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SEA-

CHANGE

MUNA

LEE

SEA-CHANGE



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SEA-CHANGE

By
MUNA LEE



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SEA-CHANGE

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THE SINGER

I would sing with my lips to the lips of a sea-shell,
I would sing to the thrush and the cardinal-bird;
I would sing though the singing breezes heard me,
Though the tall field-grasses and light rains heard.

For I have a song is fit for the singing,
And a theme unmatched till the world be done,
Though never a heart on the wide earth heed it
But mine, and another one!

THE THOUGHT OF YOU

The thought of you is taller than the sunset
Flaming up above the world's crumbling edges.
The thought of you is shyer than the lizard
In a cleft of the limestone ledges.

The thought of you is wilder than the wild birds
Whose only joy is in their own wild flying;
The thought of you is lovelier than starlight,
And sadder than a young child's dying.

THE STARS ARE COLORED BLOSSOMS

THE STARS ARE COLORED BLOSSOMS

The stars are colored blossoms on a storm-shaken
tree,

The moon a wanton shepherdess that wanders apart.

Night spreads out before us like a dark gleaming
sea,

And this glamour of the moonlight is a thing to
shake the heart.

I cannot flee beyond you; you are waiting when I
come,

Companion of the far white moon, comrade of the
dew.

I shiver in the moonlight—though my lips are sealed
and dumb,

My heart is torn asunder with desire and fear of
you.

MY DREAMS OF YOU ARE SOMBER IN
THE TWILIGHT

My dreams of you are somber in the twilight
As a hedge of bramble growing interlaced,
A dusky straggling hedge with scarlet berries,
Sharp to the touch and bitter to the taste.

My songs to you fly out above my garden,
Careless how their weary course is run;
Aimlessly they drift about in circles,
Or shift and veer before the low red sun.

THE LITTLE WHITE FLOWER

I can forget so much at will:
That first walk in the snow,
The violet bed on the wet spring hill,
The song we both loved so;
Even the rapture of love's magic hour,
Even the anguish of love's disdain,
—But never, but never, the little white flower
We found one day in the rain.

THE BLACKBIRDS FLY BEFORE THE
COLD

The blackbirds fly before the cold,
The painted grosbeaks go;
Not any tanager is so bold
As to brave the snow.

There's a look of storm about the skies,
There's trouble in the west;
And Love, who's old and very wise,
Love flies off with the rest.

MELILOT

MELILOT

Behind the house is the millet-plot,
And past the millet, the stile ;
And then a hill where melilot
Grows with wild camomile.

There was a youth who bade me goodbye
Where the hill rises to meet the sky.
I think my heart broke, but I have forgot
All but the scent of the white melilot.

SONG

What is love like? The wind
That tears great temples down?
Ah, no, the cruelest wind
Leaves some few stones behind.

What is love like? The roar
And anger of a tempest-ridden sea?
Ah, no, the angriest sea
Cast back some bits of wreckage to the shore.

AS HELEN ONCE

AS HELEN ONCE

The east unrolled a sheet of gold,
Gold for river and flower and limb;
As Helen once to Paris was
Was I to him.

All things gold fade gray and old,
Even the sun of love grows dim;
As Helen now to Paris is
Am I to him.

LIPS YOU WERE NOT ANHUNGERED
FOR

Lips you were not anhungered for,
And those that won your praises,
A century hence will blossom out
In careless purple daisies.

Eyes that smiled lightly into yours,
And eyes that wept for you—
Ah, soon, not Love himself might know
The brown eyes from the blue.

For even he will come to dust,
And even longing passes,
That crumbling flesh may feed the growth
Of the hungry-rooted grasses.

WHEN WE SHALL BE DUST IN THE CHURCHYARD

WHEN WE SHALL BE DUST IN THE
CHURCHYARD

When we shall be dust in the churchyard
—In twenty years—in fifty years —
Who will remember you kissed me once,
Who will be grieved for our tears?

The locust-tree will have grown taller,
The old walks will be hidden with grass,
And past our quiet graves may go straying
A youth with an arm round his lass.

And the bee that shall suck your grave-flowers,
—Meadow-sweet, flag, columbine—
May pause in his swift journey
To taste of the honey from mine.

