

**A MASQUE
OF LOVE**

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A Masque of Love by Charles Erskine Scott Wood

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BY

CHARLES ERSKINE SCOTT WOOD



WALTER M. HILL
CHICAGO

1904

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

A MASQUE OF LOVE. THE FIRST PART.

SCENE I. EVE AT THE FOREST'S EDGE.

EVE. This kissing air is medicined with flowers and gently sweet, but soothes me not. Palm and brow and 'twixt my breasts are moist and I am heavy with oppression of I know not what. 'Twas yestereve I watched two wrens caress, and when she hopped into the aged beech, he, swollen to a feather ball, did mad himself with song from his sky-pointed bill. And then I watched the dark-browed Night, with quiet fingers, don her diadem. Mine eyes did question hers, and as the hours in slow procession dragged I sighed—and turned and sighed again, till one by one mine eyes put out the stars, my hungering unanswered still.

SOUTH WIND. Sister!

EVE. Who speaks?

SOUTH WIND. 'Tis I,—thy sister.

EVE. I see you not.

SOUTH WIND. I'm here.

EVE. Ha! Sprang you from the solid earth or wert thou coined from air? You come as comes the dew.

SOUTH WIND. Here, sister, feel my hand. I came to heal thy ache.

EVE. How soft! You smell most sweet.

SOUTH WIND. I slept among the honeysuckles yesternight. And thou art sick?

EVE. I'm sad. I had a buck with little horns like buds. He trotted after me on slim-propped legs,—his wet nose put into my hands, and answered me with sad brown eyes. But now three days, there

TO MIND
AMBROSIA

came from out the hazel bush a sleek young doe that stood and looked and sniffed. She bounded off and he did burst from me to follow her,—nor came he back.

SOUTH WIND. We'll catch a dappled fawn.

EVE. I did use at night to touch his velvet head. I think the night breeds with the yellow swamp and sweet fern beds, which makes the cool and moisty air smell sweetly of the earth.

SOUTH WIND. I think so too. That is my sister's bridal. Come! We'll get a fawn for thee.

EVE. I want it not. I think I'm sick.

SOUTH WIND. Aye, unto death and life. I know a poison good for thee. Come thou with me.

[Exeunt]

SCENE II. A MOUNTAIN SIDE.

Enter Hubert, a black bearskin on his arm. (Sings.)

HHE Lark doth sing from top of tree,
So merrily, so merrily.
Come! Come! the sun is coming!
And I sing out with song and shout,
For woods are green and brooks are running.
The blackbird sings from slender reed,
So merrily, so merrily.
Come! Come! the sun is coming!
And so sing I unto the sky
For woods are green and brooks are running.
The speckled thrush sings in the bush,
So merrily, so merrily.
Come! Come! the sun is coming!

Three eggs do rest within the nest
And woods are green and brooks are running.

Down, Dropear. Down, good Swiftfoot. Down—
would eat me pets? Do think I sing to ye. So, so.
Now sing ye back, my beauties, pretties, glossy ones.
Down, down I say; I wonder would ye tear our
little doe if ye should meet her in the wild? I'll fear
to strike a doe again lest it be she. What whimsy
led her to be gone? (Sings)

Ah, the woods are green,
They're a pretty, pretty green,
But soon they shall be yellow,
Be not too late, ye little birds, which mate
But find your pretty fellow.
Your pretty, pretty, pretty mate,
Your pretty, pretty fellow.

Down, white-toothed ones. Must ye still leap upon
the she bear's empty hide? I like not mountain tops,
the air about them hath a loneliness. Good Dropear,
down! 'Twas hot blistering work above the clouds;
the sun untamed; the glistening, eternal snow: the
milky, melting streams a-snarling o'er the naked
rocks. The eagles far below; the woods like deep
piled velvet spread about the mountain's loins. And
there, we dragged her from her den,—this hairy
ravager of herds,—and here's her hide. I like not
those too fearful heights above the haunts of men.
The forest's calm I love—this great, green prayer
which spreads itself like upturned palms. Back!
Back! My Pretties. Yours is lower down to drink,
and give your bellies to the splashing stream. I'll
to the Forest's Eye. [Exit]

SCENE III. A FLOWER SPRINKLED
MEADOW.

