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YALE UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM

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KYRDOON: A ROMANTIC TALE IN VARIOUS RHYMED METRES

BY

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YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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Printed at the Earl Trumbull Williams Memorial by
the Yale University Press
1921

Gift
University
FEB 4 1922

PREFATORY NOTE

This poem received the twenty-first award of the prize offered by Professor Albert Stanburrough Cook to Yale University for the best unpublished verse, the Committee of Award consisting of Professors Edward B. Reed, of Yale University, William E. Leonard, of the University of Wisconsin, and Leonard Bacon, of the University of California.

KYRDOON

To Cyril Hume.

When all of Carthage brandished swords beneath the Afrit star,
When the purple town of Dido put its armor on for war,
When the swarthy sons of Sidon and the sea-brown sons of Tyre
Unhung their broad shields from the wall, and trued their swords with fire,

Then were there gorgeous gatherings north of Libyan sands,
The carrion dogs came trooping in to Carthage in great bands,
The leanish men that any fought for gold to chink in purse,
The renegades turned soldier in lieu of something worse!

From Græcia's seven towns they came, from hell-born Kurdistan,
From every land that had the stuff to breed a fighting man,
From Cyprus' den of pirates, from the ruin where was Troy,
—O to be in Carthage on that day would fill a man with joy!

To be in Carthage on that day would fill a man with flame,
To see the outland beauty that into Carthage came,
To see the brave men gathering under the reddish star,
When Carthage took her purple off, and stripped herself for war!

So, many were the names that day would fill a king with fear,
Many the pirates that had won fear's tribute far and near,
Many had wrested ransom to outshine the gaudy morn,
From the western Gates of Hercules east to the Golden Horn!

Chief among these a Cyprian was—Kyrdoon! Who sailed the seas
In fear of one low stripped black hull would tremble to their knees,
Knowing the flame that came by night along the coastwise towns,
Remembering the women's cries along the ravished downs;
And Thræmes from Piræus, who was his right-hand man;
A bold pair the seas to sail, for prey the seas to scan!

They were swaggering, they were haughty, but they had a grand way
Of comradery and freedom with those less great than they.
They would drink with a camelherd as though he gave a boon,
And let him pay magnificently—the Greek and Kyrdoon!

* * * * * * * * * *

The night before they sailed, the Greek and he
Had found a time for riotous revelry
In the small inns that smirch the waterfront.
At dawn they sailed, and those two bore the brunt,
In the small morning hours, of making ready,
Although their eyes were blear and hands unsteady,
This one more craft to take the tempestous foam,
Bearing the sword of Carthage against Rome!

So as they hoisted sail and warped her out,
They did not watch the waves, but heard the rout
Of wine-flushed harlots in a little room,
Where sputtering cressets shafted through the gloom,
And sodden sailors found in those bare arms
A short release from war and war's alarms.

There had been one—a Macedonian slave—
Whose face had made him half forget the wave,

And the loud sea and each high whimpering gull,
To look upon and know her beautiful,
And draw her to his lips, and hold her there
Crying, by all the gods, that she was fair,
And hear her sing some lilting, trivial song
That seemed to fill with fire and make him strong.

He spent long hours in the arms of her
While the Greek strummed a creaky dulcimer!

And when the daybreak hour of parting came,
Remembering how she burned him like the flame
Of a rich fire ruddy as old wine,
He asked her for some token, as a sign
That she would hold this night a whit more dear
Than all the burning nights of all the year,
Because of him.

She smiled, and from her arm
Took an old bracelet. 'Twas, she said, a charm
Out of the land of Egypt where mage kings
Wrought sorcery of old, and wondrous things.
And she besought him wear it as a charm.

"Lord, though the years shall bring you to great harm,
And Time shall bring to you all dire mischance,
So long as from your wrist this gold shall glance,
And just so long as you shall think of me,
Death may not gain his ultimate victory,
Though all the world break, break you on the wheel.
For Love will make a charm more sure than steel,
And this same circlet was immersed in the tears

Of a great queen who died before her years
In the fair flower of youth, because of Love!"
He said "More sure a guard than Heaven above
Upon my wrist I wear, and I shall wear,
Until the hounds of death themselves shall tear
This cold flesh from my corse, when beaten down
Is my arm's ward that might protect a town!"

