

Classic Poetry Series

Viggo Stuckenberg

- poems -

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Autumn Evening

A tower stands by the edge of a wood, an old weathered tower with moss and creepers growing across the peepholes, with green moss in the cracks and corners, and withered woodbine hanging like stiff, dry hair down over the red stone. High up on the east side is the only window in the crumbling walls.

Up there behind the deep-set window a woman stands gazing out at the coming night. She is small and thin, and her hands resting on the window-sill are as white as moonlight, and her chin as pale and curved as an arum-lily. But her eyes shine black as pitch which drips from a burning torch. She stands gazing out at a plain as open as the sea, while the rooks from the wood fly off over the trees and wheel and tumble down over the crowns and cry deep in the wood. Behind her the tower room is as cold as stone in the half-light, and a cricket chirps shrilly in a crevice.

Out over the plain there is nothing but the brown grass of Winter lying as if the melted snow had flattened it, and in the grass lie pools of water here and there. Near to the tower they reflect the red western sky, while farther off they are as grey as the clouds.

While she looks out over the plain where the sky darkens and is stilled by night mists, she listens for the winding stair to sound under a footfall. She listens for the groping of a hand over the lock of the iron door. She listens for the sound of another living body in the dead tower. And she hears nothing but the cricket and the hollow whine of the wind through the empty rooms beneath.

She bends farther forward, and leans her elbows on the windowsill. They are cold from the cold stone, but she does not notice. She does not see that the red sky has faded in the pools in the grass, nor that the plain which was as open as the sea has drawn itself together. And she does not notice that the rooks are silent.

For she is thinking of him who came one night and tied up his horse at the door, climbed up to her room, slept in her bed - and was gone before daylight. Of him who came to her like a squall, and whose speech was like the wind soughing in a wood, and whose embrace set all her dreams alight and brought the warmth of the sun into her heart. Of him who left her alone with the marks where his horse had pawed the ground at the foot of the tower. Sleepless, dreamless and restless, she stares into the night.

It is Lonely Yearning who sits mute at her window with the endless plain of a wasted life before her, and a withered wood behind her - Lonely Yearning, sick of her memory and as immortally young as the madness of Hope.

The sun has set. Around the tower creeps night's forest of darkness.

Viggo Stuckenberg

Snow

It is a long way, a long way away in the land where all the Fairy Tales happen.

Out on a flat, snowcovered, endless barren field squats a tumbledown hut, and in the hut's only room sits a bent old man breathing on the ice on the windowpane. He is staring out over the lonely snow-plain which is empty, cold and trackless, while and sterile all the way to the frost-blue clouds on the horizon. The old man's breath spreads like thin steam over the pane, and freezes. The frost creaks in the woodwork. The cold steals in from outside through cracks and chinks, and long icicles hang down from the eaves like a lattice in front of the window.

The old man does not move. He scarcely blinks his eyes, so fixedly does he stare out at the horizon. Farthest out there where the flat white snowfield draws a straight horizon-line with the darkling sky, it runs down like the edge of a sea that rolls wave after wave, slowly and endlessly along a shore.

It is Mankind's Youth rushing to the Castle where the Princess and half the Kingdom are to be won.

The old man stretches his hands towards the cold window. He presses his forehead against the ice-covered pane, and his mouth quivers as if he is speaking. But no sound escapes his lips. He is as dumb as one whose soul bears a sorrow no-one and nothing can alleviate. His gaze is as fixed and tearless as in one who sees life withered and wasted and can do nothing about it. Only his brain is alive. It struggles desperately and monotonously with ever the same useless, futile thought: to stop that host.

But even if he had a megaphone they would not hear him. His voice would sound like a bird crying above their heads. For out there where they walk, the white snowfield looks like a meadow decked with poppies and cornflowers, and his house looks like a jasmine-covered abode of kisses and embraces and dreams, and the winter sky's leaden clouds like the summer's clearest air. And the dead stillness of the frost on the white field sounds like the song of unseen larks. It is green and fertile and blossoming all around, while far in front stands the castle with the Princess and half the Kingdom like a song upon the lips.

Day in and day out the old man sits and stares. The crowd never stops, and no-one ever rides to the castle. But round about him he sees only barren fields and lonely huts, huts that stand empty and waiting, and huts where old men sit like he does, staring out of frozen panes into a changeless winter, always the same, cold and white - like a memory of what is forever dead...

...out into that winter which is the Dragon slowly swallowing those who never won the Princess.

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