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## SONG FROM A PLAY

F. V. BRANFORD

**W**HAT is courage? Stable terror,  
All our walking equal tumbling.  
What is thinking? Law of error:  
And the songs of saints sweet grumbling  
Sublimate,—a gallant crying  
In the dawn that light is dying.  
Dying, dying, light is dying,  
Omnia in mysterium.  
Red perfection is pale trying  
And every camp a tomb.  
Lips as hot as energy,  
Hair as cool as wine,  
Callous call and tauntingly  
None of these are thine.  
O I have spoken  
To shadows and broken  
The hollowness of shine.

## ON HEARING A WARSHIP BEFOGGED OFF HOLLAND

F. V. BRANFORD

**T**HE horns of death they blow, they blow  
From the bridge of the iron show  
That stands upon the sea.  
As a god in exile sings  
The agony of wanderings.  
We break no stone, nor rear the earth  
To sign the compass of our mirth.  
Yonder our steel temple lies  
And in the night it cries.

*April, 1917.*



## STUCCO

THOMAS MOULT

THE feet that were aching for the sheep-browned carpet of moors had trod the stone pavements twixt city warehouse and stucco-faced suburb since their winging youthtime, now well out of memory: the senses shaped for battling and biting on granite were for ever propelling those feet without the aid of the man's consciousness, so that in his bustling travels he looked neither to the right nor left, and maybe nowhere at all, though not once in thirty years had he lost the train that carried him to his toil all the days but Sunday. And yet he showed interest in every meal-time converse of his mother and his sister, though they spoke but in gossip of neighbouring houses and of little beyond them. His sister would cast new daily light on the inferior way a family across the avenue carried on its existence, and his mother always showed wonder as to how the family managed to pay the rent.

But on Saturday, when noon was come, and the warehouse shut its doors for the week-end, he would rouse himself in reality, like a massive oak in the first sunshen of the spring. Instead of making to the suburb he strode with tremendous vigour in the opposite direction. He turned to the hills, instinctively . . . At first, and many years ago, his mother had demurred to her son's week-end vanishment, and to soothe her he had taken her and his sister with him: once to an obscure fishing village at which the women expressed disappointment and boredom, and on the following

Saturday to his favourite place among the hills, but instead of staying there the full week-end they all came home immediately after tea.

Ever afterwards he had gone his ways alone, with the great winds and the little winds for comrades, the heights of the solitude about him, and the sheep and heather, and the stark sun flaming. His heart warmed gratefully to his mother and sister for breaking no more upon his wandering, and he would cast about for ways of repayment, not the least being a share in the daily speculation as to how the family across the way had managed to pay the rent.

So passed away the years. The widowed mother and her mid-aged spinister-daughter meandered placidly through the froth of suburban existence, growing more rigid every day. But their man drank deep of the hill-wine, and his dream was young. Even his toil had room for the visions of it, a future in which all the days and all the nights, not merely the week-endings, would pulse to the measure of his stride across the sheep-bitten turf, where, in and out of the tiny moorland cottage that should sometime and of surety be his, he would meet all weathers face to face, proudly . . .

He made brave endeavour sometimes to untangle something of his net of hopes for his mother and sister, but always did he perceive in their faces nothing of encouragement and much of the uncoloured toleration which elderly folk bestow on the fancies of a child. His consolation was always in the little den at the top of the house, where were lodged his maps and ordnance surveys, and the collection of books which spoke to him of the

sacred superficialities of his beloved hills. Down in the warehouse his fellows chaffed him habitually concerning his maps and books, for when he purchased some new volume he carried it under his arm everywhere till it was read to the end. Yet no man that chaffed him or called him eccentric had failed to note in his face, if only he talked, the contrast, so well-defined, of steel-gray hair, and eyes and laughter eager and fresh.

One evening he hastened at unwonted speed to his home, excitement attending him. He went straight up to his attic and carried down a large map to his mother and sister in the parlour, informing them between little breathless pauses that at the year's end would commence his annuity benefit; and he had talked it over to his employers that morning, with the consequence that an arrangement had been made for him to retire on a pension. With these two sources of income they could go to live away from the city, very comfortably, very happily . . . He spread the map on the table, his fingers uneasy from his eagerness.

"See here," he said. "This is the place I thought of. It is quite near to the village where we went that week-end a long time ago. I've seen the cottage lots of times. A lovely little spot, edging the moor. Wild in winter, perhaps, but in summer the nicest home you ever saw, with roses and apples, and no other cottage in sight if you look one way. . . ."

"But we shan't know anybody there," said his mother.

"You'd get to know them soon enough, mother. Besides, you'd have the fresh air, and the sun is warm and sweet."



"Too far from anywhere," said his sister decidedly. "We'd die of loneliness."

"Not if we were all together. Besides, there'd be no beastly fog and no smoke to upset mother, and she would have new eggs and milk every morning."

Then he saw his mother's eyes filling with tears, and his heart was suddenly empty. He grew desperate, putting forward his strongest arguments again and again, directing them mainly at his sister. But she stayed aloof, shaking her head.

"No," she said, "we couldn't leave the town after all these years. It is impossible for many reasons. Besides, you mustn't be selfish. You must think of mother."

He said no more. At bedtime his mother chanced to look into his face when he bade her good-night with his customary kiss.

"Why, dear, you are looking quite an old man to-night." She was holding his face anxiously between her thin hands.

"Well, mother, what of that?" He answered lightly. "Aren't I fifty-one next birthday?"

Then, lest she should tell once more the argument of the afternoon—not for his ease, he knew, but for her own and her daughter's justification—he took her arm gently and led her to the door of her room; "One can't stay young for ever, surely! . . . Good night, mother."

"Good night, my son."

THOMAS MOULT.