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## POEMS OF LONDON AND OTHER VERSES

BY

JOHN PRESLAND

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## POEMS OF LONDON

### LONDON DAWN

Dawn over London; all the pearly light  
Trembles and quivers over street and park,  
The houses are a strange, unearthly white;  
Pavement and roof grow slowly, palely bright;  
There is no shadow, neither light nor dark  
But everything is steeped in glimmering dawn.

Oh, purity of dawn; oh, milk-and-pearl  
Translucent splendour, spreading far and wide,  
As on a yellow beach the small waves curl  
—Almost as noiselessly as buds unfurl—  
On windless mornings with the rising tide,  
So flows the dawn o'er London, all asleep.

Indeed, I think that heaven is a sea,  
And London is a city of old rhymes  
Sunk fathoms deep in its transparency,  
That folk of living lands may dream they see  
And muse on, and have thoughts about our times,  
How we were great and splendid, and now gone.

For never light the common earth has born,  
This crystalline pale wonder that so falls  
On streets and squares the daily toil has worn,  
On blind-eyed houses, holding lives forlorn,  
For the grey roads and wide, blank, grey-brick walls  
Shine with a glory that is new and strange.

And not more wonderful, nor otherwise  
Shall dawn come up upon the dewy hills,  
Nor in the mountains, where the rivers rise  
That water Eden; and no lovelier lies  
The dawn on Paradise, than this that fills  
The space 'twixt house and house with tremulous light.

Yet, on the pavement, huddled fast asleep,  
A thing of dusty, ragged misery,  
Grotesque in wretchedness, from London's deep  
Spumed off, a strange, distorted thing to creep  
From God knows where, and lie, and let all be  
Unheeding, whether of the day or night.

Such tired, hopeless angles of the knees  
And neck and elbows—and the dawning grey  
Trembling to sunrise; in the park the trees  
Begin to shiver lightly in a breeze,  
And turning watchful kindly eyes away  
The policeman passes slowly on his beat.

## **SPRING IN OXFORD STREET**

A dash of rain on the pavement,  
In the air a gleam of sun,  
And the clouds are white, and rolling high  
From Marble Arch all down the sky  
—And that's the spring begun!

The sky is all a-shining  
With sunniest blue and white,  
The flags are streaming out full cry  
As the crisp North wind comes bustling by,  
And all the roofs are bright.

And all the shops and houses  
Of sunlit Oxford Street,  
—Pearl behind amber, gold by rose—  
To grey the long perspective goes;  
Till all the houses meet.

And there, in every gutter,  
The glory of spring flowers  
The whole long street with colour fills,  
And across the yellow daffodils  
Sharp sunshine and soft showers.

And among the drabs and greys and browns  
Of folk going to and fro  
Are trays of violets, darkly bright,  
And yellow, like the spring moon's light,  
Pale primrose-bunches show.

There's blue in every puddle,  
And every pane of glass  
Has a thousand little dancing suns,

—And up and down the glad news runs,  
That spring has come to pass.

### JUDD STREET, ST. PANCRAS

My dwelling has a courtyard wide  
Where lord with lady well might pace,  
—Such silks and velvets side by side,  
And she a fan to shield her face!—  
It's fine as any king's;  
For there I see on either hand  
The whole great stretch of London lie;  
—Just so as any king might stand  
Upon his roof, to watch go by  
The flashing pigeon wings.

Just so a king might look abroad:  
"And this is all my own," says he,  
And then he'd turn to some great lord,  
Who'd acquiesce with gravity  
—But that I do without,  
For all of lord there is up here  
Is this impassive chimney-stack,  
And cloudy be my view or clear  
My courtier will not answer back;  
All silent I look out,

And see the flight of roofs that fade  
Towards the West in golden haze,  
And all this work men's hands have made  
Like jewels in the sun's last rays—  
I have a dwelling wide;  
Three rooms are mine, but I can go  
Up to this roof in shade or shine,  
And watch all London change and glow  
Rose, purple, gold; three rooms are mine—  
And all of heaven beside.

### SPARROWS

Brown little, fat little, cheerful sparrows!  
I like to think, when I hear them chatter,  
How, when the brazen noise was gone  
Of the chariot-wheels, with the sparks a-scatter,  
Their chirp was heard in old Babylon.

In Babylon, and more ancient Memphis,  
They chattered and quarrelled, pecked and fumed,  
And loved their loves, and flew their ways,  
Where the royal Pharaohs lay entombed  
Deep from the daylight's vulgar gaze.

Then, just such little homely fellows  
(When the angry monarch, terrible,  
Watched his curled Assyrians writhe)  
They sat, on a carven granite bull  
Unheeding of anguish, feathered and blithe.

So did they sit, on the roofs of Rome,  
And preen themselves in the morning sun;  
And Caesar saw them, brown and grey,  
Whisk in the dust, when his course was run  
And he took to the Forum his fated way.

Oh, changing time; oh, sun and birds  
How little changing. In the Square  
This winter morning I have met  
Old Egypt's grandson, stopped him there,  
And "Sir, you will outlive me yet,"  
Said I politely, "mark my words."

### **THE MOON IN JANUARY**

Sharp and straight are the scaffold poles,  
Black on a delicate sky;  
Upright they stand, across they lie,  
In changeless angles fixed and bound,  
The sunset light in mist is drowned,  
And the moon has risen high;

High above houses, high and clear  
Above the scaffolding,  
So exquisite, so faint a thing,  
The young moon's silver curve that shines  
Above the fretting, tangled lines,  
With the old moon in her ring.

The young moon holds the old black moon  
In a sky all grey with frost,  
By cable wires barred and crossed,  
And below, the haze of purplish-brown  
Smokes upward from the lamp-lit town  
Where outlines all are lost.

The pure pale arch of windless sky,  
The pure bright young moon's thread,  
These wide and still are overhead;  
And in the dusky glare below  
The lamps go dotting, row on row,  
And there is movement, to and fro,  
Where far the pavements spread.

### **AN AUGUST NIGHT, 1914**

The light has gone from the West; the wind has gone  
From the quiet trees in the Park;  
From the houses the open windows yellowly shine,  
The streets are softly dark;

Row upon row the twisted chimneys stand,  
Each angle sharply lined,  
And the mass of the Institute rises, tower and dome,  
Black on the sky behind;

Green is the sky, like some strange precious stone,  
Dark, it yet holds the light  
In its depths, like a bright thing shrouded over or veiled  
By the creeping shadow of night;

And whiter than any whiteness there is upon earth  
A faint star throbs and beats—  
And the hurrying voices cry the news of the war,  
Below, in the quiet street.

