

The Imp Within

By Walter de la Mare

‘Rouse now, my dullard, and thy wits awake;
Tis first of the morning. And I bid thee make—
No, not a vow; we have munched our fill of these
From crock of hone-dry crusts and mouse-gnawn cheese—
Nay, just one whisper in that long, long ear—
Awake; rejoice. Another Day is here

‘A virgin wilderness, which, hour by hour,
Mere happy idleness shall bring to flower.
Barren and arid though its sands now seem,
Wherein oasis beckons not, shines no stream,
Yet wake—and lo, ’tis lovelier than a dream.

‘Plunge on, thy every footprint shall make fair
Its thirsty waste; and thy foregone despair
Undarken into sweet birds in the air,
Whose coursing wings and love-crazed summoning cries
Into infinity shall attract thine eyes.

‘No. . . ? Well, lest promise in performance faint,
A less inviting prospect will I paint.
I bid thee adjure thy Yesterday, and say:
“As thou wast, Enemy, so be To-day.—
Immure me in the same close narrow room;
Be hated toil the lamp to light its gloom;
Make stubborn my pen; sift dust into my ink;
Forbid mine eyes to see, my brain to think.
Scare off the words whereon the mind is set.
Make memory the power to forget.
Constrain imagination; bind its wing;
Forbid the unseen Enchantresses to sing.
Ay, do thy worst!”

‘Vexed Spectre, prythee smile.
Even though that yesterday was bleak and sour,
Art thou a slave beneath its thong to cower?
Thou hast survived. And hither am I—again,
Kindling with mockery thy o’erlaboured brain.
Though scant the moments be wherein we meet,
Think, what dark months would even one make sweet.
‘Thy quill? Thy paper? Ah, my dear, be true.
Come quick To-morrow. Until then, Adieu.’