

# **SEA GARDEN**

H. D.



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# SEA GARDEN

SEA GARDEN

**H. D.**

SEA GARDEN

**SEA ROSE**

ROSE, harsh rose,  
marred and with stint of petals,  
meagre flower, thin,  
sparse of leaf,

more precious  
than a wet rose  
single on a stem—  
you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,  
you are flung on the sand,  
you are lifted  
in the crisp sand  
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose  
drip such acrid fragrance  
hardened in a leaf?

SEA GARDEN

THE HELMSMAN

O BE swift—  
we have always known you wanted us.

We fled inland with our flocks,  
we pastured them in hollows,  
cut off from the wind  
and the salt track of the marsh.

We worshipped inland—  
we stepped past wood—flowers,  
we forgot your tang,  
we brushed wood—grass.

We wandered from pine—hills  
through oak and scrub—oak tangles,  
we broke hyssop and bramble,  
we caught flower and new bramble—fruit  
in our hair: we laughed  
as each branch whipped back,  
we tore our feet in half buried rocks  
and knotted roots and acorn—cups.

We forgot—we worshipped,  
we parted green from green,  
we sought further thickets,  
we dipped our ankles  
through leaf—mould and earth,  
and wood and wood—bank enchanted us—

and the feel of the clefts in the bark,  
and the slope between tree and tree—  
and a slender path strung field to field  
and wood to wood  
and hill to hill  
and the forest after it.

We forgot—for a moment  
tree—resin, tree—bark,  
sweat of a torn branch  
were sweet to the taste.

We were enchanted with the fields,  
the tufts of coarse grass  
in the shorter grass—  
we loved all this.

But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—drops—

## SEA GARDEN

climbs—hesitates—crawls back—  
climbs—hesitates—  
O be swift—  
we have always known you wanted us.

SEA GARDEN

THE SHRINE

("SHE WATCHES OVER THE SEA")

I

ARE your rocks shelter for ships—  
have you sent galleys from your beach,  
are you graded—a safe crescent—  
where the tide lifts them back to port—  
are you full and sweet,  
tempting the quiet  
to depart in their trading ships?

Nay, you are great, fierce, evil—  
you are the land—blight—  
you have tempted men  
but they perished on your cliffs.

Your lights are but dank shoals,  
slate and pebble and wet shells  
and seaweed fastened to the rocks.

It was evil—evil  
when they found you,  
when the quiet men looked at you—  
they sought a headland  
shaded with ledge of cliff  
from the wind—blast.

But you—you are unsheltered,  
cut with the weight of wind—  
you shudder when it strikes,  
then lift, swelled with the blast—  
you sink as the tide sinks,  
you shrill under hail, and sound  
thunder when thunder sounds.  
You are useless—  
when the tides swirl  
your boulders cut and wreck  
the staggering ships.

II

You are useless,  
O grave, O beautiful,  
the landsmen tell it—I have heard—  
you are useless.

And the wind sounds with this  
and the sea

## SEA GARDEN

where rollers shot with blue  
cut under deeper blue.

O but stay tender, enchanted  
where wave-lengths cut you  
apart from all the rest—  
for we have found you,  
we watch the splendour of you,  
we thread throat on throat of freesia  
for your shelf.

You are not forgot,  
O plunder of lilies,  
honey is not more sweet  
than the salt stretch of your beach.

### III

Stay—stay—  
but terror has caught us now,  
we passed the men in ships,  
we dared deeper than the fisher-folk  
and you strike us with terror  
O bright shaft.  
Flame passes under us  
and sparks that unknot the flesh,  
sorrow, splitting bone from bone,  
splendour athwart our eyes  
and rifts in the splendour,  
sparks and scattered light.

Many warned of this,  
men said:  
there are wrecks on the fore-beach,  
wind will beat your ship,  
there is no shelter in that headland,  
it is useless waste, that edge,  
that front of rock—  
sea-gulls clang beyond the breakers,  
none venture to that spot.

### IV

But hail—  
as the tide slackens,  
as the wind beats out,  
we hail this shore—  
we sing to you,  
spirit between the headlands  
and the further rocks.

## THE SHRINE

## SEA GARDEN

Though oak–beams split,  
though boats and sea–men flounder,  
and the strait grind sand with sand  
and cut boulders to sand and drift—

your eyes have pardoned our faults,  
your hands have touched us—  
you have leaned forward a little  
and the waves can never thrust us back  
from the splendour of your ragged coast.

