

C O L L E C T E D

V E R S E :

Fragments from

a

broken dream

* * * * *

Louis
Russell
Chauvenet

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Price 5¢

Published by the Aimless Press
1920 Thomson Rd. Charlottesville
V i r g i n i a

T O

ARIEL MINGARINI

whose friendship has for
many years so stoutly
withstood the strain
of reading my verse!

"There are things I have to do
More than just to live and die,
More than just to die of living.
I have seen the moonlight leaving
Twig by twig the elms, and wondered
Where I go, where I have wandered."

--Archibald MacLeish

Author's note

I publish these few versifications at my own expense for little other reason than the gratification of my vanity. And yet it is true that I have been greatly moved by beauty and delight and despair, and have sought to convey something of what I have felt in these verses. Perhaps at least one reader may find something not altogether displeasing in at least one line of those printed here. Dared I believe this, then I would believe the publication of my verse wholly justified.

--Louis Russell Chauvenet
Villa Fuddlejump, January 1943.

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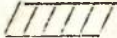
PRINT

I

Nocturne

The sleeper in the room's walled dusk
Who will not wake the long night through,
Or scent the strange night-flowers' musk,
Or, under darkness, tread on dew,
May in a timeless world imbibe
The dreams dark-brewed by slumber's powers,
While on the night the stars describe
Their tenuous arcs through turning hours.

Still, none can weigh the nebulous lure
Which draws the restless mind to sleep;
Of one thing only am I sure,
Against this call none stand secure:
Though long the night watch I may keep,
It, too, shall find oblivion deep.



PRINT

II

At Daybreak

There is rain in the west woods;
It drips from wet twigs;
On long pine needles
The bright drops gather.

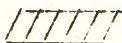
Down bark to pine floor
The rivulets trickle,
Assuaging the dryness
Of forest earth.

Beyond branch-patterns
The rain-mist of morning,
By breeze-breath shaken
Lets slow rain fall.

The woodland squirrels,
Tree-shielded from weather,
Are silent and sleepy--
How still the day!

Quietness. Moisture.
A wood-world sheltered,
Sheltered, awaiting
The will of the rain:

Here is acceptance.
Tranquillity. Patience.
Here for my troubled
Spirit waits peace.



III

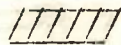
On the water

To see is to be merged in part
With what is seen; at once to find
The secret footpath to the heart
Across the detours of the mind.

The riding lights are red and green
Strewn thickly in the Thoroughfare,
There anchored vessels, else unseen,
Are shapes among the shadows there.

Each oarblade leaves a glowing play
Of phosphorescence in the tide,
And, drifting without steerageway,
We trail our fingers overside.

All shared experience is sweet--
The very sharing makes it so--
And in this loveliness complete
Our hearts come closer than we know!



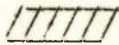
IV

Morning in the Valley

Sombre against the lightening sky
The lines of wooded hills rise clear;
The rain is stilled and day is near:
Beyond the hills horizons lie.

There let them stay! With rain and dew
The grass is cool and doubly sweet
And here I find a world complete:
No need to search for vistas new.

All things my questing heart has sought,
The secret hopes I dare not say,
Are briefly mine this break of day
Before they fade again to naught!



V

The Landscape

If I could weave in tapestry
Or on a canvas recreate
The tremulous, the delicate
And subtly simple tracery
Of what is common raised to great

Perhaps three minutes in a year
(By momentary solitude,
With iridescent colors hued,
By magic in the atmosphere
Or through recurrence of a mood!)

So that the world might grandeur feel
And spirit from the scene distill,
It would see what it never will;
Yet now it counts my view unreal
Though I---I have the vision still.

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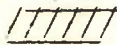
VI

Since you asked me...

How can I tell you what the sky means to me?

Regard the heavens not with mine but your eyes:

Perhaps they hold a message for you also.

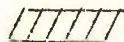


VII

Rhapsody

Spring madness garnished with lanterns
And garbed with flowing seas
Of ruby lights and amber
And burning sapphire! These
Echo the dawns and sunsets,
The midnights and the noons
And south winds blowing
Through drowsy afternoons.

