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| **The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock** |
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| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | *S’io credesse che mia risposta fosse* | |  | *A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,* | |  | *Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.* | |  | *Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo* | |  | *Non torno vivo alcun, s’i’odo il vero,* | |  | *Senza tema d’infamia ti rispondo.* | |

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| |  | | --- | |  | | LET us go then, you and I, |  | | When the evening is spread out against the sky |  | | Like a patient etherized upon a table; |  | | Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, |  | | The muttering retreats | *5* | | Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels |  | | And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells: |  | | Streets that follow like a tedious argument |  | | Of insidious intent |  | | To lead you to an overwhelming question…. | *10* | | Oh, do not ask, “What is it?” |  | | Let us go and make our visit. |  | |  |  | | In the room the women come and go |  | | Talking of Michelangelo. |  | |  |  | | The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, | *15* | | The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes |  | | Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening, |  | | Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains, |  | | Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys, |  | | Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap, | *20* | | And seeing that it was a soft October night, |  | | Curled once about the house, and fell asleep. |  | |  |  | | And indeed there will be time |  | | For the yellow smoke that slides along the street, |  | | Rubbing its back upon the window panes; | *25* | | There will be time, there will be time |  | | To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet; |  | | There will be time to murder and create, |  | | And time for all the works and days of hands |  | | That lift and drop a question on your plate; | *30* | | Time for you and time for me, |  | | And time yet for a hundred indecisions, |  | | And for a hundred visions and revisions, |  | | Before the taking of a toast and tea. |  | |  |  | | In the room the women come and go | *35* | | Talking of Michelangelo. |  | |  |  | | And indeed there will be time |  | | To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?” |  | | Time to turn back and descend the stair, |  | | With a bald spot in the middle of my hair— | *40* | | (They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”) |  | | My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, |  | | My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin— |  | | (They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”) |  | | Do I dare | *45* | | Disturb the universe? |  | | In a minute there is time |  | | For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. |  | |  |  | | For I have known them all already, known them all: |  | | Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, | *50* | | I have measured out my life with coffee spoons; |  | | I know the voices dying with a dying fall |  | | Beneath the music from a farther room. |  | | So how should I presume? |  | |  |  | | And I have known the eyes already, known them all— | *55* | | The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase, |  | | And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, |  | | When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, |  | | Then how should I begin |  | | To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? | *60* | | And how should I presume? |  | |  |  | | And I have known the arms already, known them all— |  | | Arms that are braceleted and white and bare |  | | (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!) |  | | Is it perfume from a dress | *65* | | That makes me so digress? |  | | Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl. |  | | And should I then presume? |  | | And how should I begin?  .      .      .      .      .      .      .      . |  | | Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets | *70* | | And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes |  | | Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?… |  | |  |  | | I should have been a pair of ragged claws |  | | Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.  .      .      .      .      .      .      .      . |  | | And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! | *75* | | Smoothed by long fingers, |  | | Asleep … tired … or it malingers, |  | | Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me. |  | | Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, |  | | Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis? | *80* | | But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed, |  | | Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter, |  | | I am no prophet—and here’s no great matter; |  | | I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, |  | | And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, | *85* | | And in short, I was afraid. |  | |  |  | | And would it have been worth it, after all, |  | | After the cups, the marmalade, the tea, |  | | Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me, |  | | Would it have been worth while, | *90* | | To have bitten off the matter with a smile, |  | | To have squeezed the universe into a ball |  | | To roll it toward some overwhelming question, |  | | To say: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead, |  | | Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”— | *95* | | If one, settling a pillow by her head, |  | | Should say: “That is not what I meant at all; |  | | That is not it, at all.” |  | |  |  | | And would it have been worth it, after all, |  | | Would it have been worth while, | *100* | | After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets, |  | | After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor— |  | | And this, and so much more?— |  | | It is impossible to say just what I mean! |  | | But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen: | *105* | | Would it have been worth while |  | | If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl, |  | | And turning toward the window, should say: |  | | “That is not it at all, |  | | That is not what I meant, at all.”  .      .      .      .      .      .      .      . | *110* | | No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; |  | | Am an attendant lord, one that will do |  | | To swell a progress, start a scene or two, |  | | Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool, |  | | Deferential, glad to be of use, | *115* | | Politic, cautious, and meticulous; |  | | Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse; |  | | At times, indeed, almost ridiculous— |  | | Almost, at times, the Fool. |  | |  |  | | I grow old … I grow old … | *120* | | I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled. |  | |  |  | | Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach? |  | | I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. |  | | I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. |  | |  |  | | I do not think that they will sing to me. | *125* | |  |  | | I have seen them riding seaward on the waves |  | | Combing the white hair of the waves blown back |  | | When the wind blows the water white and black. |  | |  |  | | We have lingered in the chambers of the sea |  | | By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown | *130* | | Till human voices wake us, and we drown. |  | |