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THE VILLAGE STREET  
AND OTHER POEMS 

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By FREDERICK FAUST

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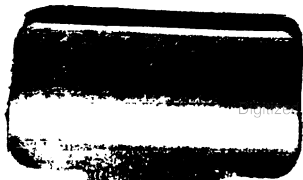


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**THE  
VILLAGE STREET**

**AND**

**OTHER POEMS**

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

**BY**

**FREDERICK FAUST**



**G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON  
The Knickerbocker Press  
1922**

TO THE  
ALBANY

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by  
Frederick Faust

Made in the United States of America

Class of 1900



**To**  
**THOMAS DOWNEY**

**480023**





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**The Village Street  
and  
Other Poems**



### THE VILLAGE STREET

**W**AIT for the time between the day and night  
When up and down the street  
The pavements have grown soft with yellow light,  
And garden airs are sweet.

Wait for a wind that moves so lazily  
It hardly lifts the scent  
Of honeysuckle or acacia tree  
With golden blossoms bent.

Wait till the red geraniums on the wall  
Are dim beneath the blue  
Of the steep shadow, and the elm trees tall  
Take on a dusky hue.

Then out of sacred silence, early or late,  
Be sure a song will flower,  
For there is music somewhere, if we wait.  
Yes, in the quiet hour.

TO VIVID  
ANNOUINC

### THE VILLAGE STREET

The human magic of some voice at last  
Will come to us, half-heard,  
Men speaking, woman's laughter blowing past,  
Or child's call, like a bird.

Then close your eyes; your spirit will have wings  
To blow in dreams away,  
The dearest and the saddest of all things—  
The dreams we have by day.

## SONNET

**T**HE ages now pass by her unaware  
And decades are like seconds in her sleep,  
With bridegroom death leaning to watch her there,  
Pale for the wedding, and the dream how deep!

She was so young, so thrilling young and fair,  
How strange it is that for her sake we weep!  
Lo, in her sleeve the silken ripples creep,  
And the wind trembles in her shining hair.

Yet little is our sorrow now, and pain.  
New grief is weak as fresh wine from the press.  
A day shall come, too bitter for belief,  
When we shall seem to hear her voice again!

Let us remember then, in midst of grief,  
That she was loveliest in her silences.



## THE TORCHES

**T**ORCHBEARER Spring rushes across the  
earth

With smoke of petals whirling in the wind,  
And all the naked orchards flush with bloom  
Until the verdure washes from the hills.

Torchbearer Love so runs upon our life,  
A thrilling moment, a transfigured face,  
And then the common sense of common things  
Returns, and in the place of loveliness  
That pains the heart, there is a sense of growth,  
A putting forth of leaf, while on the ground  
The withered petals drift.

Of their pale beauty,  
Where is the fragrance gone that brought the bee  
Questing upon a wind unharvested?

TO A LADY

**A** CHARMING ghost attends your silences  
For in the hush a turning of your head,  
A lifting of the hand, or smile, reveals  
A gleam, a hope of that enchanting soul.

It is not you. You are the precious glass  
Through which I peer and far away behold  
A star washed by the loneliness of heaven.  
Into the holy pause, into the quiet  
She steps with footfall sounding on my heart;  
She comes, my love, my lady unpossessed  
In robes that run like music on the wind  
And beauty like the sunlight dropping yellow  
On a still water where the images  
Of pleasant branches float.

I heard her first  
When first I heard your voice. I turned in haste  
Looking for her, and only saw your face.

[ 7 ]

## TO A LADY

So in your silences she still returns,  
A ghost, indeed, who lives for me alone.  
And pain takes hold on me when I remember  
That death for me for her is darkness also;  
And then my fingers tremble with desire  
To raise the mallet, grasp the chisel sharp,  
And give her immortality in stone.  
But who can render in the marble dead  
The quality of flame?

I were content  
If she could be translated to a song,  
But I, who hear the music, cannot sing.

ON A GRECIAN FUNERAL  
MONUMENT

**A** LONG the gallery the dead endure  
In stone, cat-headed goddesses of Nile  
Or Roman busts in gloomy porphyry  
Until I come to the familiar place  
Of Sostrate bending her lovely head.  
Time has destroyed and broken much, or blurred,  
Still she is Sostrate behind a veil.  
The honeybloom is fresh upon her lips,  
Beneath the robe I feel the taken breath;  
White spirit! she is still among the years  
Of laughing youth unspent.

How many come  
Since then, O Sostrate, how many come  
Like me, and for the peace upon your brow  
Pay with a deep unrest and sense of doom.

## YOUTH

**W**INGED, it seemed, by the white spray,  
She galloped her horse by the sea to-day.  
With yellow hair like a blowing light,  
With laughter rippling in her flight,  
She passed between the sea and sky  
Like a note of music high.

Beside old ocean, such laughter wild!  
She is half woman and half child,  
I think, and so, my lady dear,  
Ride on, ride on through the golden year  
For the garden is watched where the flowers  
grow  
And the buds are plucked before they blow.

She has passed, and in another place  
Surely I shall not know her face  
But I shall remember the lifting wave,  
The blue sky, and her head so brave.

## HOPE

**H**OPES, like children in our dreams,  
Have voices that are still;  
Their murmurs never touch the ear  
But hungry hearts they fill.

