Robert Hillyer (1895-1961)

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From “Sonnets”: XIV

A while you shared my path and solitude,
A while you ate the bread of loneliness,
And satisfied yourself with a caress
Or with a careless overflow of mood.
And then you left me suddenly, to press
Into the world again, and seek your food
Among the mortals whom you understood,
Instead of learning in the wilderness.

Now you return to where you fled from me,
And find me gone. You call me from afar,
And call in vain; I can not turn to see
You loveliness, beloved as you are.
Inexorably I move from sphere to sphere,
Nor wait for any soul, however dear.

A Failure

Evening has come, young man;
What have you done today?

I have fashioned a younger man
Out of the ageless clay.
He will pass invisible
Through crowds in the market square;
They will say, “Did you hear a bell?”
They will say, “How queer to smell
Incense in open air!”

Wherever he plants his feet,
Wherever he skims his heel,
The air will go mad and sweet,
The asphalt will skirl and reel.
They will say, “We can hear the beat
Of a mighty revolving wheel
In a powerhouse far off.”
Young man, that is not enough.

A Letter

Dear boy, what can this stranger mean to you,
Blown to your country by unbridled chance?
That he should drink the morn’s first cup of dew
Fresh from the spring, and quicken that grave glance
Wherein as rising tides on hazy shores
Rise the new flames and colours of romance?

Ah, wise and young, the world shall use your youth
And fling you shorn of beauty to despair,
The sum of all that fascinating truth
That you have gleaned, hands tangled in brown hair,
Eyes straining into contemplative fires,—
This truth shall not seem truth when trees are bare.

The hunger of the soul, the watcher left
To brood the nearness of his own decay,
Dully remarking the slow shameless theft
Of the old holiness from day to day,
How youth grows tarnished, wisdom changes false,—
Till one bends near to steal your life away.

Yet who am I to turn aside the hand
Outstretched so friendly and so humbly proud,
Heaped up with beauty from the sunrise land
Of hearts adventurous and heads unbowed?
Only, look not at me with changing eyes
When we must separate amid the crowd.