SEA GARDEN

**MID-DAY**

The light beats upon me.  
I am startled—  
a split leaf crackles on the paved floor—  
I am anquished—defeated.

A slight wind shakes the seed-pods—  
my thoughts are spent  
as the black seeds.  
My thoughts tear me,  
I dread their fever.  
I am scattered in its whirl.  
I am scattered like  
the hot shrivelled seeds.

The shrivelled seeds  
are spilt on the path—  
the grass bends with dust,  
the grape slips  
under its crackled leaf:  
yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,  
and the blackened stalks of ming,  
the poplar is bright on the hill,  
the poplar spreads out,  
deep-rooted among trees.

O poplar, you are great among the hill-stones,  
while I perish on the path  
among the crevices of the rocks.

## SEA GARDEN

### PURSUIT

What do I care  
that the stream is trampled,  
the sand on the stream-bank  
still holds the print of your foot:  
the heel is cut deep.  
I see another mark on the grass ridge of the bank--  
it points toward the wood-path  
I have lost the third in the packed earth.

But here  
a wild-hyacinth stalk is snapped:  
the purple buds--half ripe--  
show deep purple  
where your heel pressed.

A patch of flowering grass,  
low, trailing--  
you brushed this:  
the green stems show yellow-green  
where you lifted--turned the earth-side  
to the light:  
this and a dead leaf-spine  
split across,  
show where you passed.

You were swift,swift!  
here the forest ledge slopes--  
rain has furrowed the roots.  
Your hand caught at this;  
the root snapped under your weight.  
I can almost follow the note  
where it touched this slender tree  
and the next answered--  
and the next.

And you climbed yet further!  
you stopped by the dwarf-cornel--  
whirled on your heels,  
doubled on your track.

This is clear--  
you fell on the downward slope,  
you dragged a bruised thigh--you limped--  
you clutched this larch.

Did your head, bent back,  
Search further--

## SEA GARDEN

clear through the green leaf–moss  
of the larch branches?

Did you clutch,  
stammer with short breath and gasp:  
wood–daemons grant life—  
give life—I am almost lost.

For some wood–daemon  
has lightened your steps.  
I can find no trace of you  
in the larch–cones and the underbrush.

SEA GARDEN  
**THE CONTEST**

I

YOUR stature is modelled  
with straight tool-edge:  
you are chiselled like rocks  
that are eaten into by the sea.

With the turn and grasp of your wrist  
and the chords' stretch,  
there is a glint like worn brass.

The ridge of your breast is taut,  
and under each the shadow is sharp,  
and between the clenched muscles  
of your slender hips.

From the circle of your cropped hair  
there is light,  
and about your male torse  
and the foot-arch and the straight ankle.

II

You stand rigid and mighty--  
granite and the ore in rocks;  
a great band clasps your forehead  
and its heavy twists of gold.

You are white--a limb of cypress  
bent under a weight of snow.

You are splendid,  
your arms are fire;  
you have entered the hill-straits---  
a sea treads upon the hill-slopes.

III

Myrtle is about your head,  
you have bent and caught the spray:  
each leaf is sharp  
against the lift and furrow  
of your bound hair.

The narcissus has copied the arch  
of your slight breast:  
your feet are citron-flowers,  
your knees, cut from white-ash,  
your thighs are rock-cistus.

## SEA GARDEN

Your chin lifts straight  
from the hollow of your curved throat.  
your shoulders are level—  
they have melted rare silver  
for their breadth.

SEA GARDEN

**SEA LILY**

REED,  
slashed and torn  
but doubly rich—  
such great heads as yours  
drift upon temple—steps,  
but you are shattered  
in the wind.

Myrtle—bark  
is flecked from you,  
scales are dashed  
from your stem,  
sand cuts your petal,  
furrows it with hard edge,  
like flint  
on a bright stone.

Yet though the whole wind  
slash at your bark,  
you are lifted up,  
aye—though it hiss  
to cover you with froth.

**THE WIND SLEEPERS**

WHITER  
than the crust  
left by the tide,  
we are stung by the hurled sand  
and the broken shells.

We no longer sleep  
in the wind—  
we awoke and fled  
through the city gate.

Tear—  
tear us an altar,  
tug at the cliff-boulders,  
pile them with the rough stones—  
we no longer  
sleep in the wind,  
propitiate us.