Their shadow hands, their misty eyes  
Too lovely for belief—  
O beauty, what a pain is thine;  
O poison-wine of grief!

## THE LAST ADVENTURE

**H**E has stepped lightly on the long road out,  
The grey road, old with dust,  
The stern road, never-ending as our doubt,  
For he was strong in trusts.

That as it ran, whither he could not know,  
It might dip now and then  
Into great vales where speaking rivers go,  
Unvexed by ships of men;

That it would lead him, neither slow nor fast  
But at a proper pace,  
Into the upland silences, at last,  
Quiet before God's face.

## THE SKYLARK

**B**ETWEEN the daylight and the dark  
How swift the heaven-aspiring lark!  
Wild-hearted poet, he found the wealth  
Of the singing birds, and drained by stealth  
The jewels of dew which brim the lip  
Of the woodland lily where swallows sip,  
And nightingale and thrush have quaffed  
The honey-wine of that chilly draught.

One drop is joy for a day and a year  
But the lark drank all the magic clear.  
He tasted pure beauty, he tasted pure pain,  
So madness rushed upon his brain  
And drove him up the mountain-sky  
Past the hawk that beats his wing on high.

With rustling manes around him shaken,  
The horses of the wind awaken  
While up and up he circles free



## THE SKYLARK

Through a void of ecstasy  
And on and on in round on round  
Till, silence!

Think you he has found  
White heaven like a burst of song  
Frozen into towers strong?  
No, he plunges from the height  
Unseen, into the lower night  
And quivering lies beside the leaf  
Where the cricket sings his lyrics brief.  
We think him still, with strength unspent,  
Aloft in silence of content,  
And still beyond the stars we stare,  
Earthbound, and dream that God is there.

## BROOKLYN BRIDGE IN THE SEA-FOG

**T**HE river under mist is silver flowing,  
And black the ripple running on the tide;  
The half-seen towers go up on either side,  
White forms, with golden windows faintly  
glowing.

Now springs the bridge, light as a rising hawk,  
And leaps into the night—a broken span  
With end unseen. So may the God-in-Man  
Bridge the dim spaces where my soul would  
walk.

## THE PARTING

**W**HAT will you do when the wind at night  
Shrills in the chimney high?  
I shall sit by the fire and fill my sight  
With the flames that slacken and die.

But there is a picture in your hall,  
Fairest, you said of the fair?  
I shall raise a curtain and cover all,  
Throat, and lips, and hair.

But what of the watch-hours in your bed  
With only the cold to keep?  
I shall never turn my head,  
Thinking that I sleep.

A SONG

**W**HEN the almond trees are sweet  
With blossoms pale as foam,  
We'll walk together to the church  
And walk together home;

Some evening when the almond bloom,  
The earliest of the year,  
Is falling slowly, spirit-soft,  
On you and me, my dear;

Some evening when the wind is hushed  
And both our hearts are still  
For wonder that so large a world  
Should hold so little ill.

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

### I

#### THE QUEST

**C**RAVEN hearts are beggared hearts;  
No coward shall be my lord  
But Satan shall my master be,  
Whose name is like a sword."

So giant Offerus walked the world  
Asking on every road  
What man had seen the devil's face  
Or knew that king's abode.

They pointed to the tempest black  
And called it the devil's breath;  
The lightning wandering through the sky  
Was the glance of the king of death.

[ 18 ]

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

So on a day in a woodland dark  
When a storm through heaven poured,  
He raised his hands to the whirling clouds  
And the king of death adored.

Then hushed the shouting of the wind.  
The heavy thunder whist.  
The lofty trees like phantoms moved  
In a silver drifting mist.

A shape drew near, moth-white it was,  
With wings about it flowing  
Like spiderwebs that shine with dew  
When the wind of dawn is blowing.

Cold into the giant ran.  
His tongue was thick with fear.  
Yet he called unto the shade,  
Bidding his lord appear.

The fog rolled out of the blue, blue sky  
With the yellow sun a-flood;  
Music swelled in the giant's throat  
And tingled in his blood.

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

And the devil appeared as a tinker tall  
With weather-brown features harsh,  
His eye as quick, his foot as light  
As wild-fire on the marsh.

Upon the arm of Offerus  
His bony hand doth rest.  
He looketh into Offerus  
To the heart within his breast.

“Lo, I am a friend to friendly men  
And a comrade to the strong.  
He who blithely walks through life  
I help him swift along.

“To each his will. Unto the one  
I spacious wealth bequeath  
And for the upward lifted brow  
Undying laurel wreath.

“Then let your dreams come rioting  
Into the light of day.  
Shame is a ghost to frighten fools  
And the world is made for play.”

[ 20 ]

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

But Offerus said: "I only ask  
For deeds to fill my hands:  
Adventure over the wild sea  
And battle in far lands."

Straightway there murmured on the wind  
A far-off martial din  
Like the tread of an armored multitude  
And voice of trumpets thin.

The tinker answered: "A noble wish!  
Of all my men the best  
Have ridden into the dawn of life  
On even such a quest.

"One beguiled a lovely queen.  
One is a merchant great.  
One is a king on a stolen throne.  
All are of kingly state."

