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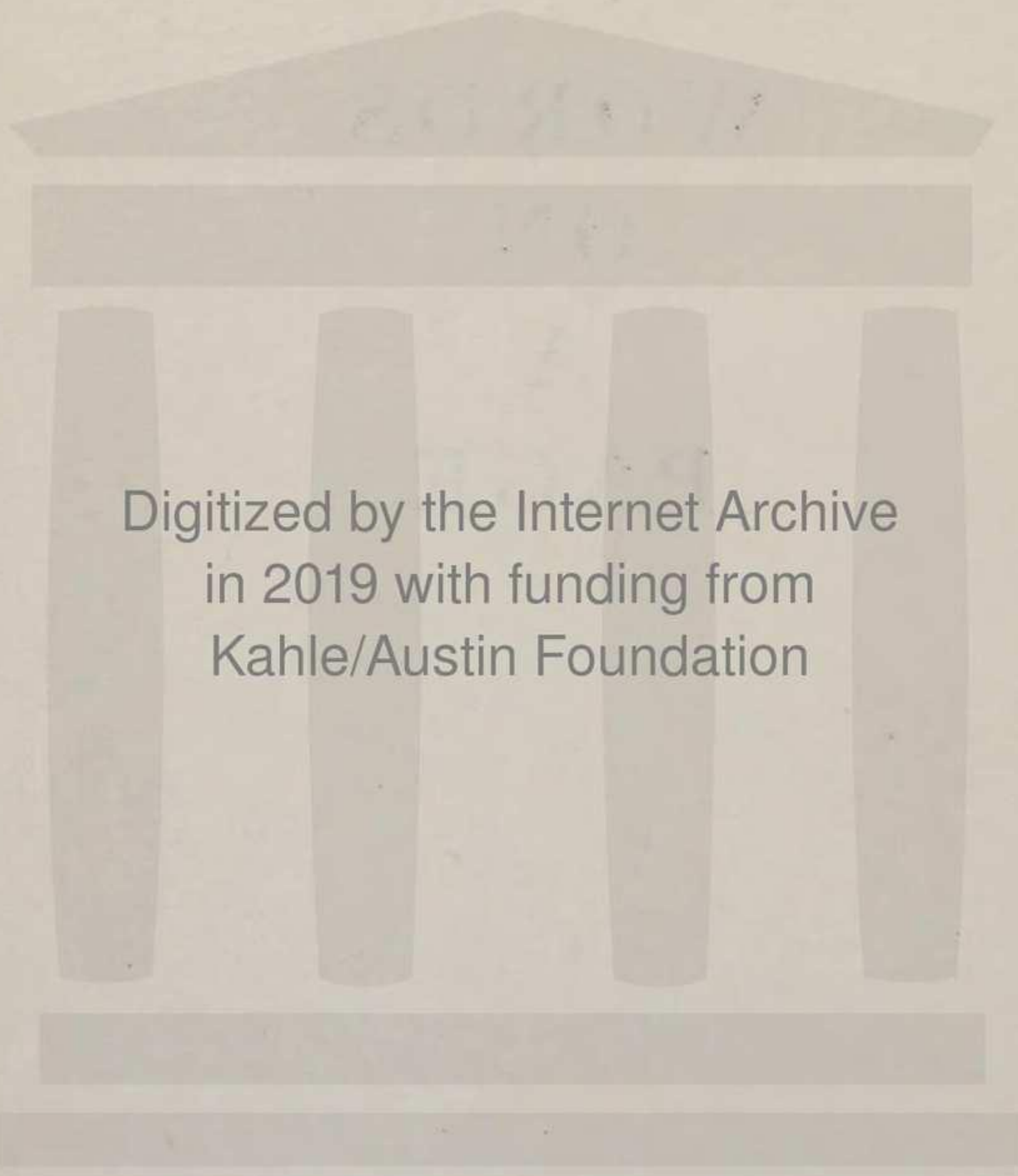


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*DORIS HEDGES*

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# WORDS ON A PAGE

## AND OTHER POEMS

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### ONWARDNESS

Into the crucible of life  
Man pours himself with recklessness  
In fear, in anger, in revolt  
In tenderness, in love; with strong resolve  
Not to be lost, nor wasted, nor destroyed.  
That wish is greater than his will  
More valiant than his deeds,  
His thoughts unspoken, or his tears unshed,  
His words of fury, or his lips turned back  
In smiling. Into the crucible  
Man pours himself, unknowing.  
Is he dream, or fantasy, or whim,  
Or mighty truth, or God Himself?  
All that he asks is that the mould  
Be ever filled and filled again  
And that this strangest spending  
Buy survival at the end of time.

