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FROM

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RIGEL
AN AUTUMN MYSTERY

By the same Author

A MARIAGE DE CONVENANCE

THE TWO LANCROFTS

HERBERT VANLENNERT

THE JOURNALIST

HIGH POLICY

A WANDERER

TWIXT DOG AND WOLF

THE BROTHERS : A FAIRY MASQUE

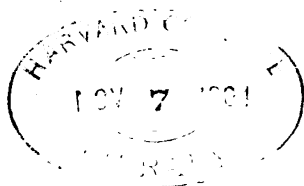
①

RIGEL
AN AUTUMN MYSTERY

BY
C. F. KEARY

LONDON: DAVID NUTT
57-59 LONG ACRE
1903

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Edouard Beaudouin

TO
E. H. K.

THE SCALDS

*All that by Earth ingraven are
Some honour had 'twixt shore and shore :
These have sped their keels so far
They are lost for evermore.*

*They that tilled the ground and passed
Somewhere in their offspring live :
Their children-songs these to the waste
Did and the wandering breezes give.*

*The winds about the earth that run,
Have forgot their voices sweet :
I only, now my day is done,
May lament their fate.*

*Thou that lovest from rocks and stones,
To fashion harmonies, O sea !
Hast thou for these thy buried ones
Thought, nor care, nor memory ?*

*To them thou art cruelest ; for thy tide
Changes his deep ocean-bed,
That even their bones may not abide
Where they once were laid*

CHARACTERS

RIGEL	GUY
BEVIS	REYNAL
FLORIO	BROOK
GILES	AMBROSE

A HOST

And various Guests in Acts II. and III.

MELISSA	GRACE
LYDIA	CHLOB

AMINTA (*Hostess*)

And other Ladies in Acts II. and III.

A WOODMAN (<i>Faun</i>)	ECHO
A ONE-EYED BEGGAR	A GNOME
A LITTLE BREEZE	A WOOD MAIDEN

Mermaids, Attendants on Night, Nymphs, Fairies,
and various Spirits

A Clock. A Chair. A Grate. A Fiddle

RIGEL: AN AUTUMN MYSTERY

ACT FIRST

SCENE I.—*A place by the seashore. The near sea is not visible, only that at the back and on the right of the scene, as if the waves were in front and to the right also. Looking out thus to the back, RIGEL is lying just above the beach amid sea-thistle and rest-harrow, of which, though it is full autumn, some blooms remain. To the left there is a wood, golden-brown, out of which have stolen, also to look out to sea, a Woodman and Woodmaiden (or faun and nymph) behind RIGEL, not seeing him, because a mound of rock and earth lies between. Anon (but not at opening of the scene) from the right comes a flight of sea-gulls, and these pass as it were overhead, watched by RIGEL and by the Woodman and Maiden.*

Near sunset at the opening of the scene, turning to night before the end.

RIGEL.

From the low-plaining, ill-contented sea
Comes up a sighing wind.
Is it not the voice of those far-buried ones

A

Who gave their service to the forgetting Muse,
 And now are lost and hidden out of mind ?
 O Lady, what excuse
 Have we—
 What answer to the wicked man who saith,
 That but in vain the bones
 Of thine anointed deck those under-ways,
 In vain did hymn on hymn exalt thy praise,
 Who hast no thought nor care for man beneath ?
 'Tis sure that from our once-loved isle have gone
 Memory and all compassion for thine own ;
 Nor can the billows in our thousand caves
 By voice or moan move thine indifference,
 Nor all thy servants, pleading from their graves,
 Claim pity for one left without defence ;
 One left behind, and quite astray
 Amid such hosts that tread the evil way.

[*The flight of sea-gulls passes.*]

WOODMAN.

List to the surges' sweet antiphony.

WOODMAIDEN.

And mark the well-poised sea-gulls sailing by.

RIGEL.

[*Following the flight of the sea-gulls.*]

How do ye so majestically move, O birds of equal flight ?

The tired sailor, labouring at his oar, in envy watches
you.

The chained, beaten galley-slave in ages past, as to some
might

Supernal, paid you vows and sacrifice, as I not less
would do.

The beaten galley-slave, he plied
His heavy sweep by Melos' side ;
Clear-voiced, but in barbarian tones,
He sang to ease his aching bones.

(Would I like him might duly frame
Some lauds, to magnify your name ;
Though cramped and slow the pinion
Of uncouth rhyme that bears me on !)

What riddles have ye hoarded up out of the jealous
North ?

For Finland queens your fosters were, O grave and
silent ones !

A floating, desert berg of ice, in summer labour, brought
you forth,

And year-long winters have ye sat and spelled in runic-
carven stones.

The heroes, they are laid to rest ;
Deep furrows graved in Gerda's breast
Shall guard them, till a golden cry
Awake their frost-bound chivalry.

(Would I, like them, might hidden keep
Through this mean age in charmed sleep,
With sword at side, to wield again
When Fenris rives his six-fold chain !)

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Unto the going down at even of the imperial sun,
Your eyes are turned, prophetic birds, and unabated
wings.

Gold are your breasts, and on your flanks are purple
shadows thrown.

So from our sight ye sail away in secret triumphings.

Far, far from here the ocean smiles
About Saint Brandan's happy isles.
And there shall your blest eyes behold
The Sun-god's swains his flocks enfold.
(O God, where is the cleansing might
Of thy far-darting arrows' flight?
And where is laid the golden bow
That brought the boastful Argives low?)

CHORUS OF FAIRIES.

[Scarcely seen, floating among the trunks in the wood.]

See Sol, the radiant giant, flinging
Level beams on earth and sky,
Like a well-fed minstrel, singing
To whoso list his lullaby.
Men are deaf, and cannot hear,
Faintly we the burden bear;
We murmur only to that chaunt,
Who are but mist and gossamer.

See the crystal Eve up-springing
From the bourn of earth and sky,
Her attendant fairies winging,
With their dew-fed buckets by.

Men are blind and cannot see ;
Mount into her train will we ;
For she our ministry doth suffer,
Who are but fun and frolicry.

[As the sea-gulls have passed overhead a dust has fallen from their wings, and, slowly descending, lights upon RIGEL, who presently seems to slumber. At the same time three of the birds separate themselves from the rest of the company and from each other ; then, turning into three maidens, they fly one towards the South, one—in the track of the others who have now gone on—towards the West, and the third towards the North : but before they alight they pass out of the scene.]

WOODMAN.

Mid Morpheus' blooms some while these birds must
keep ;
For their wings drop the pollen-dust of sleep.

WOODMAIDEN.

Three of their number, quitting the great train,
Come to our island, wafted back again.

[From the South comes the sound of a lyre and a Maiden's voice singing.]

VOICE FROM THE SOUTH.

One star, the Watcher, o'er the gate
 Through which bland Evening passed but now ;
 But by the stream, where Chloris sat,
 Whispering her reeds and sang, lies Daphnis low,
 Nor ever shall awake, howe'er we call
 Whitefoot and Iô whom he loved, and though
 Our lute-strings hum the airs he mastered over all.
 Pale, pale seemed Phœbus ere he kissed
 The blue Sicilian sea ; but here
 Anapus' wave ran red ; he wist
 The immeasurable loss, and tear on tear
 Dropped in the oozy cave from whence he springs.
 Upon the downs the flocks are cursed, and wear
 Out the dull hours in bleats and bellowings.
 The hours? How many, since thy hand
 Woke deathless music in our ears,
 Thou *first* throughout the Sicil land?
 O, mournèd Daphnis, 'tis two thousand years.
 Pan woos no more the languished nymphs by day,]
 'Long the hill-side no more the Huntress tears
 At even, and Galatea has fled the Acinian Bay.

[*The VOICE ceases.*

WOODMAIDEN.

That plaint was like the brown bird's in the grove
 Where Etna's maids wander to dream of love.

[*From the West comes the sound of a harp and a
 Voice singing.*

VOICE FROM THE WEST.

For all in no wise can undo
Your tears the knotted web of fate,
Yet, O, lament for Conall-dhu ;
And, turning to the far-off shore,
Where Boyne's dark waters foam and roar
'Gainst the salt waves that roar and foam,
Bow thrice toward his eternal home,
Rememoring his ruined state ;
And let the cromlech of your praise
Keep green his loss through years of days.

Lament for Conall-dhu, whose voice
Was potent as his gleaming brand.
How did the trembling Gaill rejoice,
When, by his treacherous kin ensnared,
Guile wrought the blow no courage dared !
(Ah ! never let the curse be ta'en
From off Duncarroch's blackened plain !)
Then powerless dropped the iron hand ;
The sword was broke ; and, greater ill !
His harp for evermore is still.

Above his mound the pee-weets turn ;
They rest not in their plaintive choir ;
The now unmastered falcons mourn,
And the sea-eagles, gazing far,
Scent from the east the endless war,
Must take from Eirè all her pride
Of song, and lay her harp aside.
Nay, worse than famine, blood and fire,

'Tis, when the baleful conquerors teach
A folk to scorn their fathers' speech.

[*The VOICE ceases.*

WOODMAIDEN.

That hymn was like the bell-buoy's fitful sound,
That, born in the salt flood, in air is drowned.

[*From the North, again a harp's sound and a
voice singing.*

VOICE FROM THE NORTH.

"O thou war-lover, that seest the swan's road over,
What news of the king of kings, the giver of rings?"

"I know not too well, though I stood upon Windfell,
And into the bath of seals saw put forth the keels.

Snow white were their sails ; red targes and ring-mails
Hung them round ; and one bears aloft the web of
spears,

The banner with blood laven, runes on its stems are
graven,

Fierce-grinning is the prow of that vessel, I know.

I saw the royal one steer towards the setting sun :

No bote-bearing thane hath yet returned again,

With mast holding high token of victory,

From the Sudreys that ride on the sea's swart tide."

"In vain, O war-lover, watchest the whale's-path over.

They shall not return to thee o'er Midholm's
bourn.

Held and scald, king and man, they have dreed the
doom of Ran.

Low lie they now, where the waves to Ægir bow.
Their eyes are reft of sight that loved the arrow's
flight,

Soundless the ears that drank the clash of spears.
And the poets, whose staves outsang the stormy
waves,

As none but theirs could do't; they are chap-
fallen and mute,
They and their endeavour rest forsaken forever,
Where the twilight seas not feel the stroke of wind
or keel."

[VOICE ceases.

WOODMAN.

That voice was like the thunder from the cave
Of winds, that stalks across the troubled wave.

A Chorus of MERMAIDS from the Sea.

[*It is unheard of RIGEL.*]

Where, then, are our heroes gone?
Have ye seen them, seamews, tell us,
If to you they maken moan,
Icebergs, say, for we are jealous.

Hath man in sooth no plummet sunken
To show us where they be,
Held and housen, shaped and shrunken
By the wasting sea?

