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SONNETS
AND
SONGS

HELEN HAY WHITNEY





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S O N N E T S
AND SONGS



SONNETS

AND SONGS

BY
HELEN HAY WHITNEY



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TO
P. W.

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SONNETS

I

Ave atque Vale

As a blown leaf across the face of Time
Your name falls empty upon my heart.
In this new symmetry you have no part,
No lot in my fair life. The stars still chime
Autumn and Spring in ceaseless pantomime.
I play with Beauty, which is kin to Art,
Forgetting Nature. Nor do pulses start
To hear your soul remembered in a rhyme.

You may not vex me any more. The stark
Terror of life has passed, and all the stress.
Winds had their will of me, and now caress,
Blown from bland groves I know. Time
dreams, and I,
As on a mirror, see the days go by
In nonchalant procession to the dark.

II

“Chaque baiser vaut un roman.”

I, living love and laughter, have forgot
The way the heart has uttered melody.
As sobbing, plaintive cadence of the sea
A poet's soul should rest, remembering not
The inland paths of green, the flowers, the spot
Where fairies ring. In hermit ecstasy
Music is born, and gay or wofully
Lovers of Poesy share her lonely lot.

For you and me, Beloved, crowned with Spring,
Catching Love's flowers from off the lap of Time,
What are the songs my voice has scorned to sing?
Ghostly they hover round my heart-wise lips;
Into a kiss I fold my rose of Rhyme,
Laid like a martyr on your finger-tips.

III

As a Pale Child

As a pale child, hemmed in by windy rain,
Patiently turns to touch his well-known toys,
Playing as children play who make no noise,
Yet happy in a way; then sighs again,
To watch the world across the storm-dim pane,
And sees with wistful eyes glad girls and boys
Who romp beneath the rain's unlicensed joys,
And feels wild longings sweep his gentle brain.

So I, contented with my flowers for stars,
Stroll in my fair, walled garden happily,
Knowing no gladder game till, shrill and sweet,
I hear life's cry ring down the silent street,
And press my face against the sunlit bars
To watch the joyous spirits who are free.

IV

Flower of the Clove

Ah, Love, have pity!—I am but a child;
I ask but light and laughter, and the tears
Darken the sunlight of my fairest years.
By love made desolate, by love beguiled,
I waste the Spring. Love's harvest wains are piled
With poppies and gold grain—I glean but fears
Of empty hands, grim hunger, and the jeers
Of happy wives whose loves are reconciled.

But mine! Ah, mine is like a tattered leaf
Upon a turbid stream. I have no pride,
No life, but love, which is a bitter grief.
As a lost star I wander down your sky.
Give me your heart. Open it wide—so wide!
I must have love and laughter, or I die.

Too Late

Upon your stone the wine of my desire

Is spilled. Your poppy lips have grown too pale

From fasting. Your white hands will not avail

The cold eyes of your heart to light the fire.

I did not think my prayers could ever tire.

Now, like doomed ships, they flutter without sail,

Lost in a calm which held no rock, no gale—

Now, when your chilly smile bids me aspire !

So, without history, my soul is slain—

Woman of barren love ; the wine was red—

Beautiful for your spending. Not again

Will the bud blossom where the frost has sped.

Timid, you dared not hark when angels sang.

All, all is lost, without one saving pang.

VI

The Supreme Sacrifice

Better than life, better than sea and morn,
And all the sun-stained fragments of the day—
Ah! more than breeze, than purple clouds that
stray

Across dim twilights—I, the tempest-torn,
Fighting the stars for glory, who must scorn
Heart-drops bespread along love's cruel way
Like scattered petals on the breast of May—
Better than life I love you, I forlorn.

Better than death—the sleeping and the peace
When warm within the breast of brooding Earth
My weary heart should give its woes release,
The pitiful dark remembering not my loss,
The calm, wise years restoring joy for dearth—
Better than death, my love, my burning cross.

VII

Malua

Out of the purple treasuries of night

Came the dark wind of evening silver-starred—

Stirred on his cheek. The forest keeping ward
Breathed with a tremulous silence, and the bright,
Bare moon crowned his adoring brow with light.

The exquisite dream of beauty held him hard

In a great love, a forest love, unmarred—

Still unprofaned—by human nature's sight.

Guarding the temple gates of peace he stood,

Statue of bronze with pagan heart of stone.

Sudden, a dazzling glory lit the wood—

Moon in his soul that dimmed the moon above.

Life was revealed, a Spring-sweet maid, alone—

Beauty was woman, and the woman—Love.

VIII

Love's Legacy

As one who looks too long upon the sun
When he must turn to earth from flame-shot
 skies
Sees all else dark through his bereaved eyes,
And yet may watch the rainbow ribbons run
Athwart the gravity of gray and dun,
He holds the darkness dearer for the prize
Wherein his only pledge of radiance lies
When he the vast magnificence must shun.

