

Alfred Noyes (1880-1959)

4 *A Victory Dance*

The cymbals crash,  
And the dancers walk,  
With long silk stockings  
And arms of chalk,  
Butterfly skirts, 5  
And white breasts bare,  
*And shadows of dead men*  
*Watching 'em there.*

*Shadows of dead men*  
*Stand by the wall,* 10  
*Watching the fun*  
*Of the Victory Ball.*  
*They do not reproach,*  
*Because they know,*  
*If they're forgotten,* 15  
*It's better so.*

Under the dancing  
Feet are the graves.  
Dazzle and motley,  
In long bright waves, 20  
Brushed by the palm-fronds  
Grapple and whirl  
Ox-eyed matron,  
And slim white girl.

Fat wet bodies 25  
Go waddling by,  
Girdled with satin,  
Though God knows why;  
Gripped by satyrs  
In white and black, 30  
With a fat wet hand  
On the fat wet back.

See, there is one child  
     Fresh from school,  
 Learning the ropes 35  
     As the old hands rule.  
 God, how the dead men  
     Chuckle again,  
 As she begs for a dose  
     Of the best cocaine. 40

“What did you think  
     We should find,” said a shade,  
 “When the last shot echoed  
     And peace was made?”  
 “Christ,” laughed the fleshless 45  
     Jaws of his friend,  
 “I thought they’d be praying  
     For worlds to mend,

“Making earth better,  
     Or something silly, 50  
 Like whitewashing hell  
     Or Piccadilly.  
 They’ve a sense of humour,  
     These women of ours,  
 These exquisite lilies, 55  
     These fresh young flowers!”

“Pish,” said a statesman  
     Standing near,  
 “I’m glad they can busy  
     Their thoughts elsewhere! 60  
 We mustn’t reproach ’em.  
     They’re young, you see.”  
 “Ah,” said the dead men,  
     “*So were we!*”

*Victory! Victory!* 65  
     *On with the dance!*  
*Back to the jungle*  
     *The new beasts prance!*

*God, how the dead men*

*Grin by the wall,*

70

*Watching the fun*

*Of the Victory Ball.*

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Blackwood & Sons, 1928)