

## AT EXERCISE

“**R**EST thee ”  
 Said the soft green grass,  
 The cool sweet grass, the soothing grass.  
 “ Rest thee on me.”

“ Be still ”  
 Said the clear blue sky,  
 The tender sky, the holy sky.  
 “ I go with thee.”

“ Now rise ”  
 Said the singing lark,  
 The joyous lark, celestial lark.  
 “ Love be with thee.”

## ENEMIES

**M**UTE, blind, with eyes wide open  
 He stands at the corner of a street  
 Waiting for someone to take him over the road.

The man he wounded stands  
 Mute, blind, with eyes wide open  
 Waiting for someone to take him over the road.

## WAR

**T**HAT old woman is mad: she paces the earth  
 in search of her dead son.  
 (He shouted “ Mother ” when the bayonet was  
 thrust through him).  
 She is followed by one who was young a year  
 ago . . .  
 And they both mumble “ So many, so many.”

That old man sniffs the air for more fresh blood.  
He is not satisfied: the earth is large; there is  
still room for corpses.

Young children play at soldiers . . .

#### OLD AGE

**A**ND now set free from all desire.  
I sit alone by my lone fire,  
And watch how on the low-roofed wall  
The shadows rise, the shadows fall.

The shadows watch my every whim,  
The pipe turns ash, the fire is dim:  
And then with me the shadows stand  
And nod their heads, they understand.

S. WINSTEN.

### LADY URSULA THE INCOMPARABLE

LOUIS GOLDING

**A**H Lady Ursula! There was in no capital so  
exquisite a being as Lady Ursula! How shall  
we speak of her with a calm voice and eyes  
that do not shine with her brightness as Eastern  
windows with morning?

Not that you could not hate Lady Ursula, but if  
you loved her, you loved her too well!

Slim, straight, sweet, swift, cold! These were the  
lines of Lady Ursula from the dispassionate shattering  
poise of her head to the curve of her instep towards  
her firm white foot. Do I need to describe her body?  
If you were a stranger and knew not the name of

Ursula (and you must be a stranger from an outward land not to have heard echoes from the silver peal of her name), you might enter the room where Ursula sat silent and hardly look towards her a second time ; only a strange current you dared not define would make a crescent riot in the streets of your blood, only a music not of sound would beat upon the drums of your head. But when she arose and spoke the air would flutter as with wings. You would see then that at the heart of her violet eyes burned a point of diamond flame. You would see that the movements of her hands were subtle as a wind and not less cool. You would see in the lift of her breasts the pride of many kings.

Her body was almost a thing of translucent alabaster through which glowed fire. Shall I say that her *soul* shone through her curtains of frail fair flesh as a lamp shines in a sanctuary ? This I dare not say. There was less of a soul's warmth in Lady Ursula than in a high mountain that looks only towards cold rivers and colder skies. What then was this flame that shone so whitely and so steady ? The world used this word only—"Personality !" they said. "Radiant creature !" a dazzled man might say. "God ! What a *personality* she has !" a sick voice would reply.

Of this Lady Ursula was not unconscious. The word was never on her lips, if it was never absent for long from the lips of all who had come her way. It was something more than the fused essence of her physical and intellectual qualities that received this name. For if she was lovely, there were lovelier women. If she was witty, then so was all the world. *C'était le métier à chacun.* But when she moved, all others were still ; when she spoke, the words of men and women faltered on their lips.

So far from being unconscious of this sword-like instant personality to which London bowed the head, Ursula played with it as with an exquisite jewel. It was a ball of crystal she held in ivory fingers, letting sun and moon strike through it with lances of light. It was a peal of bells in the tower of her presence, with which she played audacious bewildering melodies. It was a robe spangled with green opals which she drew round her shoulders as she swung, irresistible. It was a bowstring which twanged deadly messages.

She was cruel. How else could she have resisted for a long fatal hour the call of her sister who lay dying of a sudden illness, refused her presence, forsooth, because she had seen no such tint of saffron in a sunset before? When Joan, her maid, came one evening to dress Lady Ursula for dinner, having heard that day that her lover was dead in a frontier war, "Go!" said Ursula with faint horror; for how could Ursula endure again in her service a creature whose eyes had puffed with plebeian tears? She had demanded imperiously the destruction at Larmoor Towers of a dog whose warm mouth had smirched her gown. And if the dog lingered in her memory at all, he lingered more than Johnny Travers and young Lord John de Warenne, who had shot themselves in despair of a gracious word.

But the more desolation her personality achieved from Biarritz to Mayfair, the more unassailably was she the queen of her epoch. Poets foreswore poetry for her. The millions of the financial tyrants of three continents were scattered before her feet. There were whispers connecting her name with the name of a personage at St. James's. From all these she turned away with a sweet light laugh which entered flame-like into the marrow, and the more tantalisingly she flashed her crystal ball, until she became a centre of lightnings.

Hence the world's surprise when the world learned one morning that Ursula the Incomparable was married to George Aubrey. He had money, it was true, and was handsomer than many men. Yet the reason for her choice remained secret even to Aubrey, for none was more dazzled than himself to find Ursula was Ursula Aubrey. I can only hazard the suggestion that Aubrey, having hovered moth-like round Ursula since years ago when he had met a twelve-year sorceress at Capri, had succeeded in surrounding her, little that he perceived it, with a net of inevitability; a fibre that even she could not break, consisting of his quiet subdued unflinching attentions, of the deathless hungry loyalty in his eyes, of the very tissue of his voice. Perhaps she had found him the simplest solution to that problem which presented before her a prince, a man moneyed beyond dreams, the loveliest poet of his time.