Then from his throat he took a scarf of blue
And shimmering silk. He said "Wear my gift too!
Gods! There is perfume breathed about your lips
Makes me forget the sea and the sea's ships,
And all save sinking toward them in a swoon
Of perfect ecstasy! O mad Kyrdoon!"

Now, drowsy from the wine and from love's rout,
After they sent the xebeque flying out
To know the wind, and know the windy weather,
And the loud sound when strong ships come together,
Dog-tired they dropped down into the stern,
And let the others tug the oars, and churn
Great whirlpools that went sucking down the side,
Until the ship sprang forward in her pride,
Slashing the creamy waves to smothered froth.
They sank to sleep, although no broidered cloth
Covered them from the chilliness of stars.
They sank to sleep, and dreamed, but not of wars!

With the high noon they stretched themselves and woke.
The land had faded to a trail of smoke
Across the southern sky. Only the sea,

Before, around them, glittered magically.
And north and still unseen was Sicily.

The navarch beat—"Zoom! Zoom!"—the oars kept time;
The water seemed to slap the prow in rhyme;
The wind blew smokily from the southwest;
The two sails filled, each rounded like a breast.

And north she sped, a falcon flighting home,
Her brazen beak smashing the seas to foam,
The *Golden Quiver,* with her death for Rome!

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Three weeks of dazzled blue went blowing by;
The sea was covered with whitecaps far and nigh;
Great princely clouds went marching down the sky
Like argosies breasting the Indian tide
Toward pagoda cities half descried,
Gleaming with silks beyond the earth's far rim;
Or gathered in the East like seraphim,
To mass in puffy whiteness huge of form;
Or hung like hostile horsemen swift to storm,
Ever about the circle of the sea.

And all this while they cruised most valorously,
Sweeping the trade-paths up to Italy,
Swinging great curves of ocean left to right,
From dawn to noon, from simmering noon till night;
But no craft saw, only seas bare and bright,
And shoals of fish, and darkening flights of birds.
Growing morose, the seamen fingered swords,

Cursing the sunlight that no quarry sent,
As though it were some demon pestilent.

At last the clearness broke. Dawn drifted in
Gray gusts of fog in streamers raw and thin,
Like the long tentacles of a sea-beast,
Crawling to seize them from the poisonous East.
And now low grayness weighed the expanse of heaven.
No longer blew a breeze. Their keel was even,
Save for a slow surge as they drove into
The restless swell, now chilled a sullen blue.

Suddenly came the cry "A sail!—A sail!"
The navarch leaned across the bulwark's rail;
Then shouted to Kyrdoon "Where? Where away?"
"I see it not!" that outlaw cried. "No, stay!
There where the water's circle, the sky's dome,
Meet! 'Tis a Tyrian merchant! And for Rome!"

Into the spars an agile seaman clomb,
Saw the ship. "Aye, a Tyrian merchantman!"

Between them was a gray, gray, waveless span.
She stood upon the far edge of the sea,
A smudge of black that moved unquietly.

"Tyrian? Baal, the traitors!" the navarch
Cried. Cried Kyrdoon "And rich. An easy mark!
Row!" Leaped the xebeque then, a steed in race.
Her ash oars smote the sea. Began the chase.
The muscled oarsmen tugged with mighty heart.

Dusk found them barely half a league apart!

But with the night came wind and a burst of rain;
They dared not drive the oars with strength to gain,
Lest they should lose her quite, their chase be vain.

And so a new dawn, still dun overhead,
Found them the same. The Tyrian faster sped.
The xebeque like a gerhawk swooped for prey.
The waves dashed both her bellying sails with spray;
She pounded through the chop like a wild thing.
You could hear the wet wind in her rigging sing;
You could see the white-faced steersman fight his oar.
And yet they were no closer than before.

