EVELYN PALMER

VERSES BY A FEMALE ROBINSON CRUSOE

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No. 4

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DEDICATION TO K—

To you, sweet friend, my thoughts forever straying
From my Pacific-bounded home of ease
Must yet for very distance turn like bees
Too far on light and fragile wings a-straying.

So homing then against the surf-wet breeze,
No honey gathered, but the sea-salt staying
Upon my weary messengers, gainsaying
My hope of help from the antipodes.

The useless exercise of thinking done,
I lay reclined in empty-minded leisure
When my hid soul to exstasy was won
To feel the rising tide of unknown pleasure:

The soundless echo in my heart of one
Most distant throb that kept my private measure.

VERSE EPISTLE

In what way can one thank for poems, but
by writing poems? Though a clumsy fellow
like I am, Eve, may think and yawn and bellow,
and still his verse is of uncertain cut.

I see you walking in the magic mellow
light of the moon, chewing a coco-nut,
through palms and prickly shrubs to your lone hut,
I see your beach, surf-beaten, gleaming yellow.

The Southern Cross be now my lodestar, dear,
my love is better than this shaky rhyme;
I'll leave my country and my gods, to steer
a downright course to you, till I can hear
your voice, that's calling me over the grey
and tossing waters. Here I come. Your K.

Confused in Time, and that nice point of Space
Where lies my home and livelihood, unknown,
Yet is my course predictable: for thrown
On this lost island far from all my race
I can but cherish what is most mine own.
My world reflects upon its brightened face
The haloed rays from that most inward grace
Which in true hearts from Venus' breath is blown.
No sweeter do the pigeons call, than oft
The voice I love hath fallen on my ear;
The sea's continued murmur is as soft,
And to my drowsy mind one thought is clear:
— The very palm-trees pattern it aloft —
That there is no one in the world more near.

To wake in this same circling ring
Of coral-banks where sea-spray blows;
Beyond, as far as eyesight goes,
The moving wave encompassing
This sordid rock that Neptune chose
To be my prison. Menacing
His guard surrounds me. Can I bring
Sufficient sacrifice for those?

Ah, rulerless the ancient sea
And unimplorable now moves
Without the touch of mastery
By potent gods, and it behooves
Unaided mortal misery
To wait in silence what Time proves.

Within this firm and subtly rounded shell
The immaterial brush of light has laid
Each single tint that rainbowed beauty made
When first to earth the rays of sunlight fell;

Since that primeval touch, in light and shade,
Earth has been ruled by this unvaried spell
And will be so in all her buds to swell
Till cools the sun and our moist texture fade.

The layered pearl shows on its surface all
We can conceive as fair, but yet we know
The range of light is wider in its fall

Than nature's and our eyes' response. Just so
Are all those shades of feeling which love's call
Roused in our breast inadequate for show.

If beauty still be perfect in itself
Then now it is not less, though seen alone
And unaccompanied by former wealth
Of that familiar hand slipped in my own.

We find, if beauty is the lover's gift,
A new interpretation, erst unknown:
The soothing quality of sweet uplift
In contemplation, is communion's loan.

To be received but by a wider self
Which can interpret, and condone
Even Time's destruction and his stealth.

A heart without this charitable shift
In all perception is too prone
To see Earth's outward fair cracked by Death's rift.

We slept beside the moonlit sea,
Its hollow moaning in our ears,
And with involuntary tears
Awoke to find an argosy

Riding at anchor on the lea.
The fervent hopes of bygone years
Now realised, seemed more like fears;
We stood and waited silently.

And then we saw the lively fleet
Hoist coloured sail, and work to heave
The anchor up with rythmic beat.

Then, as the ships prepared to leave,
The sun burst through the cloudy sheet
And his hand faded from my sleeve.

The tender tides of morning, far away,
Have overspread the pale autumnal sky
With varied gentle colour, melting high
To wide clear fields of cloud-hemmed blue and grey.

Soft mist among the beeches seems to lie
And gather in what brighter light of day
Would fall there, in a pallid gloom to stay
Beneath the red and yellow leaves that sigh

Awaiting dissolution that will turn
The ripe and mellow colouring they show
To dull brown rustling in de fern.