RIGEL. [*Awaking.*]

The songs have ceased, and, like the rainbow's foot,
 Seem to fly from me, paler and paler growing,
 Fainter and fainter, in the crispèd air.
 O sent by whom? What comfort do ye bring
 Worshippers of gods that did contemn your praise,
 Ye long-dead singers of forgotten lays,
 Whose music even has perished?
 Round Sicil's isle, in vain, or Chios' shore
 The seaward-gazing cliffs rise as of old,
 Contend in gold
 Ceres' large fields and Glaucus' yellow sands :
 Apollo's bands
 Have left them, and the Delian quire has fled.
 Olympus' courts have judged their cause in silence,
 And know no softening, no appeal.

Alike with these

Mourning are left our skerry-sprinkled seas :
 Green islands and black scars, they watch forlorn
 Run out and in the moon-enchanted wave.
 No more to Frigg's or to Iduna's power,
 At midnight hour,
 Are sacrifices made and prayers outpoured.
 Day and night the Æsir's lord
 Goes by in the wind, and no man sees his face.
 Ah ! by whose doom
 This mortal blindness and the hidden gods?
 Unless thou help, O Muse, what hope remains
 Now, or for years to come ?

WOODMAN.

Away, away, the Night draws on,
Trailing low her violet gown.
Here, meseems, is no fit place
For man or woman of our race.
The air grows heavy, as when nigh
There moves some mortal tragedy.
Human tears and human plaints
Are like the noisome fog, that taints
A standing water, reed-encumbered,
Where a million gnats have slumbered.
Cramps and agues round it play,
And there the elf-fires sleep by day.

[*Exeunt* WOODMAN and MAIDEN.]

FAIRIES.

[*In the Wood.*]

Now in its socket slides away
The yellow awning of the day,
While through the glazed heavens do peep
The giant shapes that guard our sleep.

EVE enters with Attendant Spirits.

RIGEL.

Almost, but ah! not quite I hear
Voices that murmur in this darkening scene
And wings that beat the air.

[EVE pauses a moment, as if about to speak to RIGEL, but her Attendant Fairies call her away.

FAIRIES.

Come, our lady, mist-enfurl'd,
 Quiet keeping Eve ;
 Dip with us around the world,
 And this mortal leave.

RIGEL.

Was it that Eve went by with all her elfin rout ?
 Goddess ! they are of other race than thine.
 Then why hath not thy sadness any care for mine ?

[EVE again stays for a moment and looks back at RIGEL, but finally she departs, unspeaking.

NIGHT and her ATTENDANTS enter.

RIGEL.

Then thou, more solemn, purple-stolèd Night,
 The ever-labouring mother of the stars,
 That o'er the eastern hills once more return'st
 Over mankind to extend thine easeful reign,
 To thee, at least, I will not speak in vain.
 Not as a suppliant I lay me down
 Before thy feet. I do command thy powers
 By all my nights of service, by the uncounted hours
 I have waked with thee, until thine eyes grew pale ;
 Beyond the cricket's vigil. Then almost opened
 Those portals which, if not my prayers prevail

To open now, I turn
To thy dark Son who shakes the fearèd urn.

AN ATTENDANT ON NIGHT.

Magic winds athwart a ruined stair
Not so wild as this one's threatenings are.

ANOTHER ATTENDANT ON NIGHT.

[*Sneering.*]

What if our Lady, listening to his moan,
Should to the "inner courts" bring him alone!

THIRD ATTENDANT.

[*In same tone.*]

Thou foolish one! What is it we should tell?
That souls unnumbered tread the way to Hell;
And sweet-voiced poets in those antres bare
Sing, whence no echoes reach the sun-warmed air?
Long before Agamemnon kings were great;
And bards, now mute, in holy Tiryns sat.
Men decked with purple gold and ivory
Atlantis, sunk beneath the ignorant sea.
The Sire-of-All with Bragi's drink hath blessed,
How much! thy rocky islands of the West.
For that naught Loki's daughter showed relenting;
Whereat I heard some sea-maids late lamenting,
Gone are the gentle Incas, and their place

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Knows them no more ; gone Montezuma's race.
What will their Northern brothers leave behind
Save some few names soft as the Western wind ?

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Peace to thy gibing and thy jeer !
For in sooth he cannot hear.
And scorn not one that dares affront the might
Of the impenetrable imperious Night.

[A darkness comes over the scene as it changes to inland.]

FIRST ATTENDANT.

We are in some new land ; I hear no more
Sound of surges on the shore.
Anon a thousand eyes were peeping through
The crystal sky ; I see none now.
And this earth-scented air, it doth possess
All my soul with heaviness.

INTERLUDE.

[Sung by a Fairy.]

When the weary night comes down,
Hiding field and hiding town,
Within four walls peace-loving folk
First the Virgin's grace invoke ;

Next, about the glowing hearth,
Forgetful of the slumbering earth,
They eat and chat, and tell maybe
Tales of war and wizardry.
Nor far, in many a forest den,
By leaves enclosed, hide murderous men.

A wind about the gables sighs,
An autumn wind, that bareth sighs ;
It strays and gambols in the streets,
Or the belated traveller meets.
Then he his hat-brim holdeth tight
And prays he find his way aright.
But the wind blows with steadier breath
Over the gibbet on the heath,
And, like a mother, spends its care
To rock the one that resteth there.

The firelight stretches out before—
A yard or twain—the ale-house door,
Where cronies do old cronies meet
With clanking can and shuffling feet.
Therein, ere half the night has gone,
Many a tall fellow shall lie prone.
But in a garden that I know,
Blossoming with stones as white as snow,
Whoever takes his place shall slip
Into a surer fellowship.

END OF ACT I.

ACT SECOND

[*In the darkness the ATTENDANTS OF NIGHT sing this hymn.*]

Dark-girdled Night, our dreadful queen and mother !
 That thou hast seen and known dreameth no other.
 Raisest the borders of thy violet stole,
 Then sound of winds I hear and bells that toll.
Teach me to sing thy all-subduing might,
 And of the stars thy offspring and thy pride ;
 To tell of Sleep and Death thy twain most dear,
 And know the trailing of thy garment near :
Thy rains, that more are felt because unseen ;
 Thy frosts more eager than the day's have been ;
 Thy cowl the heavier, that it falls so light ;
 Thy dooms most dreadful, O unmoved Night !
Mother! we may not dare to search thy face :
 Comest thou from visiting of Proteus' race
 And Neptune's caves? We cannot hear thy tread
 Thou com'st perchance from Dis his fields and
 dwelling with the empty dead.

[*The darkness rolls away, disclosing*

SCENE I.—*A lawn with many shrubs and trees, chiefly upon the left. Behind, on the right, is a colonnade which forms a wing to a building in the paladian style, of which one angle is seen. The colonnade is a little advanced before this angle; and through the right columns of the colonnade is visible a stream which flows between the wing and the angle of the house; the house and the wing being connected by a bridge which is partly seen. The stream then passes behind some bushes round the angle of the house and away to the right. The lawn is supposed to slope on the right hand down to this small river. On the lawn, which is brilliant with flowers, some in vases, some in beds, are the HOST, BEVIS, FLORIO, GILES, GUY, AMINTA, MELISSA, and others, some in chairs, some standing. MELISSA is rather apart on the extreme left. A lawn-waterer is turning, and its spray takes for a moment rainbow colours in the level sunbeams. But almost immediately these are overclouded. Then they return and the rainbow spray with them.*

MELISSA.

Iris of the golden locks and changing gown,
Thou uncanny haunter of the rain!
They thought to bind thee, making thee their own
But with that thought thou'rt gone again.

B

BEVIS.

[Drawing a step nearer to MELISSA.]

She's back once more. Is it not known
That many a goddess haunts this ground?
What is that bruit of clock-bells blown?
Can the found hour still run his round
And not for ever linger when Melissa's here?

*[As MELISSA makes no sign of having heard, he
again approaches the larger group in the centre.]*

FLORIO.

It is the perfectest season of the year.
The river makes a pleasant talking,
The rooks are cawing as 'twere April weather.
With what a strut yond' stiff-necked pie is walking!

[Aside to AMINTA.]

I would see him and Lydia matched together.

GUY.

There is a noise of horse-hoofs borne on the wind,
That, like a knave, comes stealing from behind.

HOST.

That brings our women-folk back from the town.

[To FLORIO.]

You'll be first to worship Lydia's newest gown.

GILES.

Howbeit, the summer's gone and staid October,
Month of the dead, is here our thoughts to sober.

FLORIO.

Away with you ! We've no call to remember
The dead, blessed or unblessed, before November.

GILES.

The ranks of corn are felled, and half the flowers
Decayed : the dun owl haunts the midnight hours ;
Not Philomel. See, the leaves how brown and sear !
Forsaken children of the dying year.
The spring birds of their song have lost the use,
And the virgin-threads are flying loose,
Like banners on a long-besieged town,
Which the foe have captured and are gone.
Hark to their music, faint behind the hill.

BEVIS.

Tush ! 'Tis the humming of the water-mill.
And, if the days are short, the nights are lengthened
Thereby, and all our social ties are strengthened.

[*Enter* LYDIA, GRACE, CHLOE, and others from the
Colonnade.]

Ah, Lydia, what a time of cloud and rain
We've had . . .

CHLOE.

You're at some tricks again.
We've had bright sunshine every mortal moment.

BEVIS.

Each moment's mortal, when on us you gaze.

FLORIO.

Your lie, be that the text : now give the comment.

LYDIA.

'Tis but his clumsy way of saying the days
Are dark when we're not here.

BEVIS.

And now 'tis morning.

GRACE.

That won't keep me out long ; so take your warning.

BROOK.

The sun will soon be setting.

GUY.

Let it. A rustic wench the Day is,
The Night's a charmer, a Phryne or a Laïs.

We turn from west to east when day has flown ;
Banish the country, summon in the town.

[*A distant sound of church-clock chimes.*]

HOST [*to a Visitor*].

That sound of clocks and rumbling one may hear
Witnesseth the city near.
Here we are neither close immured, nor left
To the wild champain's pleasures rude.
Whoso of social life is reft
Will never come to any good.
As for my grounds and garden I some art
Have spent, wilder with tame to interchange.
Variety in every part
You'll find, where'er your eye may range.
Yond' clump of bamboos is a haunt desired
Of the hedge-warbler and the willow-wren.
In thatspinney too a fox once made his den,
Though he's gone now : the deodora's much admired :
And I've some silver firs ; you will not find
Their likes, so near a town, 'twixt here and Ind.

FLORIO.

[*To BEVIS, glancing at MELISSA.*]

Who is that maiden ?

BEVIS.

Nought else, you may swear,
It is Melissa, who loves to walk alone.