Three terrible hours of tugging oars passed, passed,
And each hour was more terrible than the last!
The navarch cried "Have them aboard by noon,
And each of you shall gain a golden boon!"
The navarch cried "Let them escape till night,
And each of you shall feel the raw thong's bite!"

Kyrdoon laughed lean and drew his curving sword,
His dark eyes glistened for the merchant's hoard.
The navarch breathed a terrible prayer to Baal.

Flat fell the wind. All lifeless drooped the sail.
The waves sank down upon the breathless sea,
Limpid and flat, which glimmered copperishly.
"Gods," cried Kyrdoon, "your words wrought evilly!"

The navarch grinned. His eyes were triumphant deeps.
"We gain apace!" he said, "they have no sweeps!"

And true it was. The water's tarnished strip
Suddenly narrowed between ship and ship.
The pirates to grasp ugly knives began,
Crowding along the sides. The merchantman
Helplessly watched them as they nearer ran.

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So just at noon the xebeque drew alongside.
Her grappling irons clenched. Her fierce speed died.
Over the bulwarks poured her brigand crew,
Eager to glut them from the cargo's pride.
Led them Kyrdoon, his fierce face red of hue,
Wielding his scimitar, and Thræmes too.
They smote the Tyrians strongly side by side.

They smote the Tyrians like a burst of hail;
The Tyrians' aimless arrows did not avail.
Thræmes struck down their captain to the deck,
Riving him as a strong wind rives a sail.
Kyrdoon slashed down the crew of the stripped wreck;
They lay slopped in their blood on the main deck.
The buccaneers saw their free cause prevail.

Into the red confusion of her hold
They rushed, and found great piles of minted gold,
And Asian corn and sacks of Syrian wheat,
And gorgeous crimson cloth all richly rolled,
And spilling gems for a proud king most meet.
They trampled the sacked grain with bloody feet,
And carried to their craft the cloth and gold.

And in the captain's cabin too they found
A lovely woman lying in a swound;
Her hair was dark, but her face deathly pale,
And her white hands behind her back were bound.
Waking she saw them, but she was too frail
Even with prayers their power to assail,
So to their ship they bore this prize they'd found.

"Back oars!" the navarch cried. They drew apart
A rod or so. Then, like a quivering dart,
Forward the xebeque thrust, gained terrible speed
And drove her beak into the Tyrian's heart.
The Tyrian ship was shaken like a reed.
"Back oars again! Behold a traitor's meed!"
Cried the navarch. Again she drew apart

To watch the other lurch upon her beam
Shuddering, struck, and see the seaweed gleam
Down to the polished iron of her keel;
And see the mouthing waters suck and cream,
And feel her give a last tempestuous reel
As though to shake a clinging burr of steel,
Then suddenly sink below the ocean's gleam!

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Kyrdoon cried loud "A toast to Carthage' weal!"
The navarch cried "A toast to bloody Baal!"
They drank. Sarcastic smiled the atheist Greek.
He saw the captive girl was soft of cheek,
And white of form. He cried "I drink to her!
Your turn, Kyrdoon! You play the dulcimer!

Some merry dockside jig of harlotry
That will rouse all the turbulent blood of me
To a hot pitch of passionate desire.
Play, play, mad man! I long to feel love's fire.
And let the navarch praise his Baal or Bel.
I have another praise—of using well
The delicious things that he has sent to me.
Baal reaps—but I enjoy—the victory!"

"Sly enough, lean old Thræmes!" said Kyrdoon;
"Yet you speak fair. I'll play for you the tune!"

He found a battered cithern with one string,
And for the Greek wild songs began to sing,
Mad with the terrible madness of the sea
That inflamed the heart to greater revelry,
Till, roused to passion by his own song's beat,
Even as the Greek he flamed with lawless heat,
And cried to him "Now you shall play awhile!"
But the pale Greek gave him a chilling smile:
"Never a bit. You play for me this time.
'Turn, turn about,' as runs the ancient rhyme.
And I made sport for you in Carthage.—No!
Play on! Play on! The racing minutes go,
And when the sun shall rise, waking the day,
Pleasure must end, and we must go our way.
No, this shall be my night, Kyrdoon!" he said.