I AM SO GLAD THAT YOU ARE DEAD

I am so glad that you are dead—
I sing to you when the stars swing low;
And though I sang till dawn grew red,
You still must hear—you could not go.

You are contented, being dead,
You who were used to wander far.
Now I plant flowers at your head,
And steal out nightly where you are.

Now it is I can go oversea;
And though I stayed till years were sped,
You would lie peaceful, waiting me:
I am so glad that you are dead!

SURVIVAL

SURVIVAL

There would be no this year's flower there
If we went back;
They have ploughed the anemones and bluets under,
Wheat grows down to the track.

The stream is widened and dammed across,
There's a house on the hill.
There is nothing left of the spring we found there,
Wild and still.

It is all changed as you and I,
Changed and torn away—
But cool and fragrant and fresh as rain
Is the song I made that day!

SEA - CHANGE

NOW HAVE I CONQUERED

Now have I conquered that which made me sad—
The passion and the anguish and regret.
Yes, I have conquered it. And yet—and yet—
The moaning of the doves will drive me mad.

DIRGE

DIRGE

Though you should whisper
Of what made her weep,
She would not hear you:
She is asleep.

Though you should taunt her
With ancient heart-break,
She would not listen:
She is awake.

Passion would find her
Too cold for dishonor,
Candles beside her,
Roses upon her.

APRIL WIND

The wind-flowers fluttered purple and white,
The maple-leaves blossomed with sun;
The redbud blazed from the winding creek,
And the willow's loose hair was undone.

And because I was in love with the sun and the wind
And the spring blooming strange and new,
I stopped on the wind-ruffled crest of the hill
And lifted my lips to you.

BECAUSE OF A GRASSY HILL

I REMEMBER YOU BECAUSE OF A
GRASSY HILL

I remember you because of a grassy hill

Where the violets grew thicker than the grass,
And through my memory flames and whistles still
A flock of red-winged blackbirds we watched pass.

Because of a rain-filled night I remember you,
And a tree we came on suddenly in the fall,
And a vague horizon that broke and foamed in blue,
—But I do not remember any words of yours
at all.

I SHALL NOT SING AGAIN OF LOVE

I shall not sing again of love—

I weary of the old unrest.

(But like a hangman, Love has set

His crimson emblem on my breast;

But like a hangman, Love has placed

His crimson seal my heart above)—

Yea, I am wearied with old pain:

I shall not sing again of love.

I HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF GLAMOUR

I HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF GLAMOUR

I have had enough of glamour,
Of dawn, and violet dusk, and stars,
Of crimson banners flaming and floating
Over vague and perilous wars;

I am tired of moonlight and water,
Of the violins and bugles of youth;
I have had romance and proud, pale sorrow—
Now I should like the truth!

A WOMAN'S SONG

This is my wrong, if wrong I have done you—

I who had all to give

And would have showered all on you

That love might teach us to live—

When you asked for a loaf of my baking

And a bit of blossomy spray,

Gave only these for your taking,

And hid the rest away.

C H O I C E

C H O I C E

I set on this barren board

(Yours is the choice, not mine)

The bread and leeks for your hunger's ease,

The unacknowledged wine.

No protests—no demands—

Always there shall be

The driftwood fire that warms your hands,

The stars you will not see.

HARVEST

I sowed my thought like seed;
Upsprung a noxious weed;
I shall sow my thought again; a flower may be the
 meed.

My thoughts are harsh and cold;
The soil is worn and old—
What if marybuds should rise and turn the earth
 to gold?

GIFTS

These are but words, and I have more than these to
give you:

I have moments to give you, delicate as fern-
leaves,
Cloudy and clear as quartz,
Colored like rose-hips and wild grasses,
Various as the infinite rain.

I have hours to give you like stretches of shell-
strewn beach,
(The sea within sight, within sound)—
And hours when there are no shells, no beach,
But only sea.

I have years to give you:

These are but words.

IMPRISONED

I

Do not chafe at your bonds, dear:
It is only my heart that holds you;
That is easily broken.

II

I was sent from a far country that I might bear
one message:
You will neither hear it nor let me return.

III

I thought love would come gloriously,
With the blare of trumpets and ruffle of silver
bugles,
Lighting the night with his pageantry.
And I found him in two sad eyes so tired they could
not look on mine.

