

The Faces

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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.