## MAN ALONE

A man alone is nothing; as we pass  
In silence on a busy street  
As we look pleading in our neighbour's face  
We see within his unrelenting eyes  
His own entrenched reflection, steely cold.  
Look in the mirror! Are your eyes so different?  
Are you quite sure a man alone is nothing?

## MIRAGE

We stand in  
A small place  
Each one  
Looking in the mirror  
It seems strange  
So large we look  
Yet in our secret minds  
We are so small.

## MAN AND ALL-POWER

Life lay buried in the ice  
Deep and impenetrable  
Its pulse sluggish with inertia.  
Then as the waters rose  
Life moved in the giant ripples  
Like awakening eyelids.  
When the first green  
Crept moss-like up the crags  
Life begat life. There was a noise  
Of wings, and breathing.

Then blood flowed; there could be heard  
The beating of a heart,  
The heart of the world, the heart  
Of man; and sound of cracking bone  
And rending flesh, and blood flowing.  
Sorrow, oh sorrow.

How soft his body is,  
And brittle are his bones.  
A needle-point can penetrate  
His swiftly ageing flesh,  
A hammer crack his joints,  
A thumb-nail gouge  
His eyeballs out; one blow  
Upon his temples kills him easily.

This heart, this sound of breathing  
And the throb of blood in vein,  
How soft it is, how almost sweet  
Like rose-bloom on a peach.  
It took him many ages to awake,  
Crack open ice and stone  
And crawl, and fly, and finally  
To stand upright and have a soul.  
Facing All-Death he stands  
Holding All-Power  
Within a moment breathless  
Before Re-Birth.

## THE MURDERED SONG

Let us fight if we must  
Let us know who it is  
That we fight. Let us fight  
Without hate and be sure  
What we fight for. I saw  
A bird die once, a little  
Sweet song-bird; he dropped  
From a branch at my feet;  
There was blood on his breast;  
I could hear laughter braying  
And saw the boy running  
His sling-shot adangle.

The bird was so warm  
And so quiet, its blood  
Stained my hand as it died  
Without sound; and a bit  
Of my heart died there too:  
But the boy was a-hunting  
Another, his ignorant laughter  
As gay as the wind.  
Blaming him was no answer.  
Let us fight if we must  
Let us know who it is  
That we fight; let us pray  
That the birds go on singing.

## SHALL WE DANCE?

I danced politely with the other man,  
Waiting for Tom to ask me,  
Then he did. He said so sweetly,  
"Shall we dance?" And I was in his arms.  
Holding me close, his cheek against my hair,  
He said, "We must go slowly darling,  
Do you care? The damn thing trips me up."  
I said, "So if we fall, we fall together,  
Darling, that is heaven." And I felt  
Him stumble, and he swore, but happily,  
And held me closer, and his eyes  
Were free of all the horror, all the pain,  
And thrusting knowledge of the cruelty  
Of man to man in war. He whispered,  
"You are lovelier than ever; all the years  
Are swallowed in your eyes, and thanks  
My dearest for not changing. This,  
The celebration of ten years with you  
Is worth it all." And then he tripped  
Upon his bloodless leg, and swore, and smiled,  
And in his arms, I felt the past lie dead.

Venus caught Jove's wandering eye  
Just like that woman over there  
Caught Tom's. His letters told me.  
They were like himself in nineteen-forty,  
Like he was when first we met,  
So full of tenderness, of marriage,  
And the pain of parting. I could feel  
His arms around me, understanding  
And approving of the way I didn't cry  
When his train pulled out. His love  
Was in those letters—up to forty-two.

And then they changed. I felt her there  
Behind his shoulder, sneering,  
Greedy, waiting, cruel too,  
Knowing me helpless all those miles  
Of water and of land between,  
And growing wider as the war went on.

A woman sleeping with another woman's man  
In war can be forgiven if she keep  
The centre pure. If the inviolate  
Sweet sacredness of loyalty remains,  
And if it's understood she'll send him back  
Once war is done, no matter what the pain.

