

CAWEIN MADISON JULIUS

THE POEMS OF MADISON
CAWEIN. VOLUME 2 (OF 5)

Madison Cawein

**The Poems of Madison
Cawein. Volume 2 (of 5)**

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Madison Julius Cawein

The Poems of Madison Cawein, vol. 2



*Ah, girlhood, through the rosy haze
Come like a moonbeam slipping.*

One Day and Another

O lyrist of the lowly and the true,

The song I sought for you
Still bides unsung. What hope for me to find,
Lost in the dædal mind,
The living utterance with lovely tongue,
To sing,—as once he sung,
Rare Ariosto, of Knight-Errantry,—
How you in Poesy,
Song's Paladin, Knight of the Dream and Day,
The shield of magic sway!
Of that Atlantes' power, sweet and terse,
The skyey-built verse!
The shield that dazzles, brilliant with surprise,
Our unanointed eyes.—
Oh, could I write as it were worthy you,
Each word, a spark of dew,—
As once Ferdusi wrote in Persia,—
Would string each rosy spray
Of each unfolding flower of my song;
And Iran's bulbul tongue
Would sob its heart out o'er the fountain's slab
In gardens of Afrasiab.

ONE DAY AND ANOTHER

A Lyrical Eclogue

PART I LATE SPRING

The mottled moth at eventide
Beats glimmering wings against the pane;
The slow, sweet lily opens wide,
White in the dusk like some dim stain;
The garden dreams on every side
And breathes faint scents of rain:
Among the flowering stocks they stand;
A crimson rose is in her hand.

I

Outside her garden. He waits musing:

Herein the dearness of her is;
The thirty perfect days of June
Made one, in maiden loveliness
Were not more sweet to clasp and kiss,
With love not more in tune.

Ah me! I think she is too true,
Too spiritual for life's rough way:
So say her eyes,—her soul looks through,—
Two bluet blossoms, watchet-blue,
Are not more pure than they.

So kind, so beautiful is she,
So soft and white, so fond and fair,
Sometimes my heart fears she may be
Not long for Earth, and secretly
Sweet sister to the air.

II

Dusk deepens. A whippoorwill calls

The whippoorwills are calling where
The golden west is graying;

“’Tis time,” they say, “to meet him there—
Why are you still delaying?

“He waits you where the old beech throws
Its gnarly shadow over
Wood violet and the bramble rose,
Frail lady-fern and clover.

“Where elder and the sumac peep
Above your garden’s paling,
Whereon, at noon, the lizards sleep,
Like lichen on the railing.

“Come! ere the early rising moon’s
Gold floods the violet valleys;
Where mists, like phantom picaroons
Anchor their stealthy galleys.

“Come! while the deepening amethyst
Of dusk above is falling—
’Tis time to tryst! ’tis time to tryst!”
The whippoorwills are calling.

They call you to these twilight ways
With dewy odor dripping—
Ah, girlhood, through the rosy haze
Come like a moonbeam slipping.

III

He enters the garden, speaking dreamily:

There is a fading inward of the day,
And all the pansy sunset clasps one star;
The twilight acres, eastward, glimmer gray,
While all the world to westward smoulders far.

Now to your glass will you pass for the last time?
Pass! humming some ballad, I know.
Here where I wait it is late and is past time—
Late! and the moments are slow, are slow.

There is a drawing downward of the night;
The bridegroom Heaven bends down to kiss the moon:
Above, the heights hang silver in her light;
Below, the vales stretch purple, deep with June.

There in the dew is it you hiding lawny?
You? or a moth in the vines?—
You!—by your hand! where the band twinkles tawny!
You!—by your ring, like a glow-worm that shines!

IV

She approaches, laughing. She speaks:

You'd given up hope?

He

Believe me!

She

Why! is your love so poor?

He

No. Yet you *might* deceive me!

She

As many a girl before.—
Ah, dear, you will forgive me?

He

Say no more, sweet, say no more!

She

Love trusts; and that's enough, my dear.
Trust wins through love; whereof, my dear,
Love holds through trust: and love, my dear,
Is—all my life and lore.

He

Come, pay me or I'll scold you.—
Give me the kiss you owe.—
You run when I would hold you?

She

No! no! I say! now, no!—
How often have I told you,
You must not use me so?

He

More sweet the dusk for this is,
For lips that meet in kisses.—
Come! come! why run from blisses
As from a dreadful foe?

V

She stands smiling at him, shyly, then speaks:

How many words in the asking!
How easily I can grieve you!—
My “yes” in a “no” was a-masking,
Nor thought, dear, to deceive you.—
A kiss?—the humming-bird happiness here
In my heart consents.... But what are words,
When the thought of two souls in speech accords?

Affirmative, negative—what are they, dear?
I wished to say “yes,” but somehow said “no.”
The woman within me knew you would know,
Knew that your heart would hear.

He speaks:

So many words in the doing!—
Therein you could not deceive me;
Some things are sweeter for the pursuing:
I knew what you meant, believe me.—
Bunched bells of the blush pomegranate, to fix
At your throat.... Six drops of fire they are....
Will you look—where the moon and its following star
Rise silvery over yon meadow ricks?
While I hold—while I bend your head back, so....
For I know it is “yes” though you whisper “no,”
And my kisses, sweet, are six.

VI

Moths flutter around them. She speaks:

Look!—where the fiery
Glow-worm in briery
Banks of the moon-mellowed bowers
Sparkles—how hazily
Pinioned and airily
Delicate, warily,
Drowsily, lazily,
Flutter the moths to the flowers.

White as the dreamiest
Bud of the creamiest
Rose in the garden that dozes,
See how they cling to them!
Held in the heart of their
Hearts, like a part of their
Perfume, they swing to them
Wings that are soft as a rose is.

Dim as the forming of
Dew in the warming of
Moonlight, they light on the petals;

All is revealed to them;
All!—from the sunniest
Tips to the honiest
Heart, whence they yield to them
Spice, through the darkness that settles.

So to our tremulous
Souls come the emulous
Agents of love; through whose power
All that is best in us,
All that is beautiful,
Selfless and dutiful,
Is manifest in us,
Even as the scent of a flower.

VII

Taking her hand he says:

What makes you beautiful?
Answer, now, answer!—
Is it that dutiful
Souls are all beautiful?
Is it romance or
Beauty of spirit,
Which souls, that merit,
Of heaven inherit?—
Have you an answer?

She, roguishly:

What makes you lovable?
Answer, now, answer!—
Is it not provable
That man is lovable
Just because chance, or
Nature, makes woman
Love him?—Her human
Part's to illumine.—
Have you an answer?

VIII

Then, regarding him seriously, she continues:

Could I recall every joy that befell me
There in the past with its anguish and bliss,
Here in my heart it hath whispered to tell me,—
They were no joys like this.

Were it not well if our love could forget them,
Veiling the *Was* with the dawn of the *Is*?
Dead with the past we should never regret them,
Being no joys like this.

Now they are gone and the Present stands speechful,
Ardent of word and of look and of kiss,—
What though we know that their eyes are beseechful!—
They were no joys like this.

Were it not well to have more of the spirit,
Living high Futures this earthly must miss?
Less of the flesh, with the Past pining near it?
Knowing no joys like this!

IX

Leaving the garden for the lane. He, with lightness of heart:

We will leave reason,
Sweet, for a season:
Reason were treason
Now that the nether
Spaces are clad, oh,
In silvery shadow—
We will be glad, oh,
Glad as this weather!

She, responding to his mood:

Heart unto heart! where the moonlight is slanted,

Let us believe that our souls are enchanted:—
I in the castle-keep; you are the airy
Prince who comes seeking me; love is the fairy
Bringing us two together.

He

Starlight in masses
Over us passes;
And in the grass is
Many a flower.—

Now will you tell me
How 'd you enspell me?
What once befell me
There in your bower?

She

Soul unto soul!—in the moon's wizard glory,
Let us believe we are parts in a story:—
I am a poem; a poet you hear it
Whispered in star and in flower; a spirit,
Love, puts my soul in your power.

X

He, suddenly and very earnestly:

Perhaps we lived in the days
Of the Khalif Haroun er Reshid;
And loved, as the story says
Did the Sultan's favorite one
And the Persian Emperor's son,
Ali ben Bekkar, he
Of the Kisra dynasty.

Do you know the story?—Well,
You were Haroun's Sultana.
When night on the palace fell,
A slave, through a secret door,—

Low-arched on the Tigris' shore,—
By a hidden winding stair
Brought me to your bower there.

Then there was laughter and mirth,
And feasting and singing together,
In a chamber of wonderful worth;
In a chamber vaulted high
On columns of ivory;
Its dome, like the irised skies,
Mooned over with peacock eyes;
Its curtains and furniture,
Damask and juniper.

Ten slave girls—so many blooms—
Stand, holding tamarisk torches,
Silk-clad from the Irak looms;
Ten handmaidens serve the feast,
Each maid like a star in the east;
Ten lutanists, lutes a-tune,
Wait, each like the Ramadan moon.

For you, in a stuff of Merv
Blue-clad, unveiled and jeweled,
No metaphor made may serve:
Scarved deep with your raven hair,
The jewels like fireflies there—
Blossom and moon and star,
The Lady Shemsennehar.

The zone that girdles your waist
Would ransom a Prince and Emeer;
In your coronet's gold enchased,
And your bracelet's twisted bar,
Burn rubies of Istakhar;
And pearls of the Jamshid race
Hang looped on your bosom's lace.

You stand like the letter I;
Dawn-faced, with eyes that sparkle
Black stars in a rosy sky;
Mouth, like a cloven peach,
Sweet with your smiling speech;
Cheeks, that the blood presumes
To make pomegranate blooms.

With roses of Rocknabad,
Hyacinths of Bokhara,—
Creamily cool and clad

In gauze,—girls scatter the floor
From pillar to cedarn door.
Then, a pomegranate bloom in each ear,
Come the dancing-girls of Kashmeer.

Kohl in their eyes, down the room,—
That opaline casting-bottles
Have showered with rose-perfume,—
They glitter and drift and swoon
To the dulcimer's languishing tune;
In the liquid light like stars
And moons and nenuphars.

Carbuncles, tragacanth-red,
Smoulder in armlet and anklet:
Gleaming on breast and on head,
Bangles of coins, that are angled,
Tinkle: and veils, that are spangled,
Flutter from coiffure and wrist
Like a star-bewildered mist.

Each dancing-girl is a flower
Of the Tuba from vales of El Liwa.—
How the bronzen censers glower!
And scents of ambergris pour,
And of myrrh, brought out of Lahore,
And of musk of Khoten! how good
Is the scent of the sandalwood!

A lutanist smites her lute,
Sings loves of Mejnoon and Leila:—
Her voice is an Houri flute;—
While the fragrant flambeaux wave,
Barbaric, o'er free and slave,
O'er fabrics and bezels of gems
And roses in anadems.