Flame as he might, Kyrdoon but bowed his head,
Remembering that the cold Greek spoke true.
Again he sang the fiery ballad through,
Stirring evil passions hotter in the Greek,
While his own passions withered his own cheek.

All night they found a dissolute time to raise
Each to the gods his own especial praise:
The girl for Thræmes. The navarch, in some wise,
A drunken sort of thankful sacrifise
Unto the bloody-hearted Lord he knew,
Pledging him flesh to mouth, and raw wine too.
The oarsmen, fire-headed from plundered wine,
A shouting song wherein they called divine
Their mighty city, mistress of the foam,
Who brought another day of victory home,
And drank derision to the men of Rome!

Wearied at last they one by one down sank
In fuddled torpor, stupid rank on rank.
Only Kyrdoon slept deep and peacefully,
Who never drank to madness, when at sea.

And as he slept suddenly standing there
He saw a ghostly vision tall and fair,
And the pale moonlight shimmered from her hair,
Seeming to flow from her in silver streams
Rich with the unreal richness of our dreams.
She bent to him and spoke "Kyrdoon, Kyrdoon!"
—Ah, and her face was lustrous as a moon,—
"Am I forgotten of you, and thus soon?
(Only a few short days, a few short days;
And oh, those words, and the wonder of your praise;
O those great gorgeous days in Carthage town!)
Lord, you recall them? Lord, they were your own!
Now has some newer wind across you blown,
Rippling my crystal beauty from your heart?
Or was I just one lustful evening's part,

And you have strown such hopes on all the seas,
And wafted to the world's end dreams as these?"

He felt a shaming fire in great waves.
He knew that luminous face—the slave's—the slave's—
And so he longed to cry "By that great Queen
Who rules the sky by night with her serene
And cool chaste majesty, my heart is true
To you—my only one—to you, to you!"
But Memory with her present hatefulness
Reached out with stifling clammy hands to press
And choke his mouth to bitter silences.

Again she spoke, and each word was a breeze,
Though each word set his heart to wondering:
"Remember my old words—the ring—the ring—
The golden cirque—the charm of Egypt's king!"

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He woke. Another ship was standing by.
She was too fierce, they were too dazed to fly;
She was too proud, they were too hopelessly
Unrigged by all the night's debauchery.

And so this galley bore them sternly down.
Her creaking sweeps awoke the pirate's swoon.
Her landsmen rowers, trained upon the shore,
Against the sea-dogs unrelenting bore,
And drove their large craft with a heavy stroke
Quite strong enough to crush the xebeque's oak.

Kyrdoon leapt up, seeing the hostile craft.
He strode to where the Greek lay sleeping aft
Crumpled on a pile of matting near the rail.
He shook him. Thræmes rose, his visage pale,
Only to see the menacing swift prow.
Both cried "All hands on deck! She boards us now!
She tramples down too swift for us to run.
Look! Her bright signal blazing in the sun!
The gaunt she-wolf of Rome! Look! The bronze pikes!
Bugle, To quarters! Bugle before she strikes!
Bowmen, on deck! Rowers, to oars, to oars!"
They bellowed like two bulls. None heard their roars.

Then Thræmes sudden remembered the navarch's drum.
He beat upon it thrice,—so "Zoom!—Zoom!—Zoom!"
The oarsmen that lay helpless on the banks
Rose up to man their sweeps in startled ranks.
"Pull! Pull! Lay to them, men!" shrieked out Kyrdoon!
O had he wakened them one whit more soon!
O had the lovely goddess of the ring
Wrought him that whit more soon her glamoring!
Then had he roused the pirates into flight,
Who lay besotted by their victorious night!