They shimmer, pale, coruscant,
In pulsing ebb and flow
Across the rim of morning
Where white clouds glow;
They splash in lazy shadows
Athwart the afternoon
Like deep-grown ripples
On a still lagoon;
They burn in blended beauty
Where the pyres of sunset gleam
With rainbow radiance
Of a sundrenched dream;
They gather midnight magic
From sky and seas and plains:
Ah, how spring madness wakens
The life within my veins!

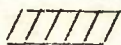


VIII

Night Paths

There's gravel underfoot. The road declines,
A nebulous path among uncertain trees.
Elusive brightness that branches cannot seize,
The stars dance over the questing boughs of pines.
Below, at the foot of the hill, their light combines
With the orange flare of a moon in western skies:
Yet one stray firefly now, for all his size,
Outrivals the constellations' star-pricked signs.

Here on the lawn the night-wet grass is cool,
Faint airs from the garden are almost scentless, yet
Half fragrant still. Now from the open door
Light forms on dim green lawn a motionless pool;
Stars vanish when the house in silhouette
Lifts its high chimneys where the night birds soar.



SPEED-O

PRINT

IX

Checkmate

The toppled king falls slowly on the squares
 Of black and white, and rolls across the board.
 I stand up, congratulate my opponent;
 We clasp hands, smile---good game, and good night all.

Down one flight of steps through the revolving
 Door at the foot----and night air of April
 Is cool upon my forehead and my flushed cheeks.
 And now the subway. Or---shall I keep onward,
 Return along the river, six or seven
 Miles of morning to the house I live in?
 Decision reached without the pain of thinking
 Is for night air and touch of breeze from water.

On to the Esplanade. Here concrete sidewalk
 Runs straight a mile along the river basin,
 Lit by recurrent street lamps. To the left rise,
 Across a narrow grass-strip, rows of houses,
 Apartment buildings, mostly, jammed together,
 Grudgingly opening to let a street seep
 Through to drink of river but beyond the
 Gap reforming ranks in a close cluster.

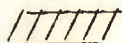
To right is river basin, and the breeze which
 Blows in my face is cooled by the chill water
 And feels good on my hot skin. I am almost
 Soothed to tranquillity by the slow rhythm
 Of walking without giving thought to where each
 Foot is placed, or even being conscious
 Of the commands which make the two feet rise
 Alternatively always. Round the basin
 Are ringed white lights, arranged in patterned sameness,
 Evenly spaced, and by that evenness soothing;
 But in one place I find the pattern broken
 By red glare of an advertising sign---I
 Watch red stains on water that is elsewhere
 Immobile, black, and unstirred by the light breeze.
 I watch---and in detachment it occurs to
 Me that life is a red stain on darkness,
 This earth a blotch upon the Universe.

My head rings with lines and half lines of poems
 I know, and mixed with these come undertones
 Of jumbled words having some music of their
 Own, but either wholly meaningless or else
 Having significance I do not know of.

"To lift then but in silence
 Illuminable laughter,
 Renascence from oblivion
 Shall follow after."

By bench and bench I mark my progress, which seems
Partaking of dream qualities. Above me
Are no stars, only clouds which over city
Drift thinly and by thinness give a hint of
The unseen half-moon in the one light spot
In all the gray---not black but neutral---heavens.

I think back----I can remember this walk
By full moon on May evenings, but now that I
Have solitude and grey sky, I prefer them
To moonlight and an evening filled with people
By twos and multiples of two. The chill air,
The late hour, and the gray sky----these are armor
To insulate myself for timeless moments
And in that insulation find a peace of
Mind not to be derived from love or friendship.



SPEED-
PRINT

X

Departure

We are leaving the island tomorrow. The trunks are full.
They are stacked in the hallway, almost blocking the door.
The cage the canaries will go in is hooded. The men
are putting up shutters. The rugs are off the floor.

Should I return to find again
The magic that I knew,
What spells could bind again,
What charms renew?

The chairs and the couch are covered. The swings are gone.
The massive rafters shadow the room below.
Beyond the shutters the wind is never still.
I think it will rain tomorrow, but we will go.

//////

XI

Romance by Moonlight

A Play in one scene. Time: Twilight

Enter, right, a boy and a girl. They seat themselves on a low grass bank in the center of the stage.

The Boy: Your hair is softer than silence,
Your eyes are charms for mine,
But you will not listen to my pleadings
And your heart is turned away.