Sherbets in ewers of gold,
Fruits in salvers carnelian;
Flagons of grotesque mold,
Made of a sapphire glass,
Brimmed with wine of Shirâz;
Shaddock and melon and grape
On plate of an antique shape.

Vases of frosted rose,
Of alabaster graven,
Filled with the mountain snows;
Goblets of mother-of-pearl,

One filigree silver-swirl;
Vessels of gold foamed up
With spray of spar on the cup.

Then a slave bursts in with a cry:
“The eunuchs! the Khalif’s eunuchs!—
With scimitars bared draw nigh!
Wesif and Afif and he,
Chief of the hideous three,
Mesrour!—the Sultan ’s seen
’Mid a hundred weapons’ sheen!”

Did we part when we heard this?—No!
It seems that my soul remembers
How I clasped and kissed you, so....
When they came they found us—dead,
On the flowers our blood dyed red;
Our lips together, and
The dagger in my hand.

XI

She, musingly:

How it was I can not tell,
For I know not where nor why;
But I know we loved too well
In some world that does not lie
East or west of where we dwell,
And beneath no earthly sky.

Was it in the golden ages?—
Or the iron?—that I heard,—
In the prophecy of sages,—
Haply, how had come a bird,
Underneath whose wing were pages
Of an unknown lover’s word.

I forget. You may remember
How the earthquake shook our ships;
How our city, one huge ember,
Blazed within the thick eclipse:
When you found me—deep December
Sealed my icy eyes and lips.

I forget. No one may say

That such things can not be true:—
Here a flower dies to-day,
There, to-morrow, blooms anew....
Death is silent.—Tell me, pray,
Why men doubt what God can do?

XII

He, with conviction:

As to that, nothing to tell!
You being all my belief,
Doubt can not enter or dwell
Here where your image is chief;
Here where your name is a spell,
Potent in joy and in grief.

Is it the glamour of spring
Working in us so we seem
Aye to have loved? that we cling
Even to some fancy or dream,
Rainbowing everything,
Here in our souls, with its gleam?

See! how the synod is met
There of the planets to preach us:—
Freed from the earth's oubliette,
See how the blossoms beseech us!—
Were it not well to forget
Winter and death as they teach us?

Dew and a bud and a star,
All,—like a beautiful thought,
Over man's wisdom how far!—
God for some purpose hath wrought.—
Could we but know why they are,
And that they end not in naught!

Stars and the moon; and they roll
Over our way that is white.—
Here shall we end the long stroll?
Here shall I kiss you good night?
Or, for a while, soul to soul,
Linger and dream of delight?

XIII

They reënter the garden. She speaks somewhat pensively:

Myths tell of walls and cities, lyred of love,
That rose to music.—Were that power my own,
Had I that harp, that magic barbiton,
What had I builded for our lives thereof?—

In docile shadows under bluebell skies,
A home upon the poppied edge of eve,
Beneath pale peaks the splendors never leave,
'Mid lemon orchards whence the egret flies.

Where, pitiless, the ruined hand of death
Should never reach. No bud, no flower fade:
Where all were perfect, pure and unafraid:
And life serener than an angel's breath.

The days should move to music: song should tame
The nights, attentive with their listening stars:
And morn outrival eve in opal bars,
Each preaching beauty with rose-tongues of flame.

O home! O life! desired and to be!
How shall we reach you?—Far the way and dim.—
Give me your hand, sweet! let us follow him,
Love with the madness and the melody.

XIV

He, observing the various dowers around them:

Violets and anemones
The surrendered Hours
Pour, as handsels, round the knees
Of the Spring, who to the breeze
Flings her myriad flowers.

Like to coins, the sumptuous day
Strews with blossoms golden
Every furlong of his way,—
Like a Sultan gone to pray

At a Kaaba olden.

Warlock Night, with spark on spark,
Clad in dim attire,
Dots with stars the haloed dark,—
As a priest around the Ark
Lights his lamps of fire.

These are but the cosmic strings
Of the harp of Beauty,
Of that instrument which sings,
In our souls, of love, that brings
Peace and faith and duty.

XV

She, seriously:

Duty?—Comfort of the sinner
And the saint!—When grief and trial
Weigh us, and within our inner
Selves,—responsive to love's viol,—
Hope's soft voice grows thin and thinner.
It is kin to self-denial.

Self-denial! Through whose feeling
We are gainer though we 're loser;
All the finer force revealing
Of our natures. No accuser
Is the conscience then, but healing
Of the wound of which we 're chooser.

Who the loser, who the winner,
If the ardor fail as preacher?—
None who loved was yet beginner,
Though another's love-beseecher:
Love's revealment 's of the inner
Life and God Himself is teacher.

Heine said "no flower knoweth
Of the fragrance it revealeth;
Song, its heart that overfloweth,
Never nightingale's heart feeleth"—
Such is love the spirit groweth,
Love unconscious if it healeth.

XVI

He, looking smilingly into her eyes, after a pause, lightly:

An elf there is who stables the hot
Red wasp that sucks on the apricot;
An elf, who rowels his spiteful bay,
Like a mote on a ray, away, away;
An elf, who saddles the hornet lean
And dins i' the ear o' the swinging bean;
Who straddles, with cap cocked, all awry,
The bottle-green back o' the dragon-fly.

And this is the elf who sips and sips
From clover-horns whence the perfume drips;
And, drunk with dew, in the glimmering gloam
Awaits the wild-bee's coming home;
In ambush lies where none may see,
And robs the caravan bumblebee:
Gold bags of honey the bees must pay
To the bandit elf of the fairy-way.

Another ouphen the butterflies know,
Who paints their wings with the hues that glow
On blossoms: squeezing from tubes of dew
Pansy colors of every hue
On his bloom's pied pallet, he paints the wings
Of the butterflies, moths, and other things.
This is the elf that the hollyhocks hear,
Who dangles a brilliant in each one's ear;
Teases at noon the pane's green fly,
And lights at night the glow-worm's eye.

But the dearest elf, so the poets say,
Is the elf who hides in an eye of gray;
Who curls in a dimple or slips along
The strings of a lute to a lover's song;
Who smiles in her smile and frowns in her frown,
And dreams in the scent of her glove or gown;
Hides and beckons, as all may note,
In the bloom or the bow of a maiden's throat.

XVII

She, pensively, standing among the flowers:

Soft through the trees the night wind sighs,
And swoons and dies.
Above, the stars hang wanly white;
Here, through the dark,
A drizzled gold, the fireflies
Rain mimic stars in spark on spark.—
'Tis time to part, to say good night.
Good night.

From fern to flower the night-moths cross
At drowsy loss.
The moon drifts, veiled, through clouds of white;
And pearly pale,
In silvery blurs, through beds of moss,
Their tiny moons the glow-worms trail.—
'Tis time to part, to say good night.
Good night.

XVIII

He, at parting, as they proceed down the garden:

You say we can not marry, now
That roses and the June are here?
To your decision I must bow.—
Ah, well!—perhaps 't is best, my dear.
Let's swear again each old love vow
And love another year.

Another year of love with you!
Of dreams and days, of sun and rain!
When field and forest bloom anew,
And locust clusters pelt the lane,
When all the song-birds wed and woo,
I'll not take "no" again.

Oft shall I lie awake and mark
The hours by no clanging clock,
But, in the dim and dewy dark,

Far crowing of some punctual cock;
Then up, as early as the lark
To meet you by our rock.

The rock, where first we met at tryst;
Where first I wooed and won your love.—
Remember how the moon and mist
Made mystery of the heaven above
As now to-night?—Where first I kissed
Your lips, you trembling like a dove.

So, then, we will not marry now
That roses and the June are here,
That warmth and fragrance weigh each bough?
And, yet, your reason is not clear ...
Ah, well! We 'll swear anew each vow
And wait another year.

PART II

EARLY SUMMER

The cricket in the rose-bush hedge
Sings by the vine-entangled gate;
The slim moon slants a timid edge
Of pearl through one low cloud of slate;
Around dark door and window-ledge
Like dreams the shadows wait.
And through the summer dusk she goes,
On her white breast a crimson rose.

I

She delays, meditating. A rainy afternoon

Gray skies and a foggy rain
Dripping from streaming eaves;
Over and over again
Dull drop of the trickling leaves:
And the woodward-winding lane,
And the hill with its shocks of sheaves
One scarce perceives.

Shall I go in such wet weather
By the lane or over the hill?—
Where the blossoming milkweed's feather
The diamonded rain-drops fill;
Where, draggled and drenched together,
The ox-eyes rank the rill
By the old corn-mill.

The creek by now is swollen,
And its foaming cascades sound;
And the lilies, smeared with pollen,
In the dam look dull and drowned.
'Tis the path I oft have stolen
To the bridge; that rambles round
With willows bound.

Through a bottom wild with berry,
And packed with the ironweeds
And elder,—washed and very

Fragrant,—the fenced path leads
Past oak and wilding cherry,
Where the tall wild-lettuce seeds,
To a place of reeds.

The sun through the sad sky bleaches—
Is that a thrush that calls?—
A bird in the rain beseeches:
And see! on the balsam's balls,
And leaves of the water-beeches—
One blister of wart-like galls—
No rain-drop falls.

My shawl instead of a bonnet!...
'Though the woods be dripping yet,
Through the wet to the rock I'll run it!—
How sweet to meet in the wet!—
Our rock with the vine upon it,—
Each flower a fiery jet,—
Where oft we 've met.

II

They meet. He speaks:

How fresh the purple clover
Smells in its veil of rain!
And where the leaves brim over
How musky wild the lane!
See, how the sodden acres,
Forlorn of all their rakers,
Their hay and harvest makers,
Look green as spring again.

Drops from the trumpet-flowers
Rain on us as we pass;
And every zephyr showers,
From tilted leaf or grass,
Clear beads of moisture, seeming
Pale, pointed emeralds gleaming;
Where, through the green boughs streaming,
The daylight strikes like glass.

She speaks:

How dewy, clean and fragrant
Look now the green and gold!—
And breezes, trailing vagrant,
Spill all the spice they hold.
The west begins to glimmer;
And shadows, stretching slimmer,
Make gray the ways; and dimmer
Grow field and forest old.

Beyond those rainy reaches
Of woodland, far and lone,
A whippoorwill beseeches;
And now an owl's moan
Drifts faint upon the hearing.—
These say the dusk is nearing.
And, see, the heavens, clearing,
Take on a tender tone.

How feebly chirps the cricket!
How thin the tree-toads cry!
Blurred in the wild-rose thicket
Gleams wet the firefly.—
This way toward home is nearest;
Of weeds and briers clearest....
We 'll meet to-morrow, dearest;
Till then, dear heart, good-by.

III

They meet again under the greenwood tree. He speaks:

Here at last! And do you know
That again you 've kept me waiting?
Wondering, anticipating
That your "yes" meant "no."

