

MICHAEL

ALEXANDER

PHILLIPS

If I were to write all you seemed to me
 And set you down as living, fleshly man -
 What could I say that would encompass you,
 While still remaining as you were?
 You seemed to be a bubbling river of the hills
 Whose quiet course was known to very few -
 But it was I who was nearly drowned
 Within your silent and careless rush.
 You might have been a butterfly in love,
 As beautiful with glowing colors;
 Yet I who am most heedless of such things
 Would soon have felt your wings were dust.
 Or would it have been the heated fire
 Of a tinder-dry pine, aflame with golden clothes -
 That viewed with more objectivity than mine
 Would have spoken pungent ashes of mortality?
 I longed and sought to touch your warmth!
 Yet when our flesh had chance to meet
 By my design, or yours, or accident -
 It was as if a gulf had opened up between us.
 You could not satisfy my spirit or lust.
 It was a welling into oblivion with you
 Or such a scale that all seemed crazy,
 The world crushed full of faceless blobs,
 A planet where no love was understood.
 My blood boiled to have so very near
 The thing I wished and did not want.
 I might have seen this from the first
 And have discarded you for what you were.
 But that moaning, pulpy heart of mine
 Said - "First pour blood into a bluish, slippery ink
 And write a poem to Michael."

He, the Thief

I found a golden coin within my lover's heart,
 And seeing him one day fastly sleeping,
 I took it out, and slipped into the street
 To barter it away in the city's crowded market.
 With part I bought a strawberry cream pie
 That filled my belly until it hurt.
 The rest I took into a stone-built house
 And there I laid myself with a red haired whore.
 I felt as if my satisfaction set the birds to sing,
 And I took myself home secretly and slyly.
 But when I arrived at the familiar door,
 There stood a great crowd of people loudly talking.
 And as I heard how a thief had come to rob;
 Finding my love asleep, had stabbed him in the ribs;
 I felt cold beads of sweat creep down my face
 And I spun around and collapsed onto the dirty street.

A S T O R Y

The policeman tugged thoughtfully at his moustache as he stared at the old man. They were alone in the darkened bedroom except for the presence on the bed with the blankets drawn over her head.

"I didn't think you'd get here so soon," said the old man emotionlessly. He eyes rose to meet the cops'.

Ignoring what the old man had said, the cop asked "Why did you do it?"

"She was in so much pain the last few months and the doctor said there was nothing he could do for her, and, well, I just couldn't let her suffer like that. I loved her an awfull lot, you know."

"You realize you'll go to jail for this. Even if she was dying, mercy killing is not legal. I'll have to take you to the police station and get your statement. I... I'm sorry."

The old man's expression didn't change. "You're younger than I am. When you get to be my age perhaps you'll understand that life means nothing to me now that she's gone. We were married for almost thirty years; thirty happy years." His eyes closed and he sunk back tiredly into the couch. Except for his shallow breathing he looked almost as dead as the lifeless body on the bed.

"I'm sorry," the cop said again, "we'll have to go now."

The old man appeared to be sleeping, but as the detective reached over to touch him he opened his eyes. Turning his head slowly he stared at the empty bottle beside his wife's bed and whispered, "I took some of them too. I couldn't let her go alone."

The cop followed his gaze and with a start moved toward the phone. "I'm going to phone an ambulance."

"Please," the old man sighed with an effort. "If you have any compassion you'll leave me alone until it's all over. No one will ever know."

The young cop hesitated and looked over at the old man as he sunk back into a deep sleep. His hand lifted the phone and then hung it up again. A moment later he walked out of the room and into the hallway, closing the quietly behind him.

Although his expression didn't change his hand trembled as he lit a cigarette and sat down in one of the living room chairs. Ten minutes later he phoned the police station.

"This is officer Peters. Look, could you send someone over from the homicide squad. It's my parents. I just came home and found them both dead."

He hung up the phone, buried his head in his hands and cried.