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| Top of Form

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| **The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock** |
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| --- | --- |
|          | *S’io credesse che mia risposta fosse* |
|  | *A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,* |
|  | *Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.* |
|  | *Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo* |
|  | *Non torno vivo alcun, s’i’odo il vero,* |
|  | *Senza tema d’infamia ti rispondo.* |

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|   |
| LET us go then, you and I, |  |
| When the evening is spread out against the sky |  |
| Like a patient etherized upon a table; |  |
| Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, |  |
| The muttering retreats | *5* |
| Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels |  |
| And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells: |  |
| Streets that follow like a tedious argument |  |
| Of insidious intent |  |
| To lead you to an overwhelming question…. | *10* |
| Oh, do not ask, “What is it?” |  |
| Let us go and make our visit. |  |
|   |  |
| In the room the women come and go |  |
| Talking of Michelangelo. |  |
|   |  |
| The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, | *15* |
| The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes |  |
| Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening, |  |
| Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains, |  |
| Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys, |  |
| Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap, | *20* |
| And seeing that it was a soft October night, |  |
| Curled once about the house, and fell asleep. |  |
|   |  |
| And indeed there will be time |  |
| For the yellow smoke that slides along the street, |  |
| Rubbing its back upon the window panes; | *25* |
| There will be time, there will be time |  |
| To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet; |  |
| There will be time to murder and create, |  |
| And time for all the works and days of hands |  |
| That lift and drop a question on your plate; | *30* |
| Time for you and time for me, |  |
| And time yet for a hundred indecisions, |  |
| And for a hundred visions and revisions, |  |
| Before the taking of a toast and tea. |  |
|   |  |
| In the room the women come and go | *35* |
| Talking of Michelangelo. |  |
|   |  |
| And indeed there will be time |  |
| To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?” |  |
| Time to turn back and descend the stair, |  |
| With a bald spot in the middle of my hair— | *40* |
| (They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”) |  |
| My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, |  |
| My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin— |  |
| (They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”) |  |
| Do I dare | *45* |
| Disturb the universe? |  |
| In a minute there is time |  |
| For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. |  |
|   |  |
| For I have known them all already, known them all: |  |
| Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, | *50* |
| I have measured out my life with coffee spoons; |  |
| I know the voices dying with a dying fall |  |
| Beneath the music from a farther room. |  |
|   So how should I presume? |  |
|   |  |
| And I have known the eyes already, known them all— | *55* |
| The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase, |  |
| And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, |  |
| When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, |  |
| Then how should I begin |  |
| To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? | *60* |
|   And how should I presume? |  |
|   |  |
| And I have known the arms already, known them all— |  |
| Arms that are braceleted and white and bare |  |
| (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!) |  |
| Is it perfume from a dress | *65* |
| That makes me so digress? |  |
| Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl. |  |
|   And should I then presume? |  |
|   And how should I begin?.      .      .      .      .      .      .      . |  |
| Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets | *70* |
| And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes |  |
| Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?… |  |
|   |  |
| I should have been a pair of ragged claws |  |
| Scuttling across the floors of silent seas..      .      .      .      .      .      .      . |  |
| And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! | *75* |
| Smoothed by long fingers, |  |
| Asleep … tired … or it malingers, |  |
| Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me. |  |
| Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, |  |
| Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis? | *80* |
| But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed, |  |
| Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter, |  |
| I am no prophet—and here’s no great matter; |  |
| I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, |  |
| And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, | *85* |
| And in short, I was afraid. |  |
|   |  |
| And would it have been worth it, after all, |  |
| After the cups, the marmalade, the tea, |  |
| Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me, |  |
| Would it have been worth while, | *90* |
| To have bitten off the matter with a smile, |  |
| To have squeezed the universe into a ball |  |
| To roll it toward some overwhelming question, |  |
| To say: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead, |  |
| Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”— | *95* |
| If one, settling a pillow by her head, |  |
|   Should say: “That is not what I meant at all; |  |
|   That is not it, at all.” |  |
|   |  |
| And would it have been worth it, after all, |  |
| Would it have been worth while, | *100* |
| After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets, |  |
| After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor— |  |
| And this, and so much more?— |  |
| It is impossible to say just what I mean! |  |
| But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen: | *105* |
| Would it have been worth while |  |
| If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl, |  |
| And turning toward the window, should say: |  |
|   “That is not it at all, |  |
|   That is not what I meant, at all.”.      .      .      .      .      .      .      . | *110* |
| No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; |  |
| Am an attendant lord, one that will do |  |
| To swell a progress, start a scene or two, |  |
| Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool, |  |
| Deferential, glad to be of use, | *115* |
| Politic, cautious, and meticulous; |  |
| Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse; |  |
| At times, indeed, almost ridiculous— |  |
| Almost, at times, the Fool. |  |
|   |  |
| I grow old … I grow old … | *120* |
| I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled. |  |
|   |  |
| Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach? |  |
| I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. |  |
| I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. |  |
|   |  |
| I do not think that they will sing to me. | *125* |
|   |  |
| I have seen them riding seaward on the waves |  |
| Combing the white hair of the waves blown back |  |
| When the wind blows the water white and black. |  |
|   |  |
| We have lingered in the chambers of the sea |  |
| By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown | *130* |
| Till human voices wake us, and we drown. |  |
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