

EDNA KINGSLEY WALLACE

THE STARS IN THE POOL:
A PROSE POEM FOR
LOVERS

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The Stars in the Pool: A Prose Poem for Lovers

I

MIDMOST *The Castle* of a forest of weaving lights and shadows, of dreaming winds, and fragrance wandering, there stood a great white castle, fair, and gleaming in the sun. Massive it was, yet high as well, so that it caught all colours of the dawn and sunset, like unto some peak of snow, remote from men.

Within the castle dwelt the good King Telwyn, lord of all that forest realm, wherein at *Good King Telwyn* whiles were clearings, with orchards and vineyards, and fields of all manner of grain good for man and beast. And with the King was Ellaline, the Queen, beloved and beautiful, and mother of Roseheart, whom Telwyn her father, old and wise, knew for the tenderest thought of God in woman form.

Fair as the dawn was Roseheart, and about her a freshness like that of babes. There was in her hair the ruddiness of tried gold, spun into a web to catch the sun. Like the sky in the East at twilight were her eyes, and the dark brows thereof as a flight of bird's wings. The mouth of her was crimson, and *The Beauty of Roseheart* fresh, and young, and curved so tenderly withal, that none looking upon her might fail to love her with the love that leaps into the heart for all young things of fair seeming and promise.

Now upon a day came overseas to Telwyn's realm one like a young god invincible, Flame, son of Lokus, lord of a far island, wherein were fiery mountains having their roots in the sea. It was a land of wondrous beauty, but they that dwelt therein, rich though they were, for that the land was exceeding fertile, yielding in fullest measure the fruits of the earth, yet dwelt ever in danger betwixt *The Isle of Lokus* the mountains and the sea. For there had been times when living fire had rolled down the mountains, and the earth had been shaken mightily, and the sea, in a huge wall of emerald, had fallen upon the land and overwhelmed it. And Lokus, giving thought to these things, had deep desire that the son of his heart should escape these dangers, and live out his years in peace and happiness. And for that the youth was ever of the mind to fashion of the clay of the earth whatsoever things he saw, and might in nowise be withheld from the cunning of his hands, it came into the mind of Lokus that it were poor kindness to the child of *Lokus Remembereth his Youth* his love to constrain him to courts and statecraft. For Lokus remembered his own youth, and the struggle thereof, when that his father had denied him the life of his own gift, which, darkling long, now sought in the son of his body and spirit its life to the glory of God.

Wherefore Lokus had called his son to him, and had bidden him to go straitly to the friend of his own youth, the wise King Telwyn, who would teach him somewhat of life and living in the great world. But more than for the ways and wit of men did Flame have thought for all things beautiful *The Gifts of Flame* in form. Right well he loved to liven clay to semblance of young maids and children, mothers, and old men wise with living. Ever into their faces he put somewhat no other man might see in them. At whiles, shapes of beauty like to nought that he had seen swam before his vision, but swiftly they faded, and he rubbed his eyes, and looked as he were silly. Wherefore men called him Dreamer. Yet with all this had he little thought for what the Lord God had meant in the making of the world, being well content in this his youth that by the instinct of his fingers, and no thought withal, he could please the good folk with *Flame and the Salt Sea* happy likeness of themselves. Tall and straight was Flame, with hair like fire seen through smoke, and with skin like ripe olives in the light of the going sun. Firm his mouth, and his brow both high and wide. In his eyes were all the changing lights and colours of the sea. And it was as if the salt sea were in his blood, so that when

he flamed in the wont of youth and joy, it seemed like driftwood burning, leaping, flowering, in all the colours known of men.

And Flame, son of Lokus, looking upon the Princess Roseheart, drew one great breath, and loved her with the *The Birth of Love* love of a man's heart. And Roseheart, when she looked into the eyes of Flame, and his heart therein, knew him for her lord, and loved him wholly.

Wherewith, Telwyn the King, her father, seeing these things, pondered the youth, and when he had questioned him straitly, was in nowise loath that the thing should be. For Telwyn was a wise man and discerning, and found Flame a goodly youth, and nought against him for an husband to the Princess, his daughter. Then was their troth plighted, yet were they over young to wed, and Telwyn the King spake plain words to Flame, *Their Troth Plighted* that it were well he should prove himself in some wise ere he should claim for bride the Princess Roseheart.