Now they walked on a meadow soft  
Where the birds sang alway,  
And wild flowers crowded underfoot  
Till the air was sweet as May.



## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

Then a bell chimed far away,  
Through the bird-notes falling,  
And saddened by the distance seemed  
A human voice was calling.

The Devil halted in middle step.  
Mid-laugh his voice doth fail.  
He cannot speak. He cannot move.  
He standeth stiff and pale.

And Offerus turned upon the fiend  
To question of his dread  
But the Tinker flashed into empty air  
And a moan passed overhead.

The meadow and the flowers dear  
Were gone, and in their place  
A lofty wood rolled solemnly  
Across the heaven's face.

But still the bell beneath the trees  
Murmured the quiet song  
As a brook running into the night  
Carries the stars along.

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

Mighty Offerus bowed his head  
And groaned into his beard  
But he followed through the woodland strange  
The voice the Tinker feared.

It led him to a hermitage  
With the hermit old thereby  
Frozen in his holy thought,  
And deadly was his eye.

To him spoke lofty Offerus:  
“I come, O Master, seeking  
To enter the service of that lord  
Of whom the bell is speaking.”

By dim degrees the hermit woke.  
Large Offerus he viewed.  
“Giant, the master of the bell  
Is He who died on rood.

“Turn otherwhere. In serving Christ  
Your power of hand will fail.  
More He prizes the hermit weak  
And the hermit’s vision pale.

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

“The child that laughs at play, I trow  
Is larger in God’s eye.  
He tosses up his hands. Behold!  
You cannot reach so high.

“Yet if you will, drop on your knees  
In prayer. Give up your sword.  
And cast the burden of your sins  
On the mercy of the Lord.”

Like rattling parchment was his voice  
But the bell sang between.  
His voice in trembling phrases broke.  
The bell, it chimed between.

“My knees are strung with tendons hard  
That cannot bend in fear,”  
Said Offerus, “nor will I call  
Unto an unseen ear.

“I know my arms are strong to seize,  
My mind is weak to hold,  
But I shall work with honest hands  
To serve your master bold.”

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

### II

#### THE TEMPTATION

Offerus found a raging stream  
Whereover, day by day,  
He carried in the name of Christ  
Travellers on their way.

He will not pray, he will not fast,  
No holy songs he sings,  
But in the peril of the ford  
He serves the King of kings.

There came a night of storm, a night  
Of thunder and of fear,  
And in his hut the giant heard  
A distant calling clear.

And the voice led him like a hand  
Into the noisy dark.  
First the lightning in the sky  
Was all that he could mark,

And then a child with yellow hair  
And eyes of quiet grace;  
A boy with blowing yellow hair  
Like a light about his face.

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

It was a strange and dreadful thing  
That lovely child to meet,  
Happy as sunshine in the storm,  
And watch his dancing feet.

He said: "Upon the other shore  
The moon is shining fair  
And a garden underneath the moon  
With playing children there.

"Carry me where the children wreath  
The yellow flowers and red—  
Roses, roses Offerus,  
Woven for your head."

But Offerus said: "Beneath the rain  
The sodden ground is black  
And through the dark the river makes  
A white and angry track.

"No voices from a garden come  
Of children at their play  
But through the dark the angry stream  
Goes shouting on its way."

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

Still the boy cried: "Look, ah, look!  
It is a goodly sight  
To see their happy games and hear  
Their laughter of delight."

He turned again and saw a thing  
Which was not there before—  
A garden where the children played  
Upon the farther shore.

The thunder spoke. The lightning leaped  
Through the shadows in the sky  
But where the noisy children played  
The moonshine seemed to lie.

The lightning through the sea of clouds  
A twisted course it steered,  
And Offerus quaked through all his limbs,  
And bowed his head, and feared.

Yet he raised the little child,  
He entered the wild water  
That shouted like an army huge  
Charging down to slaughter.

## LEGEND OF ST.. CHRISTOPHER

The sand melted beneath his feet;  
The river, it waxed great  
Till the burden on his shoulder wide  
Became a crushing weight.

He scarcely stood. About his legs  
The tangling stream was curled  
And in his heart he seemed to bear  
The sorrows of the world.

Still the white water harried him.  
Still the thunder groaned.  
And Offerus staggered in his work  
And with the labor moaned.

Thereat the child above the storm,  
In a voice thrilling clear,  
Cried out: "Now call on Jesus Christ  
Who keepeth men from fear!"

And the waves smote the giant's face  
And the waves took his breath;  
Each step in the loud river seemed  
A pace nearer death.

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

Yet he said: "Call not on Christ.  
Ask not His aid divine.  
Behold, the glory is for God  
But the labor shall be mine."

Thereby he reached the shallow water.  
He climbed to the water-side.  
And the garden that he looked upon,  
Oh, it was fair and wide!

The children dancing by the moon,  
They made his heart to swell,  
For their beauty upon Offerus  
Like gentle music fell.

Lo, in merry troops they came  
With yellow flowers and red  
And roses, roses in a wreath  
Offered for his head.

But the laughing lips, they made no sound,  
And the eyes that were so meek  
Looked wistfully on Offerus,  
But still they might not speak.



## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

Then every face at once went out.  
The moonshine pure was gone.  
The rain beat round him. Through the night  
Went the long lightnings wan.

