

A Sheaf of Poems

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1960

AND GRIEVE, LESBIA

by Maurice Kenny

ardvarh press



AND
GRIEVE,
LESBIA

by MAURICE KENNY

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...POEMS

AND GRIEVE, LESBIA

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Maurice Kenny



aardvark press

NEW YORK

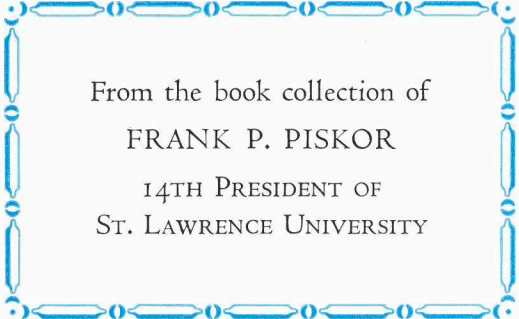
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For
Joaquin Perez

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FRANK P. PISKOR
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BALLAD

(For Those Who Dare Not)

What will I do this morning
To drive off the day...
Will I stare at the buildings
Or pitch stones from the quay...
Will I hiss at the sun
Or dribble a ball
Against the ground,
Against the wall...
Or will I tie a tin can
On the rags
Of a bum
And watch him run
Down the street
Like a bag
Full of bones
Crashing and rattling
In cumbersome tones...
What will I do this morning
To throw off the heft of the day?

What will I do,
O what will I do
When the noon
Comes scuttling down the street
In tatters of light:
Shades of yellow
And flutters of green...
Will I drink a bottle of rum,
Roll up my spleen
And give it a kick,
Or sit
Eating a handful of plums;

Will I step on a stick
And think it a snake;
O what will I do,
What will I do
When I meet, face to face,
My enemy
The noon...
Will I laugh in its face,
Call it a name,
Pinch its thighs
Or pull at its mane!
What will I do when the noon
Sits by my door
And wiggles a dance
That a whore
Would find full of firey shame!

What should I say
Should I meet a lass
In a field of ripe hay
With a laugh in her eye
And a cry in her sigh!
What should I say
To the lass should she ask
Me to stop,
To sit, to stay
By her side
And give her a kiss...
Will I run, will I shy
And look to the hills,
Strengthen my will,
And go
Un-molested upon my way!

Where can I go

When the night drops
Like a thief from a tree;
Where can I hide
When the light
Of the moon
Creeps out and away from the sea;
Where can I bury my head
When the eyes of the stars
Wink and blink at me!

I will tease a spider
And his fly,
I will drink a jug of cider;
Curse the sky,
Then hang by my neck
From a tree
With my tongue in my teeth
And spit on my lip
Until a passer-by,
Frightened at me,
Cuts me down,
Lets me drop,
Sets me free.

What will I do this morning
To throw off the sun...
What will I do this morning.

RAIN

Rain has the cold fingers
Of a new acquaintance...
It says nothing but taps
The hard road, the leaf, the pane...
Passing through the long darkness;
Like an old woman afraid
Of the stranger on the train,
The shower of Summer rain
Offers only a cool silence.

Rain clatters in the night,
Breaking the solemn quiet
Of the country field
Where not even the mice squeal,
Nor the grass murmur,
Nor the buttercups sigh in the wind;
Rain becomes the face we cannot see,
And is for the man who cannot pray.

THE PLAIN ONE (For Ada)

Curls and frills,
Frills and curls,
Lemon dresses
Cut for tea,
Polished nails
And shiny boots,
But even then
No boy
Would dance with me.

THE PUERTO RICANS

Your masks...
Now tragic, now comic,
Now child-like soft in melancholy...
Coppered and bronzed,
Will soon
Have their lines hammered
Like the Jew, the Italian,
Their brows flattened,
Like the Pole, the Irishman,
Eyes riveted
Into place,
Like the German, the Negro;
And your songs of the island
Will be gone,
Your magic, your grace;
You will be hammered and sown;
You will have new gods:
You will sleep on a clock
And worship at the shrine of Midas,
You will learn the right word
And the right street,
We will
Teach you how to kill,
And how to cheat.
And no Puerto Rican sun
Will then
Suck the sting
Of Winter from
Your bones.
We will be one!

PARIS TO HELEN

If this were not winter
I would pick armfuls of poppies
And drop them all by your bed
So you would sleep,
So I could love.

