

Sonnets to Duse

BY

SARA TEASDALE

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Sonnets to Duse

and other Poems

By

SARA TEASDALE



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To
My Father and Mother

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SONNETS TO DUSE



To Eleonora Duse

Oh beauty that is filled so full of tears,
Where every passing anguish left its trace,
I pray you grant to me this depth of grace:
That I may see before it disappears,
Blown through the gateway of our hopes and
fears
To death's insatiable last embrace,
The glory and the sadness of your face,
Its longing unappeased through all the years.
No bitterness beneath your sorrow clings;
Within the wild dark falling of your hair
There lies a strength that ever soars and sings;
Your mouth's mute weariness is not despair.
Perhaps among us craven earth-born things
God loves its silence better than a prayer.

To Eleonora Duse

Your beauty lives in mystic melodies,
And all the light about you breathes a song.
Your voice awakes the dreaming airs that throng
Within our music-haunted memories:
The sirens' strain that sank within the seas
When men forgot to listen, floats along
Your voice's undercurrent soft and strong.
Sicilian shepherds pipe beneath the trees;
Along the purple hills of drifted sand,
A lone Egyptian plays an ancient flute;
At dawn the Memnon gives his old salute
Beside the Nile, by desert breezes fanned.
The music faints about you as you stand,
And with the Orphean lay it trembles mute.

To Eleonora Duse in "The Dead City"

Were you a Greek when all the world was young,
Before the weary years that pass and pass,
Had scattered all the temples on the grass,
Before the moss to marble columns clung?
I think your snowy tunic must have hung
As now your gown does — wave on wave a mass
Of woven water. As within a glass
I see your face when Homer's tales were sung.
Alcaeus kissed your mouth and found it sweet,
And Sappho's hand has lingered in your hand.
You half remember Lesbos as you stand
Where all the times and countries mix and meet,
And lay your weight of beauty at our feet,
A garland gathered in a distant land.

*To a Picture of Eleonora Duse
in "The Dead City"*

Your face is set against a fervent sky,
Before the thirsty hills that sevenfold
Return the sun's hot glory, gold on gold,
Where Agamemnon and Cassandra lie.
Your eyes are blind whose light shall never die,
And all the tears the closed eyelids hold,
And all the longing that the eyes have told,
Is gathered in the lips that make no cry.
Yea, like a flower within a desert place,
Whose petals fold and fade for lack of rain,
Are these, your eyes, where joy of sight was slain,
And in the silence of your lifted face,
The cloud is rent that hides a sleeping race,
And vanished Grecian beauty lives again.



*To a Picture of Eleonora Duse
in "The Dead City"*

Carved in the silence by the hand of Pain,
And made more perfect by the gift of Peace,
Than if Delight had bid your sorrow cease,
And brought the dawn to where the dark has lain,
And set a smile upon your lips again;
Oh strong and noble! Tho' your woes increase,
The gods shall hear no crying for release,
Nor see the tremble that your lips restrain.
Alone as all the chosen are alone,
Yet one with all the beauty of the past;
A sister to the noblest that we know,
The Venus carved in Melos long ago,
Yea, speak to her, and at your lightest tone,
Her lips will part and words will come at last.

*To a Picture of Eleonora Duse as "Francesca
da Rimini"*

Oh flower-sweet face and bended flower-like
head!

Oh violet whose purple cannot pale,
Or forest fragrance ever faint or fail,
Or breath and beauty pass among the dead!
Yea, very truly has the poet said,
No mist of years or might of death avail
To darken beauty — brighter thro' the veil
We see the glimmer of its wings outspread.
Oh face embowered and shadowed by thy hair,
Some lotus blossom on a darkened stream!
If ever I have pictured in a dream
My guardian angel, she is like to this,
Her eyes know joy, yet sorrow lingers there,
And on her lips the shadow of a kiss.



To a Picture of Eleonora Duse

Was ever any face like this before —
So light a veiling for the soul within,
So pure and yet so pitiful for sin?
They say the soul will pass the Heavy Door,
And yearning upward, learn creation's lore—
The body buried 'neath the earthly din.
But thine shall live forever, it hath been
So near the soul, and shall be evermore.
Oh eyes that see so far thro' misted tears,
Oh Death, behold, these eyes can never die!
Yea, tho' your kiss shall rob these lips of breath,
Their faint, sad smile will still elude thee, Death.
Behold the perfect flower this neck uprears,
And bow thy head and pass the wonder by.

*To a Picture of Eleonora Duse with the Greek
Fire, in "Francesca da Rimini"*

Francesca's life that was a limpid flame
Agleam against the shimmer of a sword,
Which falling, quenched the flame in blood
 outpoured

To free the house of Rimino from shame —
Francesca's death that blazed aloft her name
In guilty fadeless glory, hurling toward
The windy darkness where the tempest roared,
Her spirit burdened by the weight of blame —
Francesca's life and death are mirrored here
Forever, on the face of her who stands
Illumined and intent beside the blaze,
Grown one with it, and reading without fear
That they shall fare upon the selfsame ways,
Plucked forth and cast away by bloody hands.

