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### **AFTERNOON**

 $\mathbf{BY}$ 

### **ÉMILE VERHAEREN**

**AUTHOR OF** 

"POEMS," "THE SUNLIT HOURS," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY

**CHARLES R. MURPHY** 

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#### **AFTERNOON**

Ι

Slowly maturity has come to our surprise, Placing its hands upon the naked forehead of our love, Looking upon it with its dimmer eyes.

And, in the garden shrivelled by July,
The flowers and shrubs and vibrant leaves
Have let fall their fervent powers which lie
Over the misty pond and gentle paths.
And bitterly the jealous sun now shows
Harshly a brilliant shadow
Round its light that grieves.

And yet, see how the fearless hollyhocks aspire Ardently to their own splendid fire!
See how season after season's stress
Is vain—the fibres of our hearts
Deeper than ever and insatiable,
Are rooted firmly in our happiness.

Oh hours of afternoon, fragrant with rose, Clutching at time, with cheek in flower and flame, Seeking, against his chilly side, repose!

And nothing, nothing is better than to feel Happy and limpid still—after what years?
But if fate had willed above
For us two naught but suffering and tears,
Still, would I have wished to live and die
Complaintless, in such unrelenting love!

II

Roses of June, you the most fair, You with your hearts transpierced by sun; Violent, tranquil roses, with the air Of halted flights of birds upon a bough; Roses of June and July, straight and new-begun, Mouths whose kisses all at once are thrilled With the wind or with it stilled, Caressing with shade and gold the moving green; Roses mutely ardent and sweet willed, Voluptuous roses in your sheaths of moss, You who pass the long summer time Loving each other In this clarity sublime; Fresh, magnificent, vivid—like you, oh roses, Is our multitudinous desire That in lassitude or leaping fire Loves, exalts, and then reposes!

If other flowers decorate our home, And multiply the splendour of this place, The little lake shines ever from the grass With the large eyes of its ever moving face.

Ah, say, from what deep distances unknown So many gleaming birds have come With wings sun-sown?

July has driven April from the close
And bluish tints have given place to red,
The skies are torpid and the wind has fled;
Joyously brilliant insects fill the air
That harks,
And summer wanders by, robed with diamonds
And sparks.

IV

Shadows are lustral in the iris'd dawn; From a branch on high whence a bird has fled Dew drops tremble and are gone.

Purity, delicate and fair,
Beautifies the hour that brings
Crystal brilliance to the air;
We hear the sounds of water and the brush of wings.

Oh! how your eyes are beauteous at this hour When our silver lake is gleaming in the sight Of the day arising;
Your forehead radiant and your heart-beat light. Intensity of life, its goodness and its power,
Like to a mighty blessedness
Of your soul are part,
So that to contain the anguish and the stress,
Suddenly your hands have clasped my own,
Laying them, as though with fear,
Against your heart.

V

I bring you, this eve, an offering of joy
From having drenched my body in the gold
And silken texture of the joyous wind
And in the yellow splendour of the sun;
My feet are pure with having walked the grass,
My hands are sweet with the dim hearts of flowers,
My eyes are brilliant with the sudden tears
Born in an instant from the sight of such
A beauteous earth and its eternal night.

Space, with arms of burning clarity,
Drunk and fervent, sobbing, led me on,
And I have gone down there—I know not where—
Where all my captive cries did free my steps;
I bring you life and beauty of the plains;
Take from me their free and bounteous breath;
Storms have laid caresses on my hands,
And air and light and perfume are in me.

Come, let us rest a while beside the path, Upon the aged bench long stained with mould, And let me leave, between your two sure hands, My hand, abandoned to your gentle hold.

And as my hand that lies upon your knees Is glad to be abandoned there and knows Contentment, so my sweet and fervent heart Between your gentle hands has found repose.

And there is joy intense and love profound Of which we do partake together now, Nor trembles on our lips a single word Too strong, nor any kiss that burns your brow.

We would prolong the ardour of this silence, Of mute desires the immobility, Save that, when they quiver of a sudden, I press your pensive hands unknowingly—

Your hands wherein my happiness is sealed— Your hands which never would attempt to reach To all these sacred and profounder things Whereby we live without the need of speech.