A voice spoke from the dark above  
And looking up again,  
Great Offerus thought to see a light,  
But only felt the rain.

“Great Offerus, in your distress  
If you had called on me  
My body once again, for you,  
Would have hung upon the tree.

“From every man who lifts his voice  
In weak humility,  
I take the burden of his woe;  
I take his agony.

“Those who kneel in suffering,  
In bitterness and in loss,  
Each prayer is but another nail  
That rives me on the cross.

## LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

“Their sorrows flee; their hearts grow light;  
Each humble mind is graced;  
But the sweetness entering their souls,  
It is my blood they taste.

“But he who makes his shoulders wide  
To bear his single part,  
He takes the burden of the world  
And lifts it from my heart.

“He binds my wounds of hands and feet.  
He pities my distress.  
He pours for me the blessed wine  
Of deep forgetfulness.

“Christ perishes for those who pray  
And they are lulled to sleep,  
But Offerus for himself will die  
And for him Christ will weep.”

Like tears the rain was on his face.  
He heard the voice depart,  
But the fragrance of the roses fell  
Like speech upon his heart.



## Six Poems for Children

[ 33 ]



## SUNDAY

**T**HE tall church spire points to the sky  
And the church steps are wide and high  
To start us climbing up to God—  
But the church is empty, and that is odd.  
Only on Sundays the people come  
And sit so frightened and so dumb.  
Yet it's a wonderful place to see.  
The arches are big as they can be,  
The pillars are wide and strong and tall  
And a shadowy dome is over all.  
The preacher talks of Death and Kings  
And Golden Heaven, and lots of Things  
While little whispers go to and fro  
Made by the angels' wings, you know.  
Up in the dome in a shadow-dress  
God listens to the talk, I guess,  
Then we all get up and go away  
And the church is hushed till another day.

## SUNDAY

For one day in church out of the seven  
Is all we need to think of heaven  
And sing for God and sit so meek—  
He only lives there once a week.

## THE LITTLE MEN

**A** WHISPER on the carpet, a creaking on the  
stair—

Hold your breath, close your eyes; the Little  
Men are there!

The middle night has voices and feet that dance  
with art

And the drum that keeps them dancing is the  
beating of your heart.

Murmuring within the wall and in the shadow  
places

They are very little men with round, white faces,  
Round, white faces and sharpest teeth to gnaw  
And fingers that are smaller than spider's poison  
claw.

They're the eyes of midnight that are watching  
you awake,

Little eyes that glitter, eyes most like a snake.  
Once upon a window in the dark of the moon



## THE LITTLE MEN

I saw a tiny goblin who was dancing to a tune;  
Tingling, tickling music and it made the goblin  
fit—

I'd set the whole world dancing if I should whistle  
it.

Whistle it I dare not for the goblins all would  
come,  
Skipping light and grinning, and marching to  
the drum.

The king of all the goblins then would sit above  
my bed

On a throne of solid moonshine with a crown  
upon his head

In the middle of a nightmare that is full of awful  
eyes—

Goblins running, goblins flying, all with fearful  
cries.

But the little men of midnight can never work  
you ill

If you cross your fingers tightly and lie there  
very still

Staring at the ceiling—counting up to ten—  
They cannot hear your heart-beat, so they  
vanish again.

## BUCCANEER

**S**ITTING here behind my book,  
Quiet in my chair,  
If they knew where I had gone,  
How they all would stare!

While mother shakes her paper out  
And father taps his chin  
I am sailing south and south  
To where the Trades begin.

The curtain-poles are yard-arms black,  
The curtain is a sail,  
And when I rock my chair the ship  
Is heeling to a gale.

The bow-wave gallops white before,  
The wake is white behind,  
Ruler of the sea am I  
And comrade of the wind.

## BUCCANEER

Down the moon-path silver bright  
The scar-faced helmsman steers us  
Drinking to battle and singing of blades  
For the Lord of the Incas fears us.

Out of the dizzy swaying tops  
We hear the look-out cry  
And far away we see a sail  
Wink in the blue of the sky.

Rising lofty from the sea,  
Slowly we overhaul her,  
A galleon of Lima town,  
Stately, tall, and taller.

In vain she shakes more canvas out,  
In vain she reels away  
And lunging through the heavy waves  
Throws up white flags of spray.

Our bow-guns boom; her mainmast falls;  
And now her cannon roar.  
She fears us though for three of us  
Her captain has a score.

[ 40 ]

## BUCCANEER

She rises like a fortress wall  
And we so small beneath,  
But every man goes up her side  
With a cutlass in his teeth.

They're the Inquisition's men,  
The Devil's hunting pack,  
But we're the sturdy dogs of Devon—  
We drive the proud Dons back.

The sun is on our swinging blades;  
The Dons are blind with fear.  
Their captain's down, their flag is struck—  
Ho, an English cheer!

And oh the loot the Spaniards robbed  
From a thousand, thousand places—  
The bullion and the silver work,  
The coin and yellow laces!

There's rum now for the focs'l, lads,  
There's Tokay for the cabin,  
Shouting, shouting in the focs'l,  
Singing in the cabin.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **BUCCANEER**

**Mother shakes her paper out  
And father taps his chin  
But down the chimney shrills the wind  
And brings the singing in.**

## THE STARS

**S**OME people say the stars may be  
Little children with golden hair  
Who at evening, silently,  
Walk from heaven a shadowy stair.