Chant in a wail  
that never halts,  
pace a circle and pay tribute  
with a song.

When the roar of a dropped wave  
breaks into it,  
pour meted words  
of sea-hawks and gulls  
and sea-birds that cry  
discords.

## SEA GARDEN

### THE GIFT

INSTEAD of pearls—a wrought clasp—  
a bracelet—will you accept this?

You know the script—  
you will start, wonder:  
what is left, what phrase  
after last night? This:

The world is yet unspoiled for you,  
you wait, expectant—  
you are like the children  
who haunt your own steps  
for chance bits—a comb  
that may have slipped,  
a gold tassle, unravelled,  
plucked from your scarf,  
twirled by your slight fingers  
into the street—  
a flower dropped.

Do not think me unaware,  
I who have snatched at you  
as the street-child clutched  
at the seed—pearls you spilt  
that hot day  
when your necklace snapped.

Do not dream that I speak  
as one defrauded of delight,  
sick, shaken by each heart-beat  
or paralyzed, stretched at length,  
who gasps:  
these ripe pears

are bitter to the taste,  
this spiced wine, poison, corrupt.  
I cannot walk—  
who would walk?  
Life is a scavenger's pit—I escape—  
I only, rejecting it,  
lying here on this couch.

Your garden sloped to the beach,  
myrtle overran the paths,  
honey and amber flecked each leaf,  
the citron-lily head—  
one among many—

## SEA GARDEN

weighed there, over-sweet.

The myrrh-hyacinth  
spread across low slopes,  
violets streaked black ridges  
through the grass.

The house, too, was like this,  
over painted, over lovely--  
the world is like this.

Sleepless nights,  
I remember the initiates,  
their gesture, their calm glance.  
I have heard how in rapt thought,  
in vision, they speak  
with another race,  
more beautiful, more intense than this.  
I could laugh--  
more beautiful, more intense?

Perhaps that other life  
is contrast always to this.

I reason:

I have lived as they

in their inmost rites--  
they endure the tense nerves  
through the moment of ritual.  
I endure from moment to moment--  
days pass all alike,  
tortured, intense.

This I forgot last night:  
you must not be blamed,  
it is not your fault;  
as a child, a flower--any flower  
tore my breast--  
meadow-chickory, a common grass-tip,  
a leaf shadow, a flower tint  
unexpected on a winter-branch.

I reason:

another life holds what this lacks,  
a sea, unmoving, quiet--  
not forcing our strength  
to rise to it, beat on beat--  
a stretch of sand,  
no garden beyond, strangling  
with its myrrh-lilies--  
a hill, not set with black violets

THE GIFT

## SEA GARDEN

but stones, stones, bare rocks,  
dwarf-trees, twisted, no beauty  
to distract--to crowd  
madness upon madness.

Only a still place  
and perhaps some outer horror  
some hideousness to stamp beauty,  
a mark--no changing it now--  
on our hearts.

I send no string of pearls,  
no bracelet--accept this.

SEA GARDEN

**EVENING**

THE light passes  
from ridge to ridge,  
from flower to flower;—  
the hypaticas, wide—spread  
under the light  
grow faint—  
the petals reach inward,  
the blue tips bend  
toward the bluer heart  
and the flowers are lost.

The cornel—buds are still white,  
but shadows dart  
from the cornel—roots—  
black creeps from root to root,  
each leaf  
cuts another leaf on the grass,  
shadow seeks shadow,  
then both leaf  
and leaf—shadow are lost.

SEA GARDEN  
**SHELTERED GARDEN**

I HAVE had enough.  
I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,  
every foot-path leads at last  
to the hill-crest--  
then you retrace your steps,  
or find the same slope on the other side,  
precipitate.

I have had enough--  
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,  
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp swish of a branch--  
there is no scent of resin  
in this place,  
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,  
aromatic, astringent--  
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover  
that wanted light--  
pears wadded in cloth,  
protected from the frost,  
melons, almost ripe,  
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling  
to the empty branch?  
All your coaxing will only make  
a bitter fruit--  
let them cling, ripen of themselves,

test their own worth,  
nipped, shrivelled by the frost,  
to fall at last but fair  
With a russet coat.

Or the melon--  
let it bleach yellow  
in the winter light,  
even tart to the taste--  
it is better to taste of frost--  
the exquisite frost--  
than of wadding and of dead grass.