## COUNTED OUT—OLYMPIA

The small white space roped off; the hard blue light  
Burning intensely on the narrow ring,  
And every muscle's movement sculpturing  
Harshly, of those two naked men who fight;  
Beyond, the yellow lights that seem to swing  
Across abysmal darkness; and below,  
Tier upon tier, all silent, row on row  
The dense black-coated throng, and all a-strain  
White faces, turned towards the narrow stage,  
Watching intently; watching, nerves and brain,  
As those two men, cut off in that blue glare  
From all reality of place and age  
Wherein our common being has a share,  
Together isolated, watch and creep  
—Sunk head, hunched shoulders, light of foot and swift,  
Deadly of purpose—in that ancient game,  
Which was not otherwise in forests deep  
Of earth primeval: that light tread the same,  
The same those watchful eyes, and those quick springs  
Of a snake uncoiling; underneath the skin,  
Glistening with sweat in that unearthly blaze,  
The muscles run and check, like living things.  
And then, the hot air tremulous with the din,  
And all the great crowd surging to its feet,  
Yet like a wave arrested, while the hands  
Of the referee allot the moments' beat;  
The seconds, strung like greyhounds on a leash  
Await the signal; and there's one who stands  
Still guarding, watchful, tense, while all around  
Lamp-light and darkness seem to rock and spin  
In one wild clamour; and upon the ground,  
Beneath the stark blue light, the beaten man!

## THE GERMAN BAND

When I was a little child  
And lived very near the sky,  
A German band was wonderful music  
That could almost make me cry.

It was to me of a beauty  
That I could not understand,  
Though I dimly guessed at sorrow and joy  
In a grown-up distant land.

All that I know with the years,  
Much that I never shall know,  
Was in my heart when the music came  
In such guise, years ago.

And now when on Friday mornings  
I hear my own child run,  
When the German band in the street starts playing,  
The wonder is never done;

The wonder at ways that our spirit  
May take for itself to rise,  
How a puddle may be a silver lake,  
And a chimney touch the skies.

All the forms through which spirit  
Yearns and strives to be known  
Are only a little greater or less,  
For great is the Spirit alone.

## STREET MUSIC

### I

There comes an old man to our street,  
Dragging his knobby, lame old feet,  
Once a week he comes and stands,  
A concertina in his hands,  
There in the gutter stops and plays,  
No matter fine or rainy days  
—Very humble and very old—  
Pavement's for them who make so bold!  
Prim, starched nurses, and ladies fair  
With taffeta dresses and shining hair,  
And gay little children, who break and run  
To give him a penny—he seems to feel  
(Out-at-elbows and out-at-heel)  
That they've a right to the morning sun;  
And so with gnarled old hands he'll play  
For an hour, perhaps, then take his way,  
Dragging his knobby, lame old feet  
In the gutter of this quiet street.

There is no grudging in his eyes,  
Nor anger, nor the least surprise  
At the uneven scales of fate:  
Glad of the sun, against the rain  
Hunching his shoulders, age and pain  
He takes as his appointed state,  
And stands, like Lazarus, at the door  
With the dread humility of the poor.

## STREET MUSIC

### II

I've heard a mad old fiddler play  
Harsh, discordant, broken strains,  
Down the wet street on a winter's day  
When the rain was speckling the window-panes,

And though it was middle afternoon  
And none of the lamps were lighted yet,  
The night had settled down too soon  
And the sky was low and dark and wet.

In a cracked old voice I've heard him sing,  
Strangely capering to and fro,  
Sawing his fiddle on one worn string,  
A grotesque and desolate thing of woe,

Wagging his head and stamping his feet  
(Unwitting of the passers-by  
Hurrying through the gloomy street)  
His shoulders hunched and his head awry.

The children would laugh when they saw him pass,  
And "Look," they'd say, "at Crazy Joe!"  
And press their faces against the glass  
To watch him—leering and lurching—go.

Where he comes from, nobody knows,  
But he, being mad, is in God's hand,  
And sacred upon his way he goes;  
And his music—God will understand.

## PICCADILLY

Above, the quiet stars and the night wind;  
Below, the lamp-lit streets, and up and down  
The tired, stealthy steps of those who walk  
When the just sleep, at night, in London town.

Poor garish ghosts that haunt the yellow glare,  
Wan spectres, lurking in the alleys dark  
Among the tainted night-smells, while the wind  
Is whispering to the trees across the Park;

For it is summer, may be, and the scent  
Of new-mown hay is sweet across the fields,  
But neither summer, nor the gleaming spring  
One breath of healing to this dark life yields;

No morning sunshine greets these sidelong eyes  
With blessings, daughters as they are of gloom,  
Ghosts only, such as seem to have a shape  
At night in some old evil, haunted room.

Would that they were indeed to be dissolved  
At every sunrise!—they are living souls  
Dragging mortality about foul streets  
While overhead the star-lit heaven rolls.

Living souls are they, and they have their share  
In seed and harvest, and the round world's boon  
Of changing seasons, and the miracle  
Of each month's waxing and waning of the moon.

Living souls are they, prisoned in a net  
Of stealthy streets—age after age they've gone  
Bearing the burden of a city's sin,  
In London, and old Rome, and Babylon.

## IN THE TUBE

A tired, working woman, draggled-tailed,  
Came in, harsh-featured in the yellow glare  
Of electricity; an urchin trailed  
Clumsily after her, with trowsled hair,  
And sharp, pale features, and a vacant stare,  
And in her arms she bore another child.

A sick child, doubtless, where all three looked sick;  
The poor legs hanging limply, lean and blue,  
Dangled grotesquely, for the boots, too thick  
For such frail bones a touch could snap in two,  
Like clock-weights seemed to swing, as staggered through  
The burdened mother, till she found a seat.

Through dark unnatural to unnatural blaze  
Of stations rocked the train; it tore the air  
To shreds and tatters in the tunnelled ways  
With such a noise as when hell's trumpets blare;  
We, swaying, faced our fellow-creatures there  
Each mercilessly pilloried in light.