So we who play with rainbows, having seen
The sun's own face. We may not hold the west,
Which burns against the bosom of the night,
But in the after-glow, with eyes serene,
We still may find, dear heart, the sun's bequest,
An echoed glory of our passionate light.

How we would Live!

How we would live! We'd drink the years like
 wine,
 With all to-morrows hid behind the veil,
 Which is your hair; between two lilies pale—
 Your slender hands—my heart should lie and shine,
 A crimson rose. We'd catch the wind and twine
 The evening stars—a chaplet musical—
 To crown our folly, lure the nightingale
 To sing the bliss your lips should teach to mine.

And if the sage, declaring life is vain,
 Should frown upon the flower of all our days
 And chide the sun that knows no tears of rain,
 He should not tease our heart with cynic eye—
 The soul's vast altar stands beyond his gaze
 When two have lived—then shall they fear to
 die?

In Extremis

Nay, touch me not, nor even with your eyes
Hold mine, for I would speak you, thus afar,
Aloof and chill and lonely as a star.
The hands that urge, the hungry heart that cries,
Have wrapped my love with love's elusive lies;
The lips that burn have laid a ruddy scar
Against the truth that stands without the bar,
And blinded faith with passion's mysteries.

Night holds a single moon, day one desire—
Her golden sun; and life a love supreme,
Wherein one moment poises, crowned with fire,
White with the naked truth. Beyond control,
'Tis here, my Sun, in love's last hour extreme,
I hold aloft my bare, adoring soul.

The Forgiveness

If I might see you dead, Beloved—dead—
 Your false eyes closed forever to the light,
 Your false smile stilled upon my aching sight;
 If I might know that nevermore your head,
 Cruelly fair, could lie upon the bed
 Of my torn heart; if I beheld the night
 Free from your living thought—ah! if I might,
 Then could my desolate soul be comforted.

For this is worst of all the woes you gave—
 My heart may not forgive. The tired years go
 And leave the great love weeping for a grave,
 Scorned and unburied, 'neath the open sky.
 I could not love you less, to see you so.
 Loving you more, I might forgive—and die.

XII

With Music

Dear, did we meet in some dim yesterday?

I half remember how the birds were mute
Among green leaves and tulip-tinted fruit,
And on the grass, beside a stream, we lay
In early twilight; faintly, far away,
Came lovely sounds adrift from silver lute,
With answered echoes of an airy flute,
While Twilight waited tiptoe, fain to stay.

Her violet eyes were sweet with mystery.

You looked in mine, the music rose and fell
Like little, lisp'ing laughter of the sea ;
Our souls were barks, wind-wafted from the
shore—
Gold cup, a rose, a ruby, who can tell?
Soft—music ceases—I recall no more.

XIII

Alpha and Omega

I died to-day, and yet upon my eyes
A glamour of the gorgeous summer green
Still wavers, and my brain has kept a keen,
Sweet bird-song. Glad with light, the summer skies
Are sapphire, and a purple shadow lies
Across the hills—no change is on the scene
Since happy yesterday. Ah! can it mean
The body lives when stricken spirit dies?

The blow has fallen, yet I can recall
The first of days when this dead heart drew
breath—
A wondrous moon-flower waking of a heart.
Strange—then as now the moment seemed to part
Body from soul, so like are birth and death;
So did I gain, and so I lost my all.

XIV

Flowers of Ice

The lights within the ice-floes are our flowers,
Lily and daffodil and violet.

Beneath these monstrous suns that never set
Tremble soft rainbows, young as Earth's first hours,
Ancient as Time. No balm of gentle showers
Make for their growth; for them, gigantic, met
The immemorial ice and sun, to get
Such blossoms—pledge of Beauty's bravest powers.

Violet and pale grass-green, the Spring-time dies
In the soft South. To us, in this grim world,
Daring with frozen heart and tearless eyes
The North's white sanctity, Fate idly throws
These alms—a deathless Spring of ice enfurled,
And over all, far flung, the sunset rose.

XV

Love and Death

I can believe that my Beloved dies,
That all her virtue, all her youth shall fail,
And life, her rosy life, grow cold and pale,
To bloom again in braver Paradise.
I must believe that death shall close her eyes,
And hold her heart beyond a heavy veil,
Where silences surround her spirit frail
And waste the form where all my loving lies.

Ah, God! but no. And is my love so weak?
Her heart may pause, may falter and grow still,
But not her laugh, the color in her cheek—
That may not fade; the catch that lifts her
breath,
Sobbing against my heart. Essay your will—
These are too dear to fill *your* grave, O Death!