VII

Sweetly and more sweetly still
Cradle in your arms my head,
My fevered eyes and forehead wearied;
Sweetly and more sweetly still
Kiss my lips and say
Words made sweeter at each break of day
When uttered by your voice:
That you are given to me and that I love you still.

The day has broken dull and sad; my sleep Was swept with sombre dreams; The rain lets down its dusky hair in streams, And skies are lost in dreary clouds that weep.

Sweetly and more sweetly still
Cradle in your arms my head,
My fevered eyes and forehead wearied;
You are to me the gracious morn
Whose caress is in your hand:
Behold, I am reborn,
With no evil or dismay,
Unto the daily work which marks my way,
—A sign
That makes me live in an heroic strife,
A sword of beauty and of power divine
Against invidious life.

VIII

Within the house our love has chosen for its birth, With its familiar things that people coign and shade, Where we two live alone with only witnesses The roses gazing through the window from the glade; There are some days so filled with reassuring peace, Hours of the radiant summer with silence made so fair, I sometimes bring to stillness the balancing of time Within the great oak clock that stands close by the stair.

Then is the hour, the day, the night so part of us That happiness which breathes upon us hears no thing Except the ardent throbbing of your heart and mine When quick embraces heart to yearning heart do bring.

IX

My pleasant work by open windows wide,
With shadow of green leafage from out-side
And path of the sun's light
Across my paper white,
Maintains a gentle violence,
A sense
Of silence in our kindly, pensive house.

Vividly the flowers lean,
And glowing fruits among the boughs are seen,
Birds on boughs and birds upon the wing
Chant and sing
In order that my verse may ring
Clear and new, pure and trues
As song of birds,
And gold of fruits and petals blossoming.

Down in the garden there I see you pass,
Over the sunny and the shady grass;
But you do not look at me,
Lest you trouble my tranquillity,
As here with jealous heart I fashion
Poems of a frank and tender passion.

X

All faith lies at the bottom of our love,
Joining an ardent thought to everything:
The faint awakening blossom, or above
Downward the drift of petals from a rose;
The flight of bird on dark or sun-lit wing;
A nest half-falling from a roof that knows
Much of the wind's harsh manner—here is scope—
And in the flowery heart where insects cling,
For fear, and all of hope.

What matters it if reason with its snows
Falls chilling on such poignant ecstasy?
Let us accept it with a mind that knows
No false, no true, no evil and no good
That it may hold prophetically;
Let us be happy with our childish eyes,
Be it an evil or triumphant power;
And let us hide from men who are too wise.

XI

Dawn, shadow, evening, space and stars; what night Hides in its veils or shows forth mistily, Add to their exaltation; they who live In love, live also in eternity.

No need that reason light its beacon fires On walls that rear them high above the ground, Kindling the docks, the harbour and the sea; For they beyond all ocean's paths are bound.

They see the light of dawns touch shore on shore, Beyond and far beyond the black sea's space; For certitude and trembling hope themselves, Meeting their ardent gaze, have the same face.

Joyous and limpid is their hungry faith; Their soul is the profound and sudden light Which burns for them on high and heavenly things; To know the world, within they turn their sight.

They go by distant paths and live with truths That bound the far horizon of their eyes, Simple and naked, deep, and sweet as dawn; For them alone are songs of paradise.

XII

It is the pleasant hour when lamps are lit; Calmness and consolation over all; The silences so deep that one could hear A feather fall.

It is the hour when the belovèd comes,
Like to the sweetly soft and low
Wandering mist upon the breeze,
Sweetly slow.
She speaks no word at first—and yet I hark,
Hark to the soul of her, surprise
Its gleam and dark,
And then I kiss her eyes.

It is the pleasant hour when lamps are lit,

The vow

To love each other through the live-long day
From depths of heart made luminous by it.

Is with us now.

And then we speak of simple things; The fruit we gathered in the close, The flowers that disclose, Between the verdant mosses thick, Their almost wings;

And thought does blossom forth once more At memory of a word so fair Hid in a just remembered drawer, In a letter of last year.

