

HIS NAME FROM AFAR

BY

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I



ILENT, unknown Invader,
Tell me who You are.
Stand to my challenge, answer,
Sound your Name from afar.
For while I tell the years like beads,
Finger my decades, pondering ages of mystery,
You come

Who came and yet will come.

You come without approach, are here yet journey not.

You break the solitude of my spirit,

And beat within me the lonely symphonic rhythm of the ages.

Unsought, your knowledge and presence,

Creeping a dawn into darkness, spring upon snow,

Perfume with unseen light and fire the sanctuary of my vigil.

Tell me who You are,

Silent unknown Invader.

Stand to my challenge, answer,

Sound your Name in my soul,

Your Name that comes from afar.

II

Lost is my challenge, echoing down through the storming notes of
the hurrying years.

But I find You again, know You again, down below all the perplexity
and questioning of my mind.

You come from within,

Startling me suddenly in the inmost secret chambers of my shrinking
spirit.

No footsteps crossed the doorway,

No wind of approach has tossed the curtains of my soul.

What terror! Nothing is hidden, no corner dark, no secret safe from
the torch of your merciful inquisitions.

My depths of filth are scorched and cleansed,

Wounds and sores are cauterised in the fire of your heraldless coming.

Your searchlights cut and purify the cold unconscious skies of sleep
within me.

Ravines in my spirit are broadened and made spacious by the rending
 night of your intolerable invasions.
 Friend or foe,
 Advocate or judge,
 Tell me, speak to my soul,
 Chasten me through by the purging cataracts of your Name poured
 forth within me.

III

Who can understand.
 Or know You, who You are?
 Health within,
 A scourge without,
 Truly always playing within me,
 Cooling and cleansing the air of my sanctuary with fountains of
 silent creation;
 Then falling sudden upon me,
 Striking all ways without,
 In a moment overwhelming,
 Wrecking my last defences in the tempest of your fury,
 Your whirlwinds from afar.

IV

Most faithful enemy,
 Tenderest foe,
 You fight me all the night,
 Thwart and wrestle against me through the Advent years
 That promise the blessing of day.
 From the night of my birth you were always ambushed against me,
 And now unconquered,
 Jealous in ravishing love,
 You assault me suddenly in hidden ways, in lanes of peace.
 You grip, prevail and conquer!
 Therefore I too will conquer!
 You shall not escape till You work that blessing within me,
 Pour out your Name in my soul,
 The Name of dawn and day.

V

No sound of words!
 No music of any song!
 Only the pure tranquillity of our vigil together!
 Only a secret rhythm floods from your throne within me,
 How is it then, silent inscrutable sovereign of the ages,
 That my soul within me is watered in wisdom,

Ruling the sympathy, sad, strong symphony of time.
 My spirit fed with the bread of understanding and life?
 Do You nourish me then with the mystery of your nameless
 presence,
 Sustaining me strongly from the core of my being, watering the
 unconscious roots of my spirit,
 Kindling life and knowledge and love by the intangible grip of your
 presence in power?
 Tell me, speak to my soul.

VI

Now I have learnt I can never escape,
 You surround me utterly, close in upon me as it were from within.
 Your sudden, silent conquest drives me to shout my surrender.
 But how can I speak?
 Bewildering presence, more inward than loneliness,
 Deeper than the well of my secret self,
 Your Name is not possible on human lips.
 No warning and You were already within.
 No sound and You were already schooling me sternly in bookless
 wisdom;
 Times I have crept away, hiding my love in the caverns of your
 creation.
 Groping in panic to find a heart, a comrade heart confined and small
 to enclose and hide my futile love.
 Vainly I know, now I know how vainly,
 For You were already there to my terror, kindly impatient, waiting
 and watching the vanity of my flight,
 Knowing and pitying my rags of poverty, the wounds of my soul's
 unloveliness.
 Your wordless telling told me, I know I can never escape.
 When I slunk away down lanes of retreat, I found them held by the
 garrisons of your conquering love.
 Tell me then, speak to my soul for I cannot avoid You.
 Tell me who You are.

VII

Unbidden Guest of my lonely life,
 Stranger most intimate,
 I thought that I bore You within me:
 Now I know that You carry me always in the womb of your
 constant creation.
 Your might imprisons, confining me strongly in the solitude of
 my being,

Clothing, guarding me surely from falling away
 To the dust of my origin, the nothing of night that went before.
 Your timeless arms are beyond all power, always around and
 beneath me.

Tell me then Guest unbidden, Stranger most intimate,
 Welcomed and dreaded before all others,
 Tell me, reveal your Name in my soul.

VIII

You are the absolute possession
 I cannot possess,
 Nearness I cannot approach.
 You are the everywhere-present, remote beyond call,
 The moment I find You.
 Hold You,
 Cling to your cowl of darkness that beats my brow when the
 shadows of morning creep out of the night.
 You are gone!
 Utterly wholly lost and gone!
 Then throned all the while in the cell of my life,
 In the midnight chamber of prayer,
 You hasten unmeasured distance down, down to find me again.
 My always lost and found,
 My always known unknown,
 Possessed yet always sought for love!

IX

Lifelong ruthless Friend, I fear to know You,
 Enemy whom I love, I dread the terrible passion of your approaches.
 Always my Parent, all-father, all-mother.
 Now only I find You.
 And in your eyes my fleshly eyes are blind,
 The eyes of my spirit find only darkness.
 Always, always your eyes are upon me, deep within me.
 Drive me to meet You face to face.
 Compel me to greet You.
 (Who can endure the darkness of his love?)
 Hold the eyes of my spirit in the night of your scrutiny.
 Tell me, spell in my soul the triumphant syllables of your Name.

X

Turning away, entering in, I seal the door of my spirit.
 Longing to speak alone with You, as man to man, round the
 embers of my broken day;
 Longing to call your Name, answer, challenge and beg.

Vainly! vainly! vainly!

All my words have crumbled away;

My language is lost, all is forgotten;

My thoughts are grainless chaff;

The tongue is lifeless against the dread of your Name that hides
Somewhere beyond and below the most inward point of knowledge.
The most hidden spark of desire.

Only a life within my life, lost it seemed, has found its fountain,
Braved its way beyond all, rests in You.

I long to speak.

My deepest life, my other and innermost life is the only word that
finds You, tells You my desire.

Speaks the surrendering utterance.

The wordless eloquence of all my being.

XI

Never a whisper told, and yet You told me beyond the telling of
words.

You who watch within me, around me always against the years
that pass away.

Never a whisper told, and yet You told me who You are,
More than Mother and Father of my life, Lord and Lover.

Creating every grain, weaving every thread of my being.

Cell of my loneliness, Friend of my solitude,

Water always in spring in the drought of my desert.

Cowl of my winter,

Flame of wind dew-laden in the furnace of my destruction!

I thought I was utterly friendless: You were grasping me round
in the cloister of your love.

Waiting, waiting my tardy return from the brothels and markets
of a perishing world.

Unconquerable Love, you are always compelling me back to the
dreadful loneliness of your temple.

To the loveliness of the dread of your approaches.

Always tell me the word of my life, the love-told word of my being.

You speak: I fall in ruins, broken, destroyed.

Crushed and moulded and made anew.

If You are silent I shall not be.

Your Name tides over my soul, flooding the caverns beneath my
thought, and I know that I am not.

Knowing You who You are.

Speak then, speak to my soul, your Word is my needful death,
Your sounding unfathomed Name in my soul is the fountain of all
my life.