FLORIO.

The wind has rumbled up her golden-brown
And crispèd hair. [*He sighs.*

[RIGEL *appears at the corner of the colonnade, where the ground is slightly elevated, so that he looks over all the company. He has been brought hither by one of the ATTENDANTS of NIGHT, who now in the daylight stands beside him no more substantial than a shadow or a dream. He speaks to RIGEL.*

ATTENDANT OF NIGHT.

Seest thou mortal? Now shall be
Changes in thy visionry.
Thou hast left the rocks and seas,
And all the powers that live by these ;
Amphitrite's mantle large,
Æolus his windy charge,
Leaden storm-clouds over-looming,
In hollow caves the surges booming ;
And, by a happy revolution,
Swift as the diorama's fusion,
Art brought where friendship is cemented
Mid care-free folk, and well-contented,
But where, alas ! I have no right,
The minister of needy Night.

[He vanishes. At once the remembrance of the evening before on the sea-beach grows dim in RIGEL'S mind. He finds himself among old acquaintance. Not yet noticed by the others, he turns to the left and comes into the sight of MELISSA, still some way from him, but he does not himself see her.]

MELISSA.

He is back again,
 Who in his hand once held my joy and all my pain.
 I had half-forgot that face,
 And in the bosom of Nature found a resting-place,
 And a so-puissant balm. What will be now
 My lot? Angels, protect me: let me show
 A virginal coldness, lest he should divine
 That of my heart already no jot is mine.
 If at his view
 Alone my sleeping passion thus renew,
 How shall I bear, O God, to hear his voice!
 It was not soft, and yet it touched the springs
 Of the very music which is the soul of things
 It had a poise
 As of the imperious eagle, who in impact
 Upon his prey falls like a cataract.

LYDIA.

[In a group of persons looking towards MELISSA.]
 She sees us not. Melissa! join us here.

MELISSA [*approaches*].

Ah, Lydia.

LYDIA.

Here are some you know ;
Here's Chloe and the lady Mortimer
And some that you should know :
Here's Guy ; and this is Grace, this Florio ;
Your old friend Rigel, too, I see once more.

MELISSA.

Who ?

LYDIA.

Rigel. You knew him once ; or can it be
That I've mistaken ?

MELISSA.

O yes, I quite remember. That is he ?

[RIGEL *meantime has come among the company to
the right and spoken to several.*

BEVIS.

[*To GILES.*]

Why are you, Giles, in such a tragic vein ?
Is it because our Rigel's back again ?

HOST.

Come, Florio, now our stars again shine o'er us,
Can you not hymn them ?

[*He takes up a lute and offers it to FLORIO.*]

BROOK.

And we'll join the chorus.

LYDIA.

Chorus ! You'd chant us like a pipe of wine ?

GUY.

Nay, Florio's pipe's for numbers much more fine.

LYDIA.

Shame on you ! More fine than we ? And *numbers* too ?

HOST.

Stay, Lydia ! let Florio show what he can do !

FLORIO [*sings*].

No beauty have the rocks and mountains,
There is no light in Dian's car ;
Voiceless the woods and dumb the fountains,
But where our true-loves are.

Doth not the Hercynian boar his rudeness
 Forget, the lion's fury die,
 And lewd, base fellows doff their lewdness,
 When Cupid wanders by?

For me, among the planets seven,
 Unto one only will I pray;
 To her, that bars the door of even,
 Or opes the gates of day.

BEVIS [*half-aloud*].

Give me the second verse for paradox!
 He'll say that Cupid guards one 'gainst

GUY.

The equinox.

RIGEL [*aside*].

Yet there's a river somewhere nigh
 That sings a song of different tone,
 With a low rustling goes it by,
 O'er marble slabs and porphyry,
 As a Court lady walks with ease,
 Thick velvet trailing from her zone.

[*He sees MELISSA.*

But ah! what Court or royal pleasaunce
 Could boast of beauty, save by Melissa's presence?

MELISSA.

It is long since we met.

RIGEL.

It seems but yesterday.

HOST.

Ah, Rigel, you have been some time ago
Where last ?

[He hardly waits for the answer, however.]

MELISSA *[only half-aloud]*.

With whom ?

RIGEL.

I have been by the sea,
I scarce can tell, alone or not alone ;
With neither man nor woman ; and yet more
Voices than of the waves haunted that shore.

MELISSA.

You say, but think not thus . . .

RIGEL.

By my faith I do ;
I know that unseen things about me were,
And dirges sang : but ah ! not quite the air
Allowed the words my waking sense to pierce.

[MELISSA shakes her head.]

Say then how comes it that when most alone
 We are least solitary? 'Tis certain there are
 Invisible powers that fancy move and the sound
 Of measured verse and all the imaginings
 That night-time breeds. Dreams of dethroned kings,
 That stalk along the ridges of the dawn :
 Vast shadows, seen sometimes by the labourer
 Too early risen, who stumbling, half-awake,
 Across his threshold, marks their royal mien,
 And gasps and rubs his eyes. Then are they vanished.

*[At this time the guests gradually leave the garden,
 and these two are presently left alone.]*

MELISSA.

I muse by what endeavour
 Such visions come to you that I see never.

RIGEL.

By none. Such sights the Nymphs and Muses
 Are ever proffering. 'Tis but that man refuses.

MELISSA.

I not. Nay, I too love the woods and plains,
 The mountains, streams, the thunders and the rains,
 Sunshine, and Iris drawn on a sable cloud.
 But all these things are beautiful and dead.
 Why? tell me.

RIGEL.

Because in your heart
Some one is too fixed. Nature hath a lesser part.

MELISSA.

You have mistook. . . Even were it as you say,
How should the Nymphs and Muses disapprove?
Is anything more *natural* than to love?

RIGEL.

Nay, I've no answer. 'Sooth, I cannot tell,
Nor on such themes philosophise.
I only know, looking into the well
Of your deep eyes,
I see therein something that troubled is
By love, remorse, or memories.

MELISSA.

Might you not cure me?

RIGEL.

But how dare I do 't?
That were perchance to pluck the fruit
Most native to your soul. Nothing can be
By all men honoured equally.

If you love Love, he hath a treasure
Greater than boasteth any other god,
And, chance you find him in a giving mood,
Love doth not stint his measure.

MELISSA.

You are clever in words ! You will not teach me, then ?
For fear I learn, and rob you of your pride
Of solitary knowledge. Such are men !
Who despise, loving ; and cherish us to chide.

RIGEL.

You are unjust.

MELISSA.

But you ?
Have you not wished to prove what such a god could do ?

RIGEL.

You know, Melissa, best what vows I paid
Short while ago, and tasted how much rue ;
Till now I worship only Leto's maid.

MELISSA.

I know you wrote full many a mournful song,
And prayed all men to witness to your pain :
Those wounds that little time made whole again !
O, are you not ashamed to do such wrong
To Love you call a god ? And she, the Queen of
Heaven,
Think you she hath no care for girls contemned ?

RIGEL.

Contemned ?

MELISSA.

Yes ; scorned by flattering lies.

RIGEL.

I never told you any. (How your eyes
Flash with blue fire, and then again are dimmed !
Now glow they with an amethystine light.)
I never told you any word but truth.
And if I said and sang, the best I might,
The love I had for you—and have—for ruth. . .

MELISSA.

O, leave me ! I said I wished to learn your lore.
In sooth I would not. 'Tis a bitter art
That can sit by and see mankind to smart
With manifold pains, the world in joy so poor,
So rich in ill ; then an enchanting circle
Draw, and within on childish fancies feed,
As though man could go back two thousand years.

The poor mechanic
Who knows his trade, and in that little round
Makes out of chaos order, is far higher
Than you, the spinner of fantastical rhymes,
And tales you not believe.

RIGEL.

Think as you choose
 About the gods. If once they were, they are,
 Being immortal. Ten times ten thousand years
 Nor any fashion of human thought can change them.
 And if they are but fantastic, all gods are so.

The Galilean's face, through envious time
 Hath dimmer grown. There are, will tell you how
 Men become gods by flight of traditional years ;
 Till more years come and kill them. If it were thus
 With the Olympians, so, be sure, 'twill be
 With Him who slew Great Pan. But if Great Pan,
 Though slain, yet liveth, and Nature ever liveth,
 Then all the creeds come back.

MELISSA [*in an altered voice*].

How come they back ?

RIGEL.

Yea, they come back in the voices of the winds
 And multitudinous seas.
 They come back, when the sun his head uprears,
 And all the host of dawn-gods shake their spears :
 'Then a low thunder 'long the horizon goes.
 In the eternal beauty of the rose
 Not less they come back. But most in the soul's voice,
 Which is the conscience.

Believe or not believe :
 Whatever thing is great 'twixt earth and heaven

Hath its everlasting home and dwelling-place
In Beings invisible, but not unknown.
From them descends it down to 'light on men
Whose lives are pure from ill. Than this, no creed
Promises more, nor less need any own.

MELISSA [*speaking low*].

Then have I wronged you.

RIGEL.

As you are always wronging.

MELISSA [*in the same voice*].

I meant not to.

RIGEL.

As once you said, my love
Was, like this creed, fantastic : a child's longing
For a toy. A child yourself, when you said that,
And o'erwise for your years.

MELISSA.

And now am I a woman, apt for tears
And the deceits that bring them. Is it not so?

RIGEL.

Deceits ! You doubt me still ?

C

MELISSA [*half to herself*].

God ! How can I know ?

[RIGEL *takes her hands and turns her towards himself.*

RIGEL.

How shall you know ? By looking in mine eyes
 And tell me if therein you see
 Aught else but truth and constancy.
 Listen, and I will sing the song I made—
 You would not let me sing. Do you remember ?

MELISSA [*half to herself*].

Yes, for I was afraid.

RIGEL [*sings*].

Tell me to what thine eyes shall likened be ?
 Unto the heavens, through which, for years
 A million million, have the steadfast stars
 Traced their paths continually ;
 As round thy will move all my hopes and fears.

To what shall I compare the eyes of thee ?
 Unto the deepest depths of the deep sea,
 Whereto their way our plummets never find,
 That is moved by no wind ;
 Thus great and terrible is thy constancy.

To what, O what shall I compare thine eyes?
 Unto the quiet amethyst, in whose soul
 So mighty and antique a power there lies,
 Some think it hath control
 Over the seas and the planets in the skies.

MELISSA.

[*Turning away and hiding her eyes.*]

O cease, O cease. You do but wound my heart,
 I have no gift of words, only the gift to love.
 Give me not homage : give me back again
 The peace I had before I saw your face.
 If thou would'st teach me, teach me not to yearn
 In midnight thoughts for thee, nor press
 My desolate pillow with a vain caress ;
 Since thou hast left me.

RIGEL.