Now through damp fields a quick tall form will go
And watch alone the smoky bon-fires burn,
And speak my name most secretly and low.

Uncertain flame, that flickers in the blast
Of passing time, called by too great a name!
No deathless passion in this mortal frame
Was by design or chance's tossing cast.

The passive earth is by great Sol aflame
With lambent heat, from spring to fall, at last
To silent winter led, and in the past
The story of my heart is all the same.

As lights the sky in secret ere the morn
Affection spread beneath Platonic leaves,
Till in one night the magic-ripened corn

Was cut, the harvest garnered into sheaves.
So easily hidden lay love ere born,
So with the day dissolves the web he weaves.

These ashes are yet warm and almost glow;
Can fanning breath rekindle their lost flame?
And all intent, as captive to a game,
I kneel before them and most gently blow.

'Tis strange for this charred wood to be the same
That yesterday in fire's resplendent show
Gave forth a living substance and did grow
Transcendent — now remains the dead black frame.

'Twill not revive. The last hid sparks are gone;
And if I rise and go upon my way
I leave but death behind me; there is none

To wonder by what hearth my riches lay.
Autumn consumed my all. Why linger on
To wait aslant for Winter's deadly day?

Ulysses wrecked and on an island cast
Had better fortune than I here have found;
However great the footsteps on the ground,
They indicated man or Cyclops passed;

And lonely with a goddess, love's sweet sound
Was murmured in his ear, until at last
Though still in show unwilling, he held fast
In smooth and scented arms at night lay bound.

Such lot were mine, had but the sylvan God
Who once inhabited this mountain-land
Leaping on two, or four, bright hooves, unshod

Come from his cavern to the still white sand
And gathered me as careless past I trod
With one swift grip of that relentless hand.

Unspoilt creation, green about the rim
Of this quiescent, time-untouchèd peak,
For ages has continued here. I seek
By unskilled labour, foolishly to trim
A garden in the forest. I am weak
Against the rising columnarly slim
And pliant palms, that far outsoar the dim
Deep interleavèd roof — a true antique
Of ancient lustre. But I've scratched it here
— the itch of instinct stirring in my hand,
I have set on old nature's calm veneer
Though transient, like a pattern made in sand
By one rare wind, which others soon blow clear,
The mark of man in either hemisphere.

THE CIRCULAR COURSE

The unforeseen full moon, in fear
Stays cloudily hidden, imbued
With shyness of the many-hued
And iridescent sea; too clear
A mirror for the bright and crude.
The hurried order of the year,
Ever an echo clanging near
The labyrinth of solitude,
Confuses by too quick a tread
The outward passage of the mind
And by perverted instinct led
I still in anguish seek to find
That which I thought, when first I fled,
Forever to have left behind.

Reduced to pure essentials, to live
Uncrowded on an island, never know
The uniform disheartening and slow
Coagulation, the sedative
Administered by Mars, that none may sow
Sedition against his rule, or give
A sudden turn to his bold narrative
Enlivened as before with blood's bright flow;
Escapèd from that stultifying press
To lie abroad in never-ending calm
Is to hold Fortune by that foremost tress
Which but once miss'd no more invites the palm.
Such lot is mine; nor could another guess
My soul's delight, secure from worldly harm.

By Nature favoured, though by Man forgot,
I am secure from ev'ry Enmity.
Blue indolence, the wet immensity
Has spread a languid arm about me, shot
With dancing fire, reflected sky to sea.
Whether I labour, or lazily plot
New thoughts, Earth's gentle care forsakes me not;
Soft cooings overhead accompany
My unprescribèd steps, voiced interest
Now focussed on me by my universe:
For here at last in very truth I rest
Clasped to a tender and infinite nurse,
Feeding at leisure upon that very breast
That Faustus cried for in his bitter curse.

These verses by Evelyn Palmer, with an introductory poem by K., and illustrated by Adine van Houten, were set in Bodoni type and printed in the spring of 1944 in an edition exclusively intended for friends and relations of the author, illustrator and publisher.

Evelyn