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Three Poems in Prose

By CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

(Translated by Clark Ashton Smith)

Une Charogne

REMEMBER, my soul, the thing we saw on that beautiful morning of sweet summer: beside the path an infamous carrion on a couch sown with pebbles, its legs in the air like a lascivious woman burning and sweating her poisons, laid open in a cynical and nonchalant manner its belly filled with exhalations.

The sun shone down upon this putrefaction, as if to cook it to a turn, and render back a hundredfold to great nature all that she had joined together; and the sky saw the superb carcass unfold like a flower. The fetor was so powerful that you believed you would swoon on the grass.

The flies hummed on the putrid belly, where issued black battalions of larvæ that flowed along these living tatters like a thick liquid. All these descended and mounted like a wave, or darted forth in sparklings; one would have said the body lived and multiplied, swollen by a vague breath. And this world gave forth a strange music, as of wind and running water, or the grain that a winnower agitates and turns with his fan in rhythmic movements.

The forms withdrew and faded, and were no more than a dream, an outline that is slow to arrive on the forgetful canvas, and is finished by the artist from memory alone.

Behind the rocks a restless bitch regarded us with an angry eye, watching for the moment to retrieve from the skeleton a morsel she had let fall.

—And still you will be like this ordure, this horrible infection, star of my eyes, and sun of my being, you, my angel and my passion! Yes, such

you will be, O queen of graces, after the final sacraments, when you have gone, beneath the grass and the rich flowers, to mold among the bones of the dead.

Then, O my beauty! say to the worms who will devour you with kisses, that I have kept in memory the form and the divine essence of my decomposed loves!
