

BY THE NORTH SEA

A LAND that is lonelier than ruin ;
 A sea that is stranger than death ;
 Far fields that a rose never blew in,
 Wan waste where the winds lack breath ;
 Waste endless and boundless and flowerless
 But of marsh-blossoms fruitless as free ;
 Where earth lies exhausted, as powerless
 To strive with the sea.

Far flickers the flight of the swallows,
 Far flutters the weft of the grass
 Spun dense over desolate hollows
 More pale than the clouds as they pass ;
 Thick woven as the weft of a witch is
 Round the heart of a thrall that hath sinned,
 Whose youth and the wrecks of its riches
 Are waifs on the wind.

The pastures are herdless and sheepless,
 No pasture or shelter for herds :
 The wind is relentless and sleepless,
 And restless and songless the birds ;

Their cries from afar fall breathless,
Their wings are as lightnings that flee ;
For the land has two lords that are deathless :
Death's self, and the sea.

These twain, as a king with his fellow,
Hold converse of desolate speech :
And her waters are haggard and yellow
And crass with the scurf of the beach :
And his garments are grey as the hoary
Wan sky where the day lies dim ;
And his power is to her, and his glory,
As hers unto him.

In the pride of his power she rejoices,
In her glory he glows and is glad :
In her darkness the sound of his voice is,
With his breath she dilates and is mad :
“ If thou slay me, O death, and outlive me,
Yet thy love hath fulfilled me of thee.”
“ Shall I give thee not back if thou give me,
O sister, O sea ? ”

And year upon year dawns living,
And age upon age drops dead :
And his hand is not weary of giving,
And the thirst of her heart is not fed :

And the hunger that moans in her passion,
And the rage in her hunger that roars,
As a wolf's that the winter lays lash on,
Still calls and implores.

Her walls have no granite for girder,
No fortalice fronting her stands :
But reefs the bloodguiltiest of murder
Are less than the banks of her sands :
These number their slain by the thousand ;
For the ship hath no surety to be,
When the bank is abreast of her bows and
Aflush with the sea.

No surety to stand, and no shelter
To dawn out of darkness but one,
Out of waters that hurtle and welter
No succour to dawn with the sun,
But a rest from the wind as it passes,
Where, hardly redeemed from the waves,
Lie thick as the blades of the grasses
The dead in their graves.

A multitude noteless of numbers,
As wild weeds cast on an heap :
And sounder than sleep are their slumbers,
And softer than song is their sleep ;

And sweeter than all things and stranger
The sense, if perchance it may be,
That the wind is divested of danger
And scatheless the sea.

That the roar of the banks they breasted
Is hurtless as bellowing of herds,
And the strength of his wings that invested
The wind, as the strength of a bird's ;
As the sea-mew's might or the swallow's
That cry to him back if he cries,
As over the graves and their hollows
Days darken and rise.

As the souls of the dead men disburdened
And clean of the sins that they sinned,
With a lovelier than man's life guerdoned
And delight as a wave's in the wind,
And delight as the wind's in the billow,
Birds pass, and deride with their glee
The flesh that has dust for its pillow
As wrecks have the sea.

When the ways of the sun wax dimmer,
Wings flash through the dusk like beams ;
As the clouds in the lit sky glimmer,
The bird in the graveyard gleams ;

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As the cloud at its wing's edge whitens
When the clarions of sunrise are heard,
The graves that the bird's note brightens
Grow bright for the bird.

As the waves of the numberless waters
That the wind cannot number who guides
Are the sons of the shore and the daughters
Here lulled by the chime of the tides :
And here in the press of them standing
We know not if these or if we
Live truest, or anchored to landing
Or drifted to sea.

In the valley he named of decision
No denser were multitudes met
When the soul of the seer in her vision
Saw nations for doom of them set ;
Saw darkness in dawn, and the splendour
Of judgment, the sword and the rod :
But the doom here of death is more tender
And gentler the god.

And gentler the wind from the dreary
Sea-banks by the waves overlapped,
Being weary, speaks peace to the weary
From slopes that the tide-stream hath sapped ;

And sweeter than all that we call so
The seal of their slumber shall be
Till the graves that embosom them also
Be sapped of the sea.