The sick child lay against the woman's breast  
Asleep, and she looked down on it and smiled,  
And with her gaunt arms made her bird a nest  
Against her poor worn bosom—sad and mild  
In such wise looked Madonna at her Child  
Where old saints worshipped, round the altar set.



Such glory of the spirit shone and streamed  
In that brief moment, that her form and face  
Were rags of vesture only, through which gleamed  
The splendour; something of wonder and of grace  
Making the poor flesh lovely—all the place  
Grew holy with the Mother and the Child.

## A LONDON IDYLL

### I

A heavy sky, and a drizzling rain  
And the lamps in rigid rows;  
Long smears of light all down the street  
Where a lean cat stalking goes;

Blank, save a glimmer here and there  
The gaunt dark houses stand—  
And a man and a girl against the gate  
Whispering, hand in hand.

There is a little dripping sound  
Of rain from off the roof;  
And gleaming like black armour goes  
The policeman's waterproof.

He crosses the road to give them room  
As he takes his evening beat;  
He also knows that heaven may look  
Like a rainy London street.

## A LONDON IDYLL

### II

Just to all of us once there comes  
This splendour and wonder of love,  
When the earth is transmuted to silver and gold,  
And heaven opens above;

When all we have ever seen with our eyes,  
Daily, under the sun,  
Seems like a miracle, happening again  
To us two, instead of to one.

When there is nothing so ugly or mean,  
But somehow shimmers and glows  
In that light, whose spring is within our hearts  
And whose stream o'er the wide earth flows.

When the spirit of us that is prisoned within  
Seems at last to have wings,  
And, soaring, looks with no common eyes  
On no other than common things;

When we may freely enter and share  
Heaven's splendour and mirth—  
Just for a moment to all of us comes  
This glory of love upon earth.

## FINIS

### S.C.K.S.

A book's end is the end of many hopes;  
Much good endeavour; certain hours of stress  
When brain and spirit fail, and laziness  
Thralls the poor body—yet the purpose gropes  
Athwart it all, and as the horseman cheers  
His tired beast with chirrup, spur, and goad  
Towards his home along the heavy road,  
So drives us purpose till the end appears.  
Read it who may! Find more or less of good  
Within its covers, but at least find this:  
Glad service to a great and noble aim  
That may be striven for, and understood,  
And fallen short of—so not quite we miss  
In our small lamp of clay Truth's very flame.

## OTHER VERSES

### IN EARLY SPRING

There's a secret, have you guessed it, you with human eyes and hearing—  
Which the birds know, which the trees know, and by which the earth is stirred,  
Stirred through all her deep foundations, where the water-springs are fastened,  
Where the seed is, and the growth is, and the still blind life is heard?

There's a miracle, a miracle—oh mortal, have you seen it?  
When the springs rise, and the saps rise, and the gallant cut-and-thrust  
Of the spear-head bright battalions of the little green things growing  
(Crocus-blade or grass-blade) pierce the brown earth's sullen crust?

Oh, wonder beyond speaking in the daily common happening;  
But the little birds have known it, and the evening-singing thrush,  
In the cold and pearly twilights that are February's token  
Speaks of revelation through the falling day-time's hush.

## A BALLAD OF THE FALL OF KNOSSOS

*(Circa 1400 B.C.)*

Is it a whisper that runs through the galleries?  
Is it a rustle that stirs in the halls?  
Is it of mortals, or things that are otherwise  
This sound that so haltingly, dreadfully falls,  
Pauses, and hurries, and falls?

No moon, and no torches; not even a glimmer  
To pin-prick the darkness that weighs like a sin,  
And nothing is breathing, and nothing is stirring,  
And hushed are the small owls without, and within  
The mice to their holes have run in.

It is not the step of a foot on the pavement;  
It is not the brush of a wing through the air;  
It is not a passing, it is not a presence,  
But the ghost of the fate that this palace must bear,  
Of the ruin of Knossos goes there.

For on such a night, when the moon is dark,  
 And all of the stars are dumb,  
 With a sudden flare by the sea-ward gate  
 Shall the doom of Knossos come;  
 For a cry will shatter the brooding hush,  
 And the crickets and mice shall wake  
 To clatter and clash and shout and cry,  
 And the stumble of frenzied feet going by  
 Death's stride will overtake.

For into the glare of a new-lit torch  
 That shakes in a shaking grasp,  
 Sweat-streaked, wild-eyed, and dark with blood  
 Shall a runner break, and gasp  
 Of a burning harbour, of silent ships,  
 Of men sprung out of the night—  
 Is it men or devils?—He moans, and reels  
 Shoulder to wall, and a red stain steals  
 Down the frescoes gay and bright.

And hard on the word they hear approach  
 The surge of the battle near,  
 And to whistle of arrows, and clang of bronze  
 The palace awakes in fear.  
 Light! Light! and torches, like waking eyes  
 Leap from each darkened door;  
 And the guard at the sea-ward gate go down  
 In the vast black sea of men, and drown,  
 While sweeps the torrent o'er.

What door shall hold, or what walls withstand  
 The roll of a full spring-tide,  
 With an on-shore wind? And the gates of bronze  
 Ring, rock, and are flung aside;  
 And a myriad unknown raiders burst  
 Into the hall of the King,  
 Where Minos on his carved, stone seat  
 Beheld the nations at his feet,  
 Watched each its tribute bring.

Minos is slain; his guards are slain;  
 Which of his sons shall live  
 In this pillared Hall of the Double Axe  
 The word of the Kings to give?  
 Which of his sons? Shall they know his sons  
 In this sudden terror sprung  
 On sleeping men? Half-armed they stand,  
 Foot pressed to foot, hand tense to hand,  
 And muscles iron-strung.

The flame of the torches in the wind  
 Of their struggle blackens the wall,  
 And the floor is sticky with blood, and heaped  
 With the bodies of those that fall.  
 What if a son of Minos live?  
 In that horror of blood and gloom,  
 What of the noble, what of the brave?  
 Better to die, than endure as a slave  
 The days after Knossos' doom.

But above the scuffle of sandalled feet,  
 And the breath of men hard-pressed,  
 And the clash of bronze, and the gasp and thud  
 As the point goes through the breast,  
 And above the startled hoot of owls,  
 And the rattle of shield and spear,  
 The wailing voices of women rise  
 As their men are stricken before their eyes  
 And they huddle together in fear.