Too late to flee, their boat scarce strained to move,
Keen as an eagle free once more to rove,
When crash! the Romans struck them, splintered through
Their starboard bank of oars, slathered askew
The shivering sweeps, hurtled the oarsmen down,
Whose ranks were into wild confusion thrown.
Then slingers from the forecastle swept clear
The wrecked remains, whirling now there, now here,

Ponderous missiles, crushing them to fear;
And then they hoisted swiftly through the air
A bridge between the two, and lashed it there;
The irons bit the xebeque bow and stern.
The two ships locked. It was the Roman's turn.

Craven the navarch ran, howled "All is lost!
Baal is gone over to the Latin host!"
And even Thræmes turned a little pale.
But Kyrdoon rallied him "We dare not fail!
Stand, draw your sword, strike hard, keep your heart brave!
Two on this ship to Rome will not be slave!
Two on this ship dare die the pirate way!
Stand by my side! We are more brave than they!"
Toward the bridge he rushed, and beat them back.
His desperate sword kept flashing a red track.
And at his side stood Thræmes, and those two
Did more than ever men found strength to do,—
More than Horatius as the Romans knew!

Five legionaries rushed them. Kyrdoon felled
The first one with his sword. The body upheld
He crashed upon the next. His challenge belled
Like a hound belling "Forward, men of Rome!
Timorous Carthage waits you! Forward! Come!"
Then Thræmes pitched the third man to the sea.
The others fled. Then Kyrdoon scornfully
Leaned on his blade. "Mother of Victory,
Send me a man to fight, a man to fight!"
The Romans huddled closely, cursed the plight
That let this pirate cow their exultant pride.
They huddled closely there. Kyrdoon defied.

Alas! A fateful arrow feathered true
Shot silverly across the gap of blue,
Sang as it sped, and did an evil work.
Kyrdoon's wild head dropped forward with a jerk;
Kyrdoon gasped strangely once, and then he fell.
His clanking armor struck the xebeque's knell,
For when the Romans saw that champion fall,
A cry of triumph shattered through them all.
Then with the gathering power of a wave,
Soundingly rolling, powerful and brave,
Or the strong tide that stems a swelling river,
They poured upon the beaten *Golden Quiver*.

A short sword thrust at Thræmes. He went down.
A round stone from a slinger neatly thrown
Crushed in the bloody skull of the navarch;
From the ship's rail they threw him to a shark.
The ten men who still fought them met the sword.
Sharp blows—a little skirmish—overboard!
The Romans had possession of the barque,
A wrecked and gutted thing, spattered with blood.
Banks, oars, masts shattered, she was little good,
And so was ruined by their assault of power
That she could never hope to float an hour.

Of her wild oarsmen all but two were slain,
And of her slingers did but two remain;
And of her captains—he still in a swoon—
Did only one survive, the mad Kyrdoon!
For that true shot that gained the day for Rome,
Though wounding him, not to his heart had come,

And so he fell, but falling he breathed still
To live to curse the fate that would not kill!

They bound him there, and carried him aboard.
Done was the fight. Broken was Carthage's sword!

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Freedom is a burst from the clouds, a great and wonderful thing,
A sword in the hand of the meanest hind, a crown for the head of a king!
It makes the lowly lift their heads, and the proud lords stand to the skies;
At the blast of its blatant trumpets, the manly nations rise!

Muck and earth were the people till Freedom's herald spoke;
The sons of men were cattle yoked to a slave-king's yoke,
They patted the clay to bricks, they bowed to the lack of straw,
But today the bonds have been shivered, since one slave a freeman saw!

Then if a man lose freedom, what shall his proud heart do?
If a brigand feel the bitter links biting his clean flesh through?
If the back that stood up free in the fierce old outlaw way
Is lashed by the whip of the slaver to red and terrible clay?

