

# The Faces

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WINNING POETRY, BUTLER LITERARY CONTEST, 1944

The door opened slowly  
Noiselessly, easily,  
Casting a great shadow on  
The dust-coated planking.

Faces marched in.  
Bloody, shining faces.  
A hundred or more,  
Scraping the splinters  
With dry, red foot.

Red, dumb faces  
Creased with hollow sockets  
And dry mouths.  
Scarred with the pain  
And hate of ten thousand years  
Twenty thousand or a greater number of days  
And nights—twilights and awakenings.

Red with the bright blood  
Of childbirth and foaming wounds,  
Dagger slashes and dumb fists  
Pounding into bubbling blood.  
The ten count of leather strap  
The scarlet of cursing armies  
The blood of passion and hot, black nights  
The blood of twenty thousand or a greater number  
Of years and minutes and endless seconds.

Great bells throbbed on the night in soft waves.  
Booming clangs brought red, cold faces  
Into the night,  
Their waterless eyes remembering the days  
And seconds

Of spring.  
The memory blowing cool and sweet  
Into empty minds  
Behind red masks  
Of spring and dew-drowned  
Buds of lilacs, roses, peach trees  
Cool and damp and fragrant  
In soft, white palms  
Palms burning with spring  
Fevered with longing  
Soft with dew from lilacs, roses.  
The gentle trickle of dew and icy water  
In the great dark river  
Pushing winter vapors out to sea  
To mingle with emerald foam and the  
Wine-red of men's veins,  
To swell with the burnt wood of dead ships and  
The feathers of screaming winged things.  
The winter vapors, pushed toward the sea  
A laugh sparkling among pink-crowned forests.  
The gurgling of suckling infants and the river  
The soft-lit, deep, damp woods filled.  
With birds songs  
And children's.  
Soft petals gently blotting out  
Rotting oak roots  
And a child smiling with the river.

"I must go away.  
We'll never meet again.  
I thirst for you and the river.  
To let my hands drop easily  
Into the black coolness  
And feel you near."

The river limps to the sea.  
And a bird cries.

Of summer.  
Of blond fields  
And green-fringed hills,  
And golden water.  
Of rose pebbles,  
Red from swift streams.  
The throbbing nights,  
Pulsed with thick, rich odors,  
Silver with a blanket of stars,  
Blown with high winds,  
Wet with rain.  
The leaf, thick and waxed,  
Pouring fountains of water into the black, hot earth.  
The buds are bloomed  
And the hot night is filled with  
The frog's sonata and the cuckoo's madness.

"Truth is beauty,  
Life is beauty,  
And now life is full and rich.  
And full of truthfulness  
And beauty.  
But I must go before  
Dawn ends the beauty and the truth."

The water shines in the night  
A thin waft of air carries it on.

Of autumn.  
Blue-haze and shining bronze.  
The homesick smoke odors,  
Rising over hills dabbed  
All golden, scarlet, mauve.  
Of hunter's bugles  
And ringing shots.  
Of mounds of fat apples and voluptuous pumpkins.  
The corn stubble, thick with frozen dew.  
The water chilled and ice-green  
Profound and melancholy  
As a deep note of lovely music.  
Of songs and tears and smoky chill.

"The beauty is dying.  
The sun is gone  
And I must go  
If I will live."  
Disease-filled ripples lap the bank  
A dry, black leaf circles to the mud.  
Of winter.  
Of white lace meadows  
And powdered branches.  
Ice-warmed twigs  
And frozen buds.  
Of the dazzling dead-white days  
And bright silver nights  
When balls of breath hang for a second in air.  
When the ground groans and crackles  
Under heavy blankets of winter.  
The water moves slowly under its lid of ice.  
The ashes of the dead are cold  
Under phantom rock of icy gray.  
What of the cobwebbed tombs?  
Beneath lie happy ashes  
Ashes that have laughed and sung  
And kissed and seen and heard.  
Ashes that have been whole bodies  
Soft hair and clear eyes,  
Smiling lips and soft warm hands,  
Caressing lilac and rose buds  
And cold linens.  
Warmth that has smoothed rich satins on dainty bodices,  
Warmed thick silver and limp beads.  
The ashes are warm, smouldering with  
Burnt fire of precious pasts.  
And the buds are green and warm in  
wood beds.  
Clear winter—dead, clear winter.  
"I am dead.  
I went away and I am dead.  
For I left the beauty and truth  
I left the river and you.  
I am dead."  
The frozen faces fixed a mad gaze  
On the door  
A hundred or more bloody, shining faces  
Marched into the frosted moon night.  
And the door closed slowly.  
The great shadow on the dust-coated planking was gone.