XVI

The Message

When one has heard the message of the Rose,
For what faint other calling shall he care ?
Dark broodings turn to find their lonely lair ;
The vain world keeps her posturing and pose.
He, with his crimson secret, which bestows
Heaven on his heart, to Heaven lifts his prayer,
And knows all glory trembling through the air
As on triumphal journeying he goes.

So through green woodlands in the twilight dim,
Led by the faint, pale argent of a star,
What though to others it is weary night,
Nature holds out her wide, sweet heart to him ;
And, leaning o'er the world's mysterious bar,
His soul is great with everlasting light.

XVII

Tempest and Calm

First came the tempest, and the world was torn
Upon its mighty passion—all the deep
Trembled before it. From the haggard steep
To the sweet valley with its brooding corn,
Its foaming lips in expletives of scorn
Lashed into life the world's eternal sleep;
Then, caught with madness, in gigantic leap
Expired upon the heights where it was born.

And then a hush—the dripping, tender rain
Falls in warm tears. The thunder could not wake
The grief that silence in her soul has furled.
Soft sighs the wind, the sea is gray with pain—
The fulness of a heart too tense to break—
And deep, unuttered sadness in the world.

XVIII

After Rain

The country road at lonely close of day
Rests for a while from the long stress of rain;
Dripping and bowed, the green walls of the lane
Reflect no glistening light, no colors gay
Has dying Summer left. The sky is gray,
As though the weeping had not eased the pain.
The Autumn is not yet, and all in vain
Seems Summer's life—a blossom cast away.

The air is hushed, save in the emerald shade
The rain still drips and stirs each fretting leaf
To soft insistence of its little grief.
The hopeless calm all thought of life denies—
But hark! out through the silence, unafraid,
A robin ripples to the chilly skies.

XIX

Not through this Door

Not through this door of elemental calm,
Patient, wet woodland, resting after rain,
Brooding brown fields that wait the sleeping
grain—

Not through this door may the wrecked spirit's
balm—

Come in and take possession. There's a psalm
Nature has crooned to weariness and pain,
Easing the tumult of the world-worn brain,
Sweet, wholesome mother of the open palm.

But the disastrous heart cries out for men,
Strife where the fight is reddest. Verily
Peace comes with fighting with the strength of ten,
Here where the world is young, with naught to
see.

But day blow out across the long, low sky—
Peace means an emptiness, which rests to die.

Pot-Pourri

All my dead roses! Now I lay them here,
Shrined in a beryl cup. The mysteries
Of their sweet hauntings and their witcheries
Are not more subtle than this jewel clear,
Are not more cold and dead. The winter's spear
Has fallen on their heart, a heart so wise
With lore of love. Dead roses, Beauty lies
Hid in a perfume still supremely dear.

Roses of love, time killed you one by one,
Laughed at my pains as sad I gathered up
All the fair petals banished from the sun.
Witness my triumph—how the dead loves bless
Life—from my heart, which is their beryl cup,
Crowning the winter of my loneliness.

Eadem Semper

How shall I hold you? By a scimitar
 Of flashing wit suspended o'er your head,
 Oh, my Beloved? Or with lips rose-red
 Lure you to Lethe? Shall I stand afar,
 Pale and remote and distant as a star,
 Challenging love? Or by a scarlet thread
 Jealousy's wiles, beguile by scorn and dread?
 Wounding the heart I love with hateful scar.

Nay, I can take no action, play no play;
 All my wit falters when I hear you speak,
 All my wise guile with which your wooing
 strove

Vanishes as the sun of yesterday.

I can but lay my cheek against your cheek—
 Love me or leave me, I can only love.

XXII

To a Woman

Take all of me, pour out my life as wine,
To dye your soul's sweet shallows. Violent sin
Blazed me a path, and I have walked therein,
Strong, unashamed. Your timorous hands need
mine,

As the white stars their sky, your lips' pale line
Shall blush to roses where my lips have been.

I ask no more. I do not hope to win—
Only to add myself to your design.

Take all of me. I know your little lies,
Your light dishonor, gentle treacheries.

I know, I lie in torment at your feet,
Shadow to all your sun. Take me and go,
Use my adoring to your honor, sweet,
Strength for your weakness—it is better so.

XXIII

Aspiration

I

The pale and misty particles of Time
Hover about us; scarce our eyes can see
Youth's far-off dream of what we were to be.
Life's truth, which once we would redeem with
rhyme,

Has proved instead a world-worn pantomime.
The running river of expediency
Has drowned the hopes that Fortune held in fee—
Why fall upon the track so many climb?