It is unfair to take your innocence,
To cheat, to mar your sleep...
Beauty must not be stirred.
You are all the poppies in the world...
I would pick them each by each,
Yet, this is Winter.

PARIS ALONE

Stones and shadows,
One movement of moonlight
On the tall columns,
And no breeze blowing from the sea.
The fright of silence and midnight
Has the power of a wave
Hurled by the sea to the rock shore...
Shaken as if by a cyclop's fist.
The pines are still, scentless,
And the coast is dark
As the ear of an Ethiop.

Here are the ships, tonight,
Like jewels suspended,
And the drunken sailors,
And their loved women...

CHINESE GIRL AT THE RIVER BANK

Lotus, run down this river of my world,
Run with the wind,
Run with the bright free fish
Under the green-brown river;
Lotus, run down this river of my world,
Wash the blood of my hand
From your leaf and petal
With the waters of this wide river;
Lotus, run down this river of my world,
Run with the wind,
Find the turbulence,
Lose yourself, soft flower from my hair,
In the wild river and the expectancy
of tomorrow.

I let you fall into the green river...
Though I would hold you back for a moment:
I return you to the element.

INEVITABILITY

(Ending Of The Days)

Autumn... one last aster...
Two lonely petals remain...
One to toss to the sky,
Hoping it will be caught by the rain,
And one to drop to the river:
Perhaps it will reach the sea;
But I can hear Winter
Rumbling on the mountain
Like an angry old man
Bitten by an angrier bee.

IN THE CITY COURTYARD
(A poem for the dying)

I

The beech, in the court
In the village of a city
In a world
Strange
From home,
Its limbs stretching
Its limbs like streaks
Of pain... brown in time...
Shoot up
Clawing the air
To be warmed by the sun.

II

Sight blocked
Through windows:
Blue greyed,
Walled by air-conditioners
Replacing geraniums and African violets
In jars once tended to by friendly hands,
Two men: young
Prepare supper.
The onion smell hangs heavy on the air.
Boys, yet not quite boys,
Sharing the cold sterility
Of frozen rooms,
Flecked by city soot.

III

Why are they not
Tending the corn

Or just lazily sitting under the sun,
Under a tree
Over a brook:
Alive with speckled trout
And shiny purple minnows, frolicking
In the waters of the sun-drenched pool!
Within the bricked abyss
How can the beech
Ever reach the sun;
How can the window shine
In the morning light
In the morning time;
How can the boys turn brown
Build, build
When their
Hands have not the breast
Of some Helen, supple and rich,
To fold.

IV

The beech
In a village of a city in a world
Will die;
And what of the men...
They seem not to care...
Strange!

THE HIDDEN SPRING OF SUDDENNESS

Out of the green
Sun, laughing,
Between the leafy elms,
A fly
Whizzed and spun
Into the dim of the room,
Hunting,
I would suppose,
Some lick of sweet:
Sugar or over-ripened plum
Too rich
For a boy's tongue.

And the fly,
Full of spice,
Vigor,
And fun...
As though drunk
On a thimbleful
Of rum...
Roared around
The turn of the coffee-cup
Race track,
Zoomed
To the mirror
Hanging on the wall,
And contented with
The image of
The frisky, fun-
Loving creature
He found returning
His leer,

He kicked his legs
And roared
Away
To nip at the ear
Of the cat
Sleeping
On the mat
In the sun on the floor.

As swift
As a bat
Frightened of a sudden shaft
Of sun,
The cat
Clawed the air
And the prince of flies
Doffed his crown
And languishly dropped
Pulverized.

RESIGNATION

The voiceless pines
Have no anger, cannot shout
At the wind as it rages
Through needles and limbs.

The quiet hum of the plundered pine,
Raped as though a closed-eyed child,
Only lifts or lowers its tone
But does not scream
Its brutal violation.

Open your arms, old mountain pine,
Accept
The cry and the lash and the hate
Of the crazed wind
Which loves you.

IN THE TIME OF FRIENDSHIP

Do not be like
The spirit of Christmas
Which, now, only enters
Once during the year...
Come to me in gladness,
Come to me in sorrow, or in despair.

I will tell you, honestly,
That there will be hours
When I shall not always smile
Nor attempt to beguile
The hearts or purses of the world;
There will be times when I
Am between the teeth of anger
Or opened like a blossom in Joy...
But if you trace the lines
Of the palms of my hands
As you, often, revive all the days
Of your past... then you will learn
To accept my pain and my joy
As I wish to accept all
Which comprises your world.