## SEA GARDEN

For this beauty,  
beauty without strength,  
chokes out life.  
I want wind to break,  
scatter these pink–stalks,  
snap off their spiced heads,  
fling them about with dead leaves—  
spread the paths with twigs,  
limbs broken off,  
trail great pine branches,  
hurled from some far wood  
right across the melon–patch,  
break pear and quince—  
leave half–trees, torn, twisted  
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden  
to forget, to find a new beauty  
in some terrible  
wind–tortured place.

SEA GARDEN  
**SEA POPPIES**

AMBER husk  
fluted with gold,  
fruit on the sand  
marked with a rich grain,

treasure  
spilled near the shrub–pines  
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root  
among wet pebbles  
and drift flung by the sea  
and grated shells  
and split conch–shells.

Beautiful, wide–spread,  
fire upon leaf,  
what meadow yields  
so fragrant a leaf  
as your bright leaf?

## SEA GARDEN

### LOSS

THE sea called—  
you faced the estuary,  
you were drowned as the tide passed.—  
I am glad of this—  
at least you have escaped.

The heavy sea—mist stifles me.  
I choke with each breath—  
a curious peril, this—  
the gods have invented  
curious torture for us.

One of us, pierced in the flank,  
dragged himself across the marsh,  
he tore at the bay—roots,  
lost hold on the crumbling bank—

Another crawled—too late—  
for shelter under the cliffs.

I am glad the tide swept you out,  
O beloved,  
you of all this ghastly host  
alone untouched,  
your white flesh covered with salt  
as with myrrh and burnt iris.

We were hemmed in this place,  
so few of us, so few of us to fight  
their sure lances,  
the straight thrust—effortless  
with slight life of muscle and shoulder.

So straight—only we were left,  
the four of us—somehow shut off.

And the marsh dragged one back,  
and another perished under the cliff,  
and the tide swept you out.

Your feet cut steel on the paths,  
I followed for the strength  
of life and grasp.  
I have seen beautiful feet  
but never beauty welded with strength.  
I marvelled at your height.

## SEA GARDEN

You stood almost level  
with the lance-bearers  
and so slight.

And I wondered as you clasped  
your shoulder-strap  
at the strength of your wrist  
and the turn of your young fingers,  
and the lift of your shorn locks,  
and the bronze  
of your sun-burnt neck.

All of this,  
and the curious knee-cap,  
fitted above the wrought greaves,  
and the sharp muscles of your back  
which the tunic could not cover—  
the outline  
no garment could deface.

I wonder if you knew how I watched,  
how I crowded before the spearsmen—  
but the gods wanted you,  
the gods wanted you back.

**HUNTRESS**

Come, blunt your spear with us,  
our pace is hot  
and our bare heels  
in the heel-prints--  
we stand tense--do you see--  
are you already beaten  
by the chase?

We lead the pace  
for the wind on the hills,  
the low hill is spattered  
with loose earth--  
our feet cut into the crust  
as with spears.

We climbed the ploughed land,  
dragged the seed from the clefts,  
broke the clods with our heels,  
whirled with a parched cry  
into the woods:

Can you come,  
can you come,  
can you follow the hound trail,  
can you trample the hot froth?

Spring up--sway forward--  
follow the quickest one,  
aye, though you leave the trail  
and drop exhausted at our feet.

SEA GARDEN

**GARDEN**

I

YOU are clear  
O rose, cut in rock,  
hard as the descent of hail.

I could scrape the colour  
from the petals  
like spilt dye from a rock.

If I could break you  
I could break a tree.

If I could stir  
I could break a tree—  
I could break you.

II

O wind, rend open the heat,  
cut apart the heat,  
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop  
through this thick air—  
fruit cannot fall into heat  
that presses up and blunts  
the points of pears  
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—  
plough through it,  
turning it on either side  
of your path.

SEA GARDEN

**SEA VIOLET**

THE white violet  
is scented on its stalk,  
the sea-violet  
fragile as agate,  
lies fronting all the wind  
among the torn shells  
on the sand-bank.

The greater blue violets  
flutter on the hill,  
but who would change for these  
who would change for these  
one root of the white sort?

Violet  
your grasp is frail  
on the edge of the sand-hill,  
but you catch the light--  
frost, a star edges with its fire.