The struggle to unlove is part of war;  
To stay unhurt, to smile and "carry on,"  
Was ever sorrier term invented?  
Yet it served. It served till forty-four.  
And then I knew my fear had changed  
To hate, not for the enemy  
But for her. That woman over there.  
My prayers were ravings now. I said  
To God in fury, let him be wounded  
Suffer, even die, what do I care?  
Let her inherit what is left,  
A broken body, or a corpse; perhaps  
A lunatic. Let her be there to mourn,  
To comfort. I've unloved successfully,  
I've "carried on," and now I'm safely past  
All sorrowing, all feeling, all desire,  
All tenderness; his letters slowly killed  
My heart, gave me her grinning portrait  
To admire, spoke of her hair, her bravery  
Her wit. Oh yes, all this he drew  
In lines of agony across my heart.

Listen! The news! The tanks have gone  
Into the hottest fight. The number?  
God! The number of his Corps, two-thirty-one!  
His Corps is there! Under the crack of shell,  
The hail of bombs. He never was  
A hercules. His throat is weak,  
And there's that old concussion.  
I have held his head against my breast  
Often, and nursed him as a woman  
Does her man, her only man, her one  
Her everlasting love. And now listen!  
Two-thirty-one wiped out! Four years it's been,  
Four years since I stood smiling  
As his train pulled out, so very sure  
His love was mine forever, sure that no war  
No thing, no cause whatever could  
Put Finis on it. Turn the radio off!

Why listen now? If he gets through  
That Hell, she will be waiting for his train;  
That woman with her wit and hair and bravery  
Under fire, she whom he has made me know  
As though she were my sister. Turn it off!  
I have unloved I say! I have unloved!

And then the cable came. It said,  
"I'm coming home. I've lost a leg,  
What's that to worry for, I'm lucky  
To be here and out of it. I'm coming home!"

Lilith caught young Adam's wandering eye  
Just like that woman over there  
Caught Tom's. But he is home.  
Just now he murmured, "Shall we dance?"  
And in his arms I feel the past lie dead.  
I hear him say, "goddam the blasted thing,"  
And shift his weight ungainly on the floor,  
And hold me closer to him as we slowly dance.

## DAUGHTER 1949

She's young, she's young  
So she must learn these values  
Integrate these pebbled themes  
Into herself, let corruscate  
Upon her virgin flesh reality  
Know how to drink  
And pet  
And be at home  
In lonely cars at night  
With callow eager hands  
A'search and old tradition  
Caught awry on a turn  
Of life's wheel. She is  
My daughter. Listen to me!  
This is not some flotsam  
Child, some freak of fate  
Some displaced person  
Or a waif from Europe  
This is a part of me  
My daughter; she who declaims  
"Life is a thrilling chart  
To read. This is all new  
And I, omnipotent!"  
She is not young, but ancient  
As the vows of youth  
A thousand years ago.  
What can I do but cry  
Take her, oh God, and do  
With her in fairness  
As her beauty bids  
Make her not do as we  
Or take the path we trod  
Give her integrity  
And lead her home with You.

## STRIKE

The house is still, it yawns itself  
From sleep, ready for sounds  
And smells; a house  
At six a.m. is tense, waiting  
To be filled by living.

Today, the house hears nothing, no  
“Heck, the coffee’s perking and the toast  
Oh Jezz, it’s burned!” But not today.  
No, this today is different.  
A man’s house is not private any more  
The world comes through the radio  
And through a person’s pores.  
There are no private lives  
Only a thousand cosmic debts  
To be repaid, man in a tempest  
Of pursuit, with chasing eyes  
Mad for a nameless goal.

“Say, Charlie, did you pay  
The grocer’s bill? I told you to  
Last week.” His laugh is easy.  
“Oh, those guys are smart  
Out there. If they say picket  
Picket it is. They’ll never let us starve.”  
“But Charlie,” low, “there’s just a hundred left  
Only a hundred, say remember  
We paid down a wad  
On the new radio  
And the dinner-set.”

The day outside is brighter now  
Gazing implacably inside  
On the bacon and the oranges  
The coffee and the wedge of butter  
And the ham, its opulent pink  
Stuck with brown cloves.  
She sees the ham  
The ham looks smaller  
Than it did yesterday  
Safe, just anything, just a ham.  
Now her eyes are scared.  
Charlie knows all the answers  
He says, "Those guys are smart  
We pay 'em to be smart  
I'll go and picket, like they say  
Gives a man a chance to rest awhile  
And thumb his nose."

No one but she knows he's afraid  
Except the house. It knows.  
It has seen fear before  
Oh, often. But this fear  
Is different.

The world before today was large  
And men might suffer and love as men  
Have children, marry,  
Go on a howling drunk  
Rouse up a healthy hate  
Against another man, against the Government.  
Men had the freedom to be fools, their way  
But men must hate to live, today.