II

NOW *The Pool* some way from the castle, deep in the forest, was set a Pool, so deep and still that in its depths was imaged all that bent above its brim—the fluttering leaves, and long-stemmed flowers, the flashing flight of birds, and white-winged argosies of cloud. And so shadowed it was, and so deep beyond depth, that he who looked as far as he might could see the stars of heaven mirrored therein.

Daylong *The Faces of Love* did Flame feed the hunger of his eyes on the beauty of his beloved, as clad in kirtle of forest-green, girt with gold, she knelt at the edge of the Pool, or laughing, chased the butterflies, to woo them to her lips and hair. At whiles deep quiet came upon them as they bent above the Pool, seeing nought of all it held save only the two faces of love that looked therein.

Upon a day at the hour of golden noon, when all the land swam in a haze of beauty, a flickering brightness came and passed, when Earthlove, sprite invisible, touched with his lips these twain, and with a lilt *Earthlove Sprite Invisible* of laughter rode away athwart a sunbeam. Thereafter did Flame kiss Roseheart long, upon the mouth, and trembling, gazed into her eyes that were like still pools, wherein was nought save his own image, more beautiful than life. And Flame's heart swelled within him, lordly-wise, for that he dwelt so in the eyes and the heart of his beloved. And in the eyes of Flame was nought save Roseheart imaged, but swaying as it were on a surging wave wherethrough ran all the changing lights and colours of the sea.

But when it was some while since these things had befallen, *The Old Gray Woman* the dusk was come, all suddenly, and there passed strangely over the Pool a shivering, and from it rose a mist that hid it. The heart of Flame was troubled, and lifting his eyes to see what was toward, he saw before him momentarily a figure of sorrow, Wur, the Old Gray Woman of Shadows, whose eyes were as misty pools at twilight, her hair as cobwebs matted, and her garments as the wings of the dusk. Yet upon her, nathless, was a wistful beauty as of moonlight, wherein were all things wondrous.

"Behold!" said Flame in wonder to the maid Roseheart, but she was in fear of somewhat *Of Sorrow* that was as a thing known and not known, and would not look, but turned her face to his breast. And Flame spoke unto the Old Gray Woman of Shadows, saying, "Gray One, I pray thee, what wouldst thou?"

She answered, and her voice was as the winds of autumn, through bare branches: "I am Sorrow, and the Way of Destiny, and the Shadow of Things to be. The flower fadeth, and the flesh falleth away as a garment, but the seed and the soul shall not perish, except the seed fall on barren ground, and the soul feed upon the body alone. Ponder ye these things in your hearts." And in a breath she was gone, leaving upon them a chill as of the winter death.

The Way of Destiny Wherefore was Flame of grievous mind for that he did not understand these things. And Roseheart clung to him weeping, the while he gave her such sweet comfort as he might. Long he looked upon her in wonder, at the spun gold of her hair, the white shining about her brows, her deep, still eyes wherein was nought but his image, her mouth fashioned to joy and love, and her slender body, curving to the grace of womanhood. And once again Earthlove, sprite invisible, touched him, and stung him, and his heart surged *Earthlove Once More* with love of the maid, and his man's desire grew great within him.

She stirred, and looked into his eyes, and shrank away, for therein was that which affrighted the peace of her soul. Looking, she saw not only her fair face, but her whole white body, drifting in the sea-surge of his eyes, wherein were all the changing lights and colours of the sea.

And the soul of Roseheart was faint with the far music of the sea-surge that was the soul of Flame. Yet being but a young maid, she was in fear also, saying, "Flame! Thou dishonourest *Sea-Surge and Fire-Bloom* me!" and freed herself, and sped away fleetly.

And upon the youth was shame, but a new strength therewith, so that he refrained him from following her, and cast himself upon the ground and wept, for that he had affrighted the innocence of Roseheart whom his soul loved. And a great cry for succor grew in him, and he prayed full heartily to the Lord God that He would show him His will.

Thereafter, feeling a presence, he looked up, and his eyes were blinded with a great light, and he covered his eyes, and bowed his head. Before him, in garments more shining than the *Senta the Radiant One* noonday sun, stood Senta, the Radiant One. She spake, and her voice had the beauty of the sea in storm, when sudden sunlight, flaming from the West, gives rainbow colours to the flying foam: "Hearken, Flame, to the voice of Vision, which the Lord God put into thy soul when thou wast born. From this day forth shalt thou rest not, but follow thy dream through all the earth and across the seas. At the last shalt thou find that thou seekest, for so is it written, but thou shalt not know the manner of thy finding, nor may I tell thee. Sleep."