Now you 're here we 'll have our day....
Let us take this daisied hollow,
And beneath these beeches follow
This wild strip of way

To the stream; wherein are seen

Stealing gar and darting minnow;
Over which snake-feeders winnow
Wings of black and green.

Like a cactus flames the sun;
And the mighty weaver, Even,
Tenuous colored, there in heaven,
His rich weft 's begun....

How I love you! from the time—
You remember, do you not?—
When, within your orchard-plot,
I was reading rhyme,

As I told you. And 't was thus:—
“By the blue Trinacrian sea,
Far in pastoral Sicily
With Theocritus”—

That I answered you who asked.
But the curious part was this:—
That the whole thing was amiss;
That the Greek but masked

Tales of old Boccaccio:
Tall Decameronian maids
Strolled for me among the glades,
Smiling, sweet and slow.

And when you approached,—my book
Dropped in wonder,—seemingly
To myself I said, “’Tis she!”
And arose to look

In Lauretta’s eyes and—true!
Found them yours.—You shook your head,
Laughing at me, as you said,
“Did I frighten you?”

You had come for cherries; these
Coatless then I climbed for while
You still questioned with a smile,
And still tried to tease.

Ah, love, just two years have gone
Since then.... I remember, you
Wore a dress of billowy blue
Muslin.—*Was* it “lawn”?—

And your apron still I see—
All its whiteness cherry-stained—
Which you held; wherein I rained
Ripeness from the tree.

And I asked you—for, you know,
To my eyes your serious eyes
Said such deep philosophies—
If you 'd read Rousseau.

You remember how a chance,
Somewhat like to mine, one June
Happened him at castle Touné,
Over there in France?

And a cherry dropping fair
On your cheek, I, envying it,
Cried—remembering Rousseau's wit—
“Would my lips were there!” ...

Here we are at last. We 'll row
Down the stream.—The west has narrowed
To one streak of rose, deep-arrowed.—
There 's our skiff below.

IV

Entering the skiff, she speaks:

Waters flowing dark and bright
In the sunlight or the moon,
Fill my soul with such delight
As some visible music might;
As some slow, majestic tune
Made material to the sight.

Blossoms colored like the skies,
Sunset-hued and tame or wild,
Fill my soul with such surmise
As the mind might realize
If one's thoughts, all undefiled,
Should take form before the eyes.

So to me do these appeal;
So they sway me every hour:
Letting all their beauty steal

On my soul to make it feel
Through a rivulet or flower,
More than any words reveal.

V

He speaks, rowing:

See, sweetheart, how the lilies lay
Their lambent leaves about our way;
Or, pollen-dusty, bob and float
Their nenuphars around our boat.—
The middle of the stream is reached
Three strokes from where our boat was beached.

Look up. You scarce can see the sky,
Through trees that lean, dark, dense and high;
That, coiled with grape and trailing vine,
Build vast a roof of shade and shine;
A house of leaves, where shadows walk,
And whispering winds and waters talk.

There is no path. The saplings choke
The trunks they spring from. There an oak,
Floods from the Alleghanies bore,
Lies rotting; and that sycamore,
Which lays its bulk from shore to shore,—
Uprooted by the rain,—perchance
May be the bridge to some romance:
Its heart of punk, a spongy white,
Glows, ghostly foxfire, in the night.

Now opening through a willow fringe
The waters creep, one tawny tinge
Of sunset; and on either marge
The cottonwoods make walls of shade,
With breezy balsam pungent: large,
The gradual hills loom; darkly fade
The waters wherein herons wade,
Or wing, like Faëry birds, from grass
That mats the shore by which we pass.

She speaks:

On we pass; we rippling pass,
On sunset waters still as glass.
A vesper-sparrow flies above,
Soft twittering, to its woodland love.
A tufted-titmouse calls afar;
And from the west, like some swift star,
A glittering jay flies screaming. Slim
The sand-snipes and kingfishers skim
Before us; and some twilight thrush—
Who may discover where such sing?—
The silence rinses with a gush
Of limpid music bubbling.

He speaks:

On we pass.—Now let us oar
To yonder strip of ragged shore,
Where, from a rock with lichens hoar,
A ferny spring falls, babbling frore
Through woodland mosses. Gliding by
The sulphur-colored firefly
Lights its pale lamp where mallows gloom,
And wild-bean and wild-mustard bloom.—
Some hunter there within the woods
Last fall encamped, those ashes say
And campfire boughs.—The solitudes
Grow dreamy with the death of day.

VI

She sings:

Over the fields of millet
A young bird tries its wings;
And wild as a woodland rillet,
Its first mad music rings rings—
Soul of my soul, where the meadows roll
What is the song it sings?

“Love, and a glad good-morrow,
Heart where the rapture is!
Good-morrow, good-morrow!
Adieu to sorrow!
Here is the road to bliss:

Where all day long you may hearken my song,
And kiss, kiss, kiss;"

Over the fields of clover,
Where the wild bee drones and sways,
The wind, like a shepherd lover,
Flutes on the fragrant ways—
Heart of my heart, where the blossoms part,
What is the air he plays?

"Love, and a song to follow,
Soul with the face a-gleam!
Come follow, come follow,
O'er hill and through hollow,
To the land o' the bloom and beam:
Where, under the flowers, you may listen for hours,
And dream, dream, dream!"

VII

He speaks, letting the boat drift:

Here the shores are irised; grasses
Clump the water gray, that glasses
Broken wood and deepened distance.
Far the musical persistence
Of a field-lark lingers low
In the west's rich tulip-glow.

White before us flames one pointed
Star; and Day hath Night anointed
King; from out her azure ewer
Pouring starry fire, truer
Than pure gold. Star-crowned he stands
With the starlight in his hands.

Will the moon bleach through the ragged
Tree-tops ere we reach yon jagged
Rock that rises gradually,
Pharos of our homeward valley?—
All the west is smouldering red;
Embers are the stars o'erhead.

At my soul some Protean elf is:
You 're Simætha; I am Delphis,
You are Sappho and your Phaon,

I.—We love.—There lies our way, on,—
Let us say,—Æolian seas,
To the violet Lesbian leas.

On we drift. I love you. Nearer
Looms our Island. Rosier, clearer,
The Leucadian cliff we follow,
Where the temple of Apollo
Shines—a pale and pillared fire....
Strike, oh, strike the Lydian lyre!—
Out of Hellas blows the breeze
Singing to the Sapphic seas.

VIII

Landing, he sings:

Night, night, 't is night. The moon drifts low above us,
And all its gold is tangled in the stream:
Love, love, my love, and all the stars, that love us,
The stars smile down and every star 's a dream.

In odorous purple, where the falling warble
Of water cascades and the plunged foam glows,
A columned ruin lifts its sculptured marble
Friezed with the chiselled rebeck and the rose.

She sings:

Sleep, sleep, sweet sleep sleeps at the drifting tiller,
And in our sail the Spirit of the Rain—
Love, love, my love, ah, bid thy heart be stiller,
And, hark! the music of the singing main.

What flowers are those that blow their balm unto us,
From mouths of wild aroma, each a flame?—
Or is it Love that breathes? sweet Love who drew us,
Who kissed our eyes and made us see the same?

He speaks:

Dreams; dreams we dream! no dream that we would banish!
The temple and the nightingale *are* there!
Our love hath made them, nevermore to vanish,
Real as yon moon, this wild-rose in your hair.

Night, night, 'tis night!—and Love's own star 's before us,
Its starred reflection in the starry stream.—
Yes, yes, ah yes! his presence shall watch o'er us,
To-night, to-night, and every night we dream.

IX

Homeward through flowers; she speaks:

Behold the offerings of the common hills!
Whose lowly names have made them three times dear:
One evening-primrose and an apron-full
Of violets; and there, in multitudes,
Dim-seen in moonlight, sweet cerulean wan,
The bluet, making heaven of every dell
With morn's ambrosial blue: dew-dropping plumes
Of the mauve beard's-tongue; and the red-freaked cups
Of blackberry-lilies all along the creek,
Where, lulled, the freckled silence sleeps, and vague
The water flows, when, at high noon, the cows
Wade knee-deep, and the heat is honied with
The drone of drowsy bees and dizzy flies.
How bright the moon is on that fleur-de-lis;
Blue, streaked with crystal like a summer day:
And is it moonlight there? or is it flowers?
White violets? lilies? or a daisy bed?
And now the wind, with softest lullaby,
Swings all their cradled heads and rocks-to-sleep
Their fragrant faces and their golden eyes,
Curtained, and frailly wimpled with the dew.

Simple suggestions of a life most fair!
Flowers, you speak of love and untaught faith,
Whose habitation is within the soul,
Not of the Earth, yet for the Earth indeed....

What is it halcyons my heart? makes calm,
With calmness not of knowledge, all my soul
This night of nights?—Is 't love? or faith? or both?—
The lore of all the world is less than these
Simple suggestions of a life most fair,

And love most sweet that I have learned to know!

X

He speaks, musingly:

Yes, I have known its being so;
Long ago was I seeing so—
Beckoning on to a fairer land,
Out of the flowers it waved its hand;
Bidding me on to life and love,
Life with the hope of the love thereof.

What is the value of knowing it,
If you are shy in showing it?—
Need of the earth unfolds the flower,
Dewy sweet, at the proper hour;
And, in the world of the human heart,
Love is the flower's counterpart.

So when the soul is heedable,
Then is the heart made readable.—
I in the book of your heart have read
Words that are truer than truth hath said:
Measures of love, the spirit's song,
Writ of your soul to haunt me long.

Love can hear each laudable
Thought of the loved made audible,
Spoken in wonder, or joy, or pain,
And reëcho it back again:
Ever responsive, ever awake,
Ever replying with ache for ache.

XI

She speaks, dreamily:

Earth gives its flowers to us
And heaven its stars. Indeed,
These are as lips that woo us,
Those are as lights that lead,
With love that doth pursue us,

With hope that still doth speed.

Yet shall the flowers lie riven,
And lips forget to kiss;
The stars fade out of heaven,
And lights lead us amiss—
As love for which we 've striven;
As hope that promises.

XII

He laughs, wishing to dispel her seriousness:

If love I have had of you, you had of me,
Then doubtless our loving were over;
One would be less than the other, you see;
Since what you returned to your lover
Were only his own; and—

XIII

She interrupts him, speaking impetuously:

But if I lose you, if you part with me,
I will not love you less
Loving so much now. If there is to be
A parting and distress,—
What will avail to comfort or relieve
The soul that's anguished most?—
The knowledge that it once possessed, perceive,
The love that it has lost.
You must acknowledge, under sun and moon
All that we feel is old;
Let morning flutter from night's brown cocoon
Wide wings of flaxen gold;
The moon burst through the darkness, soaring o'er,
Like some great moth and white,
These have been seen a myriad times before
And with renewed delight.—
So 'tis with love;—how old yet new it is!—
This only should we heed,—
To once have known, to once have felt love's bliss,
Is to be rich indeed.—

Whether we win or lose, we lose or win,
Within our gain or loss
Some purpose lies, some end unseen of sin,
Beyond our crown or cross.