IV

In our town

There are painted wooden houses, one dusty park,
and I.

Each year we grow more faded,

More hopeless,

More alike—

The houses, the park, and I.

YOU WHO HEAR ONLY THE WORDS

I

You who hear only the words
Saying I love you,
Know of my love
What a tree splashed with white foam
Knows of the salt bitterness of the sea.

II

No, I do not love you. A hundred times
I have slain my love for you, and left it dead
A hundred times.

R E L E A S E

R E L E A S E

I would have borne long torture of the flesh for you
—Would have given my body like grass.
But unending torment of the spirit I cannot give.
My pain passed
With the blossoming of the first blue morning-
glories.

THE CONFIDANTE

Has no one a gift to bring to you,

My heart,

So wearied, so listless? Why,

I shall sing to you,

My heart,

I, I!

SPRING

SPRING

And in my heart
A root long-buried
Puts forth a delicate frond.

SEA-CHANGE

NOVEMBER

The leafless branches

Fall in long gray shadows across my heart.

A M P A R O

A M P A R O

I felt

That if I had been on a hill-top

And might have flung my arms suddenly about a
pine,

There had not been such thunder on the wind.

THE HOST

Any is free to Happiness
Who has the pence to pay,
And many are feasted by Happiness
Whom Grief would turn away.

Oh, I walk as one apart this night,
And proud in my heart am I—
For it's Grief who ran and clung to me,
And would not let me by!

OUT OF MY TURBULENT DAYS

Out of my turbulent days,
 Out of gray grief and black wrong,
Out of the passion and stress,
 I shall make me a song.

I shall make it light as a bird,
 As free and as bold,
So it may tell me what youth was,
 When I have grown old.

YELLOW LEAVES

This makes of my anguish an idle thing,
And a trifle of my grief :
To follow the flight amid falling leaves
Of a falling leaf.

THE YELLOW DAISIES

THE YELLOW DAISIES

I had believed love vast and tragic,
Surging music heard afar,
Something misty, mystic, glamorous,
Dim and lofty as a star.

We have found out love together,
(All my empty dreaming done),
Sturdy as the yellow daisies
Growing in the sun!

A SONG OF HAPPINESS

So many folk are happy folk,
The feathered folk and furred;
And many a kindly glance I've had
And many a brisk, bright word
From squirrel and from gray field-mouse,
From cardinal and blackbird.

It's only folk within the wood
Can know my happiness:
I did not tell my secret,
But I heard the robins guess;
Even the golden minnow knows
Beneath the watercress.

APPLE BOUGHS

APPLE BOUGHS

We had an apple tree curved for our tent,
 We had wild grasses heaped for our bed,
And we saw a red, impossible moon
 Hang like an apple overhead.

We watched the leaves change from dusk to gray,
 Then the wing of the shadow brushed our brows;
And from dreamless slumber we woke to see
 Dawn through apple boughs.

NEW BIRTH

Their branches still rent from the cold,
 Cleft deep where the heavy frosts came,
Each storm-twisted tree flings its scarf to the breeze
 And tosses aloft its green flame.

My heart's not so wise as the hills,
 My heart's not so old as a tree,
And I cannot sing for remembering the pain
 That was heavy as winter on me.

When I have known storm after storm,
 When I have grown dulled, being old,
Then I may forget and be glad of the spring
 Though it follows so close on the cold.

FOREWORD

What other form were worthy of your praise
But this lute-voice mocking the centuries
In many a silvery phrase that hallowed is
By love not faltering with length of days?
A lute that I have little worth to raise
And little skill to sound!—Yet not amiss
Your love may find it, since my heart in this
Only one thing for your heart only says.

These are no perfect blossoms I offer you.
No rose whose crimson cup all longing slakes,
Not moonflowers, sunflowers, flowers bold of hue,
Nor silver lilies mystical with dew—
No more than bluets, blown when April takes
Millions of them to make one meadow blue.

I

These things I know: there is a lazy square
And a cathedral huger than a hill—
Massive and spacious, opulent and still—
With Saint Edita smiling downward where
A poet lies among the shadows there.
Beyond a bridge that spans a shallow rill
Are almond trees; and then white crosses fill
A cemetery mounting like a stair.