Why strive to speak what all the earth has heard?
Why labor at a work the ages plan?—
Life has been lived so oft—an outworn thing!
Then hark! the time-sweet carol of a bird,
New as a flower; and see—ah, shame to man!
The endless aspiration of the Spring.

XXIV

Aspiration

II

The full throat of the world is charged with song,
Morning and twilight melt with ecstasy
In the high heat of noon. Simply to be,
Palpitant where the green spring forces throng,
Eager for life, life unashamed and strong—
This is desire fulfilled. Exalted, free,
The spirit gains her ether, scornfully
Denies existence that is dark or wrong.

This is enough, to see the song begun
Which shall be finished in some field afar.
Laugh that the night may still contain a star,
Nor idly moan your impotence of grace.
Life is a song, lift up your care-free face
Gladly and gratefully toward the sun.

The Gypsy Blood

He gives me happiness, as flowers depend
 On loyal sun and shower. I look to love
 To give me life. Why is it not enough?
 Divine contentment, stretching without end
 O'er happy meadows. He's my love, my friend,
 And peace is in the word. You—heart's de-
 spair—

Sweep like a tempest through my sunsweet air,
 Wail like a lost soul through my blossomed grove.

Tempest and calm, with him my heart might rest,
 Lulled by eternal spring. The dream is blest,
 Yet the wild grapes you crush make life divine.
 Out in the pathless dark, all yours, I go,
 Brave with the purple promise of the wine.
 You, you I love, because you bring me woe.

XXVI

Not Dead but Sleeping

And if I came, ah, if I came again,
And laid my hand on your forgetful heart,
Where once it lay so warm, could the pulse start,
Remembering Spring? Now, at the sound of rain,
I do but turn a little in disdain
To see the flowers renew their lovely part,
Blooming afresh. For memory holds no smart,
Love aches no more to know how it was slain.

Yet if I came to you who heed no more
My name upon the wind? Love's ghost, lean
near,
I have a word that only you may hear.
If you should come to me with dear desire,
My soul's dry staff should tremble to its core
And flame against your touch in buds of fire.

XXVII

The Last Gift

What shall I give to her who will not care
If I give soul or roses, will not know
How that, for sweets she'll spend, light smiles
she'll sow,

I will reap bitter tears? If she could wear
Those tears as stars to sparkle in her hair!
What shall I give? I have not fall'n so low
I may not lay one gift before I go
Upon the altar of my heart's despair.

She will not know; yet, in my love a king,
I must be worthy of my crown and throne,
And so can sacrifice no little thing.
My life, my soul are worthless since her scorn.
Slay we then love on love's red altar-stone—
Beggared of all, I face the world forlorn.

XXVIII

Amor Mysticus

Not you, nor all the gauds that Fate bestows,
Can make me swerve so little from my dream.
Across my veil of mystery you seem
Perhaps a little dearer than the rose,
Perhaps more fair than the long light that flows
Between the lids of twilight. But the gleam
Of iris on the breast of wisdom's stream
Is of a radiance that no rival knows.

My heart is not my heart, or it might chance
To sorrow for the sorrow in your tears ;
My soul is locked against all circumstance
Of life or love or death or heaven or hell ;
I have no place for laughter in my years,
No room where little, little love might dwell.

XXIX

The Pattern of the Earth

The pattern of the earth, so wonderful,
Is, more than myrtle, very dear to me.
Across the avenue of limes I see
A little mist by ghosts made magical,
Tossing across the hills, more beautiful
Than the deep eyes of amber women, free
Of shame and of disdain, on some far sea
Swept by trade-winds the sun makes lyrical.

There is no air the mind may not recall,
Blown from the violet-beds of Greece ; and all
The moons who drop their shattered petals here
Live from the days which hid Semiramis.
Breezes upon my lips are subtly dear,
Because they bear the burden of her kiss.

Disguised

The beggar thoughts pass down the lanes of day,
And on the thorns that are the hours I find
Their tatters and their rags. Infirm and blind,
They faded in the void, and all the way
Mouthed senseless jeers at me. I dared not pray
For wisdom from these fools who throng the
mind
And leave no gifts but bitterness behind.
Chin upon hand, I watched, nor bade them stay.

Then wearily and indolently glanced
Where the thorns fluttered with their flags,
and, lo,
Fragments of cloth of silver gleamed and danced
In the late sun, and linen white as snow
Among the beggar thoughts, with lowered eyes,
Princes and kings had wandered in disguise.

SONGS

On the White Road

There's a white, white road lies under the swing-
ing moon,

Stretched from the black of the deep to the
black of the deep,

And midway the graveyard lies, with its leaves
a-croon,

The only sound of the world, like a dream in
sleep.

There's a white, white grave lies under the grave-
yard trees,

Hung on the road as a single pearl on a thread,
And silence waits, beast crouched, on the rim of
the breeze,

That moans where the only man in the world
lies dead.