Surely it is strange and chill  
To come down through the silences  
And stand so long and lean so still  
Over dark mountains and lost seas.

Upon the earth they see the lights  
So far beneath the blue, blue dome  
And listen through the windy nights  
To hear the voice that calls them home.

And when the night is nearly done,  
All the children turn away,  
Sadly turning, one by one,  
To climb into the lonely day.

## FAIRYLAND

**I**T happened in the fairy month of June,  
For fairies spend their winters in the moon  
But in red strawberry and cherry time  
They put their coats of crimson on and climb  
Below the stars to forests where they make  
The whistling in the wind, or on the lake  
Run down the star-paths, though we only see  
The twinkle where their dancing feet must be.

That day the leaves were quiet, for the breeze  
Was tired, at last, of talking to the trees  
And in a far off hollow, cold and deep,  
Slumbered—I heard him breathing in his sleep.  
So all the forest hushed, when first I heard  
The squirrels chatter, then all still. A bird  
Darted across the open. Next I felt  
That something in the hazel thicket knelt  
And stared at me with tiny, glittering eyes.

## FAIRYLAND

I sat up breathless, tingling with surprise  
To have such company. I could not see  
A thing, but knew somewhere he grinned at me—  
A little man, I think, with a green hat  
And a red coat, and ears just like a cat,  
Pointed and furry. If I caught him tight  
He'd struggle, said the book, and bite and fight  
But finally give up and let me choose  
Among seven wishes if I let him loose.  
So into the hazel shrubs I ran as fast  
As I could run, but he had always passed  
The place I reached, a step or two before  
And gone on, whispering, laughing. Yes, a  
score

Of times I almost heard his step and twice  
I saw the glitter of his bright green eyes!  
So at the last, all eager from the race,  
Breathless and panting, I came on the place  
Where it must live.

I knew it by the brook,  
And the ferns and flowers had a fairy look.  
Among green shadows and the yellow sun  
The talking of the stream was never done,  
Whispering as though it had a tale to tell



## FAIRYLAND

To someone and so told the pimperl,  
The water-lily and wild violet  
The same tale over, lest it should forget.  
I waited for the fairy, but I guess  
That he was somewhere in the wilderness  
Teaching a squirrel to say its prayers. (You  
know  
How they sit up and hold their hands just so?)  
He slipped away, grinning, and let me stand  
Shut out before the door of fairyland.  
It must have been the door, for I could see  
A water dog which lay there, watching me—  
What seemed a water dog, but I've no doubt  
That was the dragon set to keep me out.

## THE SECRET

**T**HEY drew the blinds down, and the house  
was old  
With shadows, and so cold—  
Filled up with shuddery silence like held breath;  
And when I asked, they told  
Me only that the quietness was death.

They walked tiptoe about the house that day  
And turned their heads away  
When I was near. I watched them in surprise  
And quite forgot to play,  
Seeing them pass with wonder in their eyes.

My mother came into my room that night  
Holding a shaded light  
Above my face till she was sure I slept;  
And I lay still with fright,  
Feeling her tremble and knowing that she wept.

[ 47 ]

## THE SECRET

And afterward, with no one there to see,  
I got up quietly  
And stole along the hall in my bare feet  
Until it seemed to me  
That all the air grew sorrowful and sweet.

So, hardly breathing, I went down the stair  
In the cold, quiet air,  
Into the parlor, where the perfumes led.  
I lit my candle there  
And held it a long time above my head.

There was an oblong box and at its base  
Grew lilies, in a vase  
As white as they. I thought them very tall  
In such a listening place,  
And they threw fearful shadows on the wall.

I tiptoed to the box, then, silently,  
To find what death could be.  
But then I smiled, for it was father who  
Was sleeping quietly.  
He dreamed, I think, for he was smiling, too.

## THE SECRET

And all at once I knew death is a thing  
That stoops down, whispering  
A dear, forgotten secret in your ear  
Such as the winds can sing,  
And then you sleep, and dream, and have no fear.

Perhaps the breezes tell the dream to flowers  
On nights of lonely hours;  
Perhaps we, too, could learn if we could seek  
The wind in his watch-towers;  
Perhaps the lilies knew, but could not speak.



# Balin

From Malory's Narrative of the  
Dolorous Stroke.

[ 51 ]



## BALIN'S SONG TO HIS SWORD

**B**EHOLD my lady glorious bright!  
Her body is of frozen light,  
Her face dazzles, her voice so rare  
Is a thrilling whisper in the air.

On the battlefield she knighted me,  
She clad me in samite and cramoisie,  
She filled my purse, her abundant hand  
Gave me castles and lordly land.

No hero has twice heard by choice  
The murmur of her enchanting voice.  
No warrior has ever dared  
To view her loveliness twice bared.

The fruits of our wedlock are children meet  
With silent voices and silent feet,  
But each has his mother's face of light  
And their names are Honor and Glory bright.



