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Author(s): Thomas MacDonagh

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THE SONG OF JOY

By THOMAS MACDONAGH

I

O mocking voice that dost forbid always
The poems that would win an easy praise,
Favouring with silence but the delicate, strong,
True creatures of inspirèd natural song,
Only the brood of Art and Life divine,
Thou say'st no fealty to the spurious line
Of phantasies of earth,—to mortal things
That strain to stay the heavens with their wings
And ape the crownèd orders at the Throne
Around a graven image of their own,
Setting the casual fact of one poor age
Aloft, enormous in its privilege
Of instant being!—O voice of the mind,
Wilt thou forbid the songs that come like wind
Out of the south upon the poet heart,—
Out of the quietude of certain art?
Now the cross tempests from the boreal frost
Harry my atmosphere, and I have lost
My joyous light of poetry in vain
Without the gloom profound of hell for gain—
With only hostile follies that annoy,
The brawls that overwhelm the song of joy,
And are not sorrowful or strong enough
To make a passion out of wrath or love—
Only To-day with its vain self at strife,
And affectations of fictitious life,

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And spite, and prejudice, and out worn rules
Kept by the barren ignorance of fools.—
Why, when I come to thee, shunning them all,
Why must the harsh laughter of mockery fall
Upon my soul, waiting to know the word
Of a new song within my heart half heard?
Why must the music cease and hate come forth
To call these winds out of the withering north?

II

You bring a bitter atmosphere
Of blame and vain hostilities,
Stirring beauty and joy with fear
Of words, as night wind stirs the trees
With whispers which will leave them sere.

So, harsh and bare, your bitter heart
Will leave you like a bush alone,
Sullen and silent and apart,
When all the winds it called are gone—
The winds were airs of your own heart.

Ah, bitter heart, not always thus
You came, but with a storm of Spring,
With happiness impetuous,
With joy and beauty following—
Who now leave all these ruinous!

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III

Not ruinous, O mockery, not all
Ruinous quite!—Not sped beyond recall
My storm of Spring, my storm of happy youth,
That blew to me all gifts of joy but truth,
That blew to me out of the Ivory Gate
Figures and phantasies of life and fate.
I sang of them that they were life enough,
Giving them lasting names of joy and love;
And when I saw their ghostly nothingness
I made a bitter song out of distress,
And cried how joy and love had passed me by;
Though my heart happily whispered that I,
Not truth of joy or love, had broken ease,
Had broken from false quiet, won release.
I sang distress, then came out fresh and new
Into good life, knowing what fate would do.
Not bitter mockery, not harsh to blame,
Not with dark winds of enmity I came,
But following truth, in dread of shapes that seem
Of life and prove but of a passing dream,—
In dread of ease, that has the strongest chain,—
In dread of the old phantasies again.
The south wind blew: it was my storm of Spring —
O tempest of my youth, what will you bring
To me at last who know you now at last?—
The south wind blew, and all my dread was past.
Yet thou, O mockery, wouldst hold the word
Of that harsh day, though here the south has stirred!
Cease now for ever, for that day is done;
My sad songs are all sung, Joy is begun.
Voice of the mind, thy truth no more shall mock:
That door of ease with love's rare key I lock,—
And reverent, to Joy predestinate,
With the same key open my door of fate.

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IV

A storm of Spring is blowing now
And love is throwing buds about !
Oh, there's a bloom on yonder bough
Under the withering leaves of doubt !—
The bough is green as Summer now.

O lover ! laugh, and laughing hold
What follows after piety :
In faith of love be over-bold,
Lover, the other self of me—
The bitter word no more I hold.

How could I mock you, happy one,
Who now have captured all a heart ?
Take up my tune and follow on :
Borrow the passion of my art
To sing your prothalamion !

V

Now no bitter songs I sing :
Summer follows for me now ;
For the Spirit of the Spring
Breathes upon the living bough :
All poor leaves of why and how
Fall before this wonder, dead :
Joy is given to me now
In the love of her I wed.

She to-day is rash to cast
All on love—and wise thereby ;
Love is trust, and love at last
Makes no count of how and why ;

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Worlds are wakened in the sky
That had slept a speechless spell,
At the word of faith,—and I
Hold my faith from her as well.

For she trusts to love in all,
Life and all, and life beyond;
And this world that was so small,
Bounded by my selfish bond,
Now is stretched to Trebizond,
Upsala and Ecuador,
East and west of black and blond,
In my quest of queens like her.

Was she once a Viking's child
That her beauty is so brave?
Sun-gold, happy in the wild
Of the winter and the wave,
Pedestal'd by cliff and cave,
With the raven's brood above,
In the North she stood and gave
Me the troth of all her love.

Or in Egypt the bright storm
Of her hair fell o'er my face,
And her features and her form,
Fashioned to that passionate grace,
Won me from an alien race
To her love eternally,
Life on life in every place
Where the gods cast her and me.

Here to-day we stand at last
Laughing in our new-born mirth

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At the life that in the past
Was a phantasy of earth,
Vigil of our life's true birth
Which is joy and fate in one,
Now the wisdom of the earth
And the dooms of death are done.

So my bride is wise to-day
All to trust to love alone :
Other wisdom is the clay
That into the grave is thrown :
This is the awakening blown
By the Spirit of the Spring :
Laughing Summer follows soon,
And no bitter songs I sing.