Past the cathedral lags a narrow street
Where stands a haunted house—and then, the sea!
With tamarinds that tower near the shore.
South is an Indian village. There are sweet
Strange fruits and flowers, vivid and dear to me.
Had I been there, I could not love it more!

II

I have been happy: let the falcon fly
And follow swiftly where the light wings whir—
Let him bring down the reckless wanderer,
Snatch back that eager rapture from the sky!
And I have been contented: let me cry
My discontent, until like reeds astir
Before the swift, the tragic Whisperer,
Broken are these frail dreams that satisfy!

I have known laughter: make me blind with tears.
I have loved silence: make me deaf with sound.
For every joy set vengeful grief above.
I will not shrink before the threatening years;
I will not falter, I will not give ground;
And I will love as you would have me love!

III

I make no question of your right to go—
Rain and swift lightning, thunder, and the sea,
Sand and dust and ashes are less free!
Follow all paths that wings and spread sails know,
Unheralded you came, and even so,
If so you will, you may take leave of me.
Yours is your life, and what you will shall be.
I ask no questions: hasten or be slow!

But I who would not hold you—I who give
Your freedom to you with no word to say,
And, watching quietly, with my prayers all dumb,
Speed you to any life you choose to live—
Shall ask God's self, incredulous, some day,
Why in the name of Christ He let you come!

IV

I have a thousand pictures of the sea—
Snatches of song and things that travelers say.
I know its glimmerings from green to gray;
At dawn and sunset it is real to me.
Like something known and loved for years will be
That sight of it when I shall come some day
Where little waves and great waves war and play,
And little winds and great winds fly out free.

Of love I made no pictures: Love would come
Like any casual guest whom I could greet
Serenely, and serenely let depart—
Love that came like fire and struck me dumb,
That came like wind and swept me from my feet,
That came like lightning shattering my heart!

V

Life of itself will be cruel and hard enough :
There will be pain and loss enough to bear ;
Battles to wage, sorrow and tears to share.
We must know grief and the salt taste thereof ;
Must mark the Shadow towering above ;
Must shut our eyes to gain the strength to dare
And force tired hearts to face the noise and glare,
Though it is dusk and silence that we love.

Life has no need of stones that we might heap
To build up walls between ; no need of tears
That we seek out and proudly make our own.
Oh my beloved, since we have alone
These brief hours granted from the hurrying years,
Be patient—life itself will make us weep !

VI

There have been many Junes with larkspur blowing,
Many Octobers with crimson-berried haws,
When from the heart regret like smoke withdraws,
Wreath after wreath, to watch the sunrise glowing
Or see tall poplars make so brave a showing
Against pale skies at twilight. There were no flaws
To mar the summer for me; never pause
In my delight for winds and waters flowing.

Yet was all beauty, beauty uncompleted,
Vaguely perceived, not truly heard and seen;
Or seen as are the hills with mist between,
Or heard as song thin echoes have repeated;
Until you gave earth meaning, giving me
The love that lifts the heart to hear and see.

VII

For an hour I looked on love as Moses might
Have gazed from Pisgah; there before his feet
Hills red with fruit and valleys brown with wheat—
His desert dreams made veritable to sight
So no man could deny them. From the height
Viewing the land which others should find sweet,
He knew the years of wandering complete:
Canaan was there—now he could face the night.

There were the lakes had comforted his thirst
Before the rock gushed water; there the land
Whose vision flowering from the desert sand
Had kept him stalwart while his dreams were
cursed.

Its wealth be theirs who had doubted it! Enough
For him, to have stood one hour in sight thereof.

VIII

You have not known the autumns I have known—
November for you has bloomed as bright as spring,
With tropic suns to glow and birds to sing,
And flowers more vivid than mine in August blown.
You have made besides those autumns half your own
That come with ice and sleet and wind to sting
The blood itself to ruddy blossoming:
Such autumns as the bleak North knows alone.

My autumns are merely quiet, and they show
Straight limbs that are bared alike of leaves and
snow—

Yet it is only thus you can know the trees!
Love proud enough to forego bloom and song,
To strip the bough of foliage; bare and strong
To bide your judgment, would be most like these.