## BALIN

### I

**S**OME careless pleasure-lover made the road.  
It stayed upon the hill in lazy curves  
And where the river went it wandered also,  
Drawn in to see the quiet of a pool  
Or singing waterfall, now strongly hewed  
Through the forest-heart, now running joyously  
Over the windy moor, and like the wind  
Sir Balin galloped on his charger grey.  
Ever a lordly steed ennobles man  
And on that horse the saddle was a throne.  
Like a great eagle on a tower of wind  
His glance was fierce, his gallop like the beat  
Of wings; but when he paused and raised his  
head,  
Then, then the desert which had mothered him  
Seemed spread before his eye. Upon a height  
They halted. From afar the forest rolled

## BALIN

Across the hills and at their feet it poured  
Through half the valley like a wave of night,  
And washed a foam of daisies down the meadows.  
Out of the solemn forest slipped a pair  
Of greyhounds and behind, an armored knight,  
His lady at his side with garments gay  
Fluttering like a gaudy butterfly  
Across the green. Furiously they spurred;  
Above their heads the clotted turf was tossing;  
They leaned into the wind, yet nothing followed,  
Naught in the valley lived except dumb cattle  
Lifting their heads to watch the fugitives.  
Sweeter than tidings of the hawthorn bloom  
That blew upon the wind, the warrior breathed  
Perfume of mystery and adventure strange.  
Now nearer drawn he saw the coat of arms—  
Three yellow lions on a field of black;  
He saw the lady's hanging sleeves of blue  
That cupped the wind, her veil a blowing mist,  
The hooded hawk that wavered on her arm,  
And his heart leaped before he saw her face:  
Her beauty went before her like the breath  
Of unseen gardens walking through the night.  
Her comrade was all terrible in steel,

## BALIN

His visor shut, his quivering lance erect,  
Spurring a stallion of a noble race  
That rushed against the curb with open mouth.  
His honest heart was greater than his might  
For weight of armor and the biting spur  
Had sapped his power and in his stride he reeled.  
He skimmed the valley, but he struck the hill  
With laboring gallop.

“He who chargeth mountains,”  
Quoth crafty Balin, “leaveth on the slope  
The stallion’s speed.”

And halfway to the top  
The charger staggered, shook his valiant head,  
And fell, pinning his rider with his weight.  
The maiden’s cry went shrilling up the wind;  
The dust-cloud rolled away.

“So droppeth a fool,”  
Said Balin, “drawing on his head his folly.”  
But hurrying to the place, he drew the knight  
To safety, while the girl made sad lament.  
Sir Balin marked them not. His soldier eye  
Grew dark with looking on the dying horse,  
A battle-steed and fit to die in battle.  
Meantime the fallen knight, unhelmeted,

## BALIN

Rose groaning, and Sir Balin smiled to see  
Above the shoulders, wide with jointed steel,  
The smooth face of a boy who stammered ever:  
“Invisible Garlon struck the noble horse.  
Garlon, Garlon followeth—God protect us!”  
He cried, and trembled like the silver aspen  
That shudders even when the wind is still.  
His limbs were bruised and yet his greatest hurt  
Was inward of the spirit till it seemed  
That Garlon with a murdering lance unseen  
Had truly pierced him. Pity took the knight.  
Far off he saw himself, the youthful Balin,  
Riding into a friendless world; his wounds  
In memory ached. So turned he to the girl.  
Her years were barely past the dreamy verge  
Of girlhood; she was lovely as the dawn,  
Now under mist of fear.

“Tell me the tale,”

And she obeyed, the while his heart did shrink  
To see her terror. She was Lady Nerys,  
And this was Perin, lord of Montbeliard,  
Her brother. Battle claimed their father's life  
And when the grim old warrior was gone  
Garlon the dreadful, Garlon the dark of fame

[ 57 ]

## BALIN

Who rode by wizardry invisible,  
Lusted after the meadows and the woodlands  
Of Montbeliard and came to Nerys, wooing.  
But when she scorned him, like a savage ghost  
He roamed the manor. One by one they found  
The old retainers lying in the forest  
Run through behind until a panic drove  
Their liegemen from them. So, in bitter fear  
Perin and Nerys rode from Montbeliard,  
Hounded along the way by dread of Garlon.

She ended in a breaking voice, the while  
Her gleaming fingers cherished the tercel fierce  
Against her breast, and through the mournful  
eyes

He looked into her soul, most like a child—  
So clear a smile would cloud it and so dim  
The lore of ages never could attain  
Its meaning. And the life of Balin stopped  
As when a mighty tide, between the ebb  
And flow a moment standing, shows the stars.  
Out of that holy quiet Balin drew  
Himself by force.

“In all the jongleur tales  
Of magic is no fellow to thy Garlon—

## BALIN

He should be done in rhymes upon the harp;  
But I, fair lady, fear no ghostly spear.  
Mount thou again. Let Perin take my horse.  
Turn back with Balin to thy Montbeliard."  
Thereat the plated steel on Perin shook.  
"My heart is sick of Garlon. Give me sight  
Of daylight danger and I shall not shrink  
From pain and blood and the cold-cutting steel,  
But thought of Garlon like a secret shame  
Devoureth courage." But Sir Balin cheered  
him:

"No man hath seen this Garlon work a death  
By mystery. The spear invisible  
Is but his cunning and the hood of darkness  
Is secret night in which he rideth soft.  
Courage, my friends. He slayeth lonely men,  
This walker of the night, but now you go  
With Balin. Say you?" Sharply he smote the  
hilt

And his long blade murmured into the sheath.  
They looked on him in wonder, till she said:  
"Now quiet falleth over me, dear brother.  
The God of champions sendeth Balin to us."  
"But fear like water runneth in my blood,"

## BALIN

Said Perin. "My body faileth and my spirit  
Is broken, Nerys, broken! But let us go  
Whither thou wilt or where this knight may  
lead,

And He who made us keep us in this peril!"