The Girl: Ah, but I will love you if you promise
You will never be romantic in the moonlight,
If you swear by your love for me that
You will not love by the moon.

The Boy: There are no secrets in the daylight;
There are far too many in the night.
But the moon makes all things lovely,
All things fair.

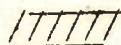
The Girl: You are drunk on poets' patter!
You have heard me: you must say
You will never be romantic in the moonlight
Or prate no more of love.

The Boy: So be it then. Yonder your hated moon
Will soon rise over the trees, and I suppose
You will want to go away and leave me here.

The Girl: Yes, if you will not promise the thing I ask.

The Boy: You are a child of the sun, I of the moon;
That do you know of moments that may bring
The dreams in unexpected masquerade,
Or of the sundial in the silent garden
Which keeps the time by moonlight thru the night?
No---if your love for me is a thing which needs
The strength of the sun, no less my need
of the moon
I do not think we are likely to meet again
Although it was nice to have known you. Goodbye.

The Girl: Goodbye. (Exit, R, to slow curtain).



XII

Dream Girl

Wind blows, fine rain is driving;
 I am alone with night.
 Yet no goal greets my striving:
 Wind, rain and gloom move with me
 almost as if from spite.

My eyes have seen a light!
 Now on my sight

There wavers, half deluding,
 A barn, with cracks a gleam,
 Thin golden lines denuding
 The night of its dark mantle,
 The mind of its black dream;

Fears that in darkness teem
 Now foolish seem.

I pull, the door swings freely;
 How warm the air inside!
 The lantern, quite small really,
 Lights up---I stand unmoving:
 She looks at me, calm-eyed,

And though my eyes are wide
 My breath has died.

She smiles, "Long have I waited,
 And you come wet and cold!
 And is your heart too sated
 To take my warmth to warm you?
 Or lack you thoughts so bold?"

Not I---who am not old!
 Her hair shines gold.

The world the light rays fashion
 Holds her and is complete;
 I have no thought but passion,
 For, as I turn down the lamplight,
 Her clothes are at her feet:

My heart burns, beat on beat:
 Her form is----sweet!

She laughs, she grasps my fingers,
 On the warm hay she lies
 And the flame of the lantern lingers
 One moment along her soft throat,
 One moment within her eyes,

And slides along her thighs.
The lamplight dies.

While the hot blood its swift course runs
One impulse rules the quivering brains
And flesh on flesh no contact shuns,
No touch denies nor thrill disdains.

While the hot blood its swift course runs
Pleasure and loveliness may blend:
One kiss outweigh a thousand suns,
Yet, ah, the pity! ----kisses end.

New lit, the lamp flames brightly,
She stands, still nude and fair,
For an instant, and then lightly
She gestures with her left hand
And merges into air! :

And though I stare and stare
She is not there.

"The Code of Sky Born Creatures,"
(Her voice is cutting, cool)
"Has some quite unpleasant features;
For example, let me quote you
The Thirty Seventh Rule:"

(I know I've been a fool,
But she is cruel!)

"They who wear auras faded
In the Presence of the Glow
Shall be summarily degraded,
Expiate their sin in torment
In the loathly form you know.

"I broke the Rule and so
I paid with woe!

"And all you thought delightful,
It was my forced pretense,
With that shape, those feelings frightful,
And an agony lit, flaming,
In every sense.

"And now I must go hence
With shame intense."

She ceases. I feel her flee me.
The air, it stirs and shakes.
I wish that no one could see me;
I tremble and hate my body,
My body quivers and quakes,

My mind reels and breaks,
In terror wakes.

And perhaps I was but dreaming,
Yet perhaps the dream was real:
So no matter how fair-seeming
Any girl appears to me,
In my mind the warnings peal:

Horror and fear I feel----
That is her seal!

//////

XIII

The Wind is Chill

Low hangs a sky whose grey and black and grey
Has set one circle of the world apart
In a pale lustre not allied to day,
For here all values hither known depart:
Under the shadow of this alien art
Survives nor joy nor sorrow, good nor ill;
Implacable, the wind cuts mind and heart
And warmth is gone, but only the wind is chill.

Here is a thing I fear to understand,
A truth on which it is not well to gaze:
Aged Horror holding all the earth in hand!
---Draw down the shades against the sombre sky,
Pile birchwood logs upon the leaping blaze
And let the cold breath of this wind pass by!