IX

No love can quite forego the battle-field,
Since life is struggle, and life and love are one.
No soul is quiet and sheltered enough to shun
The tireless foes at work to make love yield.
Not flower and samite but lance and shield
Were dower of love; not wreath but gonfalon;
And while the bitter struggle is unwon,
Not even to faith is all the truth revealed.

Each heart its own most dreaded foe must meet,
Each heart its own conspiracies must lay,
And fight what it finds hardest to defeat.
Mine is it to meet Doubt in serried mass,
Stronger and subtler with each toilsome day;
Yet steel my soul to swear, "They shall not pass!"

X

It were easiest to say: "The moon and lake
Made wizardry—how could we see aright?
That was a world unreal in silver light,
And we were lovers for the moment's sake.
It was youth spoke in us, quick to mistake
Earth-lamp for dawn, the mirage for true sight;
Hailing a hill-crest as the long-sought height;
Swearing such oaths as honors us to break."

That were far easiest: then no regret
Could chill a heart grown happy to forget,
Nor touch a soul that sophistries sufficed.
There was a man once, in a hall of trial,
Thrice before cock-crow uttered such denial—
And knows forever that he denied the Christ!

XI

It will be easy to love you when I am dead—
Shadowed from light and shut away from sound,
Held deeper than the wild roots underground,
Where nothing can be changed and no more said.
All will be uttered then: beyond the dread
Of failure in you or me, I shall have found
Most perfect quietness to wrap me round,
Where I can dream while all Time's years are sped.

But now Life roars about me like a sea,
Sears me like flame, is thunder in my ears.
There is no time for song, no space for tears,
And every vision has forsaken me.
In a world earthquake-shaken, lightning-charred,
Love is the hardest where all things are hard.

XII

Along my ways of life you never came—
You would be alien to the paths I take.
These orchards never reddened for your sake,
This larkspur never rustled with your name.
Startled alike by sound and sudden flame,
Swept centerward like clouds when tempests break,
We knew such unity as storms may make
Before returning calm shows earth the same.

I am not I who come back to old ways—
Not I, but what a dream has made of me,
Beyond earth's power to alter or undo.
And if I must walk quietly all my days,
As once I walked, content that this should be,
God must remake the world, or me, or you!

SONG IN THE HILLS

My song is slight as words may be,
And heedless as the breeze,
Light as the shining drops of rain
That shake from the budded trees.

And it will hardly still a grief
Nor turn a heart from aching—
But there's a windy hill that knows
What joy was in its making!

M I D - W E S T E R N

Whatever Aprils I may know,
 April will always mean to me
A wet bank dark with violets,
 A whitely-blossoming locust tree.

And the rough furrows of the plain
 Could call me laughing from defeat,
Remembering like a battle shout
 The lyric of the winter wheat!

GARDEN SONG

These are yours: the marigolds,
 Bitter-scented, good to see;
Four o'clock and lavender,
 Rose and rosemary;

The spiderwort I found afield,
 The foxglove from the hill—
They bloom in tended plots for you,
 Though wild bees haunt them still.

Yours, the proud flowers along the paths,
 The shy flowers by the wall—
But mine, mine the gray-leaved verbena
 That has never bloomed at all.

TROPIC RAIN

TROPIC RAIN

The blue lagoon is a sudden gray,
The tallest palm sways in the breeze,
And petals in sodden purple heaps
Pile up beneath the China trees.

Rose and hibiscus droop in rags,
The swift drops splash against the wall;
And on the courtyard's yellow tiles,
One after one the almonds fall.

Then the gray lagoon is a sudden blue,
The downpour stops, the wind is dead;
And from an oleander trunk,
A jet-black lizard lifts its head.

A SONG OF DREAMS COME TRUE

My love was born on a tropic coast

And I, far from the sea;

But the ardent eyes of my lover

Know the dreams that came to me

When I longed for wide blue waters

And great winds flung out free.

And the magic words of my lover

Are the songs I tried to sing

When my heart grew sick for green hill-tops

In the midst of the arid spring

That brought no rain to the wheat-stalks,

Nor brought me anything.

He is tall as a palm, is my lover.

As a flame-tree, vivid is he.