*A Song to Eleonora Duse in "Francesca da
Rimini"*

Oh would I were the roses, that lie against her
hands,

The heavy burning roses she touches as she
stands!

Dear hands that hold the roses, where mine
would love to be,

Oh leave, oh leave the roses, and hold the hands
of me!

She draws the heart from out them, she draws
away their breath,—

Oh would that I might perish and find so sweet
a death!

POEMS AND SONNETS

To Japanese Incense

The wind that rings the temple bell
Is far away,
And far the brazen incense urns
Of ashes grey.

And far the carven temple gates
Of red and gold —
The dreamy temples where the gods
Have long been old.

The dragonflies and irises
Beside the stream,
Are far away in lands of dawn
And lands of dream.

And here beneath an alien sky
Your breath ascends,
A column delicate and grey
That waves and bends,

And lifts a scent of sandal-wood,
Devoid of prayer,
To seek an ancient Eastern god
Thro' Western air.

To Sappho

I

Impassioned singer of the happy time
When all the world was waking into morn,
And dew still glistened on the tangled thorn,
And lingered on the branches of the lime —
Oh peerless singer of the golden rhyme,
Happy wert thou to live ere doubt was born —
Before the joy of life was half out-worn,
And nymphs and satyrs vanished from your
clime.

Then maidens bearing parsley in their hands
Wound thro' the groves to where the goddess
stands,

And mariners might sail for unknown lands
Past sea-clasped islands veiled in mystery —
And Venus still was shining from the sea,
And Ceres had not lost Persephone.

To Sappho

II

Your lines that linger for us down the years,
Like sparks that tell the glory of a flame,
Still keep alight the splendor of your name,
And living still, they sting us into tears.

Sole perfect singer that the world has heard,
Let fall from that far heaven of thine
One golden word.

Oh tell us we shall find beside the Nile,
Held fast in some Egyptian's dusty hand,
Deep covered by the centuries of sand,

The songs long written that were lost awhile —
Sole perfect singer that the world has heard,
Let fall from that far heaven of thine
This golden word.

To L. R. E.

When first I saw you — felt you take my hand,
I could not speak for happiness to find
How more than all they said your heart was kind,
How strong you were, and quick to understand—
I dared not say: “I who am least of those
Who call you friend,— I love you, and I crave
A little love that I may be more brave
Because one watches me who cares and knows.”
So, silent, long ago I used to look
High up along the shelves at one great book,
And longed to see its contents, childishwise,
And now I know it for my Poet’s own,—
So sometime shall I know you and be known,
And looking upward, I shall find your eyes.

The Meeting

I'm happy, I'm happy,
I saw my love to-day.
He came along the crowded street,
By all the ladies gay,
And oh, he smiled and spoke to me
Before he went his way.

My throat was tight with happiness,
I couldn't say a word,
My heart was beating fast, so fast
I'm sure he must have heard;
And when he passed, I trembled like
A little frightened bird.

I wish I were the flower-girl
Who waits beside the way —
I'd give my flowers all to him
And see him every day ;
I wish I were the flower-girl
Who waits beside the way.

The Gift

What can I give you, my lord, my lover,
You who have given the world to me,
Showed me the light and the joy that cover
The wild sweet earth and the restless sea?

All that I have are gifts of your giving —
If I gave them again, you would find them old,
And your soul would weary of always living
Before the mirror my life would hold.

What shall I give you, my lord, my lover?
The gift that breaks the heart in me:
I bid you awake at dawn and discover
I have gone my way and left you free.

Dead Love

God let me listen to your voice,
And look upon you for a space —
And then he took your voice away,
And dropped a veil before your face.

God let me look within your eyes,
And touch for once your clinging hand,
And then he left me all alone,
And took you to the Silent Land.

I cannot weep, I cannot pray,
My heart has very silent grown,
I only watch how God gives love,
And then leaves lovers all alone.

The Love that Goes A-begging

Oh Loves there are that enter in,
And Loves there are that wait,
And Loves that sit a-weeping
Whose joy will come too late.

For some there be that ope their doors,
And some there be that close,
And Love must go a-begging,
But whither, no one knows.

His feet are on the thorny ways,
And on the dew-cold grass,
No ears have ever heard him sing,
No eyes have seen him pass.

And yet he wanders thro' the world
And makes the meadows sweet,
For all his tears and weariness
Have flowered beneath his feet.

The little purple violet
Has marked his wanderings,
And in the wind among the trees,
You hear the song he sings.

Song

Like some rare queen of old romance
Who loved the gleam of helm and lance
Is she.

A harper of King Arthur's days
Should praise her in a hundred lays:
The queen of Love and Chivalry —
O Dieu te garde, mon coeur, ma vie.

And crown-wise plaited is her hair,
No crown of woven gold more fair
Could be.

