

The Prophets' Paradise

By Robert W. Chambers

*If but the Vine and Love Abjuring Band
Are in the Prophets' Paradise to stand,
Alack, I doubt the Prophets' Paradise
Were empty as the hollow of one's hand.*

The Studio

He smiled, saying: "Seek her throughout the world."

I said, "Why tell me of the world? My world is here, between these walls and the sheet of glass above; here among gilded flagons and dull jewelled arms, tarnished frames and canvasses, black chests and high-backed chairs, quaintly carved and stained in blue and gold."

"For whom do you wait?" he said, and I answered, "When she comes I shall know her."

On my hearth a tongue of flame whispered secrets to the whitening ashes. In the street below I heard footsteps, a voice, and a song.

"For whom then do you wait?" he said, and I answered, "I shall know her."

Footsteps, a voice, and a song in the street below, and I knew the song but neither the steps nor the voice.

"Fool!" he cried, "the song is the same, the voice and steps have but changed with years!"

On the hearth a tongue of flame whispered above the whitening ashes:

"Wait no more; they have passed, the steps and the voice in the street below." Then he smiled, saying: "For whom do you wait? Seek her throughout the world!"

I answered, "My world is here between these walls and the sheet of glass above; here among gilded flagons and dull jewelled arms, tarnished frames and canvasses, black chests and high-backed chairs, quaintly carved and stained in blue and gold."

The Phantom

The Phantom of the Past would go no further.

“If it is true,” she sighed, “that you find in me a friend, let us turn back together. You will forget, here, under the summer sky.”

I held her close, pleading, caressing; I seized her, white with anger, but she resisted.

“If it is true,” she sighed, “that you find in me a friend, let us turn back together.”

The Phantom of the Past would go no further.

The Sacrifice

I went into a field of flowers, whose petals are whiter than snow and whose hearts are pure gold.

Far afield a woman cried, "I have killed him I loved!" and from a jar she poured blood upon the flowers whose petals are whiter than snow and whose hearts are pure gold.

Far afield I followed, and on the jar I read a thousand names, while from within the fresh blood bubbled to the brim.

"I have killed him I loved!" she cried. "The world's athirst; now let it drink!" She passed, and far afield I watched her pouring blood upon the flowers whose petals are whiter than snow and whose hearts are pure gold.

Destiny

I came to the bridge which few may pass.

“Pass!” cried the keeper, but I laughed, saying, “There is time;” and he smiled and shut the gates.

To the bridge which few may pass came young and old. All were refused. Idly I stood and counted them, until, wearied of their noise and lamentations, I came again to the bridge which few may pass.

Those in the throng about the gates shrieked out, “He comes too late!” But I laughed saying, “There is time.”

“Pass!” cried the keeper as I entered; then smiled and shut the gates.

The Throng

There, where the throng was thickest in the street, I stood with Pierrot. All eyes were turned on me.

“What are they laughing at?” I asked, but he grinned, dusting the chalk from my black cloak. “I cannot see; it must be something droll, perhaps an honest thief!”

All eyes were turned on me.

“He has robbed you of your purse!” they laughed.

“My purse!” I cried; “Pierrot—help! it is a thief!”

They laughed: “He has robbed you of your purse!”

Then Truth stepped out holding a mirror. “If he is an honest thief,” cried Truth, “Pierrot shall find him with this mirror!” but he only grinned, dusting the chalk from my black cloak.

“You see,” he said, “Truth is an honest thief, she brings you back your mirror.”

All eyes were turned on me.

“Arrest Truth!” I cried, forgetting it was not a mirror but a purse I lost, standing with Pierrot, there, where the throng was thickest in the street.

The Jester

“Was she fair?” I asked, but he only chuckled, listening to the bells jingling on his cap.

“Stabbed,” he tittered; “think of the long journey, the days of peril, the dreadful nights! Think how he wandered, for her sake, year after year, through hostile lands, yearning for kith and kin, yearning for her!”

“Stabbed,” he tittered listening to the bells jingling on his cap. “Was she fair?” I asked, but he only snarled, muttering to the bells jingling on his cap.

“She kissed him at the gate,” he tittered, “but in the hall his brother’s welcome touched his heart.”

“Was she fair?” I asked.

“Stabbed,” he chuckled; “think of the long journey, the days of peril, the dreadful nights! Think how he wandered, for her sake, year after year, through hostile lands, yearning for kith and kin, yearning for her!”

“She kissed him at the gate, but in the hall his brother’s welcome touched his heart.”

“Was she fair?” I asked; but he only snarled, listening to the bells jingling in his cap.

The Green Room

The Clown turned his powdered face to the mirror.

“If to be fair is to be beautiful,” he said, “who can compare with me in my white mask?”

“Who can compare with him in his white mask?” I asked of Death beside me.

“Who can compare with me?” said Death, “for I am paler still.”

“You are very beautiful,” sighed the Clown, turning his powdered face from the mirror.

The Love Test

“If it is true that you love,” said Love, “then wait no longer. Give her these jewels which would dishonor her and so dishonor you in loving one dishonored. If it is true that you love,” said Love, “then wait no longer.”

I took the jewels and went to her, but she trod upon them, sobbing:

“Teach me to wait,—I love you!”

“Then wait, if it is true,” said Love.