

The Spirits of the Young



Nearby to Tyrifjorden lie
Long fields of wheat and also rye
That cloak the land and meet the sky.
And near the fjord, a road runs by,
A road that runs to Oslo.
Now up and down the people go,
Gazing where the roses blow,
'Round an island there below,
Utoya, it is called.

Willows whiten, birch trees bow,
Little breezes dusk and plough,
Rippling through the fjord's cold waters,
By the island's grass green bowers,
Flowing north of Oslo.
On the island, camps and buildings
Overlook a flowered shrine,
And the morning isle empowers
Dreams and spirits of the young.

By the margin, blue ridge-veiled,
Slide heavy trucks and trains,
The commerce of a nation hailed;
Its ships and planes the world has sailed.
They're driving down to Oslo.
But who hath seen that spirit's hand?
Or at a window seen them stand?
At Utoya, known throughout the land,
For the spirits of the young?

Only reapers, reaping early,
In among the bearded barley
Hear a song that echoes clearly
From the fjord and island, nearly
Down to Oslo.
And by the moon, the reaper, weary,
Piling his sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers, "'Tis the fairies,
And the spirits of the young."

There, they weave by night and day,
A magic web, all colors gay.
The young have heard a whisper say
A curse is on them if they stay,
And look downward to Oslo.
They know not what that curse may be.
The fairies weave on, steadily.
And little other care have they,
The spirits of the young.

Yet, moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before them all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There, they see the highway near,
Winding down to Oslo.
There the cold fjord's eddies swirl,
And there a sleepy village churls,
And the red coats of the market girls
Pass onward in a throng.

Sometimes children pass them by,
Or business people, gals and guys,
The elderly, in busses, cars,
A boy holding a girl in his arms –
They all go by to Oslo.
And sometimes through that mirror blue,
The youths themselves ride, two by two.
The fairies watch them as they do,
The spirits of the young.

The fairies in their web delight,
And weave the mirror's magic sights.
Yet often in the silent nights,
A funeral with plumes and lights
Goes by to storied Oslo.
And when the Moon is overhead,
Come two young lovers, lately wed.
“I am so sick of shadows,” said
These spirits of the young.

They gathered at the island green
To meet their futures, yet unseen.
Unglimpsed but bright, their social dreams,
On a red shield of labor, streamed
Their banners down to Oslo.
And policies of caring grace
Were balanced against, not race,
But human need, a human face,
A Nation's needs, that's all.

In the gray and cloudy weather,
Their leaders shared the purple heather,
Engaging tales of public service,
Fellowship, one flame, together,
Shining down to Oslo.
Participation, love of place,
Growing self-confidence and grace
Engaged them in their meetings, moved
The spirits of the young.

Too many shots that tragic day
Rang out from one who made his way
To Utoya - to make a play
Whose actors fall in death away.
From under years of hatred flowed
A senseless rage as on he ploughed.
He flashed his 'badge,' secret ill will,
He crossed onto the isle, to kill
The spirits of the young.

'Twas then they left their colored looms,
The fairies scuttling to stop the doom.
They watched the water-lily bloom,
They saw a uniform, a gun,
And cried out to Oslo.
Out flew the web and floated wide,
The mirror cracked from side to side.
"The curse is come upon us," cried
The spirits of the young.

Beneath the bright gray sky, wind straining,
Rocky shore, with green woods waning,
The fjord stream, cold, began complaining
Heavily, with low clouds raining
Over bombed Oslo.
Then down they came and found no boat,
Into the water jumped, swam, floated,
Were caught unawares on land or sea,
The spirits of the young.

And down the fjord's dark blue expanse,
Like children, seers in a trance,
Came those who cleared and beat mischance,
With dark and glassy countenance,
Crying out to Oslo.
And at the closing of the day,
The dead, injured and safe ones lay,
Down in a darkness far away,
The spirits of the young.

Some spirits scattered, snowy white,
And loosely flew up, left and right,
Through leaves and flowers, falling light
Upon them, through the noisy night.
They floated down to Oslo.
And as their boat wound along,
The mountains and the fields among,
The people heard them sing a song,
The spirits of the young.

They heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Until their blood was frozen slowly
And they closed their eyes, wholly,
Turned towards Oslo.
For 'ere they reached the other side,
Or spied their home or family ties,
Singing their song of love, they died,
The spirits of the young.

From churches' eaves and balconies,
By garden walls and galleries,
As gleaming shapes, they floated by
Their mountains, fields, their seashores, sky,
Silently from Oslo.
Then out upon the wharfs they came,
The police and people - Prince and plain,
And then it was they saw their names,
The spirits of the young.

Who is this? What happened here?
And in the lighted palace near,
Died the sounds of summer cheer,
And all who saw them cringed with fear
And sadness through Oslo.
The King and Queen and all who saw
Wept and wept. Then spread the awe
Of those whose stories were then told,
Tales of bravery and heroism bold,
Of the spirits of the young.

Who are these? What happened here,
The stories of these heroes tell:
Who sprung with love and caring near
To those who otherwise would fall?
Who road into the danger zone
To grasp the arms of those forlorn?
Who chose an instant's infinite grace
To face a demon in a place
Now known forever as the space
Of the spirits of the young.

Above the island's lush green boroughs
Hovers the love of many. Those
Who passed away on that sad day,
And those who come anew, to say,
We won't be stopped by fear and hate,
Nor stop our path to Oslo.
Meanwhile, the fairies to their bowers
Repair, wherein they spend the hours
Weaving on looms of colored flowers,
For the spirits of the young.

They carry forth their woven threads,
And in them they embrace the dead,
Lift up their spirits, overhead,
Assure them that their spirits live,
Above and beyond Oslo.
The spirits fly to fathers' homes,
And visit mothers' gardens, roam
Among our sacred places, play
In light and energy all day.

The spirits call to all of us:
They kiss the Nordic evening dusk.
"Be all that you can be among
All peoples of your blessed land,"
They say, and so their song is strong,
Forever striving, never undone.
Their gods embrace them as they tone,
'Never forget our love: far-flung.'

-The Spirits of the Young

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