So Nerys raised his spirit with gentle words  
And Balin helped him strongly to the saddle  
On the grey horse. Behold! The noble steed  
Which strode so fierce with Balin, tiger-strong,  
Now journeyed like a lady's palfrey mild,  
Bearing the wounded knight, or softly neighed  
To Balin walking by the horse of Nerys,  
And leading towards a chapel in the wood  
Far off, to rest her brother of his hurts.

Sir Perin went behind. His troubled glance  
Rived to the cloud, then downward on the earth  
He watched the silent passing of its shadow  
Or the wind-riffles running on the grass.  
Those twinkling footsteps of the breezes passed  
With dance and glimmer like the galloping  
Of Garlon's soundless horse, and every whisper  
And every thrust of chilly evening wind  
Went through him like the point of Garlon's  
spear.

## BALIN

Meantime, through twilight forest dolorous  
The Lady Nerys drifted bright, her sleeves  
Of crimson weighed with golden apples rich,  
Her gown a deeper blue than evening hills.  
Joyous she went, forgetful of her brother,  
And lost in hardy Balin at her side.  
He stepped as light in armor as the runner  
Behind whose foot the crushed grass springs  
again;

Yet more on the unvisored features dwelling,  
She saw them battle-worn but battle-eager,  
With cruel mouth and eye like a hawk's  
unhooded.

And evermore she stared with wondering soul,  
For the mystery of strange lands was in his face.  
Each step she rode was deeper in his heart,  
She knew, though not how perilous that journey  
But now her snare for little singing birds  
Had trapped a falcon out of the wild wind.

A yellow moon went up and turned to white,  
Filling the wood with magic, coiling roots  
Like serpents by the path and many a tree  
By shadow molded into wingéd form  
Of dragon, or a naked, ghostly trunk



## BALIN

With arms outstretched. Far off, a waterfall  
Rolled towards them on the wind with monster  
voice,

Then stopped to listen while the travellers passed  
A quiet river and a field inlaid  
With shadow patterning on silver cold,  
That drifted over Lady Nerys also.  
So all the forest waited. Deep in mold  
The hoofs were soundless, and they went like  
ghosts  
In a world of death.

Then wildly Perin screamed.  
When a hawk strikes, so in a windless sky  
The bird shrieks and dies midway in the sound,  
And Perin's voice grasped every nerve with  
horror.

Sir Balin, whirling, saw him headlong plunge  
While a shadow like a charging horseman struck  
The ranks of trees and vanished. "Murderer!"  
Cried Balin, "Garlon, Garlon, one man calleth—  
One man awaits thee!" But he heard no answer  
Save his own panting as he ran. It seemed  
That Garlon was dissolved in phantom moon-  
shine.

## BALIN

At length he halted, turned, and slowly followed  
The voice of Nerys wailing. Her he found  
Beside her brother. Once with belted sword  
And chain of gold he seemed a warlike knight;  
Unhelmeted now and smiling to the moon,  
His maiden-slender hand upturned, he looked  
A child, and murdered. Very like the face  
Of Nerys was his face; in her he lived  
And in his death something of Nerys died  
From earth.

And pitying her Sir Balin spoke:  
“Lady, far liefer would I see thy tears  
And hear thy voice breaking in fierce reproaches  
Than pale, pale wonder and thine empty eyes.  
This work of dole is mine, wherefore I vow:  
Balin shall be thy liegeman, thou his lady  
Until by me the wolfish Garlon dieth.”

She answered not. He raised the body light  
And slowly, slowly through the wood they went.  
Anon, no louder than the fall of water,  
Drop by drop in the silence of the well,  
They heard the matins rung, and in the dawn  
They found the chapel and the man of God.  
From Perin's hair they washed the forest mold

## BALIN

And lapped his body in the linen smooth  
And laid him deep beneath the chapel floor.

Bayberry tapers burned about the grave  
Where Nerys watched the day and weary night  
Until her eyes were dull, her lips were pale.  
Before her stood Sir Balin. Hour by hour  
His head was bowed to watch the candle flames,  
By daylight wan as spirits, but at night  
Gleaming upon the folded hands of Nerys  
Or in her level eyes the glimmer went  
As far as music on still water falling.

Each moment, now, she crept into his heart  
Farther than she had entered all the hours  
He journeyed by her through the pleasant wood.  
For beauty walks alone in crowds, with glance  
Fixed far away and inward joyousness.  
Yea, beauty is a radiance that shines  
Within the body like a holy fire  
Cupped in translucent agate. Cold with awe  
She held Sir Balin in her happy hour  
But now he found with wonder that her grief  
Transformed her to a woman to be loved  
And cherished in pain that would not waste in  
tears.

