

# POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

BY HART CRANE

The swift red flesh, a winter king—  
Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?  
She ran the neighing canyons all the spring;  
She spouted arms; she rose with maize—to die.

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands  
With mineral wariness found out the stone  
Where prayers, forgotten, streamed the mesa sands?  
He holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne.

Mythical brows we saw retiring—loth,  
Disturbed, and destined, into denser green.  
Greeting they sped us, on the arrow's oath:  
Now lie incorrigibly what years between . . .

There was a bed of leaves, and broken play;  
There was a veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride—  
O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;  
And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride.

I left the village for dogwood. By the canoe  
Tugging below the mill-race, I could see  
Your hair's keen crescent running, and the blue  
First moth of evening take wing stealthily.

What laughing chains the water wove and threw!  
I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper; I  
Drifted how many hours I never knew,  
But, watching, saw that fleet young crescent die—

And one star, swinging, take its place, alone,  
Cupped in the larches of the mountain pass—  
Until, immortally, it bled into the dawn.  
I left my sleek boat nibbling margin grass .

## POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

I took the portage climb, then chose  
 A further valley-shed; I could not stop.  
 Feet nozzled the webs of upper flows;  
 One white veil gusted from the very top.

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge;  
 Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends  
 And northward nestles in that violet wedge  
 Of Adirondacks!—wisped of azure wands,

Over how many bluffs, tarns, streams I sped!  
 —And knew myself within some boding shade:—  
 Grey tepees tufting the blue knolls ahead,  
 Smoke swirling through the yellow chestnut glade . . .

A distant cloud, a thunder-bud—it grew,  
 That blanket of the skies: the padded foot  
 Within,—I heard it; till its rhythm drew,  
 —Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root.

A cyclone threshes in the turbine crest,  
 Swooping in eagle feathers down your back;  
 Know, Maquoqueeta, greeting; know death's best;  
 —Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack!

A birch kneels. All her whistling fingers fly.  
 The oak grove circles in a crash of leaves;  
 The long moan of a dance is in the sky.  
 Dance, Maquoqueeta: Pocahontas grieves . . .

And every tendon scurries toward the twangs  
 Of lightning deltaed down your sabre hair.  
 Now snaps the flint in every tooth; red fangs  
 And splay tongues thinly busy the blue air.

Dance, Maquoqueeta! snake that lives before,  
 at casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout, horn!  
 park, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore—  
 Lie to us—dance us back the tribal morn!

Spears and assemblies: black drums thrusting on—  
O yelling battlements—I, too, was liege  
To rainbows currying each pulsant bone:  
Surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege!

And buzzard-circleted, screamed from the stake;  
I could not pick the arrows from my side.  
Wrapped in that fire, I saw more escorts wake—  
Flickering, sprint up the hill groins like a tide.

I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms,  
And stag teeth foam about the raven throat;  
White cataracts of heaven in seething swarms  
Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat.

O, like the lizard in the furious noon,  
That drops his legs and colours in the sun,  
—And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon  
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!

And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny  
Like one white meteor, pursuant and blent  
At last with all that's consummate and free  
There, where the first and last gods hold thy tent.

Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean,  
Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze—  
Across what bivouacs of thy angered slain,  
And see'st thy bride immortal in the maize!

Totem and fire-gall, slumbering pyramid—  
Though other calendars now stack the sky,  
Thy freedom is her largesse, Prince, and hid  
On paths that knewest best to claim her by.

High unto Labrador the sun strikes free  
Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,  
She is the torrent and the singing tree:  
And she is virgin to the last of men

## POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

West, west and south! winds over Cumberland  
And winds across the llano grass resume  
Her hair's warm sibilance, her breasts are fanned  
O stream by slope and vineyard—into bloom!

And when the caribou slant down for salt  
Do arrows thirst and leap? Do antlers shine  
Alert, star-triggered in the listening vault  
Of dusk?—And are her perfect brows to thine?

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,  
In cobalt desert closures made our vows . . .  
Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,  
The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.