SEA GARDEN  
THE CLIFF TEMPLE

I

GREAT, bright portal,  
shelf of rock,  
rocks fitted in long ledges,  
rocks fitted to dark, to silver granite,  
to lighter rock--  
clean cut, white against white.

High--high--and no hill--goat  
tramples--no mountain--sheep  
has set foot on your fine grass;  
you lift, you are the--world--edge,  
pillar for the sky--arch.

The world heaved--  
we are next to the sky:  
over us, sea--hawks shout,  
gulls sweep past--  
the terrible breakers are silent  
from this place.

Below us, on the rock--edge,  
where earth is caught in the fissures  
of the jagged cliff,  
a small tree stiffens in the gale,  
it bends--but its white flowers  
are fragrant at this height.

And under and under,  
the wind booms:  
it whistles, it thunders,  
it growls--it presses the grass  
beneath its great feet.

II

I said:  
for ever and for ever, must I follow you  
through the stones?  
I catch at you--you lurch:  
you are quicker than my hand--grasp.

I wondered at you.  
I shouted--dear--mysterious--beautiful--  
white myrtle--flesh.

I was splintered and torn:  
the hill--path mounted  
swifter than my feet.

## SEA GARDEN

Could a daemon avenge this hurt,  
I would cry to him--could a ghost,  
I would shout--O evil,  
follow this god,  
taunt him with his evil and his vice.

### III

Shall I hurl myself from here,  
shall I leap and be nearer you?  
Shall I drop, beloved, beloved,  
ankle against ankle?  
Would you pity me, O white breast?

If I woke, would you pity me,  
would our eyes meet?

Have you heard,  
do you know how I climbed this rock?  
My breath caught, I lurched forward--  
I stumbled in the ground--myrtle.  
Have you heard, O god seated on the cliff,  
how far toward the ledges of your house,  
how far I had to walk?

### IV

Over me the wind swirls.  
I have stood on your portal  
and I know--  
you are further than this,  
still further on another cliff.

SEA GARDEN

**ORCHARD**

I saw the first pear  
as it fell—  
the honey-seeking, golden-banded,  
the yellow swarm  
was not more fleet than I,  
(spare us from loveliness)  
and I fell prostrate  
crying:  
you have flayed us  
with your blossoms,  
spare us the beauty  
of fruit-trees.

The honey-seeking  
paused not,  
the air thundered their song,  
and I alone was prostrate.

O rough-hewn  
god of the orchard,  
I bring you an offering—  
do you, alone unbeautiful,  
son of the god,  
spare us from loveliness:

these fallen hazel-nuts,  
stripped late of their green sheaths,  
grapes, red-purple,  
their berries  
dripping with wine,  
pomegranates already broken,  
and shrunken figs  
and quinces untouched,  
I bring you as offering.

**SEA GODS**

I

THEY say there is no hope—  
sand—drift—rocks—rubble of the sea—  
the broken hulk of a ship,  
hung with shreds of rope,  
pallid under the cracked pitch.

they say there is no hope  
to conjure you—  
no whip of the tongue to anger you—  
no hate of words  
you must rise to refute.

They say you are twisted by the sea,  
you are cut apart  
by wave—break upon wave—break,  
that you are misshapen by the sharp rocks,  
broken by the rasp and after—rasp.

That you are cut, torn, mangled,  
torn by the stress and beat,  
no stronger than the strips of sand  
along your ragged beach.

II

But we bring violets,  
great masses—single, sweet,  
wood—violets, stream—violets,  
violets from a wet marsh.  
Violets in clumps from hills,  
tufts with earth at the roots,  
violets tugged from rocks,  
blue violets, moss, cliff, river—violets.

Yellow violets' gold,  
burnt with a rare tint—  
violets like red ash  
among tufts of grass.

We bring deep—purple  
bird—foot violets.

We bring the hyacinth—violet,  
sweet, bare, chill to the touch—  
and violets whiter than the in—rush  
of your own white surf.

## SEA GARDEN

### III

For you will come,  
you will yet haunt men in ships,  
you will trail across the fringe of strait  
and circle the jagged rocks.

You will trail across the rocks  
and wash them with your salt,  
you will curl between sand-hills--  
you will thunder along the cliff;--  
break--retreat--get fresh strength--  
gather and pour weight upon the beach.

You will draw back,  
and the ripple on the sand-shelf  
will be witness of your track.  
O privet-white, you will paint  
the lintel of wet sand with froth.