II

The Wanderer

Have I finished my life, am I done?
Is my heart-blood thin and cold,
That I gnaw the bones of the town?
Am I empty and old?

My flags are the chimneys' grime,
Tossed on a languid breeze.
Have I dreamed of the roaring rhyme,
A storm through the trees?

The snow in the streets is black,
Profaned with the city's sin;
I know of a star-lit track
Where God's hand has been.

Have I finished with snow and sun,
With the wind on the open plain,
That I starve in the barren town—
Is my life in vain?

III

False

The black sky stretches to the pallid sea,
As a false love and a dismantled heart,
Empty of faith and eager to depart.

He takes her yet once more, submissively,
Against his lips, then, laughing, drifts away
Swiftly within the dawning of the day.

Blindly she tosses up her foam-white hands,
Crying for mercy, and the wind—her hair—
Lashes the wide-sailed ships and leaves them
bare.

Blindly she hurls her rage against the sands.
There, in the cold sky where her love had lain
Scornful, aloof, the sun reviews her pain.

IV

A Song of the Oregon Trail

How long the trail! How far the goal!
Last year the moons might come and go
Like dancing shadows on the snow.
My heart was light, my heart was strong;
I cared not though the way be long;
But now—the end is you—my soul!—

I fear the dark, I fear the dread
White frost that hovers round my heart,
The cold, high sun, and, wide apart,
The frozen, pitiless stars above.
So far, so far from my true love,
And, oh! I fear, I fear the dead!

I fear their fingers, grasping and pale.
I did not fear the dead last year—
But now, the kisses of my dear!
The breast of her, so kind and warm,
Ah, heart! I must not come to harm—
How far the goal! How long the trail!

V

The Apple-Tree

The apple-tree is white with snow,
My heart is empty as the day;
The white hours indolently go
Graveward, because my love's away.

Months lag, then spring and love's return—
Yet once again I seem to see,
Flushed with delight, as kisses burn,
White snow upon the apple-tree.

VI

Silver and Rose

Pale as a petulant star,
She held up her face to his love;
Her spirit from his dwelt afar
As the sky from the sea is above.

Yet he gazed till her whiteness was rose,
Dawn bright with the morning above—
As the sea from the sky wakes and glows,
So his image was mirrored in love.

VII

To-Morrow

To-morrow and to morrow—shall there be
Perchance a morrow when I may not see
Your face beside me any more? Ah, no!
My love, my love, I cannot let you go.
Like sun in Egypt, ever kind and fair,
My heart must wake at dawn and know you
there—

No dread of day which holds a weeping rain,
No dread of chilly love and bitter pain,
But ever present, ever wise and true,
To-morrow and to-morrow holding you.

VIII

The Greater Joy

Not that young Joy who looked with laughing eyes,
That jocund sprite with open, idle fingers
Stretched to the dawn, the dawn whose gold
light lingers
Across the far blue hills of Paradise.

Not that young Joy, but one courageous, calm,
Who—passed beyond the quiet morning meadows
Beyond the dawn of life's delicious shadows—
Holds the great sun and moon in either palm.

In her wise heart she takes that little Joy,
Kisses to sleep tired eyes with laughter over,
Pointing to greater joys in heights above her—
This shall be ours whom fate would fain destroy.

IX

The Rose-Colored Camelia-Tree

Stained by the ardent silver of the stars,
 Glitter the leaves, a challenge to the day—
The bright, fierce flame of naked scimitars
 Holds still the argent night, folded away.

Challenging day, yet, lovelier than light,
 Blushing with dawn the flick'ring leaves between,
Burn the rose blossoms, traitors to the night—
 Color of joy upon the tranquil green.

Brave to the amorous sun, who, fearing, grieves,
 At last the tree's whole heart with love is
 crowned—
The rose-red flowers warm against the leaves,
 The rose-red petals sweet against the ground.

Good-Bye Sorrow

Day that began with a tear,
Will you end with a sigh?
Stay! See the blossoming year,
Laugh up to the sky.
Nay, here's a hope for your fear,
Sweet sorrow—good-bye!

XI

In Harbor

My little boat is in a bay,
It swings with gentle motion,
And there I lie and watch all day
The far-off, noisy ocean.

The ships go up, the ships go down,
And never see me spying.
They are the pride and fear of town—
Sails wide and colors flying.

They are so strong, they are so tall,
They fear no storm, no sorrow;
With brave eyes to the sun, they all
Set sail for some to-morrow.

Sometimes I long to range and roam,
My harbor life bewailing,
But little boats must bide at home,
To gayly speed the sailing.