XIV

Nearing her home, he speaks:

True, true!—Perhaps it would be best
To be that lone star in the west;
Above the earth, within the skies,
Yet shining here in your blue eyes.

Or, haply, better here to blow
A flower beneath your window low;
That, brief of life and frail and fair,
Finds yet a heaven in your hair.

Or well, perhaps, to be the breeze
That sighs its soul out to the trees;
A voice, a breath of rain or drouth,
That has its wild will with your mouth.

These things I long to be. I long
To be the burthen of some song
You love to sing; a melody,
Sure of sweet immortality.

XV

At the gate. She speaks:

Sunday shall we ride together?
Not the root-rough, rambling way
Through the wood we went that day,
In last summer's sultry weather.

Past the Methodist camp-meeting,
Where religion helped the hymn
Gather volume; and a slim
Minister, with textful greeting,

Welcomed us and still expounded.—
From the service on the hill
We had passed three hills and still
Loud, though far, the singing sounded.

Nor that road through weed and berry
Drowsy days led me and you
To the old-time barbecue,
Where the country-side made merry.

Dusty vehicles together;
Darkies with the horses near
Tied to trees; the atmosphere
Redolent of bark and leather,

And of burgoo and of beef; there
Roasting whole within the trench;
Near which spread the long pine bench
Under shading limb and leaf there.

As we went the homeward journey
You exclaimed, “They intermix
Pleasure there and politics,
Love and war: our modern tourney.”

And the fiddles!—through the thickets,
How they thumped the old quadrille!
Scraping, droning on the hill,
It was like a swarm of crickets....

Neither road! The shady quiet
Of that path by beech and birch,
Winding to the ruined church
Near the stream that sparkles by it.

Where the silent Sundays listen
For the preacher—Love—we bring
In our hearts to preach and sing
Week-day shade to Sabbath glisten.

XVI

He, at parting:

Yes, to-morrow. Early morn.—
When the House of Day uncloses

Portals that the stars adorn,—
Whence Light's golden presence throws his
Flaming lilies, burning roses,
At the wide wood's world of wall,
Spears of sparkle at each fall:

Then together we will ride
To the wood's cathedral places;
Where, like prayers, the wildflowers hide,
Sabbath in their fairy faces;
Where, in truest, untaught phrases,
Worship in each rhythmic word,
God is praised by many a bird.

Look above you.—Pearly white,
Star on star now crystallizes
Out of darkness: Afric night
Hangs them round her like devices
Of strange jewels. Vapor rises,
Glimmering, from each wood and dell.—
Till to-morrow, then, farewell.

XVII

*She tarries at the gate a moment, watching him disappear down the lane.
He sings, and the sound of his singing grows fainter and fainter and at last dies
away in the distance:*

Say, my heart, O my heart,
These be the eves for speaking!
There is no wight will work us spite
Beneath the sunset's streaking.

Yes, my sweet, O my sweet,
Now is the time for telling!
To walk together in starry weather
Down lanes with elder smelling.

O my heart, yes, my heart,
Now is the time for saying!
When lost in dreams each wildflower seems
And every blossom praying.

Lean, my sweet, listen, sweet,—
No sweeter time than this is,—
So says the rose, the moth that knows,—
To take sweet toll in kisses.

PART III

LATE SUMMER

Heat lightning flickers in one cloud,
As in a flower a firefly;
Some rain-drops, that the rose-bush bowed,
Jar through the leaves and dimly lie:
Among the trees, now low, now loud,
The whispering breezes sigh.
The place is lone; the night is hushed;
Upon the path a rose lies crushed.

I

Musing, he strolls among the quiet lanes by farm and field:

Now rests the season in forgetfulness,
Careless in beauty of maturity;
The ripened roses round brown temples, she
Fulfills completion in a dreamy guess.
Now Time grants night the more and day the less:
The gray decides; and brown,
Dim golds and drabs in dulling green express
Themselves and redden as the year goes down.
Sadder the fields where, thrusting hoary high
Their tasseled heads, the Lear-like corn-stocks die,
And, Falstaff-like, buff-bellied pumpkins lie.—
Deeper to tenderness,
Sadder the blue of hills that lounge along
The lonesome west; sadder the song
Of the wild red-bird in the leafage yellow.—
Deeper and dreamier, ay!
Than woods or waters, leans the languid sky
Above lone orchards where the cider-press
Drips and the russets mellow.

Nature grows liberal: from the beechen leaves
The beech-nuts' burrs their little pockets thrust,
Bulged with the copper of the nuts that rust;
Above the grass the spendthrift spider weaves
A web of silver for which dawn designs
Thrice twenty rows of pearls: beneath the oak,
That rolls old roots in many gnarly lines,—

The polished acorns, from their saucers broke,
Strew oval agates.—On sonorous pines
The far wind organs; but the forest near
Is silent; and the blue-white smoke
Of burning brush, beyond that field of hay,
Hangs like a pillar in the atmosphere;
But now it shakes—it breaks and all the
vines And tree-tops tremble;—see! the wind is here!
Billowing and boisterous; and the smiling day
Rejoices in its clamor. Earth and sky
Resound with glory of its majesty,
Impetuous splendor of its rushing by.—
But on those heights the forest still is still,
Expectant of its coming.... Far away
Each anxious tree upon each waiting hill
Tingles anticipation, as in gray
Surmise of rapture. Now the first gusts play,
Like laughter low, about their rippling spines;
And now the wildwood, one exultant sway,
Shouts—and the light at each tumultuous pause,
The light that glooms and shines,
Seems hands in wild applause.

How glows that garden! though the white mists keep
The vagabonding flowers reminded of
Decay that comes to slay in open love,
When the full moon hangs cold and night is deep;
Unheeding still, their cardinal colors leap
And laugh encircled of the scythe of death,—
Like lovely children he prepares to reap,—
Staying his blade a breath
To mark their beauty ere, with one last sweep,
He lays them dead and turns away to weep.—
Let me admire,—
Before the sickle of the coming cold
Shall mow them down,—their beauties manifold:
How like to spurts of fire
That scarlet salvia lifts its blooms, which heap
Yon square of sunlight. And, as sparkles creep
Through charring parchment, up that window's screen
The cypress dots with crimson all its green,
The haunt of many bees.
Cascading dark those porch-built lattices,
The nightshade bleeds with berries; drops of blood,
Hanging in clusters, 'mid the blue monk's-hood.

There, in that garden old,
The bright-hued clumps of zinnias unfold
Their formal flowers; and the marigold

Lifts its pinched shred of orange sunset caught
And elfed in petals. The nasturtium,
All pungent leaved and acrid of perfume,
Hangs up its goblin bonnet, fairy-brought
From Gnomeland. There, predominant red,
And arrogant, the dahlia lifts its head,
Beside the balsam's rose-stained horns of honey,
Deep in the murmuring, sunny,
Dry wildness of the weedy flower-bed;
Where crickets and the weed-bugs, noon and night,
Shrill dirges for the flowers that soon will die,
And flowers already dead.—
I seem to hear the passing Summer sigh:
A voice, that seems to weep,
“Too soon, too soon the Beautiful passes by!
And soon, amid her bowers,
Will dripping Autumn mourn with all her flowers.”—
If I, perchance, might peep
Beneath those leaves of podded hollyhocks,
That the bland wind with odorous whispers rocks,
I might behold her,—white
And weary,—Summer, 'mid her flowers asleep,
Her drowsy flowers asleep,
The withered poppies knotted in her locks.

II

He is reminded of another day with her:

The hips were reddening on this rose,
Those haws were hung with fire,
That day we went this way that goes
Up hills of bough and brier.
This hooked thorn caught her gown and seemed
Imploring her to linger;
Upon her hair a sun-ray streamed
Like some baptizing finger.

This false-foxglove, so golden now
With yellow blooms, like bangles,
Was bloomless then. But yonder bough,—
The sumac's plume entangles,—
Was like an Indian's painted face;
And, like a squaw, attended
That bush, in vague vermilion grace,
With beads of berries splendid.

And here we turned to mount that hill,
Down which the wild brook tumbles;
And, like to-day, that day was still,
And mild winds swayed the umbels
Of these wild-carrots, lawny gray:
And there, deep-dappled o'er us,
An orchard stretched; and in our way
Dropped ripened fruit before us.

With muffled thud the pippin fell,
And at our feet rolled dusty;
A hornet clinging to its bell,
The pear lay bruised and rusty:
The smell of pulpy peach and plum,
From which the juice oozed yellow,—
Around which bees made sleepy hum,—
Made warm the air and mellow.

And then we came where, many-hued,
The wet wild morning-glory
Hung its balloons in shadows dewed
For dawning's offertory:
With bush and bramble, far away,
Beneath us stretched the valley,
Cleft of one creek, as clear as day,
That rippled musically.

The brown, the bronze, the green, the red
Of weed and brier ran riot
To walls of woods, whose pathways led
To nooks of whispering quiet:
Long waves of feathering goldenrod
Ran through the gray in patches,
As in a cloud the gold of God
Burns, that the sunset catches.

And there, above the blue hills rolled,
Like some far conflagration,
The sunset, flaming marigold,
We watched in exultation:
Then, turning homeward, she and I
Went in love's sweet derangement—
How different now seem earth and sky,
Since this undreamed estrangement.

III

He enters the woods. He sits down despondently:

Here where the day is dimmest,
And silence company,
Some might find sympathy
For loss, or grief the grimmest,
In each great-hearted tree—
Here where the day is dimmest—
But, ah, there 's none for me!

In leaves might find communion,
Returning sigh for sigh,
For love the heavens deny;
The love that yearns for union,
Yet parts and knows not why.—
In leaves might find communion—
But, ah, not I, not I!

My eyes with tears are aching.—
Why has she written me?
And will no longer see?—
My heart with grief is breaking,
With grief that this should be.—
My eyes with tears are aching—
Why has she written me?

IV

He proceeds in the direction of a stream:

Better is death than sleep,
Better for tired eyes.—
Why do we weep and weep
When near us the solace lies?
There, in that stream, that, deep,—
Reflecting woods and skies,—
Could comfort all our sighs.
The mystery of things,
Of dreams, philosophies,
To which the mortal clings,
That can unriddle these.—

What is 't the water sings?
What is 't it promises?—
End to my miseries!

