

## THE OLD WOMEN



THEY pass upon their old, tremulous feet,  
Creeping with little satchels down the street,  
And they remember, many years ago,  
Passing that way in silks. They wander, slow  
And solitary, through the city ways,  
And they alone remember those old days  
Men have forgotten. In their shaking heads  
A dancer of old carnivals yet treads  
The measure of past waltzes, and they see  
The candles lit again, the patchouli  
Sweeten the air, and the warm cloud of musk  
Enchant the passing of the passionate dusk.  
Then you will see a light begin to creep  
Under the earthen eyelids, dimmed with sleep,  
And a new tremor, happy and uncouth,  
Jerking about the corners of the mouth.  
Then the old head drops down again, and shakes,  
Muttering.

Sometimes, when the swift gaslight wakes  
The dreams and fever of the sleepless town,  
A shaking huddled thing in a black gown  
Will steal at midnight, carrying with her  
Violet little bags of lavender,  
Into the tap-room full of noisy light ;  
Or, at the crowded earlier hour of night,  
Sidle, with matches, up to some who stand  
About a stage-door, and, with furtive hand,  
Appealing : " I too was a dancer, when  
Your fathers would have been young gentlemen !"  
And sometimes, out of some lean ancient throat,  
A broken voice, with here and there a note

Of unspoil'd crystal, suddenly will arise  
 Into the night, while a cracked fiddle cries  
 Pantingly after ; and you know she sings  
 The passing of light, famous, passing things.  
 And sometimes, in the hours past midnight, reels  
 Out of an alley upon staggering heels,  
 Or into the dark keeping of the stones  
 About a doorway, a vague thing of bones  
 And dragged hair.

And all these have been loved,  
 And not one ruinous body has not moved  
 The heart of man's desire, nor has not seemed  
 Immortal in the eyes of one who dreamed  
 The dream that men call love. This is the end  
 Of much fair flesh ; it is for this you tend  
 Your delicate bodies many careful years,  
 To be this thing of laughter and of tears,  
 To be this living judgment of the dead,  
 An old grey woman with a shaking head.

ARTHUR SYMONS.