

Lilith's Lover

By Madison Cawein

"And round his heart one strangling golden hair"

I

White art thou, O Lilith! as the foam that glimmers and quivers,
Glitters and clingingly silvers and snows from the balm
Of the beautiful breasts of the nymphs of the seas and rivers
That crystal and pearl by clusters of tropical palm,
Forests of tenebrous palm.—
Once didst thou beckon and smile, O Lilith! as givers
Of heavenly gifts smile: and, lo! my heart no longer was calm.

II

Cruel art thou, O Lilith! as spirits that battle
In tempest and night, in ultimate realms of the Earth;
Immaterial hosts, that shimmer and shout and rattle
Elemental armour and drive, with madness and mirth,
Down from the mountains, into the sea, like cattle,
Gaunt and glacial cattle,
Congealed thunder, the icebergs, gigantic of girth.

III

Subtle art thou, O Lilith! as the sylphids that cover
Dawn with their forms of rose, and breeze it with breasts and cheeks;
Breasts that are blossoms, and cheeks
Pearls in the morning's creeks:
And wily art thou as the daemons of beauty that hover,
Raven of hair, in sunset, trailing its gold with streaks:
And what man, Lilith, beholding, would not yield himself thy lover?
Beautiful one, thy lover?
Die as I died, Lilith! for the love that no tongue speaks? . . .

IV

Before us, behold, the long white thunder of ocean:
Around us the forest, a whispering world of trees:
Above us the glory and glitter, golden and silvery motion
Of infinite stars, O Lilith! and, arrowing out of these,
Down in my soul from these,
A sense of ancient despair, destruction, devotion,
Medusa of beauty, that slays; that is part of man's destinies.

V

O kisses, again would I die! O kisses that slew me!
O beautiful body of sin, O sin that was mine!
O splendour and whiteness of wickedness! passion that drew me,
Golden of hair that drew me,
Draw me again with thine eyes, their azure divine!
Slay me again with caresses! and let it pierce through me,
All the poignant desire that made me eternally thine.

VI

And the larvæ, the lamias, that cling to, encumber
And, bat-like, feed at the Ethiop breasts of Night,—
Swarms, like bubbles that rise from the shadowy pools of night —
Owl-eyed, hag-haired, her minions, awoke from their slumber,
And peering and whispering came, O Lilith the white! . . .
But thou, with thy beautiful hair, from their hideous number,
The night of their myriad number,
Covered me, dead at thy feet, and hid me from sight.