of action or control,
Yet a black gulph to drown so strong a soul! . . .

He lay close curled within my rose's heart.
There is no blame; yet what avails all art?
See! I reel back beneath the blow of her breath
As she comes smiling to me: that disgust
Changes her drunken lust
Into a shriek of hate—half conscious still
(Beneath the obsession of the will)
Of all she was—before her death, her death!
So hell boils over in her, and she rages
—It seems through countless ages—
With all the vile abuse
That had degraded Glasgow's grimiest stews,
With all the knowledge of despair
Striking me cunningly, striking everywhere,
Mutilating the corpse of my dead love
With such a savagery,
Intensity above

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All understanding, that it bleeds again
As a corpse should bleed at the murderer's touch !
Then, not content, she must needs smutch
All my past purifying pain,
Turning all life to a thing fouler than
Aught yet imaginable to man !

Who asks me for my tears ?
She flings the body of my sweet dead child
Into my face with hell's own epitaph,
Profanes that shrine
Of infinite love and infinite loss,
My empty shrine, the one shrine undefiled,
My one close-claspèd cross—
And hers as much as mine !
Profanes it with a hideous laugh
And a lie flung with a curse ; and I must hear,
And must not stamp on the snake, because, forsooth
This was my love, my peace, my faith, my truth,
The rosebud of my youth !

It was—it is not—it can never be.
This would corrupt God's body with a breath.
I see Him sicken and swoon ; I see Him rot
Through, though His tabernacle be
Eternity.
This makes a man catch hold of death
Greedily like a harlot in the street
That plucks by the arm some sot.
Death shakes me off with a hoarse curse.
Tied to this woman, his beneficence

Were too like heaven—and heaven's somehow to earn,
No doubt—no way that I know! Hell's enough
If hell would only burn
And silence the one devil-word of love.

Ay! death slinks off.
I have a child that claims my life
To keep from knowledge of her mother's fate,
To keep from heritage thereof,
To shield from the world's scoff,
To watch, stamp out the seeds of madness in her.
God! that hast held me back from hate,
Be merciful to me a sinner
And ward me, warding her! As it is written:
Excepting Adonai build the house, they labour
In vain that build it. And Again:
Excepting Adonai keep the city,
The watchman watcheth but in vain.
God, if there be a God, be Thou my Neighbour;
And if that God have pity, have Thou pity!
For never man was smitten as I am smitten;
Nor from Time's yesterday to Time's to-morrow
Was there a sorrow like unto this sorrow!
How many hours was Christ upon the cross?
How many days in hell? But I have hung
From the day of infinite loss
Watching her degradation into dung
Three years.
Three years!
And now who asks me to shed tears?

Let a man pierce my side,
I warrant him nor blood nor water flows,
But such a poison as Locusta never
Distilled from toad, asp, viper, scorpion,
Nightshade, gall, orpiment, Jews' hearts,
Old women's tongues, by monstrous arts;
But this my poison drips, without endeavour,
From the mere soul of the world's rose!
What alchemy of hell this ronyon
Venus has skill of!

Wonder that I live!

This has been like a bag-pipe drone to wail
Its monotone through high, low, fast and slow.
It has been like a secret cancer,
Forcing all servants of the life to give
Their work to the usurper; all its themes assail
The main word Life; they build their archipelago
Of poison in each sea where life was holy.
Their questions have no answer,
But all's converted to the abominable
Soul-sickening thing that one is tied to. This is I
Just as God in His Nature, wholly
Involved therein, its tune, its motive, its quintessence.
There were no meaning in Spring's aspen spell,
Where man's sole treasury, the sky,
Made bankrupt of His presence.
Only, this God is a black fiend;
Of blood, the babe's drink, weaned
And fattened on—what liquor and meat? Unnameable
By all the giant horrors that haunt hell!