[*Taking her in his arms.*]

But I left thee never,
 And now I find again the thing that most I love.

MELISSA.

Woe's me ! Mine eyes thou lov'st, but not my heart.
 Thou worshippest my smile, but not my soul.
 When beauty and I shall part
 Thou wilt not know me then, knowing me not now.

36 RIGEL : AN AUTUMN MYSTERY

And I, alas ! like to a spirit unshriven,
Shall wander ever, far from the gates of heaven,
Seeking in vain some hand to guide me home.

RIGEL.

You are a child still, and foolish. I'll not hear you.
[Kisses her.]

MELISSA.

Yes ; kiss me once ; let me feel once thy lips
On mine, and then I'll go.

RIGEL.

Thou shalt not.

MELISSA.

Yea, I must.
Well, if not now, some day, some day I know.
[Exeunt.]

SCENE II.—*The same Garden.*

Enter REYNAL and another.

REYNAL.

The sun has set. We scarcely noticed how
The long-drawn shadows paler grew and paler ;
Yond' copse seems to upraise his shaggy brow,
To hide the inconstant star, day's and night's jailer.

[*They pass.*]

Enter BEVIS, FLORIO, and GUY.

FLORIO.

The offended day, donning his twilight cloak,
His sword, the sun, deep in his scabbard thrusting,
Stalks to his chamber, followed by a lackey wind.

BEVIS.

And my cigar-ash floats in whorls and clouds,
As ghosts float through a wood.

GUY.

Lo! the young moon,
Like a crooked needle, in that twilight cloak
Is weaving silver threads.

FLORIO.

Ay, most insensibly did the day wane,
And yet she is gone now.

BEVIS.

Let day begone,
Queen Night's the nobler companion.

A VOICE [*sings*].

Spread'st again thy plummy wings
Across the world, O sour Night,
Mother of false shadowings,
Queen of ill, and foe of light!

Children of thee, the Lusts and Crimes
Sailing come, and pass not by.
With thee come the host of Dreams,
Morpheus' fearful progeny . . .

BEVIS [*calls out*].

Silence! Who are you, that dare blaspheme so loud?

[*The song ceases.*]

FLORIO.

The song has ceased. Could it be our cynic Giles?

BEVIS.

Florio, how you shivered!

Guy.

The moon stoops through a cloud,
The little moon ! Alas ! she scarcely smiles
Ere she must die too, following the sun !

BEVIS.

Wish ! Turn your money ! A new month's begun.

END OF ACT II.

ACT THIRD

TIME.—*A fortnight later than the last Act.*

SCENE I.—*Another portion of the grounds seen in the last Act. A lawn beneath an avenue of limes. Night, between nine and ten. RIGEL and MELISSA alone.*

RIGEL.

Bold in the sky now rides our Lady Moon,
When last we were here so threadlike and so pale.

MELISSA.

O, look not thus upon the Queen of Heaven.
You told me once, you worshipped Leto's maid,
Not any woman of earth.

RIGEL.

She loves our loves,
That are as pure as she and crystal bright.

MELISSA.

But she will wane, and leave the haunted night
Therefore more sinister ; and the demon brood

That hides now in deep clefts and hollowed trees,
 Will once again troop forth ; and foul Canidia,
 Burning with evil love and vengeance, pray
 The moon's swart sister, holy men not see,
 Whose blackness warms the fatal hellebore,
 Dread nightshade and the madding mandrake rears . . .

RIGEL.

Thou, thou art haunted, prophesying ill.

MELISSA.

[Looking at the Moon.]

Sweet queen, forgive me, that too much I love
 Not to fear much. Is not the heart hath bled
 Tenderer for others? Then holy maid, look down,
 And smile upon our loves, though on thine own
 No goddess smiled. Thou wottest I have shed
 A thousand tears o'er thy forsakenness.

RIGEL.

She hears, she hears ! Away with thy distress !
 What place for grieving find'st thou in this time
 So sweet? To me the air is soft as spring ;
 And fancy dowers with scent this rugged lime,
 Whose ghostly arms athwart the cropped lawn swing.
 Within there, folk are huddled by a fire
 The timid folk that fear the witching even.
 For though 'tis dark, and though the moon rides higher
 Than any summer night, 'tis early yet.

MELISSA.

[*To the Moon.*]

At least, O goddess, let me not forget
That thou hast shown what like it is in heaven.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—*A large hall, with a fireplace at either end, but the nearest fire not itself visible. Round this hearth is grouped a company of men. The hall is hung with wreaths, &c., and prepared for dancing; there is a stand for the orchestra half-way down it; and on either side of that stand a door. The nearest leads into the house, and through it the maskers come presently; but the other leads into the open air. The side of the hall represented by the auditorium is supposed to have high windows looking upon the park, the same in which RIGEL and MELISSA are imagined still to be at opening of this scene. The firelight from the unseen fire falls across the stage and on the countenances of the men talking. The other fire is also just alight, but nearly out, and presently it goes out altogether.*

BEVIS, FLORIO, GUY, GILES and others are drinking and smoking by the fire. GILES is seated as if gazing into it, and has his back turned to the others.

GILES.

Those wind-rocked trees and shadowy boughs, that flit
Across a silvern sward, for me have little worth;
All day contented I could sit
And contemplate this hearth.
For shrewdly now the embers glow;
There is some influence in the fire;

Its depths spread out a goodly show
 Of wood and mountain, dome and spire,
 Palaces and plains, with corn a-waving ;
 And farther forth I seem to see
 Small white-winged barques a tempest braving
 On a tide of wizardry.

Up from below some mist hath poured ;
 A vapour spreads and hems me round ;
 About mine ears 'tis as there roared
 A dull and multitudinous sound ;
 Laughter and songs, laments and dirges,
 Into one choir commingled be,
 With, that still nearer beat, the surges
 Of that unearthly sea.

Ah!—Now in magic course low-flying
 Like the seamew o'er the petulant waves,
 That each—their quarrel old denying—
 Fawns for his look, his favour craves ;
 Comes he that wears the twofold, golden,
 The sleep-and-death-dispensing rod,
 Yea ! most are men to thee beholden,
 Thou Hades-haunting god !

FLORIO.

Giles ! not by Hermes' but by Opium's grace
 Your visions come. [*To BEVIS.*] But I will own, this
 place
 Is better suited to the chilly season
 Than yonder lawn, to poetise and sneeze on.

BEVIS.

Yes, firelight and this warming wine
Give theme enough for any Muse of mine.
I'll sing the lights and shadows that play hide
And seek in the ceiling ; and how from side to side
Sway these smoke-wreaths, whereof the sleepy-heads
Among the fairies make their hammock-beds.

A GUEST.

And this cigar-ash, fallen on the stones,
Takes cabalistic shapes, triangles, cones ;
'Tis certain there's some magic brewing.

[LYDIA *and some others who have come into the hall*
approach. Dancing has begun at the back.]

BEVIS.

Here comes the magic, forged for our undoing.

LYDIA.

What are you saying ? I'll swear some blasphemy.

GRACE.

You men stand there and let the night go by.

REYNAL.

In faith 'tis true ; we waste our time in talking,
When through a minuet we might be walking.

[*He joins the dancers with GRACE. Others pass across the stage.*]

A GIRL.

[*To a Youth.*]

You'll not pretend you're speaking seriously.

A WIFE.

[*To her Lover.*]

Hush ! After supper, when he's sure to be
Blind drunk, or nearly, wait me by the row
Of cypresses. But talk no longer now,
He may be watching.

[*They pass.*]

A YOUNG WIFE.

[*Meeting her Husband.*]

Beloved, how late you've come.
I would not dance.

THE HUSBAND.

Nay, you for others shine
Here. You must play and pay. For all roads lead to
Rome,
And all the hours are ours.

THE WIFE.

O thought divine !

THE HUSBAND.

As you are. Only my poor jewelries
You tarnish, wearing them so near your eyes.

[*They pass.*]

A YOUTH.

Sweet Chloe! Take some pity on my need.

CHLOE.

Ah! Here the maskers come! That's fun indeed!

[*The first set of maskers enter. They are dressed up to represent birds and the smaller animals of the wood, and are led by the CUCKOO, who sings.*]

CUCKOO.

Cuckoo, cuckoo!
I love on high
Daily to raise
My mellow cry,
Beloved of husbandry.

Let Philomel
Chant lovers' woe.
No word of such
Sad tales I trow;
No, no; no, no.

Cuckoo, Cuckoo !
 Who would be wise,
 Will follow quick
 After my cries.

[The CUCKOO runs about, followed by the other creatures and by many of the dancers, all singing

Cuckoo, cuckoo !
 Who would be wise,
 Will follow quick
 After my cries.

[Fresh maskers come in to represent autumnal woods, some bearing red leaves of the maple, some hawthorn branches, &c. One sings.]

When Sol and pinched Pruina come to strife,
 All Nature putteth on the badge of war.
 See with red haw-berries are the hedges rife :
 The maple-leaves ensanguined are ;
 Blood-stained the toad-stools show ; and every even
 A conquered city seems to blaze in heaven.

[They have a mimic battle.

[Two others come by, bedecked with leaves and whirling round in a valse. They sing together.]

Hist, hist ! whist, whist ! attend the rustle
 Of autumn leaves borne in a bustle.

'Tis the tornado makes us go
 Round and round a-whirling so ;
 An autumn wind, that doth unite us,
 As erst the famed Hermaphroditus
 To his nymph was joined. Not that the mention
 Of such hath any ill-intention :
 For evil be to who thinks evil,
 And prurient Prudery's of the devil.

SOME GUESTS [*in deprecation*].

O! O!

CHLOE.

Most excellent ! How can they do it ?
 'Tis such a leafy screen you can't see through it.

GUY.

Ay, and who knows what other dress they've on.

A GUEST [*to REYNAL*].

This dance will grow an orgy ere we've done.

[*A car is brought in, on which is a Mænad or figure symbolic of the juice of the grape ; the car is hung with vine-leaves and clusters. FLORIO walks in front, in Greek dress, holding a full wine-cup, and chants.*

FLORIO.

Lead forth the nymph, the amber-haired,
 That beneath Ætna's suns was reared

D

And felt at birth Enceladus' thunder.
 Her kinsfolk are ripe clusters that bend low ;
 Like lauded, shamed courtesans, they ponder
 How they may make men's hot blood flow.
 They pore upon the ground to find
 How thence such madness sprang for human kind.
 The elm is cheated of his worth
 Within their arms entwined.
 She too, that daughter of the creeping plant is,
 Shall breed forgetfulness and mirth,
 And teach you all the secrets of the wild Bacchantes.