XIII

Dead kisses of the long dead years Have left their mark upon your face, Beneath the sad, harsh winds of age Of many roses now there is no trace.

I see not now your mouth and eyes Gleam, like the birth of morning fair, Nor softly now your head repose Within the dark deep garden of your hair. Your dear hands that still are sweet Have somehow suffered from the loss Of light about their finger-tips That touched my forehead, like the dawn-kissed moss.

Your body that was fair and young That I did with my thoughts endow, No longer now is fresh as dew, Your arm no longer like the white, clean bough.

All falls, alas, and fades away, All changes now: your voice once smooth, Your body, lowered like a shield To spill the precious victories of youth.

And yet my heart says still with fervent stress: What matter that the years grow heavier? Since I know well that nothing can e'er bound Or trouble our exalted happiness,
And that our souls are too profound For love to die for want of loveliness.

#### XIV

It is now fifteen years that we have thought as one; And that our passion clear has conquered habitude, Such as is wont to injure the most tenacious love With unremitting stress of wasteful hands and rude.

And when I look at you I make discoveries, Such is the intimacy your pride and sweetness bring; And time, though it has somewhat obscured your loveliness, Exalts your heart whose golden depths are opening.

Naively now you let its hidden depths be searched, Your soul yet always seems as fresh as kindled fire; And, like an eager ship with wind-swept masts, our joy Voyages upon the seas of our desire. Within ourselves alone we anchor all our faith To naked frankness and to high benevolence; And we work and live forever in the light Of a joyous and translucent confidence.

You have the strength of frailty and infinite purity To walk the sombre roadways, your heart in aureole, And to have cherished dearly in spite of mist or shade, All the rays of morning in your childlike soul.

#### XV

I thought our joy had been forever dulled Like sun that fades before the day has fled, When sickness, to a bed of weariness, Slowly dragged me with its arms of lead.

Garden and flow'rs were either feared or false; The very light of day was a distress; And my poor hands already were too weak To hold our trembling, captive, happiness.

My desires became but evil plants That scourged like thistles in a windy place; I felt my heart both frozen and afire, Then arid, and rebellious unto grace.

But, nowhere searching save in simple love, The most consoling word of all you spoke; And at the glowing fire of your word I warmed myself until the daylight broke.

I was not in your eyes, as in my own, A man belittled by disease and grief; You plucked me flowers from the window-ledge, And I believed in health with your belief.

You brought to me within your garments' folds The eager air, the wind of field and wood, Scents of the eve and odours of the dawn, And sunlight in your kisses fresh and good.

XVI

All that lives about us here,
Beneath a radiance soft and clear,
Soft grasses, tender branches, hollyhocks,
The shade that soothes them, the wind that mocks,
The singing birds that one by one
Join the brilliant swarm,
Like jewel-clusters, warm
With sun;
All that lives within the garden wall,
Love us ingenuously;
And we,
We love them all.

Dear to us the lilies that grow high;
The reaching sunflowers clearer than the sky
—Circles that bright lambent tongues enroll—
Burn, with their glowing fervency, our soul.

The simple flowers, phlox and lilac tall,
Down by the wall,
Are yearning to be near us too,
And the involuntary grass,
On the lawn when we pass,
Opens its moistened eyes that are the dew.

We live with the flowers and the grass,
Simple, pure and ardent still,
Lost in our love,
Like single sheaves within the infinite wheat,
And proudly let imperial summer pass
And from above
Sweep and pierce with clarity
Body, heart and will.

#### XVII

With all my heart and brain, my feeling and my seeing, And with the flaming torch of all my being
That reaches toward your goodness and your love,
Forever unassuaged,
I love and bring you thanks and endless praise
For having come in all simplicity
Along devoted ways,
To take, with gracious hands, my destiny.

And since you leaned above, I know—oh what a love! Candid and clear as is the dew Fallen upon my tranquil soul from you.

I am yours as by their nerves of flame Fire and fuel merge;.

All my flesh and all my soul Strive to you with undesisting urge; Nor do I cease from long remembering The fervency and beauty of our years, Till suddenly I feel my eyes are filled Deliciously, with unoblivious tears.