I must hasten my tale of Ursula. I must repeat the celebrated words which she uttered vaguely from the mists of the chloroformed sleep of her *accouchement*. "I hope," she said, "I hope the child made its appearance with decorum!"

Now came the transformation in Ursula. When she arose from her bed she became aware uneasily that not all of her had risen, aware with misgiving, terror. She stooped towards her sleeping boy, pressed her lips against his own minute lips, and withdrew swiftly, feeling that some intangible thing was passing through her and away from her into the body of the child, passing from her to leave a shell, a hulk. She gazed down towards the shut eyes; a great wave of love filled her, but she knew that the water was crested with a bitter foam. What had come to abrade the perfect surface of her crystal? Was *she* Ursula, the self-sufficient, the more than crowned queen? What usurper had entered her

country? The boy opened and closed his little fist. The robes she had gathered round her shoulders once, something had bedraggled them. The peals of bells she rang in the old proud days, something had rifted their mellowness.

“Not the old Ursula!” the world said. She did not hear the blunt words, but they burned none the less like irons into the flesh of her pride. “A little ripe almost, eh?” they said. “Hush, tell it not, positively middle-aged!” “Babies are all very well in their limited way,” someone said, “but they might have spared us our Ursula!”

Sometimes at night Ursula called to the nurse for her child, and clasped him to her bosom in a transport of fierce love, fierce hate. Ursula, whose emotions had been like a winter morning! “Darling!” she cried. “Devil!” a voice muttered in her ear darkly.

The queenship was slipping from her. Lady Mary de Sainville came like a comet into the Mayfair skies. “Poor Ursula!” they were whispering. “The de Sainville rather displays Ursula a little *passée*, don’t you think?” Ursula knew more certainly the disparagements, the withering of her wreaths, than if the world had shouted to the roof the whispers which dubiously surrounded her.

“You!” she muttered, “you!” to the sleeping child nestling in her warmth.

The day came when Lady Mary de Sainville sate worshipped openly on the throne of Ursula. As she sate, men and women were spellbound at her feet. When Ursula entered the Blue and Orange Room of Lady Mary’s triumph, not a person was aware of her entrance, not a man rose. Only by a slight lifting of her eyelids did Lady Mary betray the sense of her complete victory.

That night a storm raged in Ursula's blood. "You ! You ! You !" she hissed into her child's ear. "Who wanted you, you upstart, you thief !" White hatred seared like an arrow of lightning to the mid point of her heart. She crushed her hand down over the nostrils and mouth of her boy. "You have not beaten me yet, Lady Mary de Sainville !" her tortured soul shrilled inwardly. Her heart shook with laughter, then was still suddenly. Against her arm, the little body was heaving, shuddering. She heard a slight crying, a choking.

She tore her hand away. "Lovely, lovely one ! O my baby, my baby !" she moaned. "O my lovely, I'm mad ! Listen, baby, are you well ? Tell me quick, are you well ?"

The boy opened his eyes next morning with the sun and smiled and chuckled into the haggard face of Lady Ursula.

She faded wholly from Mayfair. Even her name became thin, a memory, in the resounding music of the name of Lady Mary de Sainville.

Lady Ursula entered the body of her child and did not depart. She had hardly no separate existence. She became a woman among other women, devoted, usual. Yet she could not eliminate from the far depths of her consciousness a hideous nightmare—the mother's hand over the breathing of the child, the heaving of the tiny breast. When the boy died, with an hour's warning or less, her first thought was the hand, the choking throat. "It is fulfilled !" an echo rolled within her, hollowly, prolonged.

For a month she moved like a sleep-walker, her eyes void of sight. Her hands twitched as she passed from room to room, then hung limply. Then like thunder one day a loud mirth volleyed within her.

"Lady Mary de Sainville," the thunder pealed, "we shall see, we shall see!"

When Lady Ursula returned to Mayfair, she blazed like the equatorial sun. She was a song more captivating than the sailors of Ulysses heard. She was like a mountain superb with snow. For Lady Mary de Sainville, who regarded where she went? Is not Ursula with us? Life, Life and for ever Life to Ursula the Queen! Where she danced she was the consummation of movement. Where she was still, movement was banal. Ursula the Queen! Homage to Ursula!

And there came a night when a low crying entered her sleep, a crying, a choking. And her arm moved emptily along the pillow and she said, "Lovely, lovely, listen! Are you there?" But the night was dark and the lovely thing had no place in the night or in the day, or in any night or day. All those black hours, Ursula's eyes, wide, tearless, gazed into the blank gloom.

Ah Lady Ursula! Frail, down-at-heels Ursula! Somewhere at the fringe of a Psychic and Theosophic and Pseudo-Oriental Society she trails, with the hollow cheeks and the questing eyes. But through all her table-rappings her tottering intellect catches no baby voice, no crowing, no tiny laughter. Sometimes at night there is a choking, a heaving beside her in the bed. Her eyes strain upward, wide, tearless, till dawn fills them indifferently. Lady Ursula . . .!

LOUIS GOLDING.