

The Reaper

By Aleister Crowley

In middle music of Apollo's corn
She stood, the reaper, challenging a kiss
The lips of her were fresher than the morn,
The perfume of her skin was ambergris;
The sun had kissed her body into brown;
Ripe breasts thrown forward to the summer breeze;
Warm tints of red lead fancy to the crown,
Her coils of chestnut, in abundant ease,
That bound the stately head. What joy of youth
Lifted her nostril to respire the wind?
What pride of being? What triumphal truth
Acclaimed her queen to her imperial mind?

I watched, a leopard, stealthy in the corn,
As if a tigress held herself above;
My body quivered, eager to be torn,
Stung by the snake of some convulsive love!
The leopard changed his spots; for in me leapt
The mate, the tiger. Murderous I sprang
Across the mellow earth: my senses swept,
One torrent flame, one soul-dissolving pang.
How queenly bent her body to the grip!
How lithe it slips, her bosom to my own!
The throat leans back, to tantalise the lip
The sudden shame of her is overthrown!
O maiden of the spirit of the wheat,
One ripening sunbeam thrills thee to the soul,
Electric from red mane to amber feet!
The blue skies focus, as a burning bowl,
The restless passion of the universe
Into our mutual anger and distress,
To be forbidden (the Creator's curse)
To comprehend the other's loveliness.
We cannot grasp the ecstasy of this;
Only we strain and struggle and renew
The utter bliss of the unending kiss,
The mutual pang that shudders through and through,
Repeated and repeated, as the light
Can build a partial palace of the day.
So, in our anguish for the infinite,
One moment gives, the other takes away.

(I, the mere rimer, she, the queen of rime,
As sweeps her sickle in the falling wheat,
Her body's sleek intoxicating time,
The music of the motion of her feet!)

I swoon in that imperial embrace—
Lay we asleep till evening, or dead?
I knew not, but the wonder of her face
Grew as the dawn and never satiated.
She knew not in her strong imperial soul
How hopeless was the slavery of life,
How by the part man learns to love the whole,
How each man's mistress calls herself a wife.
I tired not of the tigress limbs and lips—
Only, my soul was weary of itself,
Being so impotent, who only sips
The dewdrops from the flower-cup of an elf,
Not comprehending the mysterious sea
Of black swift waters that can drink it up,
Not trusting life to its own ecstasy,
Not mixing poison with the loving-cup.
I, maker of mad rimes, the reaper she!
We lingered but a day upon the lawn.
O Thou, the other Reaper! come to me!
Thy dark embraces have a germ of Dawn!