There is so much to hate  
Beginning right at home  
Spreading outward.  
Try loving? Not a chance!  
The other guy won't turn his other cheek  
Like I was taught we should  
And if he won't, I won't, and there  
It lies. Take it or leave it.

How can a man hate all the world?  
How can a man feel hate  
Against a hungry child?  
Against a thousand million,  
A hundred thousand million? Oh, to Hell  
With Germany and China and the rest  
There's plenty here at home  
To hate; yet can a man hate all the world?  
Try loving? Watch the other guy!  
He'll step right in and hate double  
And take your place.

But she sees hunger-shapes among the cloves  
The kids are coming in  
It's five o'clock, they twirl the radio on.  
Strike!

Listen! Be still, and listen!  
The kids don't understand, they shout  
"Let's have some ham, Mom, where  
Is milk? And eggs? And bread?"  
She says wildly, "it's in the bank!  
Just a hundred  
Only a hundred left from all the spending."

Try another station! Charlie said  
They'll never let us starve. Listen!  
The man says, "The world's a theatre  
The earth's a stage  
Which God and Nature do with actors fill."

The radio voice is choking out the news.  
Ships cancelled! Power cut off!  
Panic everywhere, people jamming  
Into the trains, going and coming back  
With glazing eyes, turned red  
From fear, not hate.

Fear squeezes hate out  
Like ointment from a tube.

The lights are going out!  
The world has struck—  
Or is it God?  
But Charlie said—he said—  
We paid 'em not to let  
The other guy hate better.

Fear squeezes hate out

Oh, God, let me try loving now!  
Oh, God, before it is too late  
Let us try loving!

The old house moans and shakes  
It knows, the wise old house.  
It has seen night before  
Oh often, but tonight is different.

## WITHERED ASTERS

Poets once gave us the stars, or pink asters  
Saga and song and the whisper of leaves  
At day's ending: the poet today is a man  
With a flag, and a chip on his shoulder  
His sounds like strong drink making froth  
In his cup; so we laugh as we read  
Or we sigh on a stumbling prayer  
Of our own. A man is a man if he makes  
His own verse, if hears the cock crow  
Unafraid, and can smile at each dawning.

## THE FLOWER IN THE DUSK

And thus the flower in the dusk, her petals wrung  
By sorrow and by pain stood mightily  
Her head unbowed. The end of day enfolded  
With its shadow all her loveliness  
And wrapped in darkness all her scent.  
Yet in the night she bloomed and stood  
Until the sunlight warmed her blood again  
And passersby once more could gaze at her  
In marvel and in hope, not asking how  
She had withstood the terror of the night.  
So man's eternal spirit, once dismayed,  
Emptied of love, veiled in a shoddy mist  
Is purged of apathy; and as we deeply look  
Into the eyes of youth, stern with resolve  
Upon each petal of the rose we clearly see,  
A shining drop of early morning dew.

## LONELINESS

If drunkenness would do it  
I would sell my soul to Bacchus for a song.  
If by some madness I could make you see  
I would enclose myself within a maniac's cage.  
Why should I care, why should my heart contract  
That you can gaze at me with empty eyes  
And calm acceptance when I nod at you  
And say, "of course, my dear"? You are content  
To look no further. Who am I to dare  
And dare again to hope that there are eyes  
Covered as mine are, somewhere to rejoice  
In meeting with my own, lips that are stern  
When mine are, arms that will take  
The burden of aloneness from my back  
And shoulder it in yoke: no fairer bond  
Than this could ever be, that we might know  
Together when to pull, when to let laughter come,  
When to be grave. If I were satyr without wine  
Or madman caught within a lucid moment, you  
With pity in your eyes, perhaps, would never see  
How sober was the sot, how sane the fool.

## BITTER-SWEET

The setting sun, with purple rim  
At evening from a still canoe  
Is drowned as was the Cherubim  
In a sky of bitter blue.

No touch of mine but was as white  
As blanched as now that waveless sea  
The Cherubim has taken flight  
And closed, the memory.

## FALTER

Have you seen cobwebs strong enough  
To bear a man? I have, hanging from rafters  
In a ruined church. Have you seen someone  
Jump into a garbage pail? I have;  
It was so pitiful, and he  
Looked so surprised and frightened  
When they came to bear him back again  
From where he had escaped. These things  
Can happen and they do. Over and over.  
The cobwebs and the lunatic are breaks  
In continuity, in the fine flow of life;  
Small interruptions, mere ineptitudes.