Slow comes the dawning in the East;  
 Pale light on the earth is shed,  
 And cool and dewy blows the wind  
 Over the writhen dead;

Pale light, which fades in the growing glare  
Of the flames that swirl and leap  
Through corridor, and bower, and hall,  
On carven pillar and painted wall;  
The flames that like sickles reap

A barren harvest of kingly things,  
To be bound in ashy sheaves,  
While driven forth by the work of his hands,  
Stumbles the last of the thieves.  
Behind him is fire, ruin, and death,  
Before him the kine-sweet morn,  
But vases of silver and cups of gold  
And hoarded treasures fashioned of old  
On his blood-stained back are borne.

\* \* \* \* \*

Is it the night-wind alone that blows shuddering  
Down the dim corridors, tangled with weeds;  
Is it a bat's wing, or is it an owl's wing  
That silently passes, as thistledown seeds,  
In the Hall, where the small owlet breeds?

Here do the moonbeams come, slithering, wandering  
Over the faded, pale frescoes that stand  
Faint and remote on the walls that are mouldering,  
Crowned with a King's crown, or flowers in hand,  
—Pale ghosts of a gaily-dressed band.

Faintly they gaze on the wide desolation;  
Faintly they smile when the white moonbeams play  
Over the dust of the throne-room of Minos,  
Over the pavements where small creatures stray,  
The humble small things of a day.

But there are other nights, moonless and starless,  
When no moth flutters, no bat flits, owl calls,  
Something is stirring, something is rustling,  
Something that is not of mortals befalls  
In galleries, cellars, and halls.

Soundless and viewless, a strange ghostly happening,  
Life, long since ashes, and flames, long since dead;  
For the Angel of Time goes relentlessly, steadily  
Over dark places that mankind has fled;  
And the dust is not stirred by that tread.

## A SUN-DIAL IN A GARDEN

Across the quiet garden sunlight flows  
In wave on wave like water, heavy bees  
Hang drowsily upon the drowsy flowers,  
For it is very still, and all the trees  
Are pyramided high in green and gold.  
There is a sun-dial there to mark the hours  
Where time is not, where time has grown so old  
It does not move now; yet the shadow goes  
Across the dial that's so warm to feel  
Like a cold, stealthy, creeping, living thing.  
You cannot see it steal  
Minute from minute of the golden day  
Till all are eaten away,  
You cannot press it back with both your hands,  
And, on the shadowed stone  
Laying your cheek, you never warmth can bring  
To what beneath the sad triangle stands,  
Solitary in sunlight: for we know,  
It takes the whole great swinging earth to throw  
The little shadow on the little stone.

## "TWO ONLY"

Only two hearts shall understand the sea  
That speaks at nightfall, in the wash and lap  
Of windless evenings under flaming skies;  
Only two hearts shall hear the rising sap  
In wet spring woods; and two alone, grown wise  
In union, shall make discovery  
Of what lies hidden, though before our eyes.

Oh, core of wonder in familiar things:  
Magic of evening, and of early morn  
But just created, with the dew of birth  
All fresh upon it, heaven itself new-born  
O'er the green splendour of the quiet earth  
And like a just-awakened bird that sings  
Because of sunlight, is the spirit's mirth.

All forms of beauty but express the soul  
As in a looking-glass; the wind that goes  
Low-talking to the trees beneath the stars,  
Or the small sound of water, as it flows  
Under old bridges, where the ivy mars  
The sharp stone outline—these are in the whole  
Of the World-Symphony small, tuneful bars.

And human beings in the span of years  
Some part of all the world-wealth may receive,  
More, less, but never all; and with dismay  
We see slow Time his net of hours weave  
To catch from us dear mortal night and day,  
Ere we have taken in our eyes and ears  
Beauty that lies around, beyond, away.

We, singly, feel a sudden sharp regret  
Behind all beauty, but we—two in one,  
As white and blue are separate in a flame  
Yet mingled—we shall watch the hours run  
Seeing with surer knowledge how the same  
Eternal splendour for the soul is set,  
And the day comes again from whence day came.

## THE SAINT'S BIRTHDAY

One of God's blessed pitying saints one day,  
Reaching out hands to touch the azure throne:  
"Because it is my birthday, Lord," he said,  
"That I was born in heaven, when I was known  
By an earthly name, and stoned and left for dead,

"Because it is the custom, Lord, of men  
To keep their birthdays gladly, and with gifts  
Grant me a blessing from your blessed stores."  
And from the cloudy rose and amber drifts  
About the Throne, God answered: "It is yours."

Then sprang the glad Saint earthwards; at his feet  
Were little golden flames, and all his hair  
Was blown about his head like tongues of fire,  
And like a star he burned through the dark air,  
And came, and stood by farm and shed and byre

Before the earliest grey was in the East,  
Or the first smoke above the chimney-stack

From earliest-rising housewife, yet the cheep  
And twitter of birds did gladly welcome back  
Him who such love for earth in heaven could keep,

And who on earth such love had had for men  
And bird and beast, and all that lived and grew:  
The sparrows in the eaves remembered him  
And chirruped in the gables, while the dew  
Was dark still, and the day below the rim.

He stood there, in the village of his life  
Ere he won heaven, and the breath of cows  
Came as a benediction, and the smell  
Of rain-sweet copses, and, where cattle browse,  
Long grass, and running water in the dell.

And his heart opened with the love he had  
For the dear toil-worn dwelling-place of men;  
To hear the sheep crop, see the glimmering grey  
Lighten the waiting windows once again,  
And garden roses opening to the day.

Not otherwise was Eden once—he thought—  
And by God's blessing it may be anew:  
And so put forth the power God had lent  
And took away all labour, and he drew  
Heaven to earth, till earth and heaven were blent.

Time ceased to be; and yet the sun and shade  
Shifted to make new beauty with the hours,  
And the ripe earth, unlaboured, gave her yields,  
No pain there was, no age, and all the flowers  
Unwitheringly lovely filled the fields.

And all day long the birds in ecstasy  
Sang without shadow of hawk or thought of death,  
And the saint happily went about the ways  
Filling each home with plenty—his very breath  
Was like a little thrilling note of praise.