XIV

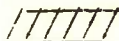
To One Unknown

I have never met you
Nor have you come to me;
Perhaps I pass you in a crowd:
Your face I never see.

And yet I feel your presence
When I am deeply stirred,
If only by a flower,
If only by a bird.

So have I known you always
By simple things I love,
Jonquills on a green lawn,
Blue above,

Shadows in a red dawn,
Light with wings,
And all the enchantment of
Color that sings.



XV

Myth

The Rainbow Boy has wed the Star of Evening.
In the Sky Country they have built a birchbark
House among the treedusk of the forest.
There is a music in the flow of water
In the shy stream a bird's call from their doorstep;
When they come down to pools they see deer drinking,
When they swim in the pools the fish are frightened.

The trees are shafted, tall---their wood is made for
Bows light to hand, but strong to send the arrows
In straight flight down the woodways. They have
all things.

But they have seen the red men, whose creations,
Those dreams and legends they have been, forget them,
And now their story is no longer chanted
Around the smoking campfires. They have all things
In the Sky Country, but they are not happy.

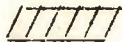


XVI

Love's end

If, in imaginary visions, you
Have come in secret through the shadow's gray
To where the tower's battlemented view
Enframes a fragment of the nascent day;
And if at moments I have heard you say,
As though you were no phantom, you could see
In that bright vista one transcendant way
Bridging the chasms of eternity:

Forgive the vain delusion! I have known
At heart how much it angered you that I
Built one strong tower in your sweep of sky
And I will build no more. When viewed alone,
The tower seems less strong; let stone on stone
Dissolve, and let the bright illusion die.

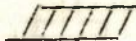


XVII

Can I deny myself ...

Can I deny myself the touch of things
I know I have most need of---turn away
From mysteries because no strong light springs
At mere desire, to make the darkness day?
Can I cling only to the easy way,
The false simplicity illusion brings,
And never wonder if the future may
Give me the strength to soar on wider wings?

The lotus grows across the river's plain
And it is pleasant merely to forget.
Too pleasant and too evil. I will get
New fortitude from sorrow, strength from pain,
That, where high mountain masses mock the wain,
I may renew my love of living yet.



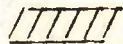
XVIII

In fremder Stadt*

Die Strasse mit unbekanntem Leuten
Beim Fenster fließt durch lange Stunden;
Unter den Vorbeigehenden heute
Wer denkt an meine Herzenswunden?

Sie folgen ihren Engeweisen,
Einer dem andern in Feindschaft zu stehen
Misstrauisch auf den Lebensreisen---
Lass gern solch' um die Ecke gehen!

Die Städtleere steigt wie ein Riese,
Zu treten auf meinen Geist bereit;
Ich will sie fliehen, auf der Wiese
Entdecken höh're Einsamkeit.



*A free translation appears on the following page.

Translation of XVIII

In a strange city

The unknown people on the street
pass by the window through long hours;
among the passers-by today
who thinks of my heart's sorrows?

They follow their own narrow ways,
Each standing enemy to each,
distrustful on life's journey:
such people are best forgotten.

The emptiness of the city rises up like a giant
prepared to crush my spirit;
I will flee from it, to country meadows
where I may find a higher solitude.



XIX

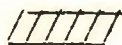
Night Rain

The night rain in the nodding garden
Makes rose leaves dance where no wind blows;
Behind green coats the young buds harden,
Behind black clouds a young moon glows.

The rain's light touch on still, dark water
Stirs rings of ripples. Each lily sways
Alone---no night moths come to court her;
On lily pads the slight rain plays.

The dial marks no moonlit hours,
The clouds' thick masses dim the skies,
Within the garden's cold, wet bowers
No single bird or insect flies:

Still, with a beat that does not cease,
The rain gives dancing leaves no peace.



XX

Realization

The wind beneath the maples weaves
A pattern built of scarlet leaves,
But, ere the symbol stands complete,
It blows on down another street,
And when it wanders back this way
It has forgotten what to say
And only stirs the leaves around
In aimless heaps along the ground.

My dreams of glory I rescind:
My mind is like this fitful wind.