* * * * * * * * * *

A week went dragging by, hateful and black.
Kyrdoon could see the galley's lengthening track
Stream southward as they moved toward Italy;
Kyrdoon could see the gray gulls following free.
Kyrdoon could hear the gray gulls' heartless laughter,
And wince to think of dull years coming after,

And feel each irking shackle at his wrist,
And strain, yet know it useless to persist
In his vain struggle, then fall down to cry
"O happy, happy Thræmes who could die!"
Or fall into a daze of swooning grief
When even death would seem a poor relief
To one whose freedom was a mighty pride;
Or else as though his valor were defied,
He'd shake his mighty head tempestuously.

The Roman captains used to come to see
This mad, mad thing they'd trapped. They'd stand apart,
And watch emotion tearing at his heart
Till his great veins stood out. They'd laugh and look
At all the frenzy that his huge frame shook.
And one would say "He'll tug a mighty oar!"
Since scorn's a venomous foe to stand before,
The terrible Kyrdoon would writhe and rage,
Flinging his bull voice as a battle-gage
Into their faces. Then they all would laugh.
And one would prod him rudely with a staff.
And one would taunt him "Cyprian, cease to rave!
Your broad back found the power your life to save,
Else had you found a wet end in the sea!"
And one "That would have pleased him mightily!"

At last far north there was a blackish streak
Against the vague horizon. Kyrdoon's cheek
Reddened at this inglorious way of seeing
The sight that should have thrilled his whole hawk being,
When (he had dreamed!) the sudden xebeque swooped,
And all her crew upon her low deck whooped,

Sending a windy wave of terror through
Those red-roofed towns beside the Tyrrhene blue.
The galley moved more swift. The captain laughed.
Rome would be proud of her returning craft,
Rome with her infant triumphs on the sea
That one small fight could swell prodigiously!

In the slave market he would sell Kyrdoon.
Riches to him and to his men. The tune
Clinked by the coin in his full lazaret
Into a merry mood his gay heart set.
His brown eyes sparkled, thinking greedily
Of golden talents, gold denarii,
And all the golden way of Rome's applause.
"Ah, mother Rome, yours is a fruitful cause!
The sons of Carthage suredly would swerve
Knew they your bounty to your sons who serve!"

The crew took up the stroke with eager shout.
Spume slathered where the racing sweeps splashed out.
The hurrying vessel scented Ostia.
She started into life. Away, away
Leaped the strong waves. She was returning home.
Away, away splashed the resurgent foam.
Away, away splashed the retarding seas.
Blown by the languorous warmth of the shore-breeze,
She must have found the odor of the quays,
And thought aflame of coming riotousness.
She must have seen the harbor women press,
Knowing the fierce desire and careless gold
Of victors safe again in their stronghold.

Only Kyrdoon shared not the revelry,
Who strained and strained to wrench his fetters free,
Muttering oaths, and looking at the sea;
Who tossed his head, and smote the bonds enraged,
With all the fury of a panther caged,
And shouted hopeless challenge to the air,
And tore his wild locks in a fierce despair.

* * * * * * * * * *

That night he dreamed. And once stood with a sword,
Closing to Roman combat on shipboard,
When once again they battled on the seas;
And once he walked by phantom ilex trees
Beside the marble border of a pool,
And bathed his raw face in the waters cool,
Till suddenly he saw reflected there
The heavenly form and heavenly golden hair
Of his bright vision.

And he would have spoken,
But that discordantly his sleep was broken,
And he awoke to be dragged to his feet
By brutal men. And all the glamorous sweet
Moments dissolved. And there he mutely stood,
As though his heart of fire had turned to mud.

They seized his wrists, and dragged him then away,
And all that night he marched, and the next day
Up a white road where men moved like flecked foam.
And the next night they haled him into Rome.

* * * * * * * * * *

In the slave market, sullen and morose,
He gnashed his teeth at those who looked him close;
He snarled at those who ever came him nigh,
And so they shook their heads and passed him by.

The slaver took his scourge "Be silent, beast!
Or I will give the lash a bloody feast!"
"Fool!" cried Kyrdoon. Swept down the stinging lash;
The Cyprian's back was gouged with many a gash.
Out of a dozen weals the fresh blood streamed.
With dangerous madness then his wet eyes gleamed.
But still he gave no ground. Only he sneered.
And still no buyer looked at him and neared
To purchase that blind rage for weighty gold.