I come to you happy and resolved
With proud desire to be unto your soul
He who shall be the surest of its joys.
Tenderness folds us in an aureole;
Echoes, within me, at your call assemble;
The hour is holy and with rapture fraught,
And just to touch your brow my fingers tremble,
As though they brushed the pinions of your thought.

#### XVIII

Oh days of fresh and quiet healthfulness When life is filled with beauty without end, And inspiration comes familiarly, A cherished friend.

He comes from lands all sweet and glimmering, And with his words, more fair than dew, has brought, Wherewith to set, a gem all luminous, A sentiment, a thought.

He seizes on our being like a storm, Rears up our spirit to new heights untrod, Pours down the fire from beating stars, and brings The gift of being God.

All fevered transports and profoundest fears
To his own tragic will are ever whirled,
That the pulse of beauty be made young
In the veins of the world.

I am at his mercy, am his ardent prey!

So, when from weary work I take my way,
Toward the deep repose which is your love,
With all my mind's high leaping fire sublime,
It seems—oh, for an instant's time—
That I may offer you, oh love,
As though of my own pulses it were part,
Of the great universe itself, the beating heart.

#### XIX

I have left the groves of sleep, Sad a little to leave you Hid beneath their branchy roof From morning sun and dew.

Gleam now phlox and hollyhock; I look on joyous garden site, And know that soon the crystal bells Will tinkle in the light.

Then suddenly I take my way to you,
With such a tenderness and love that sweep
Into my midmost being
That it seems my thought has travelled through—
To bring you joy of reawakening—
All the leafy umbrage of your sleep.

And when I come to you within the house,
That shade and silence still possess, hear
My ardent kisses, fresh
And clear,
Sing you a morning song through meadows of the flesh.

#### XX

Alas! when the poison of disease Ran, with my slow and torpid blood, More sluggish and more torpid day by day, Ran in my veins a leaden flood; And my poor eyes Saw my hands so thin and white, Morosely watched the dreaded course Of the hated blight; When I had not even force Upon your heart my burning mouth to press There to kiss our happiness; When the days, monotonous and sad, Gnawed my consciousness with spite, I never could, myself, have found the will To rise with stoic might, If you had not poured into my veins The secret heroism that you have, Daily, every hour of every week, With hands so patient, so serene and brave.

#### XXI

Within the garden there is healthfulness.

Lavishly it gives it us
In light that cleaves
To every movement of its thousand hands
Of palms and leaves.

And the good shade where it accepts,
After long journeyings,
Our steps,
Pours on the weary limb
A force of life and sweetness like
Its mosses dim.

When the lake is playing with the wind and sun, It seems a crimson heart
Within, all ardent, has begun
To throb with the moving wave;
The gladiolus and the fervent rose,
Which in their splendour move unshadowèd,
Upon their vital stems expose
Their cups of gold and red.

Within the garden there is healthfulness.

#### XXII

It was June in the garden,
It was our time, our day;
And our gaze with love on everything
Did fall;
They seemed then softly opening,
And they saw and loved us both,

The roses all.

To fling them higher.

Insect and bird
Swept through the golden texture of the air,
Unheard;
Our kisses were so fair they brought
Exaltation to both light and bird.
It seemed as though a happiness at once
Had skied itself and wished the heavens entire
For its resplendent fire;
And life, all pulsing life, had entered in,
Into the fissures of our beings to the core,

The sky was purer than all limpid thought;

And there was nothing but invocatory cries,
Mad impulses, prayers and vows that cleave
The arched skies,
And sudden yearning to create new gods,
In order to believe.

#### XXIII

Your gift of self is ever prodigal; The flight that wings you higher is above, Above cessation and all weariness, Reaching toward the heaven of fullest love.

A clasp of hands, a glance enfevers you; Your heart appears so beautiful and such That I do fear your eyes, your lips, and that I am unworthy and you love too much.

Alas! the fire and tenderness too high For beings who have only one poor heart, Wet with regrets and thorny with its faults, To find but tears to weep with when they part.

#### XXIV

O quiet garden wherein nothing moves Save, in the glassy lake, The crimson fishes, each A fiery flake.