When all was done he stepped back, childish-wise,  
To see and love his handiwork, and then  
Came a sharp pain, and pierced him through and through;  
He had wrought lovingly for the days of men,  
But the heart of men his love could not renew:

The weary heart, the ever-questioning,  
The loving, lacking, lonely, incomplete  
For ever longing to be merged in one  
With something other than itself; to beat  
To another's pulse; to be for ever done

With its sad weight of personality.  
Then God leaned down to his poor saint, and said:  
"Dear soul, would you make heaven upon the earth:  
Nor know indeed My purpose in all birth,  
Nor that My blessing is upon the dead?"

## **RUPERT BROOKE**

*April 1915*

You that are gone into the dark  
Of unknowing and unbeing;  
You that have heard the song of the lark,  
You that have seen the joy of the spring;  
You have I seen, you have I known  
—The word you have written, your pictured head—  
And they say you are laid at Lemnos among the English dead.

Soul that is gone—is gone—

Whether into the dark,  
Or into knowledge complete and the blinding light;  
Soul that was swift and free,  
Passionate, eager, bright,  
Armed with a weapon for shams,  
And set with wings for flight;  
Soul that was questioning, restless, and all at odds with life,  
Greedy for it, yet satiate, and sick with the shows of things  
—And all laid down at Lemnos, the hunger, the love, the strife,  
And the youthful grace of body, and the body's ministerings.

Darkness, darkness, or light!  
You have leapt from the circle of sense,  
And only your dust remains and the word you said:  
"If I should die," ... and we name you among the dead.  
Yet have I a hope at heart  
That somewhere away, apart,  
Knowledge is yours and joy of the act fulfilled  
To still your fever of soul as your fever of blood is stilled;  
So shall you soar and run  
In water and wind and air,  
With your old clean joy of the sun,  
And your gladness in all things fair,  
Untouched by mortality's sadness, simple, perfect, at one.

### **"COMFORT ME WITH APPLES, FOR I AM SICK OF LOVE"**

Red lilies under the sun,  
Red apples hanging above,  
And red is the wine that is spilled  
On your bare white feet, O Love.

The poppies sullenly glow  
In the smouldering red from the West,  
And black are the dregs of the wine,  
O Love, on your bare, white breast.

Aie! aie! when the wild swan flies  
Lonely and dark is the place  
That the white wings lightened, and death  
Will cover your glowing face.

O thief that is night, O thieves!  
Cold years that devour us all;  
The lilies blossom and wilt,  
The apples ripen and fall,

The apples, the apples of Love!  
—Lo, where we have spilled the wine,  
This quenchless earth is agape,  
O Love, for your body and mine.

### **OF ENGLAND**

White is for purity, blue for heaven's grace,  
Purple is for Emperors, sitting in their place,  
Yellow is for happiness, rose for Love's embrace,  
But green—oh green, the green of England—that's for Paradise!

From seashore to seashore races the green tide;  
With the pricking green of hedges by the wet roadside  
—Or ever March triumphant comes with great, glad stride—  
There is green, there's green in England, and a tale of Paradise.

Then the hawthorns flush and tremble in their early wondrous green,  
And the willows are resplendent in a green-and-golden sheen,  
Like the golden tents of princes, Babylonish, Damascene,  
Or enchanted silent fountains of a Persian Paradise.

There are beech and birch and elm-tree—evening-still or  
morning-tossed—  
And the splendid generous chestnuts with their flame-like  
blooms embossed,  
There are oak and ash and elder, till the very sun is lost  
In the green, delicious gloaming that's the light of Paradise.

Deeper, wider, steadier this beauty ever grows,  
And from field-side up to tree-top the endless colour flows,  
Till road and house and wayside, in the first days of the rose,  
Are fathoms deep in waves of green, submerged in Paradise.

Oh dim and lovely hollows of all the woods that be;  
Oh sunlight on the uplands, like a calm, great sea;  
I think indeed the souls of those from circumstance set free  
Look down, look down on England, saying: "Ah, dear Paradise!"

## QUESTION

What of this gift of Life?  
Passionate, swift, and rife  
With pleasure or pain in the hand of the hurrying hours?  
Oh little moment of space,  
Oh Death's averted face,  
How shall we grasp, shall we grasp what still is ours?

Chill, chill on either hand  
Eternities must stand,  
And pants between them, passionate and brief,  
The moment's self, to make  
Or unmake, but to take  
Just here, just now, before death turns the leaf.

Ah, if the leaf but turn,  
And if the soul discern  
Another message on another page!  
But if death shuts the book?  
We may not know nor look;  
We are fenced in upon a narrow stage;

While, splendid and intense,  
Quick-strung in every sense  
Life burns in us, and earth lies all around—  
Far blue of summer seas,  
Young green of age-old trees—  
Bound by the season, by the horizon bound.

Oh colour, sound, and light,  
Oh wondrous day and night,  
Pale dawns, and evenings' splendid stretch of gold;  
Keen beauty like a spear,  
Half pleasure and half fear,  
Goes through us for the things we may not hold.

Hot blood, hot noons, hot youth—  
When Life seems all the truth,  
And Death a mumbled far old fairy-tale;  
When just the splendid days  
Suffice our eager gaze,  
The wondrous present that will never fail.

Then one day, with a fierce  
Clamour of heart, we pierce  
The light and see the shadows all behind,  
And then, and not till then,



By the brief graves of men  
The utter loveliness of flowers we find.

So little stretch of days,  
And earth, with all her ways  
Lovely enough, I think, for Paradise;  
And body, mind, and heart,  
Each separate complex part,  
Wondrously made, and never quite made twice.

What of this gift of Life?  
Shall it be worn in strife?  
Shall it be idly spent, or idly stored?  
Each for himself must dare  
If the answer is here—or there,  
Here for regret—or there for hope, O Lord?

### **LEONARDO TO MONNA LISA**

I wish you were a beaker of Venetian glass  
That I might fill you with most precious wine  
And drink it, breathless—lo! the moments pass  
Of that subliminal communion.  
I take you from my lips, and crush you—so!—  
Into a thousand shining particles;  
So, at the last, my passionate greed shall know  
That you were wholly mine.

I wish you were a rare, stringed instrument  
Beneath my hand, and from you I would wring  
Such unimagined music, as was sent  
Never before, along the quivering nerves;  
Such strange, sharp discords, out of which I'd mould  
Music more sweet than the spring nightingale's;  
Then, ere the magic of the sound was old,  
Would I not rend each string?

