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THE IVORY GATE

I must have slumbered at the wheel
For suddenly I felt the weight
Of water underneath the keel
Lift the Adventure through the Gate
of Ivory. Oh fatal hour
When Dream hath won such power!

Far out to starboard the fell cliffs
Frown from their ice-topped bastions;
To port in hateful hieroglyphs
The savage eddies suck the sun's
Rays to their doom. Ahead
The Harbour of the Dead
Juts forth its welcoming horns. Alas
That ever in the wizard glass
Of that renowned astrologer
I peered, and through the blur
Saw the Adventure safely moored,
Successful for ever assured
Beneath the towers of that tremendous Queen
Of cities; "Yea, such towns have been
(Quoth that most ancient venerable sage
Bearded snow-white with age)

"Or, so much is reported by our spies,
And so much is recorded in these tomes
But - in these modern days? Myself surmise
They, like the Undines, Sylphs, and Gnomes
And Salamanders, are but fancies wrought
Cunningly into fact. I trust to nought
In this world fashioned by fantastic lies
Even in matters vouched by ears and eyes
And fingers. So
If you are set on going, go,
And the Gods prosper you." On that,
I made my bow,
And left the Presence. So -
Where am I now?

These huge crags overhang, this harbour, gapes,
These eddies whirl, no less and no more real
Than all those other unsubstantial shapes
Of which I was so certain just before
The Adventure put to sea.

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What truth there be
In aught is only for the time. And so
All that we know
Is just the Present - just the thought that dies
Even as it is born! Here, straight ahead,
The Harbour of the Dead,
Welcomes. Those curves? Is this the breast
Of a young slim princess
Like the New Moon? Here may
I find ripe rest
And unsought happiness.
Here let Adventure ride at anchor, let
The Murmur of the waters gently lap
Her bows! The lips of my Princess are set
On mine - what Heaven hath a happier hap?
In this caress - let Time itself obey! --
The hours of Sunday morning slip away.

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Alfred Cornwell

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