Have you put wide your helping hand  
To save a friend? Or turned aside  
Fearing his plight would drag you down?  
The web, the lunatic, are made more strong,  
Less sane, with every trust betrayed.

## NOSTALGIA

I will return to my dreams  
My remote childhood seems  
Nearer than yesterday  
Nearer than any day.

Silken and clear, the thread  
Of that dreaming led  
Taut with untried desires  
Through testing fires  
Till the tenuous strand  
Slipped from my hand.

Now I have it again  
I go bare in the rain.  
There is joy in the feeling  
That old wounds are healing.  
I have returned to my dreams  
Of the past; and it seems  
As I live them again  
Dreams are tasteless as rain.

## THE HISTORY OF A KISS

This is the history of a kiss  
Not yours or mine, a kiss  
Of love and youth  
Born in a bubble.  
This is the history  
Of men's loving  
And two-sided hating  
One being too-possessiveness  
The other ignorance.

All violence, all war  
Is someone's kiss ungiven  
A smile gone sour  
Or a mind unmated  
With another mind.  
All anger is in this; one man  
Cuts forward through the veil  
Another chokes; a man alone  
Is nothing.

I see no kisses now  
Upon the bitter lips I pass  
Upon the streets  
Yet kisses float upon the summer air  
Hang frosting in the winter mist  
Wait tremulous for welcome  
Stand rebuffed as we  
Pass blindly by searching  
For lesser things.

The first kiss melted  
As age of ice, the mark  
Of dinosaur fell black  
In the swift sinking  
And worlds whirling.  
The first kiss burned  
Along the first sun ray, stars  
Were born of it, green moss  
Appeared by magic on the stone  
And man went hunting  
For his meat and mate.

It is always the first kiss  
We hear, that or its echo.  
We must listen with eagerness  
At the roots of the trees  
At the farthest edge  
Of the sunset  
In a wood at dawn  
With the door flung wide.

Always the door flung wide.

The kiss of a French general  
On the two cheeks of heroes  
Is an echo of the first couching  
Of lovers in a hayrick.  
There is purity in it.  
A man smiles at a woman  
And a child laughs;  
This is the history of a kiss.

Between the pages yellowed  
With keeping, love-letters  
Slip kisses on your fingers  
Like a ruby ring.  
Notes in the frosty air  
Of Christmas, carols of children  
These are history's kisses  
These will stop wars  
Only these kisses.

A mother's lips set deep  
Into an infant's palm  
The tenderness of helping  
Someone weaker, this  
Will stop wars  
This and no other loving.  
There is something in what  
He said about forgiveness  
There is a truth in turning  
The other cheek. He knew.  
He was no sissy, and He knew  
It is not weakness to repay  
Evil with good. But what is good?  
Surely He made it clear.

When Cleopatra gave her kiss to Antony  
She loved him, oh she loved him well  
But when he died, she offered Caesar  
Kisses, too; and when he turned her down  
She asped herself. It is in these  
Histories that we wallow wrongly.  
Even Hero, shivering and blue  
The Hellespont a-swum and his Leander  
Waiting, Hero made no history  
Of love but only drama; Leander  
Threw herself into the waves  
And perished, too, when Hero drowned.  
Oh no, this is no history  
Of loving. These are but human  
Passions, pulsing with evolution  
And with man's emancipation  
And with hope and plaintiveness  
And with resentment  
And with war.

The gossamer kiss of life  
Is spun of ancient stuff  
Of strong stuff too  
And it lives. I see no kiss  
Upon the lips of youth today  
Or in the eyes of age. I see  
Fearing and a hungering hope  
Drowning in drunkenness  
Or swathed in a thousand wraps  
Smelling of putrefaction.

It is not weakness to repay  
Evil with good. But what is good?  
Surely He made it clear.

The fresh wind and the bees  
The flowers, the sands, the smile  
Of trustfulness, all these  
Are clean, all these are kisses  
Worth the having; a man alone  
Is nothing if he cannot learn  
The lovely history of a kiss.

## THE TWO PICTURES

“Blow me a kiss,” she said, “blow me a kiss  
As you leave me; my kiss will meet it  
I shall be waving and watching  
And waiting, till you come again.  
Blow me a kiss, darling, blow me a kiss  
One for each of the seven years  
We’ve been together.” The curve of her hair  
Swept down in background to her cheek  
All brushed with the sunset  
As his ship moved out majestically.  
Hardly had its wake receded  
And the chips at the dock’s edge  
Started dancing in the water  
When there were two pictures  
In two separate frames  
Instead of one picture in one frame.  
He looked into his glass; the motes  
Lay dustily on the copper alcohol.  
He gazed into his glass, waiting  
For the echo of the kiss to dim.  
He kept his eyes away impatiently  
From the slim ankles of the traveller  
Perched on the bar-room stool.  
He would wait, yes he had better wait  
At least until their kiss stopped echoing.  
And then he looked up furtively  
Catching the tapering sideways glance  
And suddenly there was no kiss echoing.

