

Alexander Search
IN THE STREET

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I pass before the windows lit
 With inward, curtained light,
And in the houses I see flit
Now and again shadows that hit
 The curtain's yellowed white.
Others a little gleam but show:
Inside, the people chat, I know.

And I feel cold and feel alone,
 Not that I no one have,
But — ah that dreams should ne'er be done! —
That among many I am one,
 As among flowers a grave;
One, and more lonely than can be
Imagined conceivably.

If I were born not to aspire
 Beyond the life that lead
These people whom life cannot tire,
Who chat and slumber by the fire
 Contentedly indeed,
Behind those curtains, by that light
That to the street is somewhat bright;

Could I no more aspire than these,
 Were all my wishes bound
In family or social ease,
In worldly, usual jollities
 Or children playing round,

Happy were I but to have then
The usual life of usual men.

But oh! I have within my heart
 Things that cannot keep still —
A mystic and delirious smart
That doth a restlessness impart,
 An ache, a woe, an ill;
I wearied Sisyphus I groan
Against the world's ironic stone.

I, the eternally excluded
 From socialness and mirth,
The aching heart whose mind has brooded
Till thought turned raving mad hath flooded
 The soul that gave it birth —
I weep to know I have in me
Aught at once joy and misery.

And cold before the normal, cold
 And fear-struck I remain,
As one old, formidably old,
Who doth portentous secrets hold
 That he cannot explain
But which the world's show doth suggest
Unto his mind that knows not rest.

How good after dinner to chat
 And sit in half a sleep,
Without a duty-sense to strike flat
All ease, all cosiness to abate
 An aspiration deep;
To have an ease no pains do throng
Nor felt as an ease that is wrong.

A home, a rest, a child, a wife —
 None of these are for me

Who wish for aught beyond this life
With an incessant inner strife
 That knows not victory.
Ay me! and none to comprehend
This wish that doth all things transcend.

Some in some theatre are away
 Or other place of joy
And keep, for ever glad and gay,
The hounds of thought and care at bay
 That cannot laugh or toy:
These are awaited in some homes,
A faint light from their windows comes.

A cosiness these homes must steep
 In something like a slumber,
And in that surface-living deep
'Tis hard to know that hearts do keep.

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Yet these are normal; I that sigh
And dread their living — what am I?

Oh joy! oh height of happiness!
 To wish no more than life,
To feel of pleasure, of distress,
A normal more, a normal less,
 By friend or child or wife!
None of these for my soul can be
For more than madness is in me.

I weep sad tears — oh, not to live
 As these in human joy!
Oh, that I could as much believe
As sense and custom joint can give
 Which living cannot cloy!
Man's happiness is poor, I know,
But true — a thing all unlike woe.

Sometimes I dream that I might sit
 By my own fire, and quiet
Might see my wife and children flit
Half in a sleep and not a whit
 In one of dreamy riot;
And I might noble be and pure
In mind, not stupid or obscure.

Sometimes I dream one of these homes
 Secluded socially
One for the many thousand tomes
Of life might keep my heart that roams
 Weak, desolate and free;
That quiet haply might console
My aching heart, my pining soul.

But as the thought of such a glad
 Existence simple here,
As if the thing a venom had
I shiver, tremble and grow sad
 As with a mystic fear;
I dread to think my life might pass
Like that of men, as is and was.

I dread to think of a life sweet
 By family and friends.
Mine eyes the finite that they meet
Abhor — the houses and the street.
 And all things that have ends.
I know not to what I aspire,
Yet know this I cannot desire.

So always incompatible
 And by the usual cold,
I go about, my own deep hell,
Hearing to toll in me the bell
 That tells me I grow old,

Yet this in such an accent strange
It bears the mystery of Change.

And so — alas! must e'er I be
A stranger everywhere;
The leper in his leprosy
In his exclusion nears not me
 Who cannot living bear:
The world my home, my brother men
Are prisons, chains that bind and pen.

I pass. The windows are behind,
 And I forget their peace,
But tremble yet at what my mind
Conceives and feels; and in the wind
 I wander without cease,
Glad yet sad in me to perceive
Something none other can conceive.

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