V

He seats himself on a rock and gazes steadily into the stream:

And here alone I sit and it is so!—
O vales and hills! O valley-lands and knobs!
What cure have you for woe?
What balm that robs
The brain of thought, the knowledge of its woe?
None! none! ah me! that my sick heart may know!—
The wearying sameness!—yet this thing is so!
This thing is so, and still the waters flow,
The leaves drop slowly down; the daylight throbs
With sun and wind, and yet this thing is so!
There is no sympathy in heaven or earth
For human sorrow! all we see is mirth,
Or madness; cruelty or lust;
Nature is heedless of her children's grief;
Man is to her no more than is a leaf,
That buds and has its summer, that is brief,
Then falls, and mixes with the common dust.
Here, at this culvert's mouth,
The shadowy water, flowing toward the south,
Seems deepest, stagnant-stayed.—
What is it yonder that makes me afraid?
Of my own self afraid?—I do not know!—
What power draws me to the striate stream?
What evil? or what dream?
Me! dropping pebbles in the quiet wave,
That echoes, strange as music in a cave,
Hollow and thin; vibrating in the shade,
As if 't were tears that fell, and, falling, made
A crystal sound, a shadow wail of woe,
Wrung from the rocks and waters there below;
An ailing phantom that will not be laid;
Complaining ghosts of sobs that fill my breast,—
That will not forth,—and give my heart no rest.

There, in the water, how the lank sword-grass
Mats its long blades, each blade a crooked kris,
Making a marsh; 'mid which the currents miss
Their rock-born melodies.

But there and there, one sees
The wide-belled mallow, as within a glass,
Long-pistiled, leaning o'er
The root-contorted shore,
As if its own pink image it would kiss.
And there the tangled wild-potato vine
Lifts beakered blossoms, each a cup of wine,
As pale as moonlight is:—
No mandrake, curling convolutions up,
Loops heavier blossoms, each a conical cup
That swoons moon-nectar and a serpent's hiss.—
And there tall gipsy lilies, all a-sway,
Of coppery hue
Streaked as with crimson dew,
Mirror fierce faces in the deeps,
O'er which they lean, bent in inverted view.—
And where the stream around those rushes creeps,
The dragon-fly, in endless error, keeps
Sewing the pale-gold gown of day
With tangled stitches of a burning blue:
Its brilliant body is a needle fine,
A thread of azure ray,
Black-pinioned, shuttling the shade and shine.
But here before me where my pensive shade
Looks up at me, the stale stream, stagnant, lies,
Deep, dark, but clear and silent; streaked with hues
Of ragweed pollen, and of spawnly ooze,
Through which the seeping bubbles, bursting, rise.—
All flowers here refuse
To grow or blossom; beauties, too, are few,
That haunt its depths: no glittering minnows braid
Its sleepy crystal; and no gravels strew
With colored orbs its bottom. Half afraid
I shrink from my own eyes
There in its cairngorm of reflected skies.—
I know not why, and yet it seems I see—
What is 't I see there moving stealthily?

I know not what!—But where the kildees wade,
Slim in the foamy scum,
From that direction hither doth it come,
Whate'er it is, that makes my soul afraid.
Nearer it draws to where those low rocks ail,
Warm rocks, on which some water-snake hath clomb,
Basking its spotted body, coiling numb,
Brown in the brindled shade.—
At first it seemed a prism on the grail,
A bubble's prism, like the shadow made
Of water-striders; then a trail,

An angled sparkle in a webby veil
Of duckweed, green as verdigris, it swayed
Frog-like through deeps, to crouch, a flaccid, pale,
Squat bulk below....
I gaze, and though I would, I can not go.
Reflected trees and skies,
And breeze-blown clouds that lounge at sunny loss,
Seem in its stolid eyes,
Its fishy gaze, that holds me in strange wise.
Ghoul-like it seems to rise,
And now to sink; its eldritch features fail,
Then come again in rhythmic waviness,
With arms like tentacles that seem to press
Thro' weed and water: limbs that writhe and fade,
And clench, and twist, and toss,
Root-like and gnarled, and cross and inter-cross
Through flabby hair of smoky moss.

How horrible to see this thing at night!
Or when the sunset slants its brimstone light
Above the pool! when, blue, in phantom flight,
The will-o'-the-wisps, perhaps, above it reel.
Then, haply, would it rise, a rotting green,
Up, up, and gather me with arms of steel,
Soft steel, and drag me where the wave is white,
Beneath that boulder brown, that plants a keel
Against the ripple there, a shoulder lean.—
No, no! I must away before 'tis night!
Before the fireflies dot
The dark with sulphur blurrings bright!
Before, upon that height,
The white wild-carrots vanish from the sight;
And boneset blossoms, tossing there in clusters,
Fade to a ridge, a streak of ghostly lustres:
And, in that sunlit spot,
Yon cedar tree is not!
But a huge cap instead, that, half-asleep,
Some giant dropped while driving home his sheep:
And 'mid those fallow browns
And russet grays, the fragrant peak
Of yonder timothy stack,
Is not a stack, but something hideous, black,
That threatens and, grotesquely demon, frowns.

I must away from here.—
Already dusk draws near.
The owlet's dolorous hoot
Sounds quavering as a gnome's wild flute;
The toad, within the wet,

Begins to tune its goblin flageolet:
The slow sun sinks behind
Those hills; and, like a withered cheek
Of Quaker quiet, sorrow-burdened, there
The spectral moon 's defined
Above those trees,—as in a wild-beast's lair
A golden woman, dead, with golden hair,—
Above that mass of fox-grape vines
That, like a wrecked apprentice, roofs those pines.—
Oh, I am faint and weak.—
I must away, away!
Before the close of day!—
Already at my back
I feel the woods grow black;
And sense the evening wind,
Guttural and gaunt and blind,
Whining behind me like an unseen wolf.
Deeper now seems the gulf
Into whose deeps I gaze;
From which, with madness and amaze,
That seems to rise, the horror there,
With webby hands and mossy eyes and hair.—
Oh, will it pierce,
With all its feelers fierce,
Beyond the pool's unhallowed water-streak?—

Yes; I must go, must go!
Must leave this ghastly creek,
This place of hideous fear!
For everywhere I hear
A dripping footstep near,
A voice, like water, gurgling at my ear,
Saying, "Come to me! come and rest below!
Sleep and forget her and with her thy woe!"—
I try to fly.—I can not.—Yes, and no!—
What madness holds me!—God! that obscene, slow,
Sure mastering chimera there,
Perhaps, has fastened round my neck,
Or in my matted hair,
Some horrible feeler, dire, invisible!—
Off, off! thou hoop of Hell!
Thou devil's coil!...
Back, back into thy cesspool! Off of me!—
See, how the waters thrash and boil!
At last! at last! thank God! my soul is free!
My mind is freed of that vile mesmerism
That drew me to—what end? my God! what end?
Haply 'twas merely fancy, that strange fiend:
My fancy, and a prism

Of sunset in the stream, a firefly fleck,
That now, a lamp of golden fairy oil,
Lights me my homeward way, the way I flee.
No more I stare, magnetic-fixed; nor reck,
Nor little care to foil
The madness there! the murder there! that slips
Back to its lair of slime, that seeps and drips,
That sought in vain to fasten on my lips.

VI

Taking a letter from his pocket, he hurries away:

What can it mean for me? what have I done to her?
I, in our season of love as a sun to her:
She, all my heaven of silvery, numberless
Stars and its moon, shining golden and slumberless;
Who on my life, that was thorny and lowery,
Came—and made beautiful; smiled—and made flowery.
She, to my heart and my soul a divinity!
She, who—I dreamed!—seemed my spirit-affinity!—
What have I done to her? what have I done?

What can she mean by this?—what have I said to her?
I, who have idolized, worshiped, and pled to her;
Sung with her, laughed with her, sorrowed and sighed for her;
Lived for her only; and gladly had died for her!
See! she has written me thus! she has written me—
Sooner would dagger or serpent had smitten me!—
Would you had shriveled ere ever you'd read of it,
Eyes, that are wide to the grief and the dread of it!—
What have I said to her? what have I said?
What shall I make of it? I who am trembling,
Fearful of losing.—A moth, the dissembling
Flame of a taper attracts with its guttering,
Flattering on till its body lies fluttering,
Scorched in the summer night.—Foolish, importunate,
Why didst thou quit the cool flowers, unfortunate!—
Such has she been to me, making me such to her!—
Slaying me, saying I never was much to her!—
What shall I make of it? what can I make?

Love, in thy everglades, moaning and motionless,
Look, I have fallen; the evil is potionless:
I, with no thought but the day that did lock us in,
Set naked feet 'mid the cottonmouth-moccasin,

Under the roses, the Cherokee, eying me:—
I,—in the heav'n with the egrets that, flying me,
Winging like blooms from magnolias, rose slenderly,
Pearl and pale pink: where the mocking-bird tenderly
Sang, making vistas of mosses melodious,
Wandered,—unheeding my steps,—in the odious
Ooze and the venom. I followed the wiry
Violet curve of thy star falling fiery—
So was I lost in night! thus am undone!

Have I not told to her—living alone for her—
Purposed unfoldments of deeds I had sown for her
Here in the soil of my soul? their variety
Endless—and ever she answered with piety.
See! it has come to this—all the tale's suavity
At the ninth chapter grows hateful with gravity;
Cruel as death all our beautiful history—
Close it!—the final is more than a mystery.—
Yes; I will go to her; yes; and will speak.

VII

After the final meeting; the day following:

I seem to see her still; to see
That blue-hung room. Her perfume comes
From lavender folds, draped dreamily,—
A-blossom with brocaded blooms,—
Some stuff of orient looms.

I seem to hear her speak; and back,
Where sleeps the sun on books and piles
Of porcelain and bric-à-brac,
A tall clock ticks above the tiles,
Where Love's framed profile smiles.

I hear her say, "Ah, had I known!—
I suffer too for what has been—
For what must be."—A wild ache shone
In her sad gaze that seemed to lean
On something far, unseen.

And as in sleep my own self seems
Outside my suffering self.—I flush
'Twixt facts and undetermined dreams,
And stand, as silent as that hush

Of lilac light and plush.

Smiling, but suffering, I feel,
Beneath that face, so sweet and sad,
In those pale temples, thoughts, like steel,
Pierce burningly.... I had gone mad
Had I once thought her glad.—

Unconsciously, with eyes that yearn
To look beyond the present far,
For one faint future hope, I turn—
There, in her garden, one fierce star,
A cactus, red as war,

Vermilion as a storm-sunk sun,
Flames torrid splendor,—brings to life
A sunset; memory of one
Rich eve she said she 'd be my wife;
An eve with beauty rife.

Again amid the heavy hues,
Soft crimson, seal, and satiny gold
Of flowers there, I stood 'mid dews
With her; deep in her garden old,
While sunset's flame unrolled.

And now!... It can not be! and yet
To see 'tis so!—In heart and brain
To know 'tis so!—While, warm and wet,
I seem to smell those scents again,
Verbena scents and rain.

I turn, in hope she 'll bid me stay.
Again her cameo beauty mark
Set in that smile.—She turns away.
No farewell! no regret! no spark
Of hope to cheer the dark!