A S O N G O F D R E A M S C O M E T R U E

Dusk and fire is his utterance ;
And about and over me
Are the warm soft wings of the trade winds
That blow from the tropic sea.

SAN CRISTÓBAL

Vivid and still is the noon,
The almonds forget the breeze;
Red flowers droop from the cactus hedge,
Red leaves from the mango trees.

Incredibly blue is the sea,
Incredibly blue the sky;
And above a wall four centuries old
Drifts a yellow butterfly.

VENDOR OF GREEN COCONUTS

VENDOR OF GREEN COCONUTS

Day after day, barelegged in the plaza,
He squats by his coconuts, a jade-green mound,
Hacking the husks with a gleaming machete,
Tossing jade and ivory chips to the ground.

Youth has slipped by him—he has not missed it.
With monotonous gesture and eyes half asleep,
He is only aware of the shining fragments,
And nuts piling up in a shaggy brown heap.

A world has been gutted by fire and disaster,
Nations wasted to ashes, the while he has been
Year after year, hacking and chopping
Dusky nuts from their sheaths of ivory and green.

TROPICAL BEACH

The month of spider-lilies; and the white
Antennæ quiver in the sunlit air.
In drifting clouds the pale moths hover where
No sweets were spread before for their delight.
Over the fallow dunes and out of sight
The lilies crowd together as none would dare
Alone to challenge notice with all so fair,
Alone to shine out boldly with all so bright.

Out from the lilies spreads a gleaming sea
Where the sun dazzles, till the tired eyes yearn
For blackbirds flying, for a stark bold tree.
Such is the morning, such the afternoon,
And with the dusk, still must the eye discern
Ghosts of a million spiders in the moon.

P O M A R R O S A L

P O M A R R O S A L

Ground-fern brushed your knee as we passed them,

Tree-fern drooped to my head,

And the stream at the foot of the mountain

Brawled with the fern in its bed.

Rose-apples blossomed above us,

White-tasseled, poignantly sweet,

And the rain piled crude fallen apples

Into jeweled heaps at our feet.

Rose-apples are lure and fulfilment,

Rose-apples are fruit and are flower.

(The rain built its gray walls about us,

The rose-apples roofed us an hour.)

We went down through the tropic evening

When the gray rain had ceased to fall;

But one hour we were gods on a hill-top

In a blossoming pomarrosal!

THE FLAME TREES

For I have reached a fairer place
Than I had hoped to find,
With all the life that I had known
A scroll cast-off behind;

And changed into a slighter thing
The torrent of old grief
Than heavy waves that break in spray,
White on the outer reef;

And love so sure and joy so strong
That pain and sorrow are thinned
To a little mist that cannot blur
The flame-trees in the wind.

THE CABBAGE FIELD

THE CABBAGE FIELD

Creatures of eld, the twisted willows stand,
Or bend to trail lean fingers in the brook;
An uncouth fungus native to the land
Learns the dun farmer with his pruning-hook.

Before the willows spreads a bluish mist
That makes more glamorous those warlock trees;
And hazily, in mauve and amethyst,
Drift butterflies above the cabbages.

BARRIER

My little brother toad, I am afraid of you—
A timid, helpless bit of life crouching in the dew!
I love you with my heart, but I could not bear
the clutch
Of your pitiful small hand, nor your gray skin's
clammy touch.

My little brother toad, you are afraid of me.
We cannot ever learn to speak to one another.
We start apart on meeting beneath the tolerant
tree—
Are you sorry as I am sorry, brother, little brother?

MORNING IN THE WOODS

That tree of swaying foliage and slender stem
Detached itself from the huddled mass of trees.
There was a flutter of awakened birds,
There was a sudden freshness on the breeze.

Day came so quietly—darkness merely passed;
Light merely spread and overreached the gray,
Unheralded by harsh color, calm and pure—
And we were glad that dawn had come that way.

THE SEEKER

I who had sought God blindly in the skies—
Listening for heaven to thunder forth my name,
Waiting for doves descending to my head,
Looking to see the bushes burst in flame—

Went from the temple with a weary throng
Of questions in my soul, and told my grief
To the heart of the yellow flower with the scent
Of citrus clinging to its pointed leaf.

