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THREE POEMS

by

Alexander C. Woods

Study in Circles

Once our two selves did hover rim on rim
Like two deep pools apparently convening;
His thoughts seemed mine, my ego part of him;

Two words we seemed with but a single meaning
Composed of two great truths. But now I see
Ourselves as two unbroken circles turning
Edge upon edge, and yet, for all our yearning
Him close in his, and in my circle, me.
Circles of our bodies, instincts, learning; —

Things nameable, composing perfect rings,
And in these prisons, struggling to be free,
Our two small selves, those sightless, nameless things.

Sadistic Impulse

When I see you and your new love, I think
What panic would appear upon your face
If I should say, «Recall that calloused place
Upon my finger, — how you used to shrink
Beneath its touch along your satin skin?»
Or if I said, «You kiss the same way still,
Drinking of each your utmost lusty fill,
Biting the lip, while breath comes hot and thin?»

But who could bear your stricken face? Not I;
I'd blanch at hearing your sick, broken cry.
Thus, not quite hating, I withhold the gaff,
And touch with that same calloused finger-tip,
Less subtle flesh; I bite a coarser lip,
And wonder, and respect the past, and laugh.

Poem

Now for this little while, I think of you
With neither hatred nor a trite lament
In honor of the little wealth we spent.
For love that is irrevocably fled
I have no need, nor do I now regret
Your passing, for tonight my head
Was high, and grazed Orion's spear.

Were I essentially a poet, dear,
I'd fling a taunt across the empty year
That separates us, saying love was dead
Ere you were gone, and that I've met
Another One, to whom my heart is true.

Tonight, my head among the stars, I knew
That our high passion was a thing required
To make me whole — that to have loved and lost —
Bartered, cheated, won, and paid the cost —
Starved and thirsted, coveted, desired, —
Is part of wisdom. So for this brief while
I think of you and that small wealth we spent
With neither hatred nor a trite lament.

NOTE: The author of the above poems was a young American of literary promise who died by his own hand, at the age of twenty-one, in the grim year 1929. His family was in straitened circumstances, he was unable to find work, an unhappy love affair of some years' duration had finally collapsed; above all, he condemned himself, as those nearest and dearest to him condemned him, for being homosexual. He was, basically, too much of an idealist to compromise with a furtive and unsavory homosexual reality, and in one of his last letters he wrote, «I can no longer believe that any youth could love me as I need to be loved.» He saw no way out of this all-round impasse and finally he reached his breaking-point.

For those who might be tempted to follow his example it must be added that on the day following his death a representative of a newspaper sought him out to offer him a coveted job as a reporter, and if Alex Woods could have witnessed the grief of his friends he would have known with certainty that he was deeply loved.