The pools of my river are dark
And not without a whirl
Of violence... I have blood...
And yet, see how calmly they sleep
Under the watch of the warm sun...
But I have blood...
And my red blood has fire, has chill,
And will dry in the wind and the sun.

I
May morning sun
Cavorting,
Like fairies,
Through the cherry blossoms.

II
June noon sun
Splashing,
Like rain,
Upon the wild red cherries.

III
I will pick
A cherry
From among the leaves
And taste...
Bitter on my tongue...

LIKE A BEAST

Phantom April,
Covered with muck,
Splattered with mud...
Where are your showers,
Your flowers
Which make poets sing
And bring
Young lovers' blood
To a boil!
Ah! what a shame!
Squashed in the mire,
Slimey with the cast off
Of winter...
A harmless beast...
Yet set to spring.

! EL MUNDO Y EL HOMBRE... QUE !

Ashes and peach blossoms wither...
Attain the death due the Winter;
Atom, Mother
Make the music of Babylon
Though the Summer
Melts in the snow, freezes over,
And the babble never
Again will stir;
Neither senator nor banker,
Nor scholar nor begger
Employ heaven,
That betroths a man's seasons,
May bilk or fox or pray
With all their gloss, gilder
Granite or religion
To lock petal to petal
Or tissue to tissue...
For Zeus, nearly to Reno,
Is biting the throat of his Leda
And his ears riot with screaming.
Do not regret... for, at least, you saw
The peach flowering.

THE AWAKENING

In the weird darkness
Of my loneliness
I see the future Summers
Appear: sunless, treeless, empty.

Violation
Is welcomed
For love cannot be
All blossom and tender...
And loneliness must invite
Even shadows, disaster,
Play host to strangers.

As the mountain
Does not turn
From the wind,
As the shore
Does not escape
The sea...
I shall, myself,
Invite
The prongs of time,
The cold, sometimes
Excited fingers
Of possibility.

SURVIVAL

Morning,
In great glory:
Sun on the smuddy glass pane,
Birds pecking the seeds of the roses,
Wind blowing,
Green grass growing,
Spring not knowing
She has been scythed
By the Summer.

Morning:
Boys whistling,
Little girls jumping rope
On the corner...
Angry with the boys
For not teasing.

Noon...
In splendor...:
The robin has its worm,
The gardener his starling,
The sun has its pool to devour.
Only the rock is steadfast,
And yet, the rains have power.

WHAT PROFIT THE IGNORANT

Rocks are not ice
And, yet, they, too, dissolve
Like emotion, dream, and fear.
Nightmares
Are abandoned
When the green sun
Swirls in a scarlet river,
When the tall trees
Weave in the blue-wind.
Passion dissolves,
Arises out of the west
Like morning,
Must sleep like tired birds
Or children
Who have had too much of the noon.
Love is schooled:
Education
Is a matter of forgetting,
Ambition.
Mountains wear away
After a day
Of a long, hard rain.
And pain
Erases itself.

EARLY SUMMER
(For Samuel Loveman)

This is no morning for serpents:
The sun in the sky is clearly yellow
And the leaves are green,
The river is running
And the hills are leveling.

This is no morning for serpents:
Let them be drowned in the well,
Or stomped by the shy horses;
This is the morning to hoe the corn...
Now while it is cool,
It is the time to pick the red berries
Hidden in the windy meadow.

This is no morning for serpents:
The bluejay is singing,
And everyone is sure
That after this long Summer
Autumn and harvest will follow.

AND GRIEVE, LESBIA

I
Each year chestnuts fall,
Leaves wither,
Wind grows angry and cold;
Each year wild ducks call,
Snows flutter,
Ice hardens in the mold;
Each year spring revives with all
Its luster
And lovers once again are bold.

I know only this
Winter
Dies with a kiss.

II
EVASION

Like some wild country flower,
Like chicory
You open your pale blue petals
Early every morning
To choke out the clover,
And close each evening
When the orange sun falls.

Like a field of poppies
You spread your potent venom,
Fuming the air
Which pierces butterfly and bird
And any stray man
Who happens up the road.

Like an April violet
You burst and taunt, and close
At the first touch
Of Summer's hand,
But that is the power
Of a wild flower.