The slaver turned to him with wrath untold.
At last he spoke. "O you unholy one,
Another month of this—your life is done!
Another such a month—and my blade's bite
Your unavailing insolence will 'quite!"

Fervently bowed his head the wild Kyrdoon
And prayed "Ye gods, send me the month then soon!"

* * * * * * * * * *

O Freedom who art glorious in man,
Who brightenest his little life's dull span,
O pure proud spirit, knowing no surcease,
Where didst thou find thy mighty gift of peace
To quicken all the sore heart of Kyrdoon?

No sooner heard he death was coming soon
Than half the torture left his awful face.
His once wracked features found a sort of grace,
His eyes resumed their glittering glance of fire,
No longer looked he mad, no longer dire.
His head flung back. His black locks tossed in pride.
A hope of death had made him deified!

* * * * * * * * * *

And now that month sped, squandering hour by hour
Its precious store of time, its only dower:
Bright days, drab days, days when the clouds streamed by
And when the sea-wind whistled merrily,
Recalling to him things forever flown,—
The dream, the gold of life that he had known,
The pride, the boundless pride of his great heart,—
Days when the spring awakened him to start
Down to the cool soft sand, for calling, calling
Was the clean sea, and hours ashore were palling,
And he was irked by May's inquietude
To strike out where the winds and waves were rude,
To follow the sinking sunset's path of blood!

Broke that last dawn. The slaver "One more day!"
Kyrdoon watched all the minutes reel away.
Dawn. Noon. And then the early afternoon.
His eyes flashed free. The end was coming soon.
His eyes flashed free. His stormy voice waxed loud
"Grant me the sea, O slaver, for a shroud!
Strike with your ax and fling me headlessly
Into the stream that flows into the sea;

For I have loved the sea, and I would be
Forever in her arms. When skies shall rend,
And the great earth go reeling to an end,
And the great gods be torn out of the sky,
The sea, the sea shall howl as the gods die,
And go forever singing, singing alone
Above the ruins of this world o'erthrown.
Fling me! I do not fear the unholy fate!
If I desired, I would storm hell's gate,
Beat down the guard, and swim the Lethean river,—
Take then your ax, O slaver, and deliver!"

The slaver's face was pale "When you shall see,
Perhaps you will not die so mirthfully.
Those limbs of yours are large enough to feel
Torture that might have crushed a breast of steel!"

Kyrdoon nor scoffed at this, nor was he dumb.
He bowed his head and said "The hour shall come!"

At the last hour a man came striding up,
Who held in hand a burnished golden cup.
He said "Take this, and give me that dark knave!"
He said "Take this, and sell me him for slave!"
Wroth was Kyrdoon. He bellowed his bull roar.
The buyer cried "Strong lungs! I like him more!"
The slaver said "Take him, the cup is mine!"
He called his boy "Fill up the cup with wine!—
Sir, I will drink to your good fortitude!
Who rules this man with much must be endued.
I bought him from a captain who him won.
He is as mad as any sees the sun,

He is as raging as an infuriate bull,
And yet,—great strength, and wondrous beautiful!"

* * * * * * * * * *

Kyrdoon stood in the Roman's villa hall.
His feet were chained, his hands were to the wall.
He was a very irate maddened thing;
His voice of thunder made the rafters ring.

Behind him came a step. "So—you—my brave?"
He looked, and saw—the Macedonian slave,
Just as he saw her those long months ago
Ere Carthage' mission brought him to this woe,
Just as he saw her during that night of dream
After the Tyrian sank in the waves' cream,
Just as he saw her in that ilex grove,
And would have spoken to her of his love.

"Start not!" she said. "My master brought you here.
He knows not that I know you, so beware!
I saw you chained in that cruel market place,
And I remembered. Gods, a fall of grace
Is terrible to the proud and to the free!
You see me now! Kyrdoon, had you seen me,—
But no. I go. I will return ere night."