You will bring myrrh-bark  
and drift laurel-wood from hot coasts!  
when you hurl high--high--  
we will answer with a shout.

For you will come,  
you will come,  
you will answer our taut hearts,  
you will break the lie of men's thoughts,  
and cherish and shelter us.

SEA GARDEN

**ACON**

I

BEAR me to Dictaeus,  
and to the steep slopes;  
to the river Erymanthus.

I choose spray of dittany,  
cyperum, frail of flower,  
buds of myrrh,  
all-healing herbs,  
close pressed in calathes.

For she lies panting,  
drawing sharp breaths  
broken with harsh sobs,  
she, Hyella,  
whom no god pities.

II

Dryads  
haunting the groves,  
nereids  
who dwell in wet caves,  
for all the white leaves of olive-branch,  
and early roses,  
and ivy wreaths, woven gold berries,  
which she once brought to your altars,  
bear now ripe fruits from Arcadia,  
and Assyrian wine  
to shatter her fever.  
The light of her face falls from its flower,  
as a hyacinth,  
hidden in a far valley,  
perishes upon burnt grass.

Pales,  
bring gifts,  
bring your Phoenician stuffs,  
and do you, fleet-footed nymphs,  
bring offerings,  
Illyrian iris,  
and a branch of shrub,  
and frail-headed poppies.

SEA GARDEN

**NIGHT**

THE night has cut  
each from each  
and curled the petals  
back from the stalk  
and under it in crisp rows;

under at an unfaltering pace,  
under till the rinds break,  
back till each bent leaf  
is parted from its stalk;

under at a grave pace,  
under till the leaves  
are bent back  
till they drop upon earth,  
back till they are all broken.

O night,  
you take the petals  
of the roses in your hand,  
but leave the stark core  
of the rose  
to perish on the branch.

**PRISONERS**

IT is strange that I should want  
this sight of your face—  
we have had so much:  
at any moment now I may pass,  
stand near the gate,  
do not speak—  
only reach if you can, your face  
half-fronting the passage  
toward the light.

Fate—God sends this as a mark,  
a last token that we are not forgot,  
lost in this turmoil,  
about to be crushed out,  
burned or stamped out  
at best with sudden death.

The spearsman who brings this  
will ask for the gold clasp  
you wear under your coat.  
I gave all I had left.

Press close to the portal,  
my gate will soon clang  
and your fellow wretches  
will crowd to the entrance—  
be first at the gate.

Ah beloved, do not speak.  
I write this in great haste—  
do not speak,  
you may yet be released.  
I am glad enough to depart  
though I have never tasted life  
as in these last weeks.

It is a strange life,  
patterned in fire and letters  
on the prison pavement.  
If I glance up  
it is written on the walls,  
it is cut on the floor,  
it is patterned across  
the slope of the roof.

I am weak—weak—  
last night if the guard

## SEA GARDEN

had left the gate unlocked  
I could not have ventured to escape,.  
but one thought serves me now  
with strength.

As I pass down the corridor  
past desperate faces at each cell,  
your eyes and my eyes may meet.

You will be dark, unkempt,  
but I pray for one glimpse of your face—  
why do I want this?  
I who have seen you at the banquet  
each flower of your hyacinth—circlet  
white against your hair.

Why do I want this,  
when even last night  
you startled me from sleep?  
You stood against the dark rock,  
you grasped an elder staff.  
So many nights  
you have distracted me from terror.  
Once you lifted a spear—flower.  
I remember how you stooped  
to gather it—  
and it flamed, the leaf and shoot  
and the threads, yellow, yellow—  
sheer till they burnt  
to red—purple in the cup.

As I pass your cell—door  
do not speak.  
I was first on the list—  
They may forget you tried to shield me  
as the horsemen passed.

SEA GARDEN

**STORM**

You crash over the trees,  
you crack the live branch--  
the branch is white,  
the green crushed,  
each leaf is rent like split wood.

You burden the trees  
with black drops,  
you swirl and crash--  
you have broken off a weighted leaf  
in the wind,  
it is hurled out,  
whirls up and sinks,  
a green stone.

## SEA GARDEN

### SEA IRIS

I

WEED, moss-weed,  
root tangled in sand,  
sea-iris, brittle flower,  
one petal like a shell  
is broken,  
and you print a shadow  
like a thin twig.