South Wind and Eve.



SOUTH WIND. Here in this gilded mead
we find thy medicine.

EVE. How shall I know?

SOUTH WIND. How knows the panting dog what
water is? And how doth know the adder-smitten
boar what weed to chew to cure his hurt? Surely
thou shalt know. Did'st note that laurel catch thy
scarf and lay her pearly bells against thy thigh?
She sighed that it was whiter, bade me give you joy,
and asked that in your joy you do be mindful of her.
She was a woman once, her heart still swells with
nameless summer hunger like to thine.

EVE. Poor laurel!

SOUTH WIND. How like a mimic world this glade.
The monarch oaks, deep-rooted in submissive soil,
cast haughty shade about them, killing off whatever
in the circle of their empery would share their proud
monopoly of sun and rain; the courtier buttercups, in
gilded cloaks aflaut, just at the verge and bowing
in the sun—and woodbine sycophantic—climbing
to the sun upon the oaks' great strength, and lichened
rocks which thrust their lowly snouts into this wav-
ing pageantry of privilege as if the humblest showed
their teeth and said, beware— Why look you so?

EVE. I hear the splashing of some fearsome beast.

SOUTH WIND. The beast most fearsome; dost
thou long to be devoured?

EVE. No! No!

SOUTH WIND. In time, in time!

EVE. Oh, no!

SOUTH WIND. Peep through this leafy screen and thou shalt see a sleeping pool, upon whose lips the vain, tall birches tiptoe stand and lean to see their silver mail.

EVE. Ah! Ah!

SOUTH WIND. Thou tremblest. What hast thou seen? Speak!

EVE. Oh, hush! Thou wilt affright it. 'Tis a god at play. A god a-splash within the pool that clings to him. His legs like ivory columns in the pool that dimples them. His back an ivory shield. His breast an ivory wall. His lips, his nose, his eyes, his curled brown hair with water drops a-glisten. All a god. I would that I might touch him ere I die.

SOUTH WIND. Thou shalt.

EVE. Nay.

SOUTH WIND. He'll kiss thy feet. Come thou with me.

EVE. Mock me not.

[Exeunt Eve and South Wind. Enter Hubert. He spreads a bear skin on the cushioned grass and sleeps, a hound on either side. Enter Eve and South Wind.]

EVE. How like the purest marble shines he on that ebon couch. He sleeps.

SOUTH WIND. Come thou, we'll kneel beside him.

EVE. Beautiful! How soft, yet firm, he seems. I'd see his eyes, but fear to see the blue-veined shutters lift.

SOUTH WIND. Fear not, my spell is on them too.

EVE. He's warm.

SOUTH WIND. As warm as thou.

EVE. Will he not wake?

SOUTH WIND. Not tho' it thunder. Not tho' thou should'st kill him.

EVE. O!

SOUTH WIND. Fear not.

EVE. I've touched him, felt his polished limbs, and pressed my cheek upon his breast, my heaviness all oozing out to him, my feet so light, I think yon pale blue bed of irises would bear me up.

SOUTH WIND. Come, stricken one, with me.

EVE. If stricken, 'tis with joy. Hark! to the oriole! Above his swinging pouch on yon great drooping elm he whistles to the falling sun. Once more, once more. Now come! To-night I'll be at peace. I need no medicine of fern or flag or swampy root: my fever's gone, there is no need.

SOUTH WIND. There is no further need, 'tis true, and yet much need. [Exeunt]

HUBERT (Awaking) I've slept a heavy sleep, as if I died and visions came most fair, but dimming now upon my memory. How sweet it smells of lilacs and of clover-fields afar. Yet here should only be the smell of moss and grass, moist earth, and summer leaves. The air hath witchery. Awake! ye dull and foolish sentinels! Dropear! Swiftfoot! Bad dogs. Some one has passed upon the grass and left sweet smell, perhaps a nymph. 'Tis mystery.

OAK HEART. Aye, mystery.

HUBERT. Hullo!

OAK HEART. 'Tis I, the friend whose arms have sheltered thee since first you lay upon the earth and plucked the grass, whose fruit you've chewed, whose gnarled roots have pillowed thee.