Confused by this, nor understanding quite,
The great proud-hearted buccaneer broke down.
Before his eyes his senses seemed to swoon,
Till all the place became a dizzy haze.
And then his heart filled up with buoyant praise.

And then his heart filled up with wondering
At what might be the import of the thing.

"Does she,—ah, will she—find a sudden way
Of swift escape into a place of day?
No. This is Rome. Carthage is far away.
And yet, yet were a brave man once unloosed,
His heart might find its madness unrefused,
Had he a sword in hand, a sword in hand!
In all this very valorous warlike land,
Had he a worthy sword, there were no one—
But no! there are some things cannot be done!
Better my high heart break itself and die
Than live to dream this dream of mockery!"

At dusk she came, but did not tell him why
She held him all this while in memory;
She did not tell him why she made that thrall
Her master buy and bring him to the hall;
She did not tell the things that she had done;
Yet had he seen her eyes he would have known.

She only said "Await the midnight hour,
My sleepy lord will then be in my power.
There is a boat. Await the midnight hour!"

And he—said not the things he longed to say,
And knew that he would say to her one day.
He longed to find her face as once before
Days, days ago before the tempestuous roar
Of misadventure sent him to his fate.
He longed to clasp. She fled. It was too late.

He had a tedious space of time to wait,
Fighting the fear that gnawed into his heart.
If they could only start, could only start!

* * * * * * * * * *

In the dead mid hour of night when an owl was shrieking,
Suddenly on the white stairway he heard a creaking,
Suddenly heard a whisper and call "Kyrdoon!"
Her garments all pale in the paleness of the full moon,
Her rustling garments a shimmering ghostly white,
Came like a spirit the girl into lower night!

She said "Stand up, and let me find your chains!"
She winced to see their marks and the blood-stains
They left upon his ankles. Risking sound,
She smote once, twice. They clanked upon the ground.
The links were loosed. Kyrdoon was once more free.
She moved away, and whispered "Follow me!"
A sleepy slave was snoring by the porte.
She whispered "See the guard that holds the fort!"
She moved into the silence of the street.
Followed Kyrdoon on aching swollen feet.
She led him toward the stillness of the quays.

They reached the quays. She fell upon her knees;
She breathed to all the gods one white winged prayer.
She pointed "See that little shallop there,
That is our flagship. Can it put to sea?"
Kyrdoon made doubtful answer "It must be!"

They dropped aboard. They shoved into the stream.
Around their oars the breaking bubbles' gleam
Swirled into glowing meets that dropped astern.
So calm it was the planets seemed to burn
Into the still flat waters in globed fire,
Save where each shivered to a nebulous gyre
By the slow writhing whirlpools of the wake.
They glided past the ships their course to take,
Whose spars hung starkly black across the sky.
Far off and thin, they heard the watchmen's cry,
They heard the weird faint night-sounds of the land.
Then leaving the shoal bar on their port hand,
They cleared the point, and stood out toward the sea.
Kyrdoon spread sails. The moon majestically
Touched all the path with silver where they must go.
Now the wind dropped. A while did Kyrdoon row.
Again the wind. They sailed until the shore
Seemed a ghost left behind forevermore,
Hid in the mist. . . .

Freed from pursuit's alarms,
They spent rich hours in each other's arms.

* * * * * * * * * *

Dawn found them drifting, drifting, drifting—
Hardly a breeze. The idle gusts were shifting;
Their sails hung limp or else half filled again;
The water was a very listless plain.
Now and again a sea-gull wavered by,
Now and again a cloud across the sky

Floated on drooping wings above the sea
That like a clouded mirror seemed to be,
Brassy and dull. There was no craft in sight,
Only that shallop on the waters bright,
And those two idling, idling vaguely south
Forever from the vanished river-mouth,
Like lonely planets in a desolate void,
Like life surviving in a world destroyed,
Or like this world God gave our hearts to mend,
Drifting, forever drifting—to what end?

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