Her locks unbound in golden play
 Returneth every hoared ray
 That fed her mother-fruit, the stem her sire,
 Through days long past : but in her heart she treasures
 A deeper radiance, an immortal fire.
 Her voice hath learnt Olympian measures,
 Her feet Pierian grass have trod.
 For had she not in heaven her first abode ?
 Then, who should dare her lips to scorn,
 Must tremble at her nod,
 And share the fate of Priam's wilful daughter,
 Whose ill-got wisdom served no turn
 But spent in vainly warning folk of fire and slaughter.

[Next behind the car cometh a drunkard, who sings.

DRUNKARD.

Up and down, across the town,
 I roll from east to west ;

My drop I take, for Stomach's sake,
 Like Timothy the blest.
 Be't beer or gin, my beak goes in,
 And stays as if 'twere froze ;
 On darkest night my eyes have light
 By following my nose.

{Next follows a company of revellers, who sing.

REVELLERS.

Through our streets the daily crowd
 Moves in sad and sober fashion ;
 Drab in dress, in talk not loud,
 Ne'er betraying mirth or passion.
 Let them pass, the folk sedate,
 Unendowed with love or hate.

But when Night takes her sister's room,
 To cure the daylight's shame,
 She sends for us, and forth we come,
 Cast in a nobler frame.
 We deal in love, and drink and fury,
 Unawed by bailiff, judge or jury.

Thus grey and old, with painful motion,
 Creep mountain streams in summer drouth,
 Till Rain, with her Medæa-potion
 Shall re-enchant them into youth.

Then trees with mighty strength they bear,
 And toss abroad their yellow hair. [*They pass.*]

[*A company dressed as thieves comes in and sings.*]

THIEVES.

God's grace to thieving, the modern rieving !
 We are the heroes of our day.
 Peace to our censurers ! we're the adventurers,
 They are the folk of commoner clay.
 Night, that Day's sister is, veils not her mysteries
 From our initiate eyes and ears.
 All from all take, believe : we, purged of make-believe,
 Wait unafraid for Lachesis' shears.
 Drink then to thieving, the modern rieving,
 And the true heroes fools disgrace.
 Silence, ye cavillers ! We're the unravellers
 Just of those riddles ye dare not face. [*They pass.*]

[*Next comes a company dressed as bargemen, who sing.*]

BARGEMEN.

We drift along,
 We happy bargemen,
 Past field and wood
 That others own.
 No land is ours,
 No tithe, no parish,
 No house build we
 Of brick or stone.

We journey on
 Sans heat or hurry,
 Sans dust and din,
 The long day through :
 And at the end
 Our inn stands ready,
 Our bed is made
 With small ado. [*They pass.*

[*The dancing is resumed. Then comes in BEVIS with others, who have been drinking somewhat, and BEVIS leads this round, in which they join, RIGEL, who has come in by the outer door, with them.*

BEVIS.

Grave in the grave a man must lie, but living rest he never.
 Chaste to be chased a maid must seem, but not to fly for ever.
 No wise too wise ye need to show to sing when I invite ye.
 Then draw around and bear a round to golden Aphrodite.

Let cypress wear who Cyprus shuns, or scorns the Paphian groves.
 Ay, woe to him that will not hymn the Queen of all the Loves.

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A wintry rime beset his rhyme, and teach its feet to
stumble.

Ne'er be it ours to waste good hours with folks that fret
and grumble.

[RIGEL *walks apart.*

[*Through the farther door, which is that through which
RIGEL entered, but not the one through which the rest
of the maskers came, comes now a company of
beggars.*

A MALE GUEST.

But who are these? Are these some maskers too?
Is that indeed a man, that tattered thing?

WOMAN GUEST.

How well they are disguised! No face I know,
Or can distinguish.

THE MAN.

Hist! one begins to sing.

FIRST BEGGAR.

Hark, hark!

THE OTHER BEGGARS [*joining in*].

Hark, hark,

The dogs do bark:

The beggars are coming to town

How strange seem they!

Grey and brown in their gabardines.
 Have they kings, have they queens
 In their beggarly array ?

(Fate hath her will !)
 The dogs are still ;
 The beggars have left the town.
 Why stand ajar
 The street doors thus at the dead of night ?
 A fog hath eaten up every star,
 And, away to the right,
 The moon, like a witch, is tumbling down.

A LADY.

They are too late, they ought to have come in
 After the bargemen.

HER PARTNER.

And the song is dull,
 All that is over : the cotillon will begin.

A GUEST [*to another*].

Come to the buffet: I am not half full.

*[Meantime the beggars have filed out again by the
 same door whereby they entered, all save the
 leader, a one-eyed old man, who seats himself
 at the farther end of the hall, where now the
 fire has gone quite out.]*

*The scene changes so as to show this end of the hall
 near the spectators.*

SCENE III.—*The other end of the same hall ; the fireplace, with ashes only, being now supposed near the audience to the left, and the other fireplace far off to the right. Midway, dancers ; RIGEL watching them from the right.*

RIGEL.

What be those shapes that seem to move among
The dancers, to them invisible? One bears a rod ;
And one is winged and beckons with his hand ;
O sadly beckons. Do not the lights burn low ?
The fire shoots up and falls. . . .
He perceives the beggar.] And who is that
Yond' old man, like a beggar, who sits apart
And, all unheeded of this company,
Looks at the whitening ashes. Is he ghostlike too ?
To my eyes visible only ? I will bespeak him.

THE OLD BEGGAR [*singing low to himself*].

The gods are summoned to their moot.
Thor the thunderer lags behind,
Wading, he, with heavy foot ;
But Odin rideth on the wind.

FLORIO.

[*To GUY.*]

Who is this cloak-enshrouded, one-eyed man ?
Him I have marked some while.

GUY.

And I, since the last dance began.
Who are you ? tell us.

BEGGAR.

A beggar am I; and I pray your leave to sit
At this hall's dark]end, where the shadows change and
fit.
It is enough for me to watch the dancers' feet
In the wondrous maze, that they wind and bind, like a
winding-sheet.

GUY.

O, leave the madman. *[They go off.]*

BEVIS.

[To the BEGGAR.]

Whence do you come ? Who are you ?

BEGGAR.

I came over the heath, and by many a mark and flood.
One only I saw in my rounds: he was brave and in
brave attire.
Side by side we stood for a space, unspeaking; for he
was of wood.
Warm, I ween, were the weeds he gave me, and
warmer the fire.

[BEVIS laughs and goes off.]

RIGEL.

[*To the BEGGAR.*]

Thy face is wise and terrible, one-eyed wanderer.
 Why sitst thou here in the dusk, by a fire grown cold?
 What pleasure hast thou in listening to the wind,
 Though it singeth now here in the gables, now out on the
 wold?

BEGGAR.

I sit forth of the throng and merry show
 Because none else hath bade me in but thou.
 Because no others call me to their mirth;
 And among these thou art of little worth.

RIGEL.

Rude are thy words, thou uninvited guest.

BEGGAR.

Unwise thy deeds to revel with the rest.

RIGEL.

O dreadful wanderer!
 I know thee now! Thou art the Æsir's lord;
 He, who upon the wind hath set his throne,
 And sometimes cometh,
 In likeness of an old and needy guest,
 To try men's thoughts.

BEGGAR.

Woe to thee! cunninger than these.
 Know thou hast stepped between me and my peace!
 Unto this throng I was a beggar only.
 When men deny me, then have rest my powers.
 I wander through the world, master of all the hours,
 And watch man, proud and lonely,
 Darting now here, now there,
 Like caverned fishes that have lost their eyes,
 Or moths, to whom the glare
 Of too much light is darkness, in surmise
 Wrapped up continually, in knowledge never;
 Turning toward truth with less and less endeavour.

RIGEL.

Cruel thou art, to mock because we pine,
 Although a god. Art thou to men unknown,
 On whom, then, lies the fault if 'tis not thine?
 And indolent art thou, to love thine ease
 Rather than the worship of the days foregone.

BEGGAR.

What is, must be, whether we hate or love.
 And whether good or ill my lot, thyself
 In part shalt prove. [He rises]
 For lo! I lay my heavy yoke upon you,
 With so much share of my immortal state,

That love henceforth and happiness shall shun you,
 Thereby as mine your freedom grow more great.
 Only the wandering wind shall be your mate.

But I must take my burden up again
 Your course to follow with a far-off gaze.

[*In an altered voice.*]

And when thou mak'st an ending of thy pain,
 Once more, maybe, thou wilt see my face.

[*For a minute the scene grows dark. The next, RIGEL is discovered standing by a window and watching the dancers.*]

RIGEL.

Dian keeps the sky, and here, below,
 A soul, imprisoned in the cello's wood,
 Strives, strives, like a pale Sibyl, to utter forth
 In clearer notes its cry of Woe!
 The splash it hears of a new Noachian flood
 Rising to engulf our world of little worth.
 From whose great tide, though far, a cold wind calls
 Across our weddings and our funerals.

The pall is bellied up and sideways blown :
 The blossoms of the bridal wreath are strewn.
 'Is it a bride or corpse, that is so pallid shown?

Beneath the doors and these tall window-frames,
 A mocking breath his challenge flings
 To the enchanted fiddle-strings.
 And overhead the webs of gossamer,

The light thrones to the elfin squires and dames,
Around in magic circles wafted are.

A LITTLE BREEZE [*answers*].

Who would mislike the wind ?
The wind that knocks at every door,
And down each chimney doth a message send.
And now it whispers like a child,
And now it creeps athwart a ball-room floor ;
And now it rises, with tremendous roar,
And speeds across the heath, so lone and wild.

It hath no mate, the wind :
For, though it kisses oft a maiden's cheek
And in a lily-cup plays hide and seek,
At once it leaves all dalliance behind ;
And, still urged forward by its mighty heart,
It dips round the world's shadow, and straightway
Among the moaning waves makes desperate play.

Then who would seek or hope to part
From friend or foe of such a measureless sway ?

[*The Breeze, we are to suppose, enters into RIGEL.*]

[*While this passage occurs the dancers file out. The music ceases. RIGEL crosses the hall and opens the outer door to look upon the scene. The branches faintly whisper and then are silent. A grey light of dawn steals into the hall as the other lights flicker and go out.*

RIGEL.

[*Standing by the door.*]

The wind has gone, and all the strings are silent ;
 And grey and passionless is the face of Dawn,
 And stately is her advent. The late-revelling Moon,
 That was so proud anon, suddenly pales,
 And shrinks in heaven ; and for a little space,
 O'er earth's vast plain, through the ocean of the air,
 There is no sound. . . . [A cock crows.

Until with arrows sharp

The waking cocks slay silence. [Other cocks crow.

Why do I shiver

Thus at the thought of a new day begun ?
 This is a cold that comes not from the air,
 But from my heart . . . "No mate but the wandering
 wind."

Who said that ? . . No one. . . What thoughts doth
 Fancy breed ?