That sepia sketch—conceive it so—
A jaunty head with mouth and eyes
Tragic beneath a rose-chapeau,
Silk-masked, unmasking—it denies
The look we half surmise,

We know is there. 'Tis thus we read
The true beneath the false; perceive
The ache beneath the smile.—Indeed!
Whose soul unmasks?... Not mine!—I grieve,—
Oh God!—but laugh and leave....

VIII

He walks aimlessly on:

Beyond those knotted apple-trees,
That partly hide the old brick barn,
Its tattered arms and tattered knees
A scarecrow tosses to the breeze
Among the shocks of corn.

My heart is gray as is the day,
In which the rain-wind drearily
Makes all the rusty branches sway,
And in the hollows, by each way,
The dead leaves rustle wearily.

And soon we 'll hear the far wild-geese
Honk in frost-bitten heavens under
Arcturus; when my walks must cease,
And by the fireside's log-heaped peace
I 'll sit and nod and ponder.—

When every fall of this loud creek
Is silent with the frost; and tented
Brown acres of the corn stretch bleak
And shaggy with the snows, that streak
The hillsides, hollow-dented;

I 'll sit and dream of that glad morn
We met by banks with elder snowing;
That dusk we strolled through flower and thorn,
By tasseled meads of cane and corn,
To where the stream was flowing.

Again I 'll oar our boat among
The dripping lilies of the river,
To reach her hat, the grape-vine long
Struck in the stream; we 'll row to song;
And then ... I 'll wake and shiver.

Why is it that my mind reverts
To that sweet past? while full of parting
The present is: so full of hurts
And heartache, that what it asserts
Adds only to the smarting.

How often shall I sit and think
Of that sweet past! through lowered lashes
What-might-have-been trace link by link;
Then watch it gradually sink
And crumble into ashes.

Outside I'll hear the sad wind weep
Like some lone spirit, grieved, forsaken;
Then, shuddering, to bed will creep,
To lie awake, or, haply, sleep
A sleep by visions shaken.

By visions of the past, that draw
The present in a hue that's wanting;
A scarecrow thing of sticks and straw,—
Like that just now I, passing, saw,—
Its empty tatters flaunting.

IX

He compares the present day with a past one:

The sun a splintered splendor was
In trees, whose waving branches blurred
Its disc, that day we went together,
'Mid wild-bee hum and whirring buzz
Of locusts, through the fields that purred
With summer in the perfect weather.

So sweet it was to look, and lean
To her young face and feel the light
Of eyes that met my own unsaddened!
Her laugh that left lips more serene;
Her speech that blossomed like the white
Life-everlasting there and gladdened.

Maturing summer, you were fraught
With more of beauty then than now
Parades the pageant of September:
Where What-is-now contrasts in thought
With What-was-once, that bloom and bough
Can only help me to remember.

X

He pauses before a deserted house by the wayside:

Through ironweeds and roses
And scraggy beech and oak,
Old porches it discloses
Above the weeds and roses
The drizzling raindrops soak.

Neglected walks a-tangle
With dodder-strangled grass;
And every mildewed angle
Heaped with dead leaves that spangle
The paths that round it pass.

The creatures there that bury
Or hide within its rooms
And spidered closets—very
Dim with old webs—will hurry
Out when the evening glooms.

Owls roost on beam and basement;
Bats haunt its hearth and porch;
And, by each ruined casement,
Flits, in the moon's enlacement,
The wisp, like some wild torch.

There is a sense of frost here,
And winds that sigh alway
Of something that was lost here,
Long, long ago was lost here,
But what, they can not say.

My foot, perhaps, would startle
Some owl that mopes within;
Some bat above its portal,
That frights the daring mortal,
And guards its cellared sin.

The creaking road winds by it
This side the dusty toll.—
Why do I stop to eye it?
My heart can not deny it—
The house is like my soul.

XI

He proceeds on his way:

I bear a burden—look not therein!
Naught will you find save sorrow and sin;
Sorrow and sin that wend with me
Wherever I go. And misery,
A gaunt companion, my wretched bride,
Goes ever with me, side by side.

Sick of myself and all the earth,
I ask my soul now: Is life worth
The little pleasure that we gain
For all our sorrow and our pain?
The love, to which we gave our best,
That turns a mockery and a jest?

XII

Among the twilight fields:

The things we love, the loveliest things we cherish,
Pass from us soonest, vanish utterly.
Dust are our deeds, and dust our dreams that perish
Ere we can say *They be!*

I have loved man and learned we are not brothers—
Within myself, perhaps, may lie the cause;—
Then set one woman high above all others,
And found her full of flaws.

Made unseen stars my keblahs of devotion;
Aspired to knowledge, and remained a clod:
With heart and soul, led on by blind emotion,
The way to failure trod.

Chance, say, or fate, that works through good and evil;
Or destiny, that nothing may retard,
That to some end, above life's empty level,
Perhaps withholds reward.

PART IV LATE AUTUMN

They who die young are blest.—
Should we not envy such?—
They are Earth's happiest,
God-loved and favored much!—
They who die young are blest.

I

Sick and sad, propped with pillows, she sits at her window:

When the dog's-tooth violet comes
With April showers,
And the wild-bee haunts and hums
About the flowers,
We shall never wend as when
Love laughed leading us from men
Over violet vale and glen,
Where the red-bird sang for hours,
And we heard the flicker drum.

Now November heavens are gray:
Autumn kills
Every joy—like leaves of May
In the rills.—
Here I sit and lean and listen
To a voice that has arisen
In my heart; with eyes that glisten
Gazing at the happy hills,
Fading dark blue, far away.

II

She looks down upon the dying garden:

There rank death clutches at the flowers
And drags them down and stamps in earth.
At morn the thin, malignant hours,

Shrill-voiced, among the wind-torn bowers,
Clamor a bitter mirth—
Or is it heartbreak that, forlorn,
Would so conceal itself in scorn.

At noon the weak, white sunlight crawls,
Like feeble age, once beautiful,
From mildewed walks to mildewed walls,
Down which the oozing moisture falls
Upon the cold toadstool:—
Faint on the leaves it drips and creeps—
Or is it tears of love who weeps?

At night a misty blur of moon
Slips through the trees,—pale as a face
Of melancholy marble hewn;—
And, like the phantom of some tune,
Winds whisper in the place—
Or is it love come back again,
Seeking its perished joy in vain?

III

She muses upon the past:

When, in her cloudy chiton,
Spring freed the frozen rills,
And walked in rainbowed light on
The blossom-blowing hills;
Beyond the world's horizon,
That no such glory lies on,
And no such hues bedizen,
Love led us far from ills.

When Summer came, a sickle
Stuck in her sheaf of beams,
And let the honey trickle
From out her bee-hives' seams;
Within the violet-blotted
Sweet book to us allotted,—
Whose lines are flower-dotted,—
Love read us many dreams.

Then Autumn came,—a liar,
A fair-faced heretic;—
In gypsy garb of fire,

Throned on a harvest rick.—
Our lives, that fate had thwarted,
Stood pale and broken-hearted,—
Though smiling when we parted,—
Where love to death lay sick.

Now is the Winter waited,
The tyrant hoar and old,
With death and hunger mated,
Who counts his crimes like gold.—
Once more, before forever
We part—once more, then never!—
Once more before we sever,
Must I his face behold!

IV

She takes up a book and reads:

What little things are those
That hold our happiness!
A smile, a glance; a rose
Dropped from her hair or dress;
A word, a look, a touch,—
These are so much, so much.

An air we can't forget;
A sunset's gold that gleams;
A spray of mignonette,
Will fill the soul with dreams,
More than all history says,
Or romance of old days.

For, of the human heart,
Not brain, is memory;
These things it makes a part
Of its own entity;
The joys, the pains whereof
Are the very food of love.

V

She lays down the book, and sits musing:

How true! how true!—but words are weak,
In sympathy they give the soul,
To music—music, that can speak
All the heart's pain and dole;
All that the sad heart treasures most
Of love that 's lost, of love that 's lost.—
I would not hear sweet music now.
My heart would break to hear it now.

So weary am I, and so fain
To see his face, to feel his kiss
Thrill rapture through my soul again!—
There is no hell like this!—
Ah, God! my God, were it not best
To give me rest, to give me rest!—
Come, death, and breathe upon my brow.
Sweet death, come kiss my mouth and brow.

VI

She writes to her lover to come to her:

Dead lie the dreams we cherished,
The dreams we loved so well;
Like forest leaves they perished,
Like autumn leaves they fell.
Alas! that dreams so soon should pass!
Alas! alas!

The stream lies bleak and arid,
That once went singing on;
The flowers once that varied
Its banks are dead and gone:
Where these were once are thorns and thirst—
The place is curst.

Come to me. I am lonely.
Forget all that occurred.
Come to me; if for only

One last, sad, parting word:
For one last word. Then let the pall
Fall over all.

The day and hour are suited
For what I 'd say to you
Of love that I uprooted.—
But I have suffered, too!—
Come to me; I would say good-by
Before I die.

VII

The wind rises; the trees are agitated:

Woods that beat the wind with frantic
Gestures and sow darkly round
Acorns gnarled and leaves that antic
Wildly on the rustling ground,

Is it tragic grief that saddens
Through your souls this autumn day?
Or the joy of death that gladdens
In exultance of decay?

Arrogant you lift defiant
Boughs against the moaning blast,
That, like some invisible giant,
Wrapped in tumult, thunders past.

Is it that in such insurgent
Fury, tossed from tree to tree,
You would quench the fiercely urgent
Pangs of some old memory?

As in toil and violent action,
That still help them to forget,
Mortals drown the dark distraction
And insistence of regret.

VIII

She sits musing in the gathering twilight:

Last night I slept till midnight; then woke, and, far away,
A cock crowed; lonely and distant I heard a watch-dog bay:
But lonelier yet the tedious old clock ticked on to'ards day.

And what a day!—remember those morns of summer and spring,
That bound our lives together! each morn a wedding-ring
Of dew, aroma, and sparkle, and buds and birds a-wing.

Clear morns, when I strolled my garden, awaiting him, the rose
Expected too, with blushes,—the Giant-of-battle that grows
A bank of radiance and fragrance, and the Maréchal-Niel that glows.

Not in vain did I wait, departed summer, amid your phlox!
'Mid the powdery crystal and crimson of your hollow hollyhocks;
Your fairy-bells and poppies, and the bee that in them rocks.

Cool-clad 'mid the pendulous purple of the morning-glory vine,
By the jewel-mine of the pansies and the snapdragons in line,
I waited, and there he met me whose heart was one with mine.

Around us bloomed my mealy-white dusty-millers gay,
My lady-slippers, bashful of butterfly and ray;
My gillyflowers, spicy, each one, as a day of May.

Ah me! when I think of the handfuls of little gold coins, amass,
My bachelor's-buttons scattered over the garden grass,
The marigolds that boasted their bits of burning brass;

More bitter I feel the autumn tighten on spirit and heart;
And regret those days, remembered as lost, that stand apart,
A chapter holy and sacred, I read with eyes that smart.