They are the memories that play within our thought, Calm and undistraught And clear, as in the water's breast Of confidence and rest.

The red fish leap and the clear water wells, In the abrupt and potent light, Amid the iris green and bleaching shells And motionless stones Around the border bright.

It is sweet to see them come and go
In all the freshness and lucidity
That bathes them so;
We have no need to fear or fret
Lest they should bring up from below
Other than a fugitive regret.

As with others, time and change and strife—
Morose time and moods of hate—
Have left their sombre scars upon our life;
But never yet our hearts have heard,
Even at close of days unfortunate,
The utterance of an unpardonable word.
Ardent, luminous sincerity
Was our wisdom and delight,
So that our fervid souls in verity
Tempered themselves as in a bath of light.

We told each other our most humble griefs, Grief by grief, a rosary, Told each other, weeping tears of love; And then confidingly, At each avowal, with our lips we pressed A kiss on every fault confessed.

Thus simply, without weakness or despair, We save us from ourselves and worldly harms, And ward off suffering and gnawing care, And see our spirits born again; As reappear when washed by rain, When sunlight sweetly dries and warms, The purity of glass and gold of window pane.

#### XXVI

The golden ships of summer time That left this morning, mad with space, Return now from the blood-red west, Sad, with slackened pace.

Over the ocean now they come, Moved by listless, weary rowers; They seem like cradles in the sky Where sleep the autumn flowers.

Lilies, with your faded brows, You have felt the wind's keen breath; Only the flaming roses strive To live beyond all death.

What matter for their fullest flower October days or April bright? They have but simple wish to drink, Even the sanguine, light;

On sombre days, when under clouds Haggardly the heavens hide, They will, for one lone ray of sun, Exalt at Christmastide.

You, oh spirits, live like them!
They have not pride that lilies feel,
But hold within their folds a sacred
And immortal zeal.

#### XXVII

Fervency of sense, of heart, of soul— Vain words created to despoil love's powers; Sun, you distinguish not between your flames Of all your evening, dawn, or midday hours. You move all blinded by your proper light Through blazing space, beneath the arched sky, Knowing alone that your great, ample power Works at things mysterious and high.

For love means exaltation's ceaseless deeds; Oh you whose sweetness sweetens my proud heart, What need to weigh the pure gold of our dream? I love you wholly, with my every part.

#### XXVIII

The moveless beauty
Of the summer evenings,
Upon the grass where they deploy,
Gives with symbolic offerings,
Gestureless, without a word,
The deep repose of joy.

Morning with its surprises
Has gone where no wind rises;
Midday itself with folds of velvet air
No longer sinks upon the torpid plain;
Now is the hour when the evening once again
Without a moving leaf or ripple on lake breast,
Comes down from lofty hills
To our garden where
It seeks its rest.

Oh golden splendour of the burnished lake,
And trees and shadows of them on the reeds,
And tranquil sumptuous silences
That take
Immutably the kingdom of our hearts,
So that within us now a vow we cherish
Of it to live and die and live again,
Like two hearts drunk almost to pain
With light,
Who cannot perish!

#### XXIX

You spoke that evening words so beautiful That even the flowers, leaning on the breeze, Suddenly loved us so that one of them, To touch us both, fell down upon our knees.

You spoke of the near time when our two lives, Like too-ripe fruits, would be upgathered, And how the tocsin of our fate would knell, And love be with us still, though youth had fled.

Your voice was round me like a close embrace, Your burning heart so quiet and so brave, I would have seen unfold without a fear The winding road that leads toward the grave.

#### XXX

"Sun-lit Hours," "Hours of Afternoon," Hours superbly now a part of us! Your measured pace lights up our garden paths, Our golden roses kiss you as in pain; Summer's dying; autumn comes now soon.

Hours of fragrant flowering, will you come again?

And yet if Fate, that holds the stars in leash, Spare us its evil and its bitter chance, Perhaps you shall weave some day before my eyes The measured footfalls of your radiant dance; And I shall add then to your ardent showers Of shade and sunlight on the grassy slope—Like a supreme, immense and sovereign hope—The steps and farewells of my "Twilight Hours."

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AFTERNOON \*\*\*

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