

Alone in Immortals

Lord Dunsany

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I heard it said that very far away from here, on the wrong side of the deserts of Cathay and in a country dedicate to winter, are all the years that are dead. And there a certain valley shuts them in and hides them, as rumor has it, from the world, but not from the sight of the moon nor from those that dream in his rays.

And I said: I will go from here by ways of dream and I will come to that valley and enter in and mourn there for the good years that are dead. And I said: I will take a wreath, a wreath of mourning, and lay it at their feet in token of my sorrow for their dooms.

And when I sought about among the flowers, among the flowers for my wreath of mourning, the lily looked too large and the laurel looked too solemn and I found nothing frail enough nor slender to serve as an offering to the years that were dead. And at last I made a slender wreath of daisies in the manner that I had seen them made in one of the years that is dead.

"This," said I, "is scarce less fragile or less frail than one of those delicate forgotten years." Then I took my wreath in my hand and went from here. And when I had come by paths of mystery to that romantic land, where the valley that rumour told of lies close to the mountainous moon, I searched among the grass for those poor slight years for whom I bought my sorrow and my wreath. And when I found there nothing in the grass I said: "Time has shattered them and swept them away and left not even any faint remains."

But looking upwards in the blaze of the moon I suddenly saw colossi sitting near, and towering up and blotting out the stars and filling the night with blackness; and at those idols' feet I saw praying and making obeisance kings and the days that are and all times and all cities and all nations and all their gods. Neither the smoke of incense nor of the sacrifice burning reached those colossal heads, they sat there not to be measured, not to be overthrown, not to be worn away.

I said: "Who are those?"

One answered: "Alone the Immortals."

And I said sadly: "I came not to see dread gods, but I came to shed my tears and to offer flowers at the feet of certain little years that are dead and may not come again."

He answered me: "These ARE the years that are dead, alone the immortals; all years to be are Their children -- They fashioned their smiles and their laughter; all earthly kings They have crowned, all gods They have created; all the events to be flow down from their feet like a river, the worlds are flying pebbles that They have already thrown, and Time and all his centuries behind him kneel there with bended crests in token of vassalage at Their potent feet."

And when I heard this I turned away with my wreath, and went back to my own land comforted.