And very queen-like, too, the smile
That lightens every little while
A face too fair for men to see,
O Dieu te garde, mon coeur, ma vie.

She is not over kind, I know ;
The queens were gracious long ago,
 Ah me!
Queen Guenevere would give a kiss
Ofttimes to Launcelot, I wis —
I would that I were loved as he!
O Dieu te garde, mon coeur, ma vie.

Wishes

I wish for such a lot of things
That never will come true —
And yet I want them all so much
I think they might, don't you?

I want a little kitty-cat
That's soft and tame and sweet,
And every day I watch and hope
I'll find one in the street.

But nursie says, "Come, walk along,
"Don't stand and stare like that"—
I'm only looking hard and hard
To try to find my cat.

And then I want a blue balloon
That tries to fly away,
I thought if I wished hard enough
That it would come some day.

One time when I was in the park
I knew that it would be
Beside the big old clock at home
A-waiting there for me —

And soon as we got home again,
I hurried thro' the hall,
And looked beside the big old clock —
It wasn't there at all.

I think I'll never wish again —
But then, what shall I do?
The wishes are a lot of fun
Altho' they don't come true.

Dusk in Autumn

The moon is like a scimitar,
A little silver scimitar,
A-drifting down the sky.
And near beside it is a star,
A timid twinkling golden star,
That watches like an eye.

And thro' the nursery window-pane
The witches have a fire again,
Just like the ones we make,—
And now I know they're having tea,
I wish they'd give a cup to me,
With witches' currant cake.

In David's "Child's Garden of Verses"

The dearest child in all the world,
Should have the dearest songs,
And that is why this little book
To David-Boy belongs.

Triolets

Before a lonely shrine
Of foam-born Aphrodite,
Ungarlanded of vine,
Undyed by dripping wine,
I brought green bay to twine,
And prayed to her, almighty,—
And lo, the prayer of mine
Was heard of Aphrodite.

I sang of answered prayer,
And now before the goddess,
The maids lay flowers rare,
And she has ceased to care
For bay that I might bear.
To heal my heart's distress,
My feet must wander where
There waits some lonelier goddess.

Sonnet

I saw a ship sail forth at evening time;
Her prow was gilded by the western fire,
And all her rigging one vast golden lyre,
For winds to play on to the ocean's rhyme
Of wave on wave forever singing low.
She floated on a web of burnished gold,
And in such light as praying men behold
Cling round a vision, were her sails aglow.
I saw her come again when dawn was grey,
Her wonder faded and her splendor dead —
She whom I loved once had upon her way
A light most like the sunset. Now 'tis sped.
And this is saddest — what seemed wondrous fair
Are now but straight pale lips, and dull gold hair.

Dream Song

I plucked a snow-drop in the spring,
And in my hand too closely pressed;
The warmth had hurt the tender thing,
I grieved to see it withering.

I gave my love a poppy red,
And laid it on her snow-cold breast;
But poppies need a warmer bed,
We wept to find the flower was dead.

To Joy

Lo, I am happy, for my eyes have seen
Joy glowing here before me, face to face;
His wings were arched above me for a space,
I kissed his lips, no bitter came between.
The air is vibrant where his feet have been,
And full of song and color is his place.
His wondrous presence sheds about a grace
That lifts and hallows all that once was mean.
I may not sorrow for I saw the light,
Tho' I shall walk in valley ways for long,
I still shall hear the echo of the song,—
My life is measured by its one great height.
Joy holds more grace than pain can ever give,
And by my glimpse of joy my soul shall live.

Roses and Rue

Bring me the roses white and red,
And take the laurel leaves away;
Yea, wreath the roses round my head
That wearies 'neath the crown of bay.

“ We searched the wintry forests thro’
And found no roses anywhere —
But we have brought a little rue
To twine a circlet for your hair.”

I would not pluck the rose in May,
I wove a laurel crown instead;
And when the crown is cast away,
They bring me rue — the rose is dead.

The Heart's House

My heart is but a little house
With room for only three or four,
And it was filled before you knocked
Upon the door.

I longed to bid you come within,
I knew that I should love you well,
But if you came the rest must go
Elsewhere to dwell.

For you would never be content
With just a corner in my room,
Yea, if you came the rest must go
Into the gloom.

And so, farewell, O friend, my friend!
Nay, I could weep a little too,
But I shall only smile and say
Farewell to you.

The House of Dreams

I built a little House of Dreams,
And fenced it all about,
But still I heard the Wind of Truth
That roared without.

I laid a fire of Memories
And sat before the glow,
But through the chinks and round the door
The wind would blow.

I left the House, for all the night
I heard the Wind of Truth;—
I followed where it seemed to lead
Through all my youth.

But when I sought the House of Dreams,
To creep within and die,
The Wind of Truth had levelled it,
And passed it by.

Faults

They came to tell your faults to me,
They named them over one by one,
I laughed aloud when they were done;
I knew them all so well before,—
Oh they were blind, too blind to see
Your faults had made me love you more.

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