The chips moved up and down and up and down  
Against the dock, green and slime-encrusted.

She said, "I said blow me a kiss and so he did.  
I blew one, too. I said my kiss would meet  
His kiss, one for each of the seven years  
We've been together. No, not yet, wait!  
Let's wait at least until the kiss  
Stops echoing. I hear it still."  
She listened carefully. There was no kiss  
No echo of a kiss. Only the oily whispering  
Of the chips against the dock's edge  
As they rose and fell and rose and fell  
Aimlessly, in the ship's wake.

#### INVITATION A LA VALSE

I liked what I saw in your eyes  
It had nothing to do  
Nothing whatever  
With what was going on at the time  
Your lips smiled a little  
Your voice was silent  
Your hands moved restlessly  
And your eyes looked at me  
With a look I liked.  
It had to do with me  
Quite definitely with me  
With you and me only  
There was plenty going on at the time  
But our charming mood  
Met and matched  
As though we had kissed warmly  
Alone and happy in an empty room.

## THE WAVE

How beautiful your eyes are, and how hard.  
The shore is grey with rocks.  
I am a wave which dies against you  
Sighing like wind, and soft.  
A little line, a green line  
Rising and falling with the beat of tides.  
The errant wind can bend my curve  
In storming frenzy.  
Helpless, my bubbling whiteness spends itself,  
Recedes, is lost again.  
I am a wave, child of a giant sea,  
Knowing no purpose, no integrity  
Save to wind unceasing beauty at your feet.  
How beautiful your eyes are, and how hard.

## THE MOMENT

A pity not to get this moment down  
Either in words or in a thought  
Etched deep in memory; a moment  
Such as this is like a blade  
Cutting through mist. It makes no mark  
Unless we press its hurt into our flesh.

A moment such as this has meaning  
Only if it ravishes in passing.

## THE BLADE

Once, there were kisses everywhere  
Soft kisses, like a shaft of sun  
Across the daffodils.  
Others there were, more downward into me  
The blade of passion feeling for its mark  
Before the plunge.  
Kisses resting like dew were mine  
Dew in the moment of its vanishing  
Which in a breath  
Conceals the dancing footprint in the grass.  
Under those lips, the eagerness  
Of thrusting hopes  
I yielded smilingly, a fool  
Until your glances entered me  
Like golden anger.  
The blade of passion held between your teeth  
Cut ruthless path, nor would be stayed  
Within a kiss.

## GLANCE ACROSS A ROOM

This feeling that I have  
For you is without price.  
It goes far back, oh delicate  
Ephemeral young memory,  
Oh us, at play  
In side street and in field;  
If I could put  
Our sweet relationship  
Into a nutshell, then I would.

You went to war and you returned  
And so did I, before the shouts  
Had shrunk, before the paper streamers  
Had descended to the earth,  
Mingling with the ashes  
Of our dead.

Oh, paper streamers,  
Oh, remembrance, oh, fine words  
Said in good faith  
At cenotaphs.

Now, suddenly, I see you there  
Tonight, across a room.  
Your eyes are young  
As mine once were  
When we saw war together  
And returned. Tonight,  
You look across a crowded room  
And, smiling with your eyes,  
You say, "you are as young,  
As lovely as you ever were."  
I see the sparks  
Break from our skates  
On a moonlit night  
So long ago. The years between  
Are nothing, melting like mist  
Within this sudden glance.

## RELUCTANT AWAKENING

I was content with Spring  
Until you came.

I was a quiet world  
Without a boundary  
Until your kiss made dull  
The kiss of Spring  
Stirred passions long asleep  
Woke ancient dreams  
Made limitations visible.

Now with the trees in leaf  
Blind in the glare  
Of Summer's lusty noon  
I venture forth.

You have despoiled the Spring  
Of simple joy  
Made it but prelude now  
To some far Summer.  
Why have your kisses taught  
Such discontent?

## SHRINE

My love for you is simple  
As the earth  
Fire is not warmer  
Than my love, nor waters  
Diamond-black with deepness  
More profound.