Possess you? Ah, not with the world's possession,  
You still, strange creature; neither force nor will  
Could make you serve a man's mere earthly passion.  
I would dissolve you, in one blinding flash,  
Into a drop of elemental dew,  
And let you trickle down the barren rock  
Into the black abyss, if so I knew  
That you henceforth were powerless to mock  
My spirit with your smile.

### **THE ETERNAL FLUX**

Let us hold April back  
One splendid hour  
To bless the passionate earth  
With golden shower  
Of sunlight from the blue;  
Oh April skies,  
That earth yearns up to; blue has burned to gold,  
Gold pales and dies  
In delicate faint rose,  
Oh flowing time, oh flux eternal. Hold  
The hour back. The April hour goes.

Then, let it be of May,  
When sound and sight  
And all that's beauty manifest

Through all the day,  
Of deep on deep with green,  
Of light on light  
Across the waves of blossom, when the white  
Is lovelier than the rose, except the rose  
Is loveliest of all;  
When through the day the cuckoo calls unseen,  
And at nightfall  
The nightingale, whose music no man knows  
The magic heart of, sitting in the dark  
Sings still the world-old way;  
When all of these,  
Flowers and birds, and sunset and pale skies  
Seem gathered up in scent,  
And all of sound and sight  
Dissolved, ethereal, not of ears and eyes  
But only the soul-beauty of the brain  
Flows, in such waves of perfume, over all  
—Or like a song in colour, of such strain  
As spirits finer than our own must hear  
(The beautiful made clear);  
Then, then, when it is May,  
Surely our hand must touch eternity.  
Day pales to night, stars pale upon the day,  
And May's last blossoming hour flows away.

Not of June either, though the hanging skies  
Make but a little span  
'Twi'x light and growing light;  
And when through that short darkness palely flies  
The silent great white moth  
—A spirit lost in the night,  
A soul, without will or way—;  
When the arch of trees  
Is duskily green, and close as a builded house  
Where love with love might stay,  
Guarded and still, from sight;  
When the hay is sweet in the fields  
And love is as sweet as hay;  
When the life-impulse of the wonderful untamed earth  
Has reached its fulness and height,  
Is broad and steady and wide  
As sweeps into splendid bays the flowing tide;  
When God might look on the land,  
When God might look on the sea,  
And say: "For ever be  
Perfect, completed, achieved,  
As now at this moment you stand."  
Neither in June shall we stay the eternal flow  
Nor grasp the present with pitiful, mortal hand,  
For sliding past like water the June hours go.

### **"LOVE IS THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF THE SOUL"**

Love is the ultimate measure of the soul;  
Love is the biting acid, the sure test  
To strip the naked gold, discard the rest  
Of earthly stuffs; Love is the one thing whole  
In a world of broken parts, for Love is all.

Love is creation; Love is the low call  
Of deep to deep; Love is the force that shapes  
The thing that it believes, and while there gapes  
The black earth-pit, where the poor flesh must fall,  
Love builds on hope, and buds eternal life.

Love is a victory unsoiled by strife;  
Who is there that shall adequately name  
All that Love is, this thing as swift as flame

And vast as heaven, yet in every life  
Tamed to the narrow needs of little men?

From humble love, that makes the partridge hen  
Brave for her chickens, to the Love that shakes  
The world from Calvary, all love partakes  
Of immortality; one cannot pen  
Divinity in words; Love is divine.

The very essence of God does Love enshrine;  
For let the heart, however sorely tried,  
Open itself to loving, and the wide  
Earth is a home; love-lacking must decline  
Where black fears crowd across the starless dark.

For Love is light; the faith that will embark,  
Unpiloted, upon uncharted seas  
Is Love alone; the fiery leap to seize  
The splendid distant aim, the invisible mark,  
What else but Love's? Love is the thing that stands  
Unchanged, on changing tides and shifting sands.

## NOVEMBER 8

THE LITTLE SUMMER OF ALL SAINTS

The year stands still, the tearing winter winds  
Hold off their claws a moment, that the trees  
May keep the glory of their blended gold  
A little minute; there's not so much breeze  
As summer mornings hold.

Golden and still the hours; russet gold  
The birch-leaves o'er the silver of the bark;  
Pale gold the poplars, like a lady's hair,  
And thunderous gold along the hollows dark  
The sunlit brackens flare.

## THE LOVERS

There are ghosts we walk with, lady of mine,  
Arm in arm, and side by side,  
Pallid ghosts, though the sun may shine,  
Ghosts that are cold in the warmth of day,  
And neither of us may fend them away,  
But step by step they go with us, stride by stride.

There are doors in your heart that are shut to me,  
And behind them dwellers I cannot know;  
And my soul has windows that open wide  
On a ghostly, memoried country-side,  
That—lady of mine—you never will see,  
Where your voice will never be heard, nor your footsteps go.

So we walk together, hand in hand,  
While dark eyes peer at us, pale forms come,  
And speak in my ear—or call your name  
With a voice I hear not, for praise or blame,  
And you walk alone with that ghostly band,  
While I go by the side of you, pitying, powerless, dumb.

## THE GENTLE HEART

What shall harm the gentle heart  
In its purpose undefiled?  
Even grief shall lose its smart  
In some way becoming part  
Of that nature, soothed and gentled,  
As a sorrow to a child.

Through the blackness and the sin  
Of the old world's wrongs and woes,  
And through the greater dark within,  
The gentle heart shall surely win,  
As some bright angel, armed with mercy,  
Swiftly on his errand goes.

All the body may have wrought,  
All the energies of mind  
That for its own purpose sought,  
Make at length a little nought  
Among the stars—the gentle heart  
Death itself will leave behind.

## A BALLAD FOR HERMAN

This is the ballad for Herman, the ballad of humble things,  
The hedge-side thistles that flower, the small brown lark that sings,  
And the stumbling flight of a beetle, and the dust  
    on a butterfly's wings.

The snails are out in the sunshine after the morning rain,  
And the wasps are whirring and buzzing round the mulberry tree again,  
And the ants are busy of course, working with might and main.

While the crickets leap, and rustle, and play at being blades of grass,  
And humble-bumble the bees go, lurching as they pass,  
And the flies are stupidly walking up the window-glass.

The sun is bright on the hedges, on thistle and bramble and briar,  
The columbine leaves are heart-shaped, and shine as bright as fire  
—And oh! the smell of the bracken, that's straight as Salisbury spire!

Life of the woods, life of the rivers, life of the trees,  
Life of the rich plain-grasses that seed to the morning breeze,  
And the thymy mountain-grasses June makes loud with bees.