XII

Rosa Mundi

O life that flowered at the very top of the tree,
Redder than all the roses out of the South,
This was the blossom colored and wrought for me,
Sweeter than scarlet bloom of a maiden's mouth.

Fain would I climb, and fain would I reach the
flower.

Ah, but the tree was tall as the flower was fair!
Weary I grew and slept through the noonday
hour;

Winds caught my fate and strewed it over the
air.

XIII

The Ribbon

Ah, dearest, dearest, not alone
I face the day's white monotone.
The fair, bright ribbon of the hours—
A mountain brook bestead through flowers—
Runs, a dear line, from you to you.
There is no smallest deed I do
Through which the ribbon does not run,
A silver string to pearls of sun.
So glad I watch the moments fly
Across the high-hung summer sky,
Till in a radiant flame they burn,
To mark the hour of your return.

XIV

The Aster

The little vagrant gypsy flower
Has blossomed forth again—
Your face against the autumn sky,
Your face against the rain.

The fevered youth of summer days
Has passed away in tears.
The aged winter totters down
The pathway of the years.

Yet, nodding, luring, laughing o'er
The tired world's pain and scars,
Joyous I find between my hands
Your face—in aster stars.

XV

Heart and Hand

Singing, he smote his heart—
The woman smiled,
And Love leaped, flaming,
Into being—wild.

Singing, he smote his hands—
The woman sighed,
And Love grew weary,
Turned his face, and died.

XVI

The Golden Fruit

I lacked not Love, I lacked not lovely Love,
But, ah, the apples of Hesperides!
The golden apples and the emerald trees,
The flower-sweet maidens, dancing in the breeze—
Holds Love a blossom with such fruits as these?

I gave up Love, I gave up lovely Love,
And sought the island of enchanted skies,
With little rainbow rifts of seraphs' eyes,
Round which the flaming sword forever plies
Against the darkened world of rue and sighs.

Alas for Love! alas for lovely Love!
In dreams I heard the beating of his wing;
His soft voice, beautiful as sea in spring,
Mourned through the empty songs the seraphs
sing;
Life seemed in sleep more dear than everything.

Take me back, Love; take me back, lovely Love.
Dark winds may drive me o'er thy tyrannous seas—
Life is a world that breaks the thing it frees.
I would be bound in all thy masteries—
Yet, ah, the apples of Hesperides!

XVII

To a Moth

Spirit of evil, heavily flying, turning,
Dropping to earth,
Caught to the light, with brown wings torn and
burning,
Whence was your birth?

Was there a cause that, ceaselessly turning, flying,
Drew you from night?
All that we know is this—the aimless dying,
Killed by the light.

Evil the star that led you, spirit of evil,
Out of your dark,
Breeding desire that conquers us, man and devil—
Passion's red spark.

XVIII

Winter Song

Oh, it's winter, winter, when you're here,
And summer when you're gone.
What need of birds when hearts sing clear,
From dusk of day to dawn?

The noble wind, the silver snow,
High stars, and, best of all,
The red-rose hearth—a golden glow
When twilight curtains fall.

Who'd cry the heat of summer skies,
The bare, despairing sun,
The languid flowers, with closing eyes,
The earth's fair wooing done?

The possibilities of spring,
The reticence of bliss,
Love with the winter's argent wing,
We'll scorn the sun for this.

XIX

Youth

Youth and its pensive agonies! How soon
The restless heart forgets to crave the moon!
Age is too weary for the butterflies—
Spring's rainbow radiance fluttering through sweet
 skies,

Hope merrily deferred. We see the morn,
We who are old, in shattered fragments. Scorn
For laughter and for singing clouds our breast.
Youth, take your fill of pleasure, for the rest
Of Age is endless. Sing, nor grudge the song—
Youth is so short, and Age, quiet Age, so long!

Persephone

Persephone, Persephone—her sweet face wanders
up to me,

Through this bewildering maze of spring.

At length she daunts the tyrannous year,

Her little laugh usurps the tear,

Her little song she dares to fling

Against the black stars, merrily.

Persephone, Persephone—her hands lean through
the spring to me.

Sweet, could I show you in what wise

Your song has blossomed—how the air

Is mad with gold because your hair,

Tossed golden 'neath your sea-blue eyes,

And earth goes laughing with your glee?

Persephone, Persephone, this hour sends out your
heart to me.

Child of the Dark, with soul sun-bright,

Ah, give me largesse, give me May,
So shall I charm the saddest day,
And life—one amber dawn's delight—
Shall bear your song eternally.

Étoiles d'Enfer

The four wide winds of evening have their stars,
Fashioned in fire, in purity of snow,
Tossed to their height by endless avatars—
These all the righteous know.

