

## ALAN GOULD

### A MASQUE FOR THE WEDDING

Tonight be hostess: none must see  
the Drang behind your gaiety.  
Your houselights twinkle white and red,  
the bride is calling for the groom  
who has withdrawn to sulk in bed  
persuaded by the ocean's boom  
he is the one who sojourns on  
through gulfs where lighthouse never shone:  
the boy! Tonight promote the wit,  
the joke-as-good to follow it:  
disguise your daughter's sobbing, take  
grim comfort in the bridal song:  
ignore the growls her brothers make,  
the grouchy whispers in the throng.  
Tonight be tactful, wise, dispel  
the wicked rumours that foretell  
the loss of someone very dear,  
the brothers who will interfere,  
for even now the levelled gun  
is smoking and the crowd's recoiled.  
The bride's white wedding gown is spoiled  
and round her bridesmaids scream and run.

Tonight be stunning, be the bride  
the wedding host displays with pride.  
Yes, move beneath the coloured lights  
where every glass is raised to you  
and every smiling eye invites  
favours you smilingly eschew.  
Behind you stand the watchful three  
who eye the crowd derisively  
and growl as you implore the groom  
to come down from his upstairs room.  
The leaves upon the tree are still:  
it is an icy quarter-moon  
the tree will not set free until  
the groom fall at your feet aswoon

Proceed. There will be checkpoints. Flit  
down alley and the unlit road.  
On reaching target-zone transmit  
a signal briefly: use the code.  
Enter. The gateman has been paid.  
Note where the quarry is displayed —  
you'll recognize her long white dress,  
she may show signs of some distress.  
Approach. *Shoot now*. The wound is clean.  
The guests are shouting wild alarms.  
Three men have pinned you by the arms.  
They'll kill you, as you had foreseen.

Tonight be audience and see  
the action in the fantasy.  
The girl who now will change her name  
is at the centre of the scene.  
The hired assassin never came:  
the sea is moonlit and serene.  
Drink to her as she talks to each,  
drink to her father's comic speech,  
drink to the bridegroom's flushed reply  
then doze beneath this kindly sky.  
Tomorrow there is ample time  
for the disguises love may bring  
to play their risky pantomime  
and show the world their everything.  
But now the night is drawing on.  
The blissful couple must be gone  
to where bliss is, and so must you.  
Wink at the host and hostess who  
now smile with joy and some remorse,  
wink at the groom so near the bride  
who never really left her side,  
whose smile is purest joy, of course.

and gently as a rising tide  
you raise the husband to your side.  
The windows of his room stay black  
and mutters start behind your back.  
Though crowds should press, though you should feel  
the touch of something very cold  
be brave, for now you're being told  
you have a wound that will not heal.

Tonight be awkward, be the groom,  
the taciturn young man for whom  
the ceremony is arranged.  
Your hiding place is cramped and dark.  
The pledge you made can not be changed.  
Across the water signals spark  
like fireworks from ships that steam  
to search the gulfs in which you dream  
of one who's trained to shoot on sight  
an agent who is here tonight.  
Downstairs the call for you is loud:  
the guests are waiting like a net.  
Though some you know are in the crowd  
your bride is one you haven't met.  
Though singers praise her loveliness  
she fills you with a vague distress  
as if some terrible event  
is aimed at her with your consent.  
Now out at sea a signal beams,  
'the hired assassin has slipped through  
and made his threatened rendezvous.'  
Rigid, you listen for the screams.

Tonight be swift, make no mistakes,  
be him the quarter moon forsakes.  
Observe the radio-silence, cross  
the Strait where hostile ships patrol.  
The beach is as it should be, toss  
your wet clothes in the shallow hole.  
Strike north across the dunes, then veer  
north east as soon as lights appear.  
Reach the 'safe' house by five-to-one.  
Eat here, then change, and check the gun.