My love for you is not  
In my desires, nor in my eager mind  
All nature has no name for it  
Nor dreaming call it up  
In images.

It is of stranger stuff  
Than sleep, or mating.  
Rhythms of life unwedded  
To this counting  
Fall ashamed.

My love for you is simple  
As the earth.

## WORDS ON A PAGE

Yes, I wrote it today;  
Dearest, why do you keep  
Staring that way  
As though in your sleep?  
It is not about you,  
It is done, it is over;  
Do not fear I'm untrue  
Or a rover.

Dearest, why do you pale  
With the reading?  
You must know it is stale,  
But the poem was needing  
Its head to let go  
And so end it that way;  
It was dead long ago.

Let me say,  
That is all, and your rage  
Is unfair, is unjust  
For what lingers  
Is crumbling dust  
On your fingers,  
Only words on a page.

## POET'S PROTEST

Words were meant  
To catch meanings in.

You say you cannot  
Prison beauty in a word,  
Ephemeral things are sacred  
So you say. You are afraid  
Of moulds; yet no one else  
Can say it better.  
Why not make moulds  
Of lovely words  
And pour the moment in?

A poem written for one eye to see  
Is not a poet's drab return  
Of grist to mill  
But is a string of words  
Like finest jewels  
Sharing infinity's meaning.

There is no wealth can buy  
My word's fine purity.  
This is not poetry,  
It is a chant, flung skyward  
Heavy with challenge.

Words were meant  
To catch meanings in.

## THE TOAST

Laughter upon the surface.  
The bubbles in each glass  
Float lightly up into the brain  
Leaving the heart untouched.  
He said, "ladies and gentlemen,  
A toast! At my own board!  
Seeing your faces turned  
Towards me now, I drink to friendship,  
To sincerity, to love,  
To faith in God." The laughter broke  
Drowning him out, each heart  
Beat frightened in its case  
And cried, "no, no!", until  
Reprieved, they saw he smiled  
Derisively, and did not drink.

## SPRING-FEVER

There were tangled ferns at our feet  
And bluebells like bubbles  
All shimmering sweet  
As our immature troubles.

It was I who proposed that we go  
You appeared to be cold  
How could I then know  
That your love was so bold?

I suppose I shall die in my bed  
Like the rest of the good  
I wish I had said  
Darling, stay in the wood.

## BEGINNINGS

One leg, two legs, three legs gone!

Oh, funny little fly  
Why don't you die?

One wing, two wings, both wings gone!

Oh, funny little fly  
You make me cry.

Oh nurse, oh nurse, do come quick!

Oh, horrid little fly  
It will not die!

Oh please, oh please, I feel sick

Oh, poor little fly  
It wasn't I!

## GLASS HOUSES

We may watch the goldfish go  
Round and round, some fast, some slow,  
Circumspect in work or play,  
For they cannot hide away.  
If the bowl were made of wood  
Do you think they'd be so good?

## ADVICE TO A SQUEAMISH LADY

Cut your coat to suit your cloth  
(God may send a little moth!)  
If drinking beer gives you a pain  
Plenty of guys can buy champagne!

There's lack of smooth and plenty of rough  
Of what you want there's never enough  
Moralists tell us money's a curse  
But the rest of us know it's just the reverse!

There are always men to buy you things  
(Angels have nothing but feathery wings)  
You've all to gain and nothing to lose  
If there are wounds, you don't care whose!

Display your heart for the world to buy  
Price it firmly and price it high  
The wages of sin are death they say  
(But everyone's got to die some day!)

## ST. PETER IS A WISE OLD GUY

He who loves because of duty  
Never sees the face of beauty  
He who gives to get it back  
Ever feels an inward lack  
Hard may he work and know no rest  
Give of his money wounds to bind  
Wear many honours on his breast  
Blazon his service to mankind  
He will be wafted up above  
But not on the pointed wings of love  
St. Peter will meet him in the clover  
And say, "go back and do it over!"

## SAGUENAY

The painter on the cliff and I  
Upon the sand below sit silently  
He with his colour and his brush  
I with my words ready to drop  
In patterns and seductive webs.  
Upon the river lay a silver sheen  
Muting the steely blue of sky  
The harsh outline of jutting crag  
Seagulls wheeled stately there  
So near the painter's easel  
That their shade fell shifting  
On his trembling colours.  
At my feet a school of porpoises  
Made playful arcs in gambol  
As they rolled and sucked. My hand  
Clenched fruitless on my pen and sorrow  
Flooded me that beauty should so kiss  
Us two alone. There are no stores  
From which to borrow rivers  
And a moment drenched with peace  
A picture and a song too great  
For human pen or brush to catch  
Within a measured square.