What of the stars of Hades? On the gloom
The outcast see them shine like angels' eyes,
And in the living night that is their tomb
They dream of Paradise.

They know the stars of Hades. They are deeds,
Wickedly born, which came to good at last—
Fair blossoms spring from villany of weeds,
Rest—and redeem the past.

XXII

Enough of Singing

Enough of singing; since your heart is tired,
We'll leave the lute, so long, so long desired,
And in the silence speak one quiet word,
Simple as earth, forgetting song and bird.

No more of singing; mating-time has sped,
In the broad fields the poppy-lips are red.
Crush them, Beloved, drink the lethe deep;
Song being dead, what else is left but sleep?

XXIII

Truth

Up from the soul, as a blade of grass from the sod,
Springs the intent of the prayer as a cry to God.
Blossoms may veil it or visions with ways uncouth,
He sees the ultimate grass-blade, the heart of Truth.

XXIV

The Philosopher

The grim immensities are mine,
The sunlight on the brook is theirs;
I drink the lees of bitter wine,
Fate grants a gift to all their prayers.

I stammer, all afire to tell
The thoughts that urge for life like pain;
For them words brim the shallow well
Like easy drops of summer rain.

And which, ah, Heaven, which is best—
The little lute for every mood,
Or, shrinking coldly from life's test,
The heights and depths of solitude?

Prayers

Prayers that were birds winging wide,
Daring the flame of the sun,
How have you faltered and died,
Now the day's done!

Prayers must be brave for the dark,
Strong for the chill of the star,
Fearing no fate to embark
Over the bar.

Prayers of the sun and the moon,
Prayers for the sky and the nest,
All must reach haven so soon—
Which shall reach rest?

XXVI

A South-Sea Lover Scorned

When the red coral of your lip is pale
As the bleached sea-sand, ah, wearily, wearily,
Will you behold your face, your fingers frail,
Gnarled like a wind-blown tree; your star-bright
eyes
Blind as a cloudy midnight without moon.
No more fair necklaces nor scarlet dyes
Can make you cruel to men, for soon, so soon,
Your heart will bear the years—ah, wearily,
wearily.

Then I, your scorn, shall still be man and chief;
Turning to free your hands so carelessly, care-
lessly,
You will be dead to love past all belief.
Still round the slender columns of the palm

The moon shall lie in shivering, silver pools,
Still shall the trades lash through the summer
calm
While twilight with her smile the island cools
And Time forgets your presence, carelessly,
carelessly.

XXVII

In May

Blithe Nature leaned to kiss her favorite child,
Her sunshine hair about her bosom swirled;
Gay Baby Spring held out his hands, he smiled,
And Apple-Blossoms dimpled on the world.

XXVIII

For Your Sake

Bid me for your sake,
Not for self or right—
You alone can wake
Power to gain the fight.

In your name I'd dare
Aught in earth's great bounds ;
Forth my sins should fare,
Leashed like cringing hounds.

When you touch my hand,
Through your holy eyes
I can see the land
Where is Paradise.

Yet I may not go,
Leaving cold and night,
Till your soul of snow
Sees that mine is white.

Let my heart not break
Till I kill my sin ;
Bid me for your sake
Fight the world—and win!

XXIX

Lyric Love

The world deserves its wisdom. You and I,
Serene within the shadow, crowned with hours,
Cinctured with solitude, the bended sky
Folds us in hues of tulip twilight flowers.

Knowledge is chill ; your hair is warm with gold,
A lock lies heavily across your cheek.
I somewhere heard of darkness, pain, and cold—
Keep your own, world. Ah, Love, stir not nor
speak.

XXX

Be Still

Be still, be still, vex not the night with sound,
The moon has laid her finger on the lake,
And in the shadows of the wood profound
There lies a peace we would profane to break.

Upon the lonely avenue of trees,
As pearls upon an airy silver string,
Are caught the threaded echoes of the breeze
That sets the ruffled leaves a-murmuring.

Be still, dear heart, as though 'twere death to
speak.

Love waits you, lily-like, with leaves unfurled,
While on the breast of day night lays her cheek,
The silence speaks the secret of the world.

Butterfly Words

Butterfly words from the sun in my brain,
Flitting and darting and flitting again,
Gleaming of golden and violet and rose,
What is the rainbow you spring from, and where?
Butterflies daintily poise and disclose,
Whence is this secret of color you bear?

Sun that is ruddy and fragrant with flowers,
Garnered and hid from these desolate hours,
Misty with beauty, the silver of spring—
Ah, for the ways that are lost to my feet!
Only the dip of the butterfly wing,
Poised for a moment, revives me the sweet.

XXXII

Music

Music has opened her hands,
Through fingers her jewels are falling,
Fingers so delicate slender,
Pale as the ghost of a flower.