Nay, but I sicken with some deathly fear ;

As one whom a crime beckons and commands.

It is as if my hands

Were blood-stained, even now. Yet, what have I done ?

Nothing . . .

That most I fear which most I love,

Melissa. . . .

Mortals may taste one perfect hour.

But straight the limping shadow of Nemesis

Falls on their path . . She saw it first, now I . .

SCENE IV.—*The borders of a wood. A high fir advanced a little before the other trees. MELISSA stands beside it. RIGEL presently comes along a path which leads to this point. It is early morning, four-and-twenty hours after the end of the last scene.*

MELISSA [*alone*].

Hail! bare woods, but umbrageous!
Dryad-haunted trees!
Brooks that whisper still by-us-
Forgotten histories.
Blest are ye! sunbeams, sisters pale
Of the shortened days;
Ye, too, ye clouds, should ye prevail
Along the skyey ways.
Spring's myriad eyes, that are not dead,
In your enchanted swoon
Underground, dream on the maid
That must unmaid-her soon.
Hail ye! ye vestals, winged and armed,
That, in your convent-bowers,
Scorn at Love, and yet, love-charmed,
Flowers wed to flowers.

And thou, O moon, so wan and waste ;
 And ye crystal airs ;
 And all ye mornings, that have passed
 Down Time's golden stairs.
 Thou most, O day unborn ! more splendid
 Than the world hath known,
 When the Sea-Queen, by Loves attended,
 Shall crown me with her crown.

Blessed are ye, O ye blades and knotted boughs !
 Thou pine-tree softened in this amber light,
 To be the allowed witness of our loves.
 Venus will pay you for it. You shall never
 Henceforth feel icy piercings, nor the hand
 Too heavy of south-western storms, that bend
 To breaking. And all about, shall fairy feet
 Charm the unwithered grass where mushrooms grow,
 But never poisoned fungus. . . .

*[Sees RIGEL, who is coming along the path
 through the wood.]*

Ye gods, he is here !
 Walking with strained glance and footsteps slow.
 Do lovers walk thus ?—Is this but a dream ?

*[She makes a step backwards, so that she is no longer visible
 to one coming along the path. RIGEL appears.]*

RIGEL.

Melissa ! Melissa !

MELISSA.

Why does he cry my name
So strangely, yet not look toward her he names?

[*She steps in front of RIGEL.*]

O friend, thou art changed! Like some strange citadel
Thou showest: and like a tower thy head uprears
Too stately for thy years:
And in those eyes 'tis as there burned a fire,
A beacon for far folk, but not for me,
For it is strange to love. . . .
Is it not so?

[*She gazes at him; he turns his eyes down and remains
silent.*]

You will not speak . . .
Why, then, I know 'tis true.
O heavy truth . . . And have you naught to say?

RIGEL.

God knows I love you.

MELISSA.

But you would leave me?
O, I foresaw it, yet would not be warned.
You only sought me out again, to draw
The avowal of my love, and then to leave me.

RIGEL.

I never sought you out. God knows I love you.
But something, not myself, drives me away.
What difference makes it to have ta'en from you
That avowal of your love ?
It is no shame to love ; Love has no reason.
He shines upon the unworthy and the worthy.
The only shame is mine, and half the sorrow,
I know. But where is help ? What must be, must.

MELISSA.

There is no help then ?

RIGEL.

Some day, perchance . . .

MELISSA.

Some day !

Some day ! You know that day will never come,
While you have life and reason. Shall I live
In hopes that "some day," when you are very old
And I too old, I may creep back to be
Your nurse or . . . ? Ah, God, I would wait for that ;
If I were only sure that day would come.

RIGEL.

You break my heart, Melissa ; yet I must go.

MELISSA.

Your heart !
 Well, that is foolish. You are not compelled to love me.
 I only give you reason to despise
 All women more than even now you do.
 We are not logical : and yet I know
 Quite well that love can make no claim on love ;
 Not though 'twere mountains great. Others perhaps
 Have longed for that poor creature you contemn ;
 And she turned from them, as you turn from me.
 So is she paid.

RIGEL.

Why do you speak so cruelly?
 I cannot explain, I cannot understand
 The strong constraint that rests on me, nor say
 Is it a god's curse, or a god's command.
 But 'tis immutable, irrevocable ;
 And that is all I know. The gods are cruel.
 The way I set on is a bitter way.
 Gall is the cup which I must drink ; unfriended,
 I must go, reproached for good, enticed to ill,
 Belittled by the little ; but oftenest
 Shunned only.

MELISSA.

Then God forgive me ! (What you say,
 You think, I know.)
 If you do good or ill in leaving me

I cannot tell. But I will never make
Your steep path steeper.
Must we then kiss and part? 'Tis not too hateful
To touch my lips once more?

RIGEL.

You are cruel still!
I love but only you, and ever shall.
[*He takes her in his arms.*
If I could hold you thus, and kiss and kiss,
[*Kissing her.*
Till doomsday . . .

MELISSA [*wrenching herself free*].

No. Leave me. You shall not hold me thus.

RIGEL.

Kiss me once more.

MELISSA.

No.

RIGEL.

Your hand then. Thus.

MELISSA [*turns her head away*].

Good-bye! Go now. Go, while I turn away.

END OF ACT III.

ACT FOURTH

SCENE I.—*The same as in Act III., Scene 4. One month later. Evening. A mist has cleared off; but light drops fall from the pine-tree, by which MELISSA is standing alone.*

MELISSA.

Alone : I am left alone. And all the years
Of life remaining, though each day ran tears
Frequent as drops fall from this dewy pine,
Will never bring him back : not, though as mine
His pains were mighty, would he yet return.
I saw it in his face ; or destiny,
Or mad ambition, or a god's decree—
Men call it " duty "—'tis that I cannot learn ;
And wish not to. Yea, as he said, my heart
Is too fulfilled of love to spare a part
To Nature or to Conscience, or the Gods ;
Fates are they ? who beat with scorpions, not with rods.

Ah me ! thy love was like the winter sun,
Than which, when shining, nothing is more fair ;
But in a moment it is gone,
And leaves the widowed air
Dowered with ten thousand eyes, that she may weep the
more.

Her dewy drops fall on the stony floor
 Of earth, and turn to ice and cruel rime,
 Earth's barren flowers she hath for mourning ta'en.
 Alas! my grief's warm rain,
 'Tis all transmuted through the chilling time,
 That lies between us now,
 And scarce remember can its softer flow.

But are there in the heavenly choir no powers
 Who have a care for loving maids? Thou too,
 Sad queen, o'er the horizon dim and blue
 Gazing, faint yet, with eastward-pointing horns,
 O, Lady Moon! thou, too, hast felt the scorns
 Of unrequited love. Then, by thy solitary hours,
 Take pity on mine! Help me! I cannot bear
 My body longer in this wretched world,
 Unless thou learn me some new way to live.
 Goddess! I will not think thou can'st not hear.
 Alas! Dimly thou lookest, through the shroud
 For our dead earth the misty Night hath woven.
 Would'st say, perchance, that thou thyself hast bowed
 At last to fate and long time vainly stroven;
 And that no more—ah me!—with fruitless pain
 'Thou seek'st o'er hill and down thy Latmian swain.

Enter AMBROSE, a "Fond Fool."

AMBROSE.

Lady Melissa, why do you hide away
 From folk who all keep holiday?

And why look you so pale ?
 Is it for sorrow that Winter doth prevail ;
 And that the wind, a hard task-master,
 Puffing his cheeks and swearing roundly,
 Having stripped the trees, doth beat them soundly,
 And spurns the dry leaves that they run not faster.

MELISSA.

O, Ambrose, why do you follow me ? I went
 Aside, having a business intent,
 And wanting all my thoughts.

AMBROSE.

Chide not, I will go.

MELISSA.

Nay ; as you are here, stay with me, and show
 If you have forgot to sing, as once you used,
 Pleasantly enough. So shall you be excused.

AMBROSE [*sings*].

How can I sing ? For all the ways
 Are miry at this winter time.
 It is for rhyme
 No season, nor the lute-strings sound ;
 When the fierce Bowman rules the days,
 And Hiem's withering power is spread around. . .

MELISSA.

You give and deny in a breath ! Ambrose, you are
strange.

AMBROSE.

'Tis Florio's song. My voice hath not his range ;
And Rigel wrote it, last winter but one. . .

MELISSA.

No more ! ¶ No more ! Now leave me. O, begone !

END OF ACT IV.

ACT FIFTH

SCENE I.—*Another wood, far from the scene of Acts II.—IV.*
It is the thirty-first of October (All Hallows E'en),
one year after the parting of RIGEL and MELISSA.
Evening. RIGEL alone.

RIGEL.

In Nature is no rest. Though the wind scarcely sighs
And no bough stirs, unceasingly there falls
Either a yellow leaf in tortuous flight,
Silent as snow upon a windless hill,
Or else some acorn drops with sullen sound.
Everywhere the worms are casting spiral coils,
The rabbit mines ; and list ! a regular knocking
Shows the woodpecker at his cruel search.
The doves uneasy change from bough to bough :
High whirls a poisoning raven : squirrels chirp,
And scamper through the pale brown leaves for joy,
To see such store of 'corns and chestnuts spread.

I had forgot what magic time is now !
O god ! this purple mist, it is alive
And sentient. And how strangely show the trees !
Stretching gaunt arms, as they would strive and strive

To apprehend the inarticulate voices
That to all souls speak at this Hallows-tide.

I feel the earth deep-breathing. Nature hovers
Twixt two eternities, ready, at a word,
To change all into spirit.

Ah ! who would of her largesse then inherit ?
And will the very gods who o'er her sway
Survive the closing of that judgment day ?

A SPIRIT-VOICE FROM A MARSH [*mocking*].

A-ha ! what saith the reedy grass
Whose feet are hidden in the dregs
Of ooze ? What saith the segs ?
What saith the flag whose flower long since did pass ?
What saith the water-beetle running,
With a face so strange and cunning,
And the long eels, what say they,
Up-rising half asleep out of their clay ?

RIGEL.

Who spake ?
Do not some elfin creatures by me move
And mock me as they pass ? Of love
What can they know, or sorrow ? Cruel God,
Thou hast driven me forth ; hast brought me here to
sing,

But to inhuman ears and soulless fays ?

Now like a rustling garment comes the wind
Over the trees. Ah ! would it were the cloak
Of dark oblivion. But neither dawn

Nor the mid hour, when all the air is stilled,
 Nor the chill breeze which blows from the sun's grave,
 Nor magic night,
 When the dragon with neck outstretched divides the
 wains,
 Can hide from me the image of thine eyes,
 Nor still for me the echo of thy heart,
 O my beloved !
 As for the last time it beat on mine.