This does not age nor alter; the low sharp song of the reeds  
As the evening wind goes over, and the fishing heron feeds  
On the still and shallow waters, salt with the floating weeds.

This does not change nor vanish; the mating calls of the springs,  
When April's green on the copses, and bright on the shining wings  
Of birds going backwards and forwards, while the whole green  
    forest sings.

All is our sister and brother, as once St. Francis said;  
The little stones in the river, the bright sun overhead,  
And newts, and the spawn of fishes, and the unnamed mighty dead.

This is the ballad for Herman. O friend, may good befall!  
There is never a star so distant, there is never a creature small,  
But living and knowing and loving in our brain we hold them all.

## FRANCE

*April 1915*

Great ever, with the hope that seeks the stars;  
The brain clear-cold, like ice; the soul like flame;  
The spirit beating at the physical bars;  
The reason guiding all—oh, there we name  
France!

A country that can think, and thinking, acts;  
A country that can act, and acting, dreams;  
That neither bears the tyranny of facts,  
Nor of its own dear hopes, nor of what seems,

But still, clear-visioned, treats with things that are;  
Yet—seer, prophet, priest of life-to-be—  
Leaps to the visionary days afar,  
And all the splendour she will never see.

School of the spirit, chastening, yet a spur  
For all that men aspire to: as of old  
Athens held up the torch, and did incur  
Persia, with her fierce armies manifold,

So France against the evil strikes and strives  
For liberty, and we of island race,  
—Humbled a little by our careless lives—  
Glory to stand beside her in our place,

Glory that we are one in hope and aim  
With her from whom in blood and agony  
The second gift of human freedom came  
Through Terror and the red Gethsemane.

On her fair, ravaged borders stand her guns,  
She has thrown away the scabbards, bared the swords,  
And, snatching laughter out of death, her sons  
Challenge high Fate to show what life affords—  
France!

## ILGAR'S SONG

*(From King Monmouth)*

O love that dwells in the innermost heart of man  
Secret and dark and still,  
Like a bird in the core of a green mid-summer tree—  
Height upon height and depth upon depth where never the eye can see  
The brown bird, hidden and still.

O Love that is wild and eager, sun-lit and free  
Like a seagull that turns in the sunlight above the sea;  
Between the sea and the sky it flashes and turns,  
And the sun on its wings is white,  
While sharply and shrill by the headland the keen wind sings  
Where the grass is salt and grey  
With the beating winter spray,  
And the seagull sweeps and soars on magnificent wings.

Love that is like a flame,  
Held in the hollow hand,  
So dear and precious a thing  
As a light in a stranger land,  
As a flickering candle to him who wanders by night.

Love that is wide as the dawn  
To the eyes of night-bound men;  
And the evil ghosts and the goblins it puts to flight,  
And stealthy creatures of dark that rustle and creep,  
And elfins and witches and all such devil's game

That cannot live in the light,  
They squeak and gibber and cheep,  
And vanish like shadows before the splendour of day.

Love that has wide, white wings like a flying swan  
—Oh what a noble span,  
From tip to tip they are more than the height of a man  
And curved like the sails of a boat—  
When over the evening river the wild swan flies  
The curve of those wings is like the arch of the skies  
Over the shielded earth.  
Love is most like a bird,  
For birds have least of the dust that gave them birth,  
They soar and poise and float,  
They wheel and swerve and skim,  
And their wings are strong to the wind, and swift to the light,  
And their voice is a promise of dawn while yet it is night,  
And their song is a pæan of hope before it is spring,  
And the song of the bird to his mate is lyrical love.

Love is secret and holy, a spiritual thing,  
Dark and silent and still  
In the heart of man, as a treasure is hid in a shrine.  
Love is splendid and fierce, as the summer sun  
Drenches the sea and the sky with its blaze and shine,  
Till every pebble is hot to the touch of the hand,  
And the air is a-shimmer with heat o'er the hazy land—  
Yet Love is not any of these things, Love is of one  
With the strange, half-guessed at, vast, creative plan  
We cannot see with our eyes nor understand—  
Yet is Love pitiful too, for Love is of man.

## THE INN

### I

Friendship's an inn the roads of life afford  
—I'll speak to you in metaphor, my friend—  
And there a tired man his way may wend,  
And, coming in, sit down beside the board,  
Out of the dust and glare, and boldly send  
For drink and victuals; haply cross his knees,  
And in the cool dark parlour take his ease,  
And gossip of his journey and its end.

That's friendship; there is neither right of place  
Nor landlord duties, just the short hour's stay  
From the sun and weariness between those kind  
And quiet walls; and when the road's to face  
Stony and long again, we take our way  
Keeping that respite gratefully in mind.

## THE INN

### II

We take our pack, and jog our way again  
Towards the windy sunset and the night;  
The inn is now behind us, out of sight,  
Showing no welcome shine of windowpane,  
But dark and silent standing by the way  
As we go forward, seeing mile on mile  
Sink out of sight—just for a little while  
We rested, in the middle of the day.

Is there an end at last, and shall we reach,  
By the faint glimmer of new-risen stars,  
Our house at last, and find the heart-repose  
Which is the ultimate desire of each  
Poor traveller—ah! shall they drop the bars,  
And the doors open? Dear my friend, who knows?

### **"TO-DAY I MISS YOU"**

To-day I miss you ... "Only for to-day,  
Some little matter of hours and nothing more."  
That at least the worldly-wise folk say,  
Who've never waited for the opening door,  
The greeting look, the known step on the floor;  
Who've never missed a loved one like a lover.

To-day I miss you. What to-morrow brings  
Is the other side of all the stars, God knows!  
Only to have you here, now evening swings  
Its quiet shadow round the globe again,  
And in our talk of old familiar things,  
And in familiar gestures, turn of brain,  
Looks, tone of voice, I may discern again  
That union from which alone love grows.

We'd close the curtains;—while the world outside,  
Noisily autumn, makes a sense of peace  
Deeper within,—open the bookcase wide  
And take a book out; then another book,  
And then another.... "Here's a favourite, look!  
We cannot pass him." ... Then from reading cease,  
Gossip and laugh, with finger in the page,  
And challenge thought with thought, and mind with mind  
Each speaking freely, that we might increase  
Some knowledge to which, singly, we were blind.