Jewels of crimson, the life
Ebbing from hearts that are broken,
Roses and wine and red sunsets,
Flames of undying desire.

Jewels of azure, the sea
Dreaming of stars, and the morning
Dancing with life, then the silence
Blue of mysterious caves.

Jewels of green, and the grass
Lifts up its hands to the summer,
Hiding insidious serpents,
Fair as the sweets that are sin.

Jewels more bright than the sun
Music lets fall from her fingers.
We who have stood in the shadow—
How may we die for her sake?

XXXIII

The Ghost

You came and you went, and I swept you aside,
not a trace
Does my wisdom endure of your words and your
beautiful face
And the curls of your hair;
Yet your presence, a song, murmurs ever in hope-
less refrain,
And I wake in the night with my empty hands
yearning in vain
For the touch of your hair.

You went, and I triumphed—I crushed out my
heart with a kiss
On the lips that are ashen, forgetting spring's
wonderful bliss
And your tremulous lips;

Yet the kisses were ghostly with jasmine, dear
jasmine of May—

The new has the soul of the old, is aflame with
the way

And the touch of your lips.

You came and you went, and the world wearies on
with its game.

My heart never falters or fears at the sound of
your name

Or the sight of your face;

Yet the ghost of our passion stands white in the
midst of my heart,

With your hands and your hair, and I know it
will never depart

Passion's ghost with your face!

XXXIV

Fight !

Fight, though the bulwarks of your faith may fall,
Life become gray and full of weariness,
Love prove a lie and wisdom bitterness—
Fight, for the strife alone avails for all.

Fight and fight on, exulting in the light,
Standing alert and upright gleefully,
Seizing life's joys and woes courageously,
Man to the end, and master—laugh and fight.

XXXV

In Tonga

The windy rain beats, beats about my door—

Alas for love when love goes wandering !

The dawn mist rises on the forest floor—

Alas for life when love goes wandering !

With wet, green leaves the palm-trees lash the
night,

The pitiless trades drive wild gods in their flight.

And, ah, my lover ! Moons have come and
gone,

The fighting ended, still he lingers on.

Sleepless I hear the demon wind above—

Alas for love when love goes wandering !

And I must wed with one I do not love—

Alas for life when love goes wandering !

XXXVI

This was the Song

We have forgotten. This the rowers knew,
 Straining within the galleys' reeling night.
Life bent to breaking, while their great souls
 grew

Strong in the ancient purposes of Time.

 This was the song whereby they made their
 fight,
Laughed as they swung. Gods! how the cord bit
 through!

This was the song the pagan lovers heard,
 Wakened by flowers in a rose-red dawn.
Through the bright dew they fled, like ocean
 stirred

With morning. Bare and beautiful they ran,
 Holding each other's hand. Through leaves
 they're gone,
Cleaving the silver pool with flash of bird.

Carven in stone, Abydos holds it fast—

The little Eastern dancer with her lute,
Wild Erin's faeries crying for the past.

They keep the deathless secret of the word

Hid behind Nature's lips, who, grave, remote,
Guard this from profanation till the last.

Not unto us who bide the ebb and flow,

The senseless order of the tide of law.

We have forgotten to be free ; we know

Only the iteration of the day.

The priceless moon, white pearl without a flaw,
Drowns in the muddy stream of worldly woe.

We take the petty part and leave the whole.

Lost to our ken the song of Nature's youth—
The great barbaric winds that sweep the soul
And leave it emptied of all else but truth.

XXXVII

To E. D.

She wrought her songs in secret ways,
Yet cared not where they fell ;
Her soul distilled itself like dews
In rue and asphodel.

They fell in countless happy hearts,
Made wise by sun and showers,
Like pollen blown about the earth,
Conceiving royal flowers.

XXXVIII

The Dance

Like little, eager children
The tiptoe tulips stand,
Row upon row of dancing heads
In joyous saraband.

With lithe, long emerald petticoats,
And happy hands tossed up,
The sunshine is the laughter
That brims their golden cup.

XXXIX

Vanquished

Heart, here are roses burning with the South—
("Fairer was her false mouth")—

Close your tired eyes, the twilight gives you rest—
("Cool was her snowy breast").

Take of the sunshine, nor remember rain—
("Love is a cruel pain")—

Hush! you shall sleep forgetting love's alarms—
("Sleep died in her false arms").

XL

Tranquillity

Do you respect the heavy-lidded flowers
That nod so drowsily upon their bed ?
Can you endure the slow-stepped, dreamy hours
That fall, indifferent, to gold and red ?

Have you the key that opens to green arches
Where trees repeat their prayers in monotone ?
Then take my hand down life's mysterious marches,
And let us walk in silence and alone.



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