These years I have watched her fade, my masterful
love
And all-embracing pity strove
Like athletes in an amorous bout to make
Some child to tread upon that snake.
But ever the worm slipped, escaped; its spires
Here crushed, there rose the stronger for the pressure
That gave it purchase; keener flamed the fires
In its eyes triumphant. Now its soul asserts
Its master-pleasure;
The worm exerts
Its adult might, and in one bout
The spine snaps of that child of Love and Pity,
And mangled he falls out
Of the fight. Just so child Hercules
Strangled two serpents in his pretty
Red fists, achieved twelve labours, won to ease,
And was done down to death and madness by
The subtle poison that himself distilled.
So all the God in life is chilled
To a corpse. The informing one? God's a cast
clout
Of a leper! Leave me here, corruptest of earth's whores
To scrape my sores!

Cry like a dog and run about the city!
There is no word left, now the deed is dead!
No thought of her is in me; I am a stranger
To all that dream of danger
And bliss that Rose was. The green shoots

Of life that spring in me are fed
Not even on the mire of her decay.
They spring from other roots.
Now I am cleansed of her, I am so to say
A man part paralysed. One limb is dead
In feeling as in motion. This remains
To ask: Will all catch death—how soon? This head
Excites its miserable brains
To think the word it knows by intellect
To be the right word—pity! Then reflect:
“Pitiful! Pitiful! most pitiful!
The pity of it! Think of the love past,
Blossoms too beautiful!
Think of the hardships conquered comrade-wise!
Think of the babe and its most piteous end!”
—All these things sound like lies.
I do not comprehend
Anything of them—“Pity! pity! pity!”
’Tis like the dripping of some stagnant rain
From the housetops of a ruined city
Upon the flagstones. Not one petal clings
Upon the stalk of life or memory. Stain
Not one pale thought with blushes; my soul’s dead
As a corpse flung out of the tideway on
The stinking flats of London mud. The springs
Are dry beyond appeal; dull grey like lead
(And heavier) is my soul’s carrion.
If she came pleasing now, pure passionate, and
sane,
I would not take her back again.

I am warned—that's one word. Let my own back feel
the lash!

All power of love is burnt right through to ash.
Bray it in a mortar, mix with gall and ink,
And give it to the children for a drink!

I'll wait till she is dead, to bring those tears.
I doubt not in the garden of my heart
Whence she is torn that flowers will bloom again.
May those be flowers of weeping, flowers of art.
Flowers of great tenderness and pain,
Broad liliated meers
Lying in a lonely leafless forest
Silent and motionless beneath the moon.

I feel my weakness, O thou soul that soarest
Into a heaven beyond imagining
On the unfaltering wing.
Of the magic swan! I know this tune
Should swell to a strong note, a triumph note
Blared through a trumpet's throat
To tell the world I am no coward, or else
Sob in sweet minor, soft as Asmodel's
Chant to the nightingale. I am so wrecked, so rent
That one seems brag, the other sentiment.
I cannot leave the present; I will not pose
There lies the rotten rose
And stinks. That is the truth; the rest is gloss.
My loss was total loss.
So close that rose lay to my heart, its fall
Was the catastrophe of all.

Now call me callous! Pass me, prigs, and sneer
At the base soul that could not bear its cross!
I say that infinite loss is infinite loss,
That tears are trivial, tears are happiness,
That this blind ache is God's last punishment
For love; that all things in that one thing shent
Are damned, that had I loved her less
I could have prated in some honeyed strain.
Taking a subtle pleasure in my pain.
It is my bulk, the mass of my intent,
That makes the ruin abject. I had sung
Some partial earthquake; here the universe
Crashes with one great curse,
Whelming the singer and the song. My tongue
Is palsied; only this chaotic clash
Of curses echoes the dire crash.

And after all the roar, there steals a strain
At last of tuneless, infinite pain;
And all my being is one throb
Of anguish, and one inarticulate sob
Catches my throat. All these vain voices die,
And all these thunders venomously hurled
Stop. My head strikes the floor; one cry, the old cry,
Strikes at the sky in its exquisite agony:

Rose! Rose o' th' World!

