

## “The Fête

To-night again the moon's white mat  
Stretches across the dormitory floor  
While outside, like an evil cat  
The *pion*<sup>1</sup> prowls down the dark corridor,  
Planning, I know, to pounce on me, in spite  
For getting leave to sleep in town last night.  
But it was none of us who made that noise,  
Only the old brown owl that hoots and flies  
Out of the ivy—he will say it was us boys—  
*Seigneur mon Dieu*:\* the *sacré* soul of spies!                      \* Lord, my God  
He would like to catch each dream that lies  
Hidden behind our sleepy eyes:  
Their dream? But mine—it is the moon and the wood that sees;  
All my long life how I shall hate the trees!

In the *Place d'Armes* the dusty planes, all Summer through,  
Dozed with the market women in the sun and scarcely stirred  
To see the quiet things that crossed the Square—,  
A tiny funeral, the flying shadow of a bird,  
The hump-backed barber Celéstin Lemaire,  
Old Madame Michel in her three-wheeled chair,  
And filing past to Vespers, two and two,  
The *demoiselles* of the *pensionnat*\*\*                      \*\* boarding school  
Towed like a ship through the harbour bar,  
Safe into port, where *le petit Jésus*  
Perhaps makes nothing of the look they shot at you:  
*Si, c'est défendu, mais que voulez-vous?*<sup>2</sup>  
It was the sun. The sunshine weaves  
A pattern on dull stones: the sunshine leaves  
The portraiture of dreams upon the eyes  
Before it dies:  
All Summer through  
The dust hung white upon the drowsy planes  
Till suddenly they woke with the Autumn rains.

It is not only the little boys  
Who have hardly got away from toys,  
But I, who am seventeen next year,  
Some nights, in bed, have grown cold to hear  
That lonely passion of the rain  
Which makes you think of being dead,

And of somewhere living to lay your head  
As if you were a child again,  
Crying for one thing, known and near  
Your empty heart, to still the hunger and the fear  
That pelts and beats with it against the pane.

But I remember smiling too  
At all the sun's soft tricks and those Autumn dreads  
In winter time, when the grey light broke slowly through  
The frosted window-lace to drag us shivering from our beds.  
And when at dusk the singing wind swung down  
Straight from the stars to the dark country roads  
Beyond the twinkling town,  
Striking the leafless poplar boughs as he went by,  
Like some poor, stray dog by the wayside lying dead,  
We left behind us the old world of dread,  
I and the wind as we strode whistling on under the Winter sky.

And then in Spring for three days came the Fair  
Just as the planes were starting into bud  
Above the caravans: you saw the dancing bear  
Pass on his chain; and heard the jingle and the thud.  
Only four days ago  
They let you out of this dull show  
To slither down the montagne russe and chaff the man à la tête de veau—  
Hit, slick, the bull's eye at the *tir*,\*\*\* \*\*\* shooting  
Spin round and round till your head went queer  
On the *porcs-roulants*. *Oh! là là! fête!*  
*Va pour du vin, et le tête-a-tête*<sup>3</sup>  
With the girl who sugars the *gaufres*!\*\*\*\* *Pauvrette*, \*\*\*\*waffles  
How thin she was! but she smiled, you bet,  
As she took your tip—"One does not forget  
The good days, Monsieur." Said with a grace,  
But *sacrebleu*: what a ghost of a face!  
And no fun too for the *demoiselles*  
Of the *pensionnat*, who were hurried past,  
With their "*Oh, que c'est beau—Ah, qu'elle est belle!*"<sup>4</sup>  
A lap-dog's life from first to last!  
The good nights are not made for sleep, nor the good days for dreaming in,  
And at the end in the big Circus tent we sat and shook and stewed like sin!

Some children there had got—but where?  
Sent from the south, perhaps—a red bouquet  
Of roses, sweetening the fetid air

With scent from gardens by some far away blue bay.  
They threw one at the dancing bear;  
The white clown caught it. From St. Rémy's tower  
The deep, slow bell tolled out the hour;  
The black clown, with his dirty grin  
Lay, sprawling in the dust, as She rode in.

She stood on a white horse—and suddenly you saw the bend  
Of a far-off road at dawn, with knights riding by,  
A field of spears—and then the gallant day  
Go out in storm, with ragged clouds low down, sullen and grey  
Against red heavens: wild and awful, such a sky  
As witnesses against you at the end  
Of a great battle; bugles blowing, blood and dust—  
The old *Morte d'Arthur*, fight you must—  
It died in anger. But it was not death  
That had you by the throat, stopping your breath.  
She looked like Victory. She rode my way.

She laughed at the black clown and then she flew  
A bird above us, on the wing  
Of her white arms; and you saw through  
A rent in the old tent, a patch of sky  
With one dim star. She flew, but not so high—  
And then she did not fly;  
She stood in the bright moonlight at the door  
Of a strange room, she threw her slippers on the floor—  
Again, again  
You heard the patter of the rain,  
The starving rain—it was this Thing,  
Summer was this, the gold mist in your eyes;—  
Oh God! it dies,  
But after death—,  
To-night the splendour and the sting  
Blows back and catches at your breath,  
The smell of beasts, the smell of dust, the scent of all the roses in the  
world, the sea, the Spring,  
The beat of drums, the pad of hoofs, music, the dream, the dream, the  
Enchanted Thing!

At first you scarcely saw her face,  
You knew the maddening feet were there,  
What called was that half-hidden, white unrest  
To which now and then she pressed

Her finger-tips; but as she slackened pace  
And turned and looked at you it grew quite bare:  
There was not anything you did not dare:—  
Like trumpeters the hours passed until the last day of the Fair.

In the *Place d'Armes* all afternoon  
The building birds had sung "Soon, soon,"  
The shuttered streets slept sound that night,  
It was full moon:  
The path into the wood was almost white,  
The trees were very still and seemed to stare:  
Not far before your soul the Dream flits on,  
But when you touch it, it is gone  
And quite alone your soul stands there.

Mother of Christ, no one has seen your eyes: how can men pray  
Even unto you?  
There were only wolves' eyes in the wood—  
My Mother is a woman too:  
Nothing is true that is not good,  
With that quick smile of hers, I have heard her say;—  
I wish I had gone back home to-day;  
I should have watched the light that so gently dies  
From our high window, in the Paris skies,  
The long, straight chain  
Of lamps hung out along the Seine:  
I would have turned to her and let the rain  
Beat on her breast as it does against the pane;—  
Nothing will be the same again;—  
There is something strange in my little Mother's eyes,  
There is something new in the old heavenly air of Spring—  
The smell of beasts, the smell of dust—*The Enchanted Thing!*

All my life long I shall see moonlight on the fern  
And the black trunks of trees. Only the hair  
Of any woman can belong to God.  
The stalks are cruelly broken where we trod,  
There had been violets there,  
I shall not care  
As I used to do when I see the bracken burn.

1914

<sup>1</sup> elementary particle responsible for the forces in the atomic nucleus

<sup>2</sup> Yes, it is defended, but does that please you?

<sup>3</sup> movable pig. Oh! there there! Festival! Go for wine, and the tête-a-tête

<sup>4</sup> Oh, that is nice—ah, that is beautiful!