And upon Flame came sleep as the sleep of the sea at sunrise, *The Vision* midmost of the summer, whenas the glory of the sky is a great magic in the sea, swinging as a censer to and fro, that the Lord God may be honoured of the wonders He hath made. Now the dream of Flame was a dream of womanhood—of women beautiful as dawn or flowers, of women whose fair seeming covered evil, women good and women false, maids and mothers and harlots, drifting, thronging, clamouring, praying, fawning, passing—until at last came one clad in shining garments, fashioned full seemly, of white silk that flowed and clung, revealing gracious lines of her form who walked stately-wise, with little *The Woman of Radiance* children about her knees. And Flame saw that her form was radiance, and her eyes were stars, but he might not discern the fashion of her face for the light thereof. And he was sore troubled that the seeming of her face was withholden from him, for he knew in his soul that he had somewhat to do with her.

Came once more the voice of Senta the Radiant One: "Flame, Maker of Images, attend my words. This woman shalt thou seek throughout the world, forasmuch as she is the dream of dreams in thy soul. In the fullness of thy manhood shalt thou fashion her in pure marble, and she shall be called Mother of *Mother of Men* Men. As for thee, thou shalt be called the Giver of Dreams. Awake."

And Senta the Radiant One, passing, gathered to her breast with one swift motion the sprite Earthlove, that had revealed to her Flame and Roseheart in their need to be taught the wisdom of life which they knew not.

III

Senta Taketh Earthlove AND when that Senta had taken Earthlove unto herself, and had passed, the evening was come, and there were stars a-many in the depths of Pool. Therewith, looking upon them, a great peace came upon Flame, and being weary, he laid himself down that he might sleep and be refreshed. And as he slept, he dreamed of that woman whose form was radiance, and whose eyes were stars. And *Dreams and Awakening* his fingers stirred, and sought to fashion out of the earth her form of beauty; but all crumbled under his touch, and he might not.

When the morning was come, and upon all things lay new freshness as of the world's beginning, the youth Flame arose and stripped him, and plunged his body in the Pool that sleep might be shaken from him. Whereafter he got him to the castle, and when that he had stayed his hunger with bread and new milk, asked that he might have speech with his troth-plight, the Princess Roseheart. Then a serving-man led him through many halls to a *The Queen and her Women* great room wherein with their women sat Roseheart and the Queen her mother.

And there, in seemly raiment of soft colours, crimson, and the brown of old wood, and fresh green, the women sat before their looms, and their frames wherein rich broidery grew under their white fingers. And over all was sunlight, a flickering whereof was made by blown vines without the casements, which were open to the morn. There was the whisper of silk, and much babble of talk, after the fashion of women working. Shuttles flew in the looms, and white arms wondrous fair in motion drew forth *Beauty Added unto Beauty* long silken threads, being wrought into fine stuffs, to the end that beauty might be added unto beauty.

Queen Ellaline sat very still in the midst of these her women. Of delicate fashion she was, and gentle. Her eyes were widely set, and blue, and mother-sweet, and her hair was silvering with the caress of the years. And she was sad in the midst of sunshine, forasmuch as she was troubled at the mien of the maid, her daughter, who sat with drooping head and still hands. And in good sooth, the heart of the Princess was heavy within her, and no little in fear. Nightlong had she *Roseheart is Troubled* seen the vision of Flame, in whose eyes like the sea lay her white body floating. Never before since he had loved her had she seen aught but her soul's self therein, and she was troubled.

And now Flame, son of Lokus, lord of that far isle of sea-surge and fire-bloom, entered in courtly wise this room of work and idleness, of gayety and gossip, and of love perplexed. In reverent greeting did he kiss the hand of Queen Ellaline; then turning him to the Princess Roseheart, he took both of her white hands in his, seeking to look into her eyes. And soon, for her love of him she *Roseheart is Troubled* might not refrain, and bravely gave them to his seeing. And for that she was shamefast, in the way of a maid, she looked as one that saw not. But in the eyes of Roseheart, he who loved her saw as he was wont only the image and seeming of himself. And he was sorrowful therewith, forasmuch as he had thought mayhap to find in the eyes of his love the twin stars of the woman of his dream. But the thing was not. And remembering the Radiant One, and the things that she had said, he knew that, will-he, nill-he, he must fare forth in quest of that woman whose form was radiance, and whose eyes were stars—her from *Mother of Men*

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