III
AGAIN YOU HAVE HIDDEN

Again you have hidden
Yourself in shadows,
Rouged and scented,
Disappeared into the night,
The lights of the city...
And I wait by the river.
You flaunt yourself
In the mirror of his eyes.
Is your revenge complete
When finally the screams
Of madness reach your ears,
Or are you determined
That the knife sink to the hilt!
Murder may never be your crime,
Lesbia,
But, for love of you,
It well might be mine.

IV
LESBIA

You are the ape
Suspended in the black-purple
Of the nightmare;
You are the stone
So finely crushed
For that hint of blood;
You are the sweat
Of the crowd
At the arena.

Before I intimately knew you
I was the willy willow on the wind;
Before I trusted your strength
I was strong;
Before I believed in your stories
I could invent my own,
And the endings were then always happy.

I shall become a priest
And close the shutters;
Or a woodsman
And hack off the vines;
Or a town-crier
And I will cry your name.

V
IS

Love is no matter of words...
Love is fight, cruel, it is death;
It is blood not red rose,
It is ice not white moon,
It is knife not soft wind...
Love is no matter of words.

Love is single moments, built or unbuilt...
No invention for place and time...
It is a mouse cornered
And held momentarily,
It is a swift smile, a short glare of hate.
Love is single moments.

It is not... it is not, it is...
Love is no matter of words.

VI

Your eyes...
Black,
Bitter
From pain...
Are beautiful,
And so I love you.
But eyes,
Or lips or cheek or hair
Alone, together
Do not, magical as each may be,
Change indifference
To love...
It is the pain
I saw,
The laugh
I heard
Which bred my love.

VII

Beautiful!
Yes, your eyes and your raven hair,
Your olive cheek against the pillow
Was meant for Leonardo.
But, Lesbia,
There are men
Who would love you
Without all those embellishments.

VIII
COMRADE

All right... she is yours... take her,
But may she break off your manhood,
Break it in half.

You will learn to wipe
The spit from your face,
To cover the scratch
On your flaming cheek,
You will discover
The eaglet
Hiding under
The pretty feathers of the swan.

Yes, she is yours...
Or so you are led to think.
She may peacefully sleep
In your arms for weeks,
But then one night, restless,
When the moon is big
And its beams are bright
She will leave,
And leave you holding nothing
In your arms but pain.

IX
NIGHT FRUSTRATION

I've been
Left only
The swan
To strangle,
To kill
While the moon
Spankles
The sky
In the chill
Of dusty
October...

But he
Will not moan.
Again
And again
He must rise,
Stubborn
In his
Refusal
To die.

X
EYES

Eyes as though sleeping,
Now stone-quiet,
Have lost the glitter
Of a black river
Splashed with morning sun,
Now closed like the wilted lips
Of a tired flower.

I do not let you go
Completely
To the dreamless
Darkness...
Never to revive,
Not even in Spring.

I hold
Back a little
Of you
Forever.

It is only your hand
Which droops
Like a slender bough
Of a river willow,
It is only your eyes
Which close.

XI
AND GRIEVE, LESBIA

Bones are merely bones...
They cannot sing, nor dance,
Nor love until the night,
Exhausted, sprawls before
The dawn to sleep.
I cannot love a pile of bones
Or memories...
I may only remember,
And grieve, Lesbia.

Maurice Kenny was born in Watertown, New York, in 1929. After resigning an early, though active, career in the theater, Mr. Kenny attended Butler University, N. Y. U., and St. Lawrence University. Shortly after his arrival in N. Y. C., he wrote play reviews and a book column for the now-defunct "Off-Broadway" magazine. At present, Mr. Kenny is cleaning up a novel and adding the last trimmings to a children's fairy tale which has a fall publishing date. THE HILL IS HOME, Mr. Kenny's fifth volume of verse, is being prepared for spring, 1961, release.

Other Books by Maurice Kenny:
THE HOPELESS KILL
DEAD LETTERS SENT
WITH LOVE TO LESBIA

AARDVARK PRESS

Poetry:

THE HOPELESS KILL
DEAD LETTERS SENT
WITH LOVE TO LESBIA
AND GRIEVE, LESBIA

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"WITH LOVE TO LESBIA is a book to be read alone
when all the beauty and love in the world seem
washed down the sewers..."

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"... an effect of continuity and naturalness
I like."

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Excellent."

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