//////

Notes to the verses

- I---the octet is a sensuous way of expressing the strange feeling which sometimes comes to me passing along late at night down a street of lightless houses. In the sestet I try to find a slightly fresh angle to the old sleep-death analogy.
- II---this effort advocates whole hearted acceptance of life with all its joys and limitations.
- III---an attempt to catch the remembered magic of an evening in a row boat with a girl I knew long ago. I have not seen her for years, but the last stanza is by no means the less true for that.
- IV---an expression of the mood of belonging., a kind of sense of "at homeness" in the world. There is also evident my strong sense of the transience and impermanency of all experience. That is held cannot be held always; I think this very fact heightens our appreciation of beauty.
- V---This was suggested to me during an afternoon I once spent high up in a tall tree on the edge of a wood, overlooking the valley (of IV) in which our farmlands lay. The perfectly ordinary and familiar hills of home rising beyond took on a surprisingly enchanting air for a few exultant minutes late in the afternoon. To find beauty in unexpected places is always most memorable.
- VI--I could never fully define the attraction the clear sky holds for me in its changing colors, day, night, evening, dawn. But the advice is good, I think.
- VII---perhaps typically adolescent in its somewhat over-done imagery, but I include it here for its healthy and tingling delight in the mere sensation of being alive.
- VIII--atmospheric poems, according to me, serve a definite function, and have a definite value: they preserve the essential essence of experience, so that it may be delighted in again and again, and also by others. So the purpose of this verse is simply to call up in the mind a vivid, pleasing picture of a summer's night.
- IX---an exploratory effort, directed towards savoring the full taste of defeat, and extracting therefrom an immunizing serum, so to speak. It is vital to remember that I lost the chess game; had I won, I would have walked home with far other feelings!
- X---in memory of leaving our summer home in Maine for the last time, saying farewell to places very dear to my heart.
- XI---This is, of course, allegorical. The sun represents the real world, the world of common sense and proper behaviour; the moon symbolizes a world in which more value is placed on delight in living and appreciation of beauty. I was thinking of an otherwise attractive girl who seemed to have few or no esthetic tastes in common with myself.
- XII---an allegory of a different nature. It is unlike most of the other verse which is included here in that it was written during the height of the feelings it expresses, not from 'recollection in tranquillity.' The work is

an effort to express the emotions accompanying the tragic outcome of a love affair. From the boy's point of view it is the discovery that the girl he thought he loved is in reality a different being with whom he has little in common. The terms in which the allegory was expressed are strong because the shock was great. The conclusion drawn in the final stanza is an emotional exaggeration because the lines were actually written under the influence of painful and stormy emotions.

- XIII----some-
 ③ what a calmer look at the evil potentialities of the inanimate world. (emotions respond more readily to living things). Here the attempt is made to convey the strange coldness of a world suddenly seen as essentially alien to humanity.
- XIV
 ② largely inspired by the perusal of a book of Amerindian legends.
- XV-----this was
 ④ XVI---I have always been surprised that some people profess to find the symbols in this thing obscure. The meaning is merely that I loved a girl who was not interested in me that way; that I realized her disinterest, but nevertheless centered my boyhood dreams around her; and that finally I came to understand fully that I must give up those dreams "and let the bright illusion die."
- XVII---I wrote this sonnet primarily to encourage myself in accepting the limitations of man's knowledge and in learning to live fully in spite of the accompanying limitations of my physical being; but afterwards I was much amused to note it was rather popular among people of a religious turn of mind, who placed their own interpretations on it! But I must admit that Temple Hollcroft's comment: "Tennyson exhausted that lotus vs. big fight thing long ago," rather flattened me.
- XVIII-----the
 ⑥ urge to express this feeling happened to be strong in me at a time just after I had been reading a German novel for several hours, and I had the unique experience of having the German come to my mind more easily than the English. (The grammar was revised and corrected by my German prof; otherwise it's just as I wrote it)
- XIX---The first two lines leapt into my head one night as I was sitting in an unlit room, looking idly out into a rainy darkness. The rest followed. The *raison-d'être* is as VIII's.
- X
 ① XX---The latest in point of time of all these verses, and a kind of epitaph for the long adolescent period in my life, during which I took seriously my romantic "dreams of glory." These lines are a final honest admission to myself of my own limitations.
- and now at last I must leave these little verses to find their own way to Helen Blazes, who alone of all my readers is sure to give them a warm reception!