## MONTREAL CHIMES

Here is the shining steeple of a church,  
The pointed finger of New France,  
Showing the way to Heaven  
As the sun strikes glinting  
On the silver paint. Below,  
The faithful and unfaithful pass  
Along the way, drowned in the roar  
Of traffic from a thousand streets.  
The pointed finger of New France  
Has aged and mellowed with the years.  
"This Montreal of ours is old,"  
The church-bells say, "New France is old.  
The cobble-stones of Bonsecours are worn  
Quite smooth by history's passing feet,  
The mingled tread of Britain and of France."  
Then as the beckoning chimes die out  
The siren of a tourist bus is heard,  
A laughing voice cries out, "Look up!  
Look how the steeple points toward the sky,  
And see, there is a cross upon its top!  
A lacy cross of filagree. How sweet  
It looks, how charming! Let us go  
Uptown and find a wining-place  
A dancing-place. The cross makes me uneasy."

The bus speeds on, the heedless voice  
Fades out. The lonely steeple  
Pierces through the blue in endless prayer.

## ENTENTE

Montreal is a city  
At least the majority  
Of the population  
Calls it so  
Only the minority calls it  
A small town  
But that's because  
They don't mix with the rest.

The French speak French  
And the English  
Speak English, and few  
Speak both, but all the same  
We like each other  
Pretty well. I know I do.  
The clashings of race and creed  
And temperament  
Cause heat  
But isn't it a spark  
That makes an engine go?  
Scratch a Montrealer  
With a French tooth-pick  
Or an English thorn  
It's good Canadian blood  
He's proud of it. I know I am.

D. P.

My roots swing dangling  
Over a riven earth  
Split by explosion.  
My roots are shrunken  
And my eyes are dark  
With wisdom, born of sorrow.  
My burgeoning is strong  
With helpless anger  
And a hymn of longing.  
I know the stir of pain  
The shock of emptiness  
The stab of hatred  
I am beautiful  
With cruel winnowing.  
My roots dangle  
In hunger  
For their earth.  
Where shall I find anew  
The welcoming soil  
The rain of love  
The sun's fine warmth?  
When shall I see once more  
My brother's smile?  
When shall my life  
Be one again  
With God and man?

## THE HELPLESS POET

Have I the right to make a verse of this?  
Man is a spectre, staring at Armistice,  
Bending with swollen stomach on his land  
The plowshare falling from his nerveless hand  
Into the rubbled furrow, made by war.  
The asses bray, the peacocks strut before  
The worldly mirror; man in the guise of beast  
Is not alive, nor fully dead: the yeast  
Of living feebly works while children cry  
In vain for food, and women's breasts are dry.  
Gone is the sowing and the gentle seed  
Gone is the yearning to uproot the weed.  
The little golden images we built  
Stand all awry, their tawdry crowns atilt.  
God watched in anger when the books were burned.  
Which of all this is mine? Have I returned  
My borrowing? Have you? What is this stain  
Upon the earth? Which one of us is Cain?  
Man's hand, a puny cloud, obscures the sun  
The runner stops before his race is run  
The infant's cry fades helpless at our door  
My brother's blood will haunt me evermore.

Was this my doing? That, my Judas kiss?  
Have I the right to make a verse of this?

## CRISIS

Man is looming large again  
Here his hunger, here his pain  
Here upon our window-sill  
Sings the angry whippoorwill  
Bray the asses, low the kine  
Which are yours, and which are mine?  
There the empty kitchen drawer  
And the gaping forage store  
There the school door open wide  
Hunger stalks at eventide  
Hungry body, hungry mind  
We are satisfied and kind.  
It is easy to be good  
With a larder full of food.

In our silken beds we lie  
Could that be an infant's cry?  
Man is looming large again  
Be he Abel, be he Cain?

## PRAYER

O God of Goodness, Forwardness, and Fulness  
Let not my feet stray from the path of nature.  
Nor my heart and soul from contemplation of the  
    heavens.

Keep thou my mind alive and ever searching  
And my eyes open to the glow of beauty.  
Help my strength that it may flow outward  
And return from conflict unvanquished and  
    undimmed.

God of all strength, keep me strong.

God of light, terrify me not by fear of ultimate futility  
But let me hope one day to gaze unblinded at the sun  
And sing my song of joy in perfect purity. Amen.





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