How warm was the breath of the garden when he met me there that day!
How the burnished beetle and humming-bird flew past us, each a ray!

—
The memory of those meetings still bears me far away:

Again to the woods a-trysting by the water-mill I steal,
Where the lilies tumble together, the madcap wind at heel;
And meet him among the flowers, the rocks and the moss conceal:

Or the wild-cat gray of the meadows that the black-eyed Susans dot,

Fawn-eyed and leopard-yellow, that tangle a tawny spot
Of languid panther beauty that dozes, summer-hot....

Ah! back again in the present! with the winds that pinch and twist
The leaves in their peevish passion, and whirl wherever they list;
With the autumn, hoary and nipping, whose mausolean mist

Entombs the sun and the daylight: each morning shaggy with fog,
That fits gray wigs on the cedars, and furs with frost each log;
That velvets white the meadows, and marbles brook and bog.—

Alone at dawn—indifferent: alone at eve—I sigh:
And wait, like the wind complaining: complain and know not why:
But ailing and longing and pining because I can not die.

How dull is that sunset! dreary and cold, and hard and dead!
The ghost of those last August that, mulberry-rich and red,
The wine of God's own vintage, poured purple overhead.

But now I sit with the sighing dead dreams of a dying year;
Like the fallen leaves and the acorns, am worthless and feel as sere,
With a soul that 's sick of the body, whose heart is one big tear.

As I stare from my window the daylight, like a bravo, its cloak puts on.
The moon, like a cautious lanthorn, glitters, and then is gone.—
Will he come to-night? will he answer?—Ah, God! would it were dawn!

IX

He enters. Taking her in his arms he speaks:

They said you were dying.—
You shall not die!...
Why are you crying?
Why do you sigh?—
Cease that sad sighing!—
Love, it is I.

All is forgiven!—
Love is not poor;
Though he was driven
Once from your door,
Back he has striven,
To part nevermore!

Will you remember
When I forget
Words, each an ember,
That you regret,
Now in November,
Now we have met?

What if love wept once!
What though you knew!
What if he crept once
Pleading to you!—
He never slept once,
Nor was untrue.

Often forgetful,
Love may forget;
Froward and fretful,
Dear, he will fret;
Ever regretful,
He will regret.

Life is completer
Through his control;
Lifted, made sweeter,
Filled and made whole,
Hearing love's metre
Sing in the soul.

Flesh may not hear it,
Being impure;
But in the spirit,
There we are sure;
There we come near it,
There we endure.

So when to-morrow
Ceases and we
Quit this we borrow,
Mortality,
What chastens sorrow
So it may see?—

(When friends are sighing;
Round one, and one
Nearer is lying,
Nearer the sun,
When one is dying
And all is done?

When there is weeping,
Weary and deep,—
God's be the keeping
Of those who weep!—
When our loved, sleeping,
Sleep their long sleep?—)

Love! that is dearer
Than we're aware;
Bringing us nearer,
Nearer than prayer;
Being the mirror
That our souls share.

Still you are weeping!
Why do you weep?—
Are tears in keeping
With joy so deep?
Gladness so sweeping?
Hearts so in keep?

Speak to me, dearest!
Say it is true!
That I am nearest,
Dearest to you.—
Smile, with those clearest
Eyes of gray blue.

X

She smiles on him through her tears; holding his hand she speaks:

They did not say I could not live beyond this weary night,
But now I know that I shall die before the morning's light.
How weak I am!—but you 'll forgive me when I tell you how
I loved you—love you; and the pain it is to leave you now?

We could not wed!—Alas! the flesh, that clothes the soul of me,
Ordained at birth a sacrifice to this heredity,
Denied, forbade.—Ah, you have seen the bright spots in my cheeks
Glow hectic, as before comes night the west burns blood-red streaks?

Consumption.—“But I promised you my hand?”—a thing forlorn
Of life; diseased!—O God!—and so, far better so, forsworn!—
Oh, I was jealous of your love. But think: if I had died
Ere babe of mine had come to be a solace at your side!

Had it been little then—your grief, when Heaven had made us one
In everything that's good on earth and then the good undone?
No! no! and had I had a child—what grief and agony
To know *that* blight born in him, too, against all help of me!

Just when we cherished him the most, and youthful, sunny pride
Sat on his curly front, to see him die ere we had died.—
Whose fault?—Ah, God!—not mine! but his, that ancestor who gave
Escutcheon to our sorrowful house, a Death's-head and a Grave.

Beneath the pomp of those grim arms we live and may not move;
Nor faith, nor truth, nor wealth avail to hurl them down, nor love!
How could I tell you this?—not then! when all the world was spun
Of morning colors for our love to walk and dance upon.

I could not tell you how disease hid here a viper germ,
Precedence slowly claiming and so slowly fixing firm.
And when I broke my plighted troth and would not tell you why,
I loved you, thinking, “time enough when I have come to die.”

Draw off my rings and let my hands rest so ... the wretched cough
Will interrupt my feeble speech and will not be put off ...
Ah, anyhow, my anodyne is this: to know that you
Are near and love me!—Kiss me now, as you were wont to do.

And tell me you forgive me all; and say you will forget
The sorrow of that breaking-off, the fever and the fret.—
Now set those roses near me here, and tell me death's a lie—
Once it was hard for me to live ... now it is hard to die.

PART V WINTER

We, whom God sets a task,
Striving, who ne'er attain,
We are the curst!—who ask
Death, and still ask in vain.
We, whom God sets a task.

I

In the silence of his room. After many days:

All, all are shadows. All must pass
As writing in the sand or sea:
Reflections in a looking-glass
Are not less permanent than we.

The days that mold us—what are they?
That break us on their whirling wheel?
What but the potters! we the clay
They fashion and yet leave unreal.

Linked through the ages, one and all,
In long anthropomorphous chain,
The human and the animal
Inseparably must remain.

Within us still the monstrous shape
That shrieked in air and howled in slime,
What are we?—partly man and ape—
The tools of fate, the toys of time!

II

The bitterness of his bereavement speaks in him:

Vased in her bedroom window, white
As her glad girlhood, never lost,
I smelt the roses—and the night

Outside was fog and frost.

What though I claimed her dying there!
God nor one angel understood
Nor cared, who from sweet feet to hair
Had changed to snow her blood.

She had been mine so long, so long!
Our harp of life was one in word—
Why did death thrust his hand among
The chords and break one chord!

What lily lilies than her face!
More virgin than her lips I kissed!
When morn, like God, with gold and grace,
Broke massed in mist! broke massed in mist!

III

Her dead face seems to rise up before him:

The face that I said farewell to,
Pillowed a flower on flowers,
Comes back, with its eyes to tell to
My soul what my heart should quell to
Calm, that is mine at hours.

Dear, is your soul still daggered
There by something amiss?
Love—is *he* ever laggard?
Hope—is *her* face still haggard?
Tell me what it is!

You, who are done with to-morrow!
Done with these worldly skies!
Done with our pain and sorrow!
Done with the griefs we borrow!
Joys that are born of sighs!

Must we say “gone forever?”
Or will it all come true?
Does mine touch your thought ever?
And, over the doubts that sever,
Rise to the fact that ’s you?

Love, in my flesh so fearful,

Medicine me this pain!—
Love, with the eyes so tearful,
How can my soul be cheerful,
Seeing its joy is slain!...

Gone!—'t was only a vision!—
Gone! like a thought, a gleam!—
Such to our indecision
Utter no empty mission;—
Truth is in all we dream!

IV

He sinks into deep thought:

There are shadows that compel us,
There are powers that control:
More than substance these can tell us,
Speaking to the human soul.

In the moonlight, when it glistened
On my window, white of glow,
Once I woke and, leaning, listened
To a voice that sang below.

Full of gladness, full of yearning,
Strange with dreamy melody,
Like a bird whose heart was burning,
Wildly sweet it sang to me.

I arose; and by the starlight,
Pale beneath the summer sky,
There I saw it, full of far light,—
My dead joy go singing by.

In the darkness, when the glimmer
Of the storm was on the pane,
Once I sat and heard a dimmer
Voice lamenting in the rain.

Full of parting and unspoken
Heartbreak, faint with agony,
Like a bird whose heart was broken,
Moaning low it cried to me.

I arose; and in the darkness,

Wan beneath the winter sky,
There I saw it, cold to starkness,—
My dead love go wailing by.

V

He arouses from his abstraction, buries his face in his hands and thinks:

So long it seems since last I saw her face,
So long ago it seems,
Like some sad soul in unconjectured space,
Still seeking happiness through perished grace
And unrealities, a little while
Illusions lead me, ending in the smile
Of Death, triumphant in a thorny place,
Among Love's ruined roses and dead dreams.

Since she is gone, no more I feel the light,—
Since she has left all dark,—
Cleave, with its revelation, all the night.
I wander blindly, on a crumbling height,
Among the fragments and the wrecks and stones
Of Life, where Hope, amid Life's skulls and bones,
With weary face, disheartened, wild and white,
Trims her pale lamp with its expiring spark.

Now she is dead, the Soul, naught can o'erawe,—
Now she is gone from me,—
Questions God's justice that seems full of flaw,
As is His world, where misery is law,
And all men fools, too willing to be slaves.—
My House of Faith, built up on dust of graves,
The wind of doubt sweeps down as made of straw,
And all is night and I no longer see.

VI

He looks from his window toward the sombre west:

Ridged and bleak the gray, forsaken
Twilight at the night has guessed;
And no star of dusk has taken
Flame unshaken in the west.

All day long the woodlands, dying,
Moaned, and drippings as of grief
Rained from barren boughs with sighing
Death of flying twig and leaf.

Ah, to live a life unbroken
Of the flings and scorns of fate!
Like that tree, with branches oaken,
Strength's unspoken intimate.—

Who can say that we have never
Lived the life of plants and trees?—
Not so wide the lines that sever
Us forever here from these.

Colors, odors, that are cherished,
Haply hint we once were flowers:
Memory alone has perished
In this garnished world that's ours.

Music,—that all things expresses,
All for which we've sought and sinned,—
Haply in our treey tresses
Once was guesses of the wind.

But I dream!—The dusk, dark braiding
Locks that lack both moon and star,
Deepens; and, the darkness aiding,
Earth seems fading, faint and far.

And within me doubt keeps saying—
“What is wrong, and what is right?
Hear the cursing! hear the praying!
All are straying on in night.”

VII

He turns from the window, takes up a book, and reads:

The soul, like Earth, hath silences
Which speak not, yet are heard:
The voices mute of memories
Are louder than a word.

Theirs is a speech which is not speech;

A language that is bound
To soul-vibrations, vague, that reach
Deeper than any sound.

No words are theirs. They speak through things,
A visible utterance
Of thoughts—like those some sunset brings,
Or withered rose, perchance.

