

## THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

flight of the desolate sea-gulls over the icy waters. I shall go to regions where Nature, eternally virginal, sleeps under an enduring veil of snow.

## CHRISTIANIA

THE Dunnes' yacht *Pythia*.

*August.*—I have got back to the fairytale. The facts of life, the meaning of words, no longer touch me. I was in another universe, another life, amidst another humanity. Now I am empty-hearted, glad, sunfilled.

I would like to sculpture this moment—the broad noon, the emerald sea, the pale sky. Everything is crystalline, young, unmoved. The silence of the winter has hardly left it; it is August; yet the woods are coloured under foot with buds and delicate leaves that come with spring. The wind is vibrant with the smell of pine trees, and one hears the ceaseless music of forests.

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Christiania looks grey and indifferent at the edge of the fjord. It seems jaded against this supernal freshness of nature.

I did not want to go into the town nor to go again near any place where mankind lived. The phrases of their episodes are nothing any longer except as values for art criticism; passion is the nervous effect of augmented ninth, and voluptuousness an expression that was made for the emotion of colour.

The people on the yacht are adjuncts, furniture, creatures whose existence makes possible the routine of food and sleep and this luxury of travel, this theft of beautiful things out of life. For if that indecent exposure of circumstance which is called truth should take place I would not be here. I have no money, and people without money are not popular members of civilised communities. As a matter of fact, in a couple of months I shall have

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made myself a pauper—just as much a pauper as the unimaginative beings who inhabit workhouses. For, of course, if they had any imagination, any trace of temperament, any redeeming sign of the attributes which we flatter ourselves distinguish us from brutes, they would be thieves or courtesans.

But for the meantime I have Doucet frocks, and I drink out of Sèvres tea-cups.

At the back of my mind somewhere I enjoy the prospect of danger. I am glad to have poured all my chance of safe life into the lap of Fate. It is on the knees of the gods. That's the charm of it; it will be a play between the gods and me.

I was determined that when I *did* go on shore I would go alone. People deaden me if I am not making a mental play out of them; then the surroundings are only scenery for the stage of the idea.

Human beings devour my vitality, muti-

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late my moods, get between myself and the picture of the moment, as smoke gets in front of a camera. Their nearness mauls off the bloom of any beauty, and is to me like rough hands fingering grapes.

Even Jim Blake is merely a male tint for the effect of moonlight. I find him very useful on the yacht for the sex illustration of crepuscular effects; then his six feet two, his Irish accent, his eagerness to paint scenery by instinct, are as useful as plates at dinner. He is superfluous, however, in the emotion of places or Art.

So I took my senses in my hand and went to the Viking Ships. I sat down in front of them, and asked them what they were going to make me feel.

But I hate old things—they drown us in the depths of our little years. For, after all, there is so little originality in anything we know of our existence. Even the sea pants and rages in its early manner. I

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can't imagine how it gets up enough energy, now, to generate a storm.

And life with us is still the same, automatic expression of an instinct that we certainly ought to have considerably amplified when we shed our tails. A few daring souls may decorate the world in the form of cannibals, but really novel methods of using the forces which we share with all creation, from an earthworm up, are practically non-existent.

I want, you want, they want; I love, you love, they love. To be held in the declension of a verb! Shade of Spencer! is there nothing personal in being human?

I am sick of sharing in the enlightenment of a jelly-fish, and I don't care about being a superior protoplasm. I want to be I, myself, with a whole set of original instincts for my exclusive use.

When I left the ships, to go to the little picture-gallery, they were selling red roses

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on the quay—a blur of blood against the grey of the palace.

The red roses made my cheeks go white. It is yet August, and the birds are still whimpering among the stones of Palace Yard. It was so far away; it was over; my heart became hollow in the sunlight. I had touched life for a moment: what were the fjord and the trees worth beside that? They were an imitation world.

But I went doggedly on, to see the painted emotion I had promised myself. It is, after all, familiar to me to forget that I am flesh and blood.

The walls at first only opened out to fresh seas, and distant skies and wind, the invariable blue and white and sun of the Northern men. I looked at them vacantly; the dusty red velvet seats were not very comfortable; the sun pressed hard on the linen blind that bulged down from the glass ceiling. A shaft of sun in front of

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me tremoured with a myriad glittering mites of dust. Everything was mordant and hushed, youth was dead—stillborn. I could never get back those mysterious, London days, that seemed to veil some ecstasy ready to come on the world.

I went dully on to the next room, and there waited for me—to brand me, to mock me, to mark me as a coward—the Sinding “Humanity”; its abandonment, the sense of the ultimate embrace. My life was dust before it. All I had to make up for this were some phrases of Rossetti I had read, some moments of Strauss I had listened to, and what beside? What beside?—some memory of perfume of hawthorn blossoms, some smothered murmuring of birds, and afterwards—I forced my memory to it—those words! The place faded behind my tears. It needs not all the surrender of the “Humanity” to burn up the universe in everybody’s final fire.