

“In Nunhead Cemetery”

It is the clay that makes the earth stick to his spade;
 He fills in holes like this year after year;
The others have gone; they were tired, and half afraid
 But I would rather be standing here;

There is nowhere else to go. I have seen this place
 From the windows of the train that's going past
Against the sky. This is rain on my face—
 It was raining here when I saw it last.

There is something horrible about a flower;
 This, broken in my hand, is one of those
He threw it in just now: it will not live another hour;
 There are thousands more: you do not miss a rose.

One of the children hanging about
 Pointed at the whole dreadful heap and smiled
This morning after THAT was carried out;
 There is something terrible about a child.

We were like children last week, in the Strand;
 That was the day you laughed at me
Because I tried to make you understand
 The cheap, stale chap I used to be
Before I saw the things you made me see.

This is not a real place; perhaps by-and-by
 I shall wake—I am getting drenched with all this rain:
To-morrow I will tell you about the eyes of the Crystal Palace train
 Looking down on us, and you will laugh and I shall see what you see again.
 Not here, not now. We said “Not yet
 Across our low stone parapet
Will the quick shadows of the sparrows fall.”

But still it was a lovely thing
 Through the grey months to wait for Spring
 With the birds that go a-gypsying
In the parks till the blue seas call.
 And next to these, you used to care
 For the Lions in Trafalgar Square,

Who'll stand and speak for London when her bell of Judgment tolls—
And the gulls at Westminster that were
The old sea-captains' souls.
To-day again the brown tide splashes step by step, the river stair,
And the gulls are there!

By a month we have missed our Day:
The children would have hung about
Round the carriage and over the way
As you and I came out.

We should have stood on the gulls' black cliffs and heard the sea
And seen the moon's white track,
I would have called, you would have come to me
And kissed me back.

You have never done that: I do not know
Why I stood staring at your bed
And heard you, though you spoke so low,
But could not reach your hands, your little head.
There was nothing we could not do, you said,
And you went, and I let you go!

Now I will burn you back, I will burn you through,
Though I am damned for it we two will lie
And burn, here where the starlings fly
To these white stones from the wet sky—;
Dear, you will say this is not I—
It would not be you, it would not be you!

If for only a little while
You will think of it you will understand,
If you will touch my sleeve and smile
As you did that morning in the Strand
I can wait quietly with you
Or go away if you want me to—
God! What is God? but your face has gone and your hand!
Let me stay here too.

When I was quite a little lad
At Christmas time we went half mad
For joy of all the toys we had,

And then we used to sing about the sheep
 The shepherds watched by night;
We used to pray to Christ to keep
 Our small souls safe till morning light—;
I am scared, I am staying with you to-night—
 Put me to sleep.

I shall stay here: here you can see the sky;
The houses in the street are much too high;
 There is no one left to speak to there;
 Here they are everywhere,
And just above them fields and fields of roses lie -
If he would dig it all up again they would not die.

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