The heavens that once, in purple and flame,
Spake to two hearts as one,
In after years may speak the same
To one sad heart alone.

Through it the vanished face and eyes
Of her, the sweet and fair,
Of her the lost, again shall rise
To comfort his despair.

And so the love that led him long
From golden scene to scene,
Within the sunset is a tongue
That speaks of what has been.—

How loud it speaks of that dead day,
The rose whose bloom is fled!
Of her who died; who, clasped in clay,
Lies numbered with the dead.

The dead are dead; with them 'tis well
Within their narrow room;—
No memories haunt their hearts who dwell
Within the grave and tomb.

But what of those—the dead who live!
The living dead, whose lot
Is still to love—ah, God forgive!—
To live and love, forgot!

VIII

The storm is heard sounding wildly outside with wind and hail:

The night is wild with rain and sleet;
Each loose-warped casement claps or groans:
I hear the plangent woodland beat

The tempest with long blatant moans,
Like one who fears defeat.

And sitting here beyond the storm,
Alone within the lonely house,
It seems that some mesmeric charm
Holds all things—even the gnawing mouse
Has ceased its faint alarm.

And in the silence, stolen o'er
Familiar objects, lo, I fear—
I fear—that, opening yon door,
I'll find my dead self standing near,
With face that once I wore.

The stairway creaks with ghostly gusts:
The flue moans; all its gorgon throat
One wail of winds: ancestral dusts,—
Which yonder Indian war-gear coat
With gray, whose quiver rusts,—

Are shaken down.—Or, can it be,
That he who wore it in the dance,
Or battle, now fills shadowy
Its wampumed skins? and shakes his lance
And spectral plume at me?—

Mere fancy!—Yet those curtains toss
Mysteriously as if some dark
Hand moved them.—And I would not cross
The shadow there, that hearthstone's spark,
A glow-worm sunk in moss.

Outside 't were better!—Yes, I yearn
To walk the waste where sway and dip
Deep, dark December boughs—where burn
Some late last leaves, that drip and drip
No matter where you turn.

Where sodden soil, you scarce have trod,
Fills oozy footprints—but the blind
Night there, though like the frown of God,
Presents no fancies to the mind,
Like those that have o'erawed.—

The months I count: how long it seems
Since summer! summer, when with her,
When on her porch, in rainy gleams
We watched the flickering lightning stir

In heavens gray as dreams.

When all the west, a sheet of gold,
Flared,—like some Titan's opened forge,—
With storm; revealing, manifold,
Vast peaks of clouds with crag and gorge,
Where thunder-torrents rolled.

Then came the wind: again, again
Storm lit the instant earth—and how
The forest rang with roaring rain!—
We could not read—where is it now?—
That tale of Charlemagne:

That old romance! that tale, which we
Were reading; till we heard the plunge
Of distant thunder sullenly,
And left to watch the lightning lunge,
And storm-winds toss each tree.

That summer!—How it built us there,
Of sorcery and necromance,
A mental-world, where all was fair;
A land like one great pearl, a-trance
With lilied light and air.

Where every flower was a thought;
And every bird, a melody;
And every fragrance, zephyr brought,
Was but the rainbowed drapery
Of some sweet dream long sought.

'Mid which we reared our heart's high home,
Fair on the hills; with terraces,
Vine-hung and wooded, o'er the foam
Of undiscovered fairy seas,
All violet in the gloam.

O land of shadows! shadow-home,
Within my world of memories!
Around whose ruins sweeps the foam
Of sorrow's immemorial seas,
To whose dark shores I come!

How long in your wrecked halls, alone
With ghosts of joys must I remain?
Between the unknown and the known,
Still hearing through the wind and rain
My lost love moan and moan.

IX

He sits by the slowly dying fire. The storm is heard with increased violence:

Wild weather. The lash of the sleet
On the gusty casement, clapping—
The sound of the storm like a sheet
My soul and senses wrapping.

Wild weather. And how is she,
Now the rush of the rain falls serried
There on the turf and the tree
Of the place where she is buried?

Wild weather. How black and deep
Is the night where the mad winds scurry!—
Do I sleep? do I dream in my sleep
That I hear her footsteps hurry?

Hither they come like flowers—
And I see her raiment glisten,
Like the robes of one of the hours
Where the stars to the angels listen.

Before me, behold, how she stands!
With lips high thoughts have weighted,
With testifying hands,
And eyes with glory sated.

I have spoken and I have kneeled:
I have kissed her feet in wonder—
But, lo! her lips—they are sealed,
God-sealed, and will not sunder.

Though I sob, “Your stay was long!
You are come,—but your feet were laggard!—
With mansuetude and song
For the heart your death has daggered.”

Never a word replies,
Never, to all my weeping—
Only a sound of sighs,
And of raiment past me sweeping....

I wake; and a clock tolls three—

And the night and the storm beat serried
There on the turf and the tree
Of the place where she is buried.

RED LEAVES AND ROSES

I

And he had lived such loveless years
That suffering had made him wise;
And she had known no graver tears
Than those of girlhood's eyes.

And he, perhaps, had loved before—
One, who had wedded, or had died;—
So life to him had been but poor
In love for which he sighed.

In years and heart she was so young
Love paused and beckoned at the gate,
And bade her hear his songs, unsung;
She laughed that "love must wait."

He understood. She only knew
Love's hair was faded, face was gray—
Nor saw the rose his autumn blew
There in her heedless way.

II

If he had come to her when May
Danced down the wildwood,—every way
Marked with white flow'rs, as if her gown
Had torn and fallen,—it might be
She had not met him with a frown,
Nor used his love so bitterly.

Or if he had but come when June
Set stars and roses to one tune,
And breathed in honeysuckle throats
Clove-honey of her spicy mouth,
His heart had found some loving notes
In hers to cheer his life's long drouth.

He came when Fall made mad the sky,
And on the hills leapt like a cry
Of battle; when his youth was dead;
To *her*, the young, the wild, the white;
Whose symbol was the rose, blood-red,
And his the red leaf pinched with blight.

He might have known, since youth was flown,
And autumn claimed him for its own;
And winter neared with snow, wild whirled,
His love to her would seem absurd;
To youth like hers; whose lip had curled
Yet heard him to his last sad word.

Then laughed and—well, his heart denied
The words he uttered then in pride;
And he remembered how the gray
Was his of autumn, ah! and hers,
The rose-hued colors of the May,
And May was all her universe.

And then he left her: and, like blood,
In her deep hair, the rose; whose bud
Was badge to her: while unto him,
His middle-age, must still remain
The red-leaf, withering at the rim,
As symbol of the all-in-vain.

III

“Such days as these,” she said, and bent
Among her marigolds, all dew,
And dripping zinnia stems, “were meant
For spring not autumn; days we knew
In childhood; *these* endearing those;
Much dearer since they have grown old:
Days, once imperfect with the rose,
Now perfect with the marigold.”

“Such days as these,” he said, and gazed
Long with unlifted eyes that held
Sad autumn nights, “our hopes have raised
In futures that are mist-enspelled.
And so it is the fog blows in
Days dearer for the death they paint
With hues of life and joy,—as sin,
At death, puts off all earthly taint.”

IV

Like deeds of hearts that have not kept
Their riches, as a miser, when
Sad souls have asked, with eyes that wept,
Among the toiling tribes of men,
The summer days gave Earth sweet alms
In silver of white lilies, while
Each night, with healing, outstretched palms
Stood Christ-like with its starry smile.

Will she remember him when dull
Months drag their duller hours by?
With feet that crush the beautiful
And leave the beautiful to die?
Or never see? nor sit with lost
Dreams withered, 'mid hope's empty husks,
And wait, heart-counting-up the cost
Of love's illusions 'mid life's dusks?

V

He is as one who, treading salty scurf
Of lonely sea-sands, hears the roaring rocks
Of some lost isle of misty crags and lochs;
Who sees no sea, but, through a world of surf,
Gray ghosts of gulls and screaming petrel flocks:
When, from the deep's white ruin and wild wreck,
Above the fog, beneath the ghostly gull,
The iron ribs of some storm-shattered hull
Loom, packed with pirate treasure to the deck
A century rotten: feels his wealth replete,
When long-baulked ocean claims it; and one dull
Wave flings, derisive at despondent feet,
A skull, one doubloon rattling in the skull.

VI

And when full autumn sets the dahlia stems
On fire with flowers, and the chill dew turns
The maple trees, above geranium urns,
To Emir tents, and strings with flawless gems
The moon-flower and the wahoo-bush that burns;
Calmly she sees the year grow sad and strange,
And stands with one among the wilted walks
Of the old garden of the gray, old grange,
And feels no sorrow for the frost-maimed stalks
Since—though the wailing autumn to her talks—
Youth marks swift spring on life's far mountain-range.
Or she will lean to her old harpsichord;
A youthful face beside her; and the glow
Of hickory on the hearth will balk the blow
Of blustering rain that beats the casement hard;
And sing of summer and so thwart the snow.

“Haply, some day, she yet may sit alone,”
He thinks, “within the shadow-saddened house,
When round the gables stormy echoes moan,
And in the closet gnaws the lonesome mouse;
And Memory come stealing down the stair
From dusty attics where is piled the Past—
Like so much rubbish that we hate to keep—
And turn the knob; and, framed in frosty hair,
A grave, forgotten face look in at last,
And she will know, and bow her head and weep.”

WILD THORN AND LILY

I

That night, returning to the farm, we rode
Before a storm. Uprolling from the west,
Incessant with distending fire, loomed
The multitudes of tempest: towering here
A shadowy Shasta, there a cloudy Hood,
Veined as with agonies, aurora-born,
Of torrent gold; resplendent heaven to heaven,
Far peak to peak, terrific spoke; the vast
Sierras of the storm, within which beat
The caverned thunder like a mighty stream:
Vibrating on, with rushing wind and flame,
Now th' opening welkin shone, one livid sheet
Of instantaneous gold, a giant's forge,
Wild-clanging; now, with streak on angled streak
Of momentary light, a labyrinth
Where shouting Darkness stalked with Titan torch:
Again the firmament hung hewn with fire
Whence leapt the thunder; and it seemed that hosts
Of Heaven rushed to war with blazing shields
And swords of splendor. And before the storm
We galloped, while the frantic trees above
Went wild with rain, through whose mad limbs and leaves
Splashed black the first big drops. On, on we drove,
And gained the gates, pillaring the avenue
Of ancient beech, at whose far, flickering end,
At last, beaconed the lights of home.

And she?
Was it the lightning that lent lividness
And terror to her countenance? or fear
Of her own heart? revulsion? memory?
Did deep regret, that, now the thing *was* done,
That she was mine, a yearning to be free,
Away from me, assail her? or, the thought,
The knowledge, that she did not love the man
Whom she had wedded? knowing better now
That all her heart was Julien's from the first,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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