So goes the evening. Side by side we stand,  
Dear friends and brothers, till, a sudden pause,  
Or kindly, almost careless touch of hands,  
Swings us to face each other, and we feel  
Those deepest stirrings of the human heart  
Man has no name for yet, those changeless laws  
Of more than mating—that eternal part  
Our body is aware of, and our brain,  
Unchallenging with reason, must receive,  
That sense of intimate wonder!—Now again,  
The blinds are drawn; lamp, books, chairs, all retain  
Familiar aspects, but, you absent, leave  
The room all empty, empty all the day.

### **"HOW SMALL THE THREAD THAT HOLDS UP HAPPINESS"**

How small the thread that holds up happiness;  
But one frail life between the dark and me,  
Your life, dear love—and here I seem to see  
You whimsically smile, that I confess  
The whole round world, with its vast energy,  
Its summers, and its sunshine, and its aims,  
Its splendid hopes, the faith that unquenched, flames  
—All sunk into the compass of you and me.  
Yes, you are right, the single leaves that fall  
Mar not the summer; do I think one leaf  
Denudes a forest?—We are nought at all.  
Yet the bereaved small bird within the tree

May break its heart above its nest for grief  
—And perhaps this must happen, love, to me.

### **"IN ALL THINGS GRACIOUS THERE IS A THOUGHT OF YOU"**

In all things gracious there is a thought of you:  
In the soft fall of April rain, the blue  
Of April skies in the morning, the full moon  
Of windless August nights, perfect and still,  
When the white moonlight lies across the hill  
Of new-cut stubble, where a little mist,  
Flickering, rises. In the song of birds  
My heart turns to you, emptied all of words  
By loveliness, and in the poise and swing  
Of flowering grasses, and in the lingering  
Grave, spacious fall of evening on the earth,  
When the wide, liquid spaces of the sky,  
Above the dewy fields and darkening lanes,  
And windless water lying quietly,  
Yield up the daylight, until none remains.

I could endure—or so it seems to me—  
Without your presence, a life of winter days,  
Stark, grey Novembers stretching endlessly,  
Where I, forgetting laughter and bright things,  
Might set my face to duty; but the stir,  
The loveliness, the poignancy of springs,  
The growth, the rise, the universal press  
Up to sensation—ah, I could not bear  
To live an April through, but must take wings  
Out of a world too fair for loneliness.

### **"THERE'S DUTY, FRIEND, TO JOG WITH ARM IN ARM"**

There's duty, friend, to jog with arm in arm  
Through these dark streets; there's kindness indeed,  
And there's the hope a little more to weed  
Our own small patch of life which the tares harm;  
There's patience for the folly of the earth;  
There's pity for the poor who suffer wrong;  
There's honour for the striving and the strong  
—But ah, dear friend of mine, where is the mirth?  
Where's the old jollity of everyday  
That makes a holiday of common things  
Because they all are shared by us aright,  
The trivial daily work and happenings  
Having a sort of fervour and delight,  
And the sun rising, even, a different way?

### **"EVENING"**

Beloved of my soul, the day is done;  
The busy noises cease, the lights are low;  
Gently the doors shut to behind each one  
Seeking his sleep; the fading embers glow  
On silent hearths; the silent ashes fall—  
Ah, absent spirit, do you hear me call,  
Me, sitting waiting by the fireside?



This is the hour of all the night and day,  
—This is the hour when, work put aside,  
And all the talking, whether grave or gay,  
For pleasure or for profit, hushed and dumb,  
We used to, in the days before you died,  
Seek out each other's mind for rest, and say:  
"Now am I home, and all is well with me;  
To-day is gone, to-morrow is to come;  
Here let us be."

Surely, for all the barriers of sense,  
And the stark grossness of this flesh I wear,  
For all the vacant distance of the skies  
Between me here alone, and you, gone hence,  
There must be some quick knowledge; I must hear  
That dear familiar voice again, must see  
Some semblance of you with my bodily eyes,  
Now, now, when in the solitude I yearn  
Towards your heart, my home; now when I turn  
Humbly and searchingly towards that goal  
That lies beyond the purchase of the world—  
You again, you, dear comrade of my soul.

## FINIS

Life, in its unimaginable heights,  
When we may seize and apprehend the true  
Soul essence, of one nature with the stars:  
Rare moments when our senses are a mist  
That the truth shines through:—oh, most strange and rare,  
Such ecstasies as unimprisoned souls  
Experience in that thin empyrean  
Beyond the gross world; this we two have known  
We two together. There are memories  
Of such high happiness in a fence of pain  
As martyrs in their fiery heart of death  
Have blessed their God for; passion and holiness,  
When all the body (sinew, bone, and brain)  
Are like a harp, from which the spirit makes  
Marvels of harmony; some sense too rare  
To be called happiness, not to be named indeed  
In human speech—this we have touched and known  
Together, at some thrilling edge of time.

I fall away from it; the barriers close  
About me; I descend from the clear heights  
Into the plains and valleys of the world.  
The traffic of the market-place is mine,  
The heat and dust, the jostling and the noise,  
The kindly challenge and the neighbour-talk,  
All these may claim me, so that I forget  
To lift my eyes and see the far-off peaks,  
And the eternal splendour of the stars.

So be it; let the tide of men's affairs  
Carry me back and forward; let the rub  
Of greasy ha'pence passed from hand to hand,  
In humble traffic of a bunch of herbs  
Not pass me by; let me jog arm in arm,  
Or cheek by jowl, the shady side o' the street,  
With friends and neighbours, glad to know them there,  
Imperfect, human, kind, and tolerant.

So may the years go. Yet, when the call comes,  
And the world's colours fade before the eye  
That turns for spiritual vision on itself;  
When, from the four walls of the silent room,  
The noises of the world fall back and fail  
In that great silence which enrings the last

Ecstatic moment of experience,  
Here on this earth—ah, then indeed I know  
That I shall find you. All that lies behind  
(The years of trivial experience)  
Shall open and fall back from off my soul,  
As falls the brown sheaf from the opening bud;  
And in that poignant moment, that mere breath  
Of temporal time, that aeon of the soul,  
I shall reach out and know you, mix with you  
As flame with flame, as ray with ray of light,  
Be perfectly yourself, as you are me,  
With all else fallen, gone, dispersed away  
Save the pure drop of spiritual essence—Then  
Let come what may, light or oblivion.

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