 And must I traverse all that remains of life
 As now, and hear her voice in every wind,
 Or look upon the red and angry heaven
 Forewarning night, or list to the last cry
 Of some soft creature caught by pitiless death,
 And not think how, in a world so full of woe,
 I have of choice abandoned love and good ;
 Spurning the better,
 To my more sure damnation, choosing the worse ?

[He sits down, hiding his head. The night comes on.]

SPIRITS.

Now the Swan, in ghostly flight
 Glideth o'er the towers of Night,
 Deep groans in splendid grief the Bear,
 Denied for ever cave or lair ;
 The Eagle hovers, and alone
 Sits Cassiopæa on her throne.
 The Lion prowls with angry eye :
 Pegasus holds the eastern sky :

Far to the north the Dragon flings
His armèd tail and shadowy wings ;
And, guardians of enchanted seas,
Scarce rise the paly Pleiades.

[*The ATTENDANTS OF NIGHT come on and point to RIGEL.*]

FIRST ATTENDANT OF NIGHT.

That is the man who did defy
Our Lady Night so valiantly.

SECOND ATTENDANT.

He would command, he would not crave.
Yet, all he did command, she gave.

FOURTH ATTENDANT.

When will mortals stay content
In their mortal element ?

FIFTH ATTENDANT.

Learn to love, their seed to cherish,
To grow ripe, and then to perish.

SIXTH ATTENDANT.

Not deeming that some special uses
Have for them the gods and muses.

SEVENTH ATTENDANT.

To whom the sphery planets sing
And winds cease not their quiring.

EIGHTH ATTENDANT.

One more plague must we devise
For his new senses, ears and eyes.

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Make speed. Begin. For but one hour
Longer the gods extend our power.

[The darkness suddenly rolls away, and the light of early morning floods the scene. Moreover, instead of the wood, a placid sea seems to be dully heaving in the distance, and at the horizon over the sea is a bank of rose and amber clouds. The ATTENDANTS OF NIGHT, who were dimly visible before, have now taken the form of angels carrying a bier. In quite different tones they sing.]

ANGELS.

'Tis not Charon's fatal barque,
Lady, that solicits thee ;
Nor Atropos her visage dark
In this last hour that visits thee.
These sullen powers may put forth
No influence on thy sacred earth.

On thee immortal odours fall
 From the wings of Death ;
 And, with waftings musical,
 Quittest the world beneath.
 Ridest, as doth Venus ride,
 Dove-drawn o'er the awakening tide.

There the fisher cradled on
 The misty ocean swell,
 From half-waking vision,
 Shall report thee well :
 And Arion's steeds from play
 Pause, to do thee courtesy.

Till, past Amphitrite's bourn,
 Where, in the temple clouds,
 As in the veil by Moses worn,
 Eternal brightness shrouds,
 The dewy portals shall unroll,
 And passage give to thy sweet soul.

RIGEL [*starting up and gazing round*].

Who sings thus? O Remorse, thou art double fanged
 And double-tongued ! Yet shalt thou not take me in
 With leasing. There is no truth in what I see
 And hear. Thou art in bond with baleful Night.
Thou, vengeful Queen ! thou art mine enemy.
 Thy plummy wings that once so softly beat
 How have they summoned forth on every side

Such troops of terrors? Legion cares advance
 Against my rest, and throned the heavy gates
 Of sleep, through which Oblivion stays his tread.

*[The vision has departed. He gazes into the darkness. It
 is as if the darkness hath a human form.]*

The vision all hath vanished : and in its place
 I see thy mighty form, Mother of Death !
 And in thy hand a scroll. With cowed head
 Thou show'st as one commanding. But this power
 Is mine : I will not read and learn despair.
 Even as I speak thou palest : and in my mind
 What was so dark grows clearer. Now I know
 That by thy hest the fatal wind-god came
 To cast his spell upon me, yea his curse ;
 But his gift too.
 What once I longed for, shall it fear me granted ?
 Not thou alone hast semblance. Nothing now,
 Be it wood, or evening mist, or the long echo
 That hallowed rocks return, but hath a mien
 Friendly or adverse ; almost their hands I touch
 And voices hear, these insubstantial things.
 If they o'er me, I over them hold sway.
 O'er thee and o'er thy children, Death and Sleep.

[He speaks an incantation.]

One or both, ere I have done,
 Shall hark my incantation.
 Thee command I first, O Sleep

God of the slumbrous Poppy, sweep
 Thy spicy robes across my path.
 Whate'er a drowsy potency hath
 Bring in thy train : wind in the eaves,
 Or rustling of autumn leaves ;
 The night bird's plumes, the cushat's call ;
 A far, half-smothered waterfall ;
 A brook to the full moon that sings ;
 The pine grove's awful whisperings ;
 The scent of hay to night airs given ;
 Stars that fall silently through heaven ;
 The beetle's hum ; the church-bell's toll ;
 The sigh of a new scapèd soul.
 Such things dost in thine armoury keep ;
 Such things lend to my need, O Sleep.

*[A dark hand seems to extend over RIGEL, who falls asleep.
 The morning dawns, and the following Pageant or
 Masque is enacted before RIGEL as he wakes.]*

THE PAGEANT.

[ECHO *first comes forth to open the pageant.*]

ECHO.

Echo, step-son of Solitude, am I (put from your mind
That feigned tale that as a nymph I pined
For a flower) ; the winds' jailer, Æolus
My twin-born was, whose mother fostered us,
One to the Earth, one to the boundless Sea.
Akin I am to clear-eyed Memory
And leaden-hued Remorse, of leaden tread.
Wherefore for men I hold both good and ill ;
But peace for this one, thereto summonèd
By higher powers of Heaven (or deeming he
Hath had enough of fears and misery,
Or moved by another's prayers) one day to fill
With the best fancies that the nymphs and sprites
Embody through long summer days and nights.

WOOD SPIRITS.

Brother urchins, goblins, fays,
Fauns and dryades,
Leave for him your woodland ways
To use your mysteries.

F

Whate'er of love, whate'er of good,
He have left behind,
To us, the creatures of the wood,
Was he ever kind.
For the strife that he hath striven
Is there not a bourn?
For the joy which he hath given
What shall we return?
Some shall speak of common days,
And the household spirits;
Some of ghostly-haunted ways
That old Night inherits.
Some Chioné's dirge shall chant,
Some Simætha's prayer;
But in such notes as may not daunt
The daughters of the air.
For sorrow nought nor fear shall be
On this enchanted ground;
In so great a fantasy
We will wrap him round.

OTHER NYMPHS.

First we will of morning sing
Who brings up her purple droves
For the telling of the sun,
While Night, the Palmer, passes on;
The Earth, his portal unlatching,
Towards his new labour slowly moves
Over the threshold stumbles he,

Breathing the chill air drowsily.

But never can our song have called up
 These most uncouthly shapes that toward us troop.
 For what have ranges, fiddles, chairs or clocks
 To do among these misty trees and rocks?
 Who hath conjured them here, and why?

THE CHAIR.

For each
 Hath now for him his proper speech.
 Erst were we chattels, and before
 Dumb as nails upon a door ;
 The nails themselves are dumb no more.

THE CLOCK.

The monotonous tick, tick,
 And then the burr, the hum :
 I called the dark-winged Night
 To come, come, come.

The minute-hand that marches
 Unbent, but slow, slow :
 I called the sad-eyed Night
 To go, go, go.

THE GRATE.

O'er glowing coals the pot that boils,
 The talking flames, the man that toils,
 They are companions three ;

But the fire treads the road of death
 First of that company.

THE FIDDLE.

I could, the fiddle, speak for all,
 Though I am but a chattel too,
 Hanging most while upon a wall,
 Buried in dust and flue.

[*In an altered tone.*]

And yet no voice, no voice of Nature's breathing
 That hath not left an echo in my strings ·
 The whisper that the free air flings
 'Mong tender leaves unsheathing,
 Through grass or sprouting corn, whose blades
 Tremble from green to white ;
 The long sound of a tide, when it invades
 Some still lagoon by night :
 Ringing anvil, crackling fire,
 With the thud of scampering feet,
 Voices echoing down a street ;
 All these are of my choir.

Not else those caverns, just the green waves under,
 That list no lesser voice than the sea's thunder :
 Those clouds, that spread their eagle wings
 Above our earth, and earliest hear
 The bolts of Jove, giving them softenings,
 Lest men too greatly fear.
 His essence each to me hath 'parted,

And, when the thought of Earth's eternal roll
 Lies most heavy on the soul,
 It creeps into my wood and, tender-hearted,
 That essence breathes and dies
 In soul-enslaving harmonies. *[They pass away.]*

A NYMPH.

All are gone : speak ye again,
 Nymphs that keep Aurora's train,
 Nature's servants, unentangled
 In the net that men have woven.
 Far from us divines have wrangled,
 Law hath pressed his footsteps cloven.
 Say thou, Aglaia, hast thou been
 By hill or stream, or glade or green ?

AGLAIA.

Where I did hear Syrinx in accents low
 Teaching a stream melodiously to flow :
 Hard by, two young fauns lay them still,
 In pity at the groaning of a mill ;
 And a huge, concave cliff, that would adore them,
 Had spread his rugged shadow o'er them.
 So when, with churning drops, some thunder-rain
 Essayed to fright them, 'twas in vain.
 Above was a goats' feeding-place,
 Where an old tup, with cynic-amorous face
 And sharpened horns, kept greedy watch,
 Baring at whiles his yellow teeth to snatch
 Fennel and ragwort from between the boulders.

A mountain on his sloping shoulders
 Wore a blue mantle, shapely, still, and dire,
 With folds close-guarding their unearthly fire.

[*They dance.*]

THE NYMPH.

Fuller draws the morning on :
 Play, and we will rest at noon.
 Sol himself comes to our dance
 In a summer radiance.
 Lo ! among our choir I see
 The far-wandered Panope ;
 Say, cousin, than our forest shades
 Hast fairer seen ?

PANOPE.

Through fields and glades,
 With thy sisters, up and down,
 I have been brought and all things shown.

I deem that holy are your woods,
 And fairy-haunted. Yet, there broods
 A deeper, more mysterious spirit
 Among the groves *our* nymphs inherit
 Boughs that sway—not with the wind,
 Nested of a flying kind,
 Though unfeathered, browsed upon
 By flocks of blue Poseidaón.

Pleasant is the hammer's click
 On the anvil, or the thick
 Gurgling of a cider-press ;
 Sweet is mid-day's heaviness,

Murmuring with innumerable wings ;
 Or the buzz abroad that flings
 The thresher, like a spreading mist ;
 Yea and gracious is the "whist"
 Of the willows, or the whisper
 That a stream hears from the rain,
 While her bubbles say again
 What Pan's amorous rushes lisp her.
 But to *Her* prophetic voice
 What is any earthly noise ?