Fortunate one,  
scented and stinging,  
rigid myrrh-bud,  
camphor-flower,  
sweet and salt—you are wind  
in our nostrils.

II

Do the murex-fishers  
drench you as they pass?  
Do your roots drag up colour  
from the sand?  
Have they slipped gold under you—  
rivets of gold?

Band of iris-flowers  
above the waves,  
you are painted blue,  
painted like a fresh prow  
stained among the salt weeds.

**HERMES OF THE WAYS**

[I]

THE hard sand breaks,  
and the grains of it  
are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it,  
the wind,  
playing on the wide shore,  
piles little ridges,  
and the great waves  
break over it.

But more than the many-foamed ways  
of the sea,  
I know him  
of the triple path-ways,  
Hermes,  
who awaits.

Dubious,  
facing three ways,  
welcoming wayfarers,  
he whom the sea-orchard  
shelters from the west,  
from the east  
weathers sea-wind;  
fronts the great dunes.

Wind rushes  
over the dunes,  
and the coarse, salt-crust-ed grass  
answers.

Heu,  
it whips round my ankles!

II

Small is  
this white stream,  
flowing below ground  
from the poplar-shaded hill,  
but the water is sweet.

Apples on the small trees  
are hard,  
too small,  
too late ripened  
by a desperate sun

## SEA GARDEN

that struggles through sea–mist.

The boughs of the trees  
are twisted  
by many bafflings;  
twisted are  
the small–leafed boughs.

But the shadow of them  
is not the shadow of the mast head  
nor of the torn sails.

Hermes, Hermes,  
the great sea foamed,  
gnashed its teeth about me;  
but you have waited,  
were sea–grass tangles with  
shore–grass.

SEA GARDEN

**PEAR TREE**

SILVER dust  
lifted from the earth,  
higher than my arms reach,  
you have mounted,  
O silver,  
higher than my arms reach  
you front us with great mass;

no flower ever opened  
so staunch a white leaf,  
no flower ever parted silver  
from such rare silver;

O white pear,  
your flower—tufts  
thick on the branch  
bring summer and ripe fruits  
in their purple hearts.

**CITIES**

CAN we believe—by an effort  
comfort our hearts:  
it is not waste all this,  
not placed here in disgust,  
street after street,  
each patterned alike,  
no grace to lighten  
a single house of the hundred  
crowded into one garden—space.

Crowded—can we believe,  
not in utter disgust,  
in ironical play—  
but the maker of cities grew faint  
with the beauty of temple  
and space before temple,  
arch upon perfect arch,  
of pillars and corridors that led out  
to strange court—yards and porches  
where sun—light stamped  
hyacinth—shadows  
black on the pavement.

That the maker of cities grew faint  
with the splendour of palaces,  
paused while the incense—flowers  
from the incense—trees  
dropped on the marble—walk,  
thought anew, fashioned this—  
street after street alike.  
For alas,  
he had crowded the city so full  
that men could not grasp beauty,  
beauty was over them,  
through them, about them,  
no crevice unpacked with the honey,  
rare, measureless.

So he built a new city,  
ah can we believe, not ironically  
but for new splendour  
constructed new people  
to lift through slow growth  
to a beauty unrivalled yet—  
and created new cells,  
hideous first, hideous now—  
spread larve across them,

## SEA GARDEN

not honey but seething life.

And in these dark cells,  
packed street after street,  
souls live, hideous yet—  
O disfigured, defaced,  
with no trace of the beauty  
men once held so light.

Can we think a few old cells  
were left—we are left—  
grains of honey,  
old dust of stray pollen  
dull on our torn wings,  
we are left to recall the old streets?

Is our task the less sweet  
that the larve still sleep in their cells?  
Or crawl out to attack our frail strength:  
You are useless. We live.  
We await great events.  
We are spread through this earth.  
We protect our strong race.  
You are useless.  
Your cell takes the place  
of our young future strength.

Though they sleep or wake to torment  
and wish to displace our old cells—  
thin rare gold—  
that their larve grow fat—  
is our task the less sweet?

Though we wander about,  
find no honey of flowers in this waste,  
is our task the less sweet—  
who recall the old splendour,  
await the new beauty of cities?

SEA GARDEN

**[The city is peopled]**

The city is peopled  
with spirits, not ghosts, O my love:

Though they crowded between  
and usurped the kiss of my mouth  
their breath was your gift,  
their beauty, your life.