## BALIN

Then, as the rain, long misty grey in heaven,  
Brings in the evening with a whispering fall  
That promises a brighter sky the morrow,  
The Lady Nerys wept, and after slumbered.

## II

Sir Balin walked the garden in the morning.  
Would she come forth all pale, with dreamy eyes  
Not yet returned from wandering in the world  
Of death with Perin? Lo, the lady came  
And never a shadow dwelt upon her face!  
They broke their fast together. The green wood  
Rolled by the open door; the man of God  
Was singing in his garden; and the knight  
Marvelled at Nerys singing the same song,  
Then Balin thought: "Already she forgets!  
God wot, my horse will mourn a longer time!"  
But when the noble chanting of the priest  
Was blown away and forest voices moved  
About them, softly, Balin saw by chance  
A shadow of listening fall upon her face,  
Whereat the knight pondered, and thus he  
thought:  
"He is not dead, and she hath not forgotten

## BALIN

But marketh him in flowers and in the morning.”  
He said: “Whatever house will give thee shelter  
For honor of thy name, tell me the road.  
Our journey must be there.” “But Garlon  
liveth!”

“Despite his cloak of darkness I shall reach him;  
Now seek we rest for Nerys.” But she roused,  
Flushing and crying: “Balin, Balin, peace  
Shall never come to Nerys. Every tale  
Of Garlon like a spear will run me through.  
Yea, and his black face is unknown to thee  
But I shall point him out.” “Child, the first  
storm  
Would melt thee.” “Ah, Sir Balin, where thou  
goest

By might, be sure Nerys will learn to follow  
As lightly as a bubble in thy wake.”  
He could not choose but smile, and having smiled  
He had no force against her. So they started.  
They went by hill and dale a wondrous way  
In solemn wilderness or twilight forest  
Where songs of birds out of the treetops fell  
And dropping among shadows told of day  
And the blue sky above. On many a night

## BALIN

Their beds were chilly turf; sometimes they  
broke

The hermit's bread in silence; or they sat  
Among the ashes of the cottager's hut  
Where little naked children, brown and wild,  
Peered from the shadows and grinned in scared  
delight

To see the lovely lady. Rumor led them,  
For wild as marsh light Garlon roved and marked  
His path with evil.

On a day they crossed  
An ashen forest and a wood of oak  
Until they came above a valley green  
With meadow land. The shallow evening lay  
Across the pastures and the long white road,  
But high above the mist they saw tall towers,  
A goodly company going up the sky  
With drift of birds across them. In the shade  
A village huddled, but the donjon tall  
Still brightened with the sunset. "Listeneise!"  
Cried Nerys. "Ah, my father told me tales!  
There is a ceiling of marble crusted with gold,  
Gardens filled with flowers that never bloom  
In other places. Black men from the east

## BALIN

Are servants, and I know—a miracle!—  
A wizard lieth in a room of gold,  
And on a table at his side, the spear  
That pierced the Savior hanging on the cross.  
He made all this and with a single word  
Can blast the stones to dust and wither the men  
To dead leaves in a rattling wind.” Her lips  
Could hardly whisper such a mortal speech  
But her eyes rounded with delight. Then Balin:  
“We ride in search of Garlon, not of rooms  
Of gold or strong enchanters. Mark how black  
It stands against the sky!” “Thou wilt not pass  
Old Listeneise unseen?” “I like it not.  
My wounds are pricking, lady.” But she  
smiled:

“Balin, strong Balin, gloomy evening cometh  
And the shadow of the palace standeth far  
Along the valley. Therefore thou art sad.  
Have I not seen my father, that brave man,  
Quake when a dog howled or the firelight cast  
An image at his feet?” Sternly he said:  
“Enough! We harbor not in Listeneise.”  
Meantime over the hill beside the castle  
A rout of hunters poured, the deer hounds first,

## BALIN

Low running silhouettes, and after these  
On dancing horses, lady, lord and squire  
Over the crest against the sunset red,  
Then streaming into the evening mist all colors  
Were blurred, crimson, purple, yellow and green  
Like a garden under shadow. Far and faint  
Their voices tingled and an echo small  
Beat from the hollow drawbridge as they crossed.  
Then Balin saw the hands of Nerys folded  
Together at her breast, and in her eyes  
The tears. "Alas," she said, "the happy life!"  
And Balin sighed: "Ride on! Thou shalt not  
weep."

Who then so gay as Nerys?

As they rode

The darkness came and in the dark they met  
With many a troop hurrying on Listeneise.  
Anon, a horn blew wildly from a tower  
Whereat the castle flared with sudden torches  
And beacons rose, and the hills rolled out of night  
All red, and like a blowing fire a cloud  
Streamed in the sky. But Nerys urged her horse,  
Laughing, and crying ever: "On, make on!  
The board is set, the king is in his place,



## BALIN

The lords and all the ladies take their chairs  
With shimmer of samite and with gleam of gold."

### III

It was a mighty hall. The vault arose  
On clustered piers; a clear story shone above  
With myriad tapers on fretwork windows  
gleaming,  
The fretwork windows of mosaic glass,  
Emerald, crimson, purple, golden, blue  
In harmony, like sunset through a mist.  
Sir Balin looked yet higher to the vault,  
Obscure as midnight, then, a dizzy fall,