What are the mountains, though they look adown
 From their vast silences
 On men like insects busy, or a town
 Large as a hive for bees ?
 Wide the unblemished robes they proudly wear ;
 But by our Queen of small account they are.
 And when I think on sad Humanity
 And its ten thousand ills,
 I know the air how fills
 Along all our coasts from *Her* a perpetual sigh ;
 That as a prayer goes up
 To the pure goddess that she serves and we.
 And, like to incense rising from a cup,
 Are those white wreaths that jets toward heaven the Sea.
 [*They dance. Anon, a rumbling sound is heard below.*]

THE NYMPH.

But who are these, whose threatening sound
 Seems to swell from underground ?

Are we dancing o'er the homes
 Of the crabbed, misshapen gnomes ?
 Then, O sisters, must we let them
 To our dance : for should we fret them
 They will conjure from their mines
 Sulphurous airs and choking fumes,
 All the evils earth inhumes
 Of acids and of alkalines.
 Even now they approach. . .
 Come here,
 And welcome, master-metaller !
 First to dance. . . Next what reports
 Bring you from your kingly courts ?

GNOME.

"Kingly ?" Yea, in sooth was I
 Last night in royal company.
 O'er ground, yet under. For I come
 From the gnomes' Elysium.
 There may you list a thousand feet
 Hurrying through lane and street.
 Lamps into the night did glare ;
 Folk slept upon a stinking stair ;
 Passed by a chorus that the dead might rouse,
 And paused, unwitting 'fore a haunted house,
 Whose windows were as idiot's eyes
 (Within 'twas full of memories).
 There were gin-bescented bars ;
 Domes in converse with the stars ;

There a leaden stream did swirl
Round about a drowned girl,
With face unseeing, skyward set.
Nothing mortal looked at it !

[*The NYMPHS turn away. The GNOME continues in
a changed voice.*]

Yet in that air, so fog-enchanted,
And in that leaden flood,
Live mighty powers, gay, undaunted,
Wishing human good.
From the river's solemn march,
The whistle of a train,
The answer of a railway arch
To a grumbling wain ;
From street cries and echoes jesting,
They can fashion if they choose,
Harmonies as pure and lasting
As great masters use.
Bow ye to them, O woodland sprites
These powers are dreadful and are kind,
As those to whom ye pay your rites,
Who enflower the earth or rule the wind.

NYMPHS.

Nought of such dreadful powers know we,
O gnome, thy breath is killing. See
Titan himself 'gins to decline,
And lose his radiance crystalline.

His chariot, as by thee oppressed,
 He turneth toward the gaping west.
 Methinks even now in interspaces
 Here and there among the boughs,
 Some I see of Vesper's house,
 Ready drawn to take their places
 In our masque and pageantry.
 Then, sister maids, join hands with me,
 To trace the wanderings of the Hours,
 What time, by Kronos' fall affrighted,
 O'er Earth's roads they lost their way.
 Then Winter, in her barren flowers,
 They saw to Sol by Cancer plighted,
 And brownly Bacchus joined to May.

[A dance mimicking the different seasons of the year.]

[Evening begins.]

AN EVENING SPIRIT *[sings from the wood].*

The ousel, on her muddy nest a-sitting,
 The bee, whose drony sound,
 Deep in her strawy house is drowned,
 The flittermouse that hath begun his flitting ;
 The echo of a curfew bell
 Across the water, booming like a knell ;
 And to his mate, the purged air through,
 Flapping a solitary grue ;
 All these be signs
 That Day his rule to 's sister Night resigns.

[It grows darker.]

SECOND SPIRIT [*sings from the wood*].

Bright and treacherous is the strand
Of Fairyland ;
Caverns it hath, where the waves make moan
Of oblivion.
Frail human thoughts, fly you swift through the air ;
Alight not there.

[*It grows yet darker.*]

THIRD SPIRIT [*the same*].

A thousand pattering feet,
A whisper and a hum,
Proclaim the troops that Sleep before her sends
O 'tis not meet
To question whence they come,
Who drives them forth his cave, and to what ends.

[*It is Night.*]

FOURTH SPIRIT [*the same*].

Now a dog howls
In some deserted yard.
And men, close housed abed, lie sore afeared,
Lest they should hear the low and tender note
Of *his* compelling flute,
The Psychopomp's, the Gatherer of Souls.

WOOD SPIRIT.

With me! ye servants of the day;
 Leave this ground and haste away.
 The voices that usurp the wood
 Are too solemn for our mood. [*They depart*

ECHO.

The lighter nymphs are gone,
 What new commandment cometh from Jove's throne?
 I have sway over the hosts
 Of nymphs and airy sprites, but not of ghosts.

[*End of Pageant.*]

[*A Chant is heard.*]

The six-days moon is sunk the earth below,
 Cold mists have covered up the stars,
 And the owl's melancholy, long to-who
 Unfathomable darkness hears.

The hungry vixen resting in the wood,
 Knows not whether her mate be far or nigh:
 Her five cubs she would feed them if she could,
 But that her dugs are dry.

The cotter hath barred forth the baleful night;
 Warm sits he, of his muddy shoon unshod;
 And one without, turn he to left or right,
 Yet shall he find no road.

RIGEL.

The airy shapes of cheerful day are gone.
And now I hear
The beings of the night and of the waste,
That to a soft and melancholy tune,
Sing the dark hour and my darker way.

[GHOSTS *come upon the scene and whisper among themselves.*]

And yet they fright me not. . .

I am not alone.

I am accompanied by voices, spirits,
I guess not what, that press upon mine own.
Who are ye? Were ye of that mournful band,
Whom the stern goddess, cause of all our woe,
Drew apart from the healthy ways of earth,
And showing heaven, showed hell?

GHOSTS.

Not she, not she ;
Ungrateful men and envious held us down.

FIRST GHOST.

[*Who now becomes visible as a white mist.*]

When upon earth I had my home
Such a song I sang,

As from sunk Milan to enslaved Rome
 Like a clarion rang.
 And men, in their high thankfulness,
 Left me almost penniless.

Is there one to-day so hardy,
 He will match his lyre
 Against mine? For I was Leopardi.
 Dead is the fire
 Of poetry through all that land. Pretence
 Rules there, as here, and empty eloquence.

SECOND GHOST.

If in my sixty years of life men chose,
 Instead of mine, to list to Gounot's pipe,
 No more I blame them now. The hour being ripe
 Wagner they heard. But I was Berlioz.

RIGEL.

O splendid shades!
 Had I your greatness I might share your pride;
 But I have not a heart so triply bound.

THE GHOSTS.

We ask it not
 That thou should'st bear what we on earth have borne.
 But since thou art nothing yet, blaspheme not
 Her nor the Immortals.

For mighty are the gods ; and little time have we,
 Between Lucina and the Veiled Queen,
 To trace the tangled webs which Clotho spins.

A GHOST.

Whist ! There is in the air
 A scent of springtime. And, though Dian be long
 Sunk to the under world, out of the East
 A moonlike radiance comes. Whether for thee,
 Mortal, this rising wonder I not know,
 By man before unwitnessed : not less the effect
 To end thy doubts and life. . .

*[The radiance spreads till the whole scene is bathed as if
 in moonlight, to the blotting out of all the persons
 present, but no form is visible.]*

VOICES [*sing*].

Silvern the night
 That veils thy great Presence, thou Guardian of Light.
 And in the vast Silence thy voice is obscured,
 Like a Delphian word.

Though immense and apart
 Thou dwellest for ever, even thou and thy heart,
 Yet we touch thee, we feel thee ; for all thou hast no
 Corporeal show.

Are thy feet still unshod
 By the sandals of pity, Dread Daughter of God ?
 Speak, thou Being divine ; speak, thou Presence august ;
 For obey thee we must.

A VOICE [*speaks out of the light*].

What do ye seek of me ? I covet no man's prayer.
 Ye trouble me in vain.
 Have ye not said it that, through ages past, ye were
 Appointed of my train ?

How should one man's momentary ills touch my im-
 mortal mind,
 Who have seen nations come and go ?
 Have ye, perchance, forgèd new bounds the wings of
 change to bind,
 Or stay the Earth's procession slow ?

With Chaldæan sages, in brick many-storey'd towers,
 I have watched, night by night, the planetary roads
 Interlacing, casting weal and woe on men's birth-hours,
 And constellations that wove strands of fate in their
 abodes.

With hymn-y-chanting Aryas I have journeyed o'er the
 plain
 Where Indra thunders from the quick-darkening sky ;
 Where Agni keeps the camp at night and Vishnu reigns.
 These things have been, these things I have seen
 pass by.

And O, I have seen the moon go down on Tamerlane's
 field,
 A vapour, born of carnage, made her white round red.
 One star there shone, poised in the middle heaven, to
 yield
 The balm of Aphrodite to the uncounted dead.

Is it nothing to have seen a Scipio coming home,
 The crimson tunic held above the lictors' rods?
 Athens' violet crown I knew, and the walls of Rome;
 And Arab shepherds singing nightly to forgotten gods.

If ye deem that either worship or forgetfulness of
 mortals
 Might enhance my state or dim my praise,
 Look that the sun shall linger in the stony portals
 Of dawn, till men once more their morning hymns
 upraise.

[*The light fades. The creatures of the wood have all
 vanished; only the sound of a clock ticking is heard.
 RIGEL lies dead upon the ground. Anon comes by
 the figure of the ONE-EYED BEGGAR, who stoops over
 RIGEL.*]

BEGGAR.

This is no place for thee,
 O child far-wandered from the Western sea.
 Haste, haste thee back
 From the o'ercumbered earth to the whale's track,

G

The swan's unfretted road,
Where have so many bards their last and lost abode.
And though, O Lone One, here must end thy story,
Thou shalt not want for glory.
There shall some caves and sacred grotts be found,
Shadowed and still, by the green waves attended ;
Where mermen and sea-maidens gathered round,
Shall to that harp where harsh with sweet is blended,
Give no unkindly ear ; nor thou again,
Unto their humorous conks to list disdain.

CURTAIN.

[*After the fall of the Curtain, FLORIO comes before it and
sings this song.*]

AD MUSAM.

*Hast thou our prayers forgot
And is all our hope in vain ?
Thou wilt never turn towards us thy face again !
Seeking some happier folk,
Old vows remembered not,
Speed'st on younger necks to bind thy flowery yoke.*

*Other mists shall rise
About thy gracious tread ;
Level beams, but not of ours, shall crown thy head.
For us the naked day
And all its cruelties ;
Never more the shine and cloud and rainbow-play.*

*And the lovely resonance
Of thy voice, that from the towers
Of heaven seemed to fall like golden showers,
Shall find us deaf ; thy lute
To weeping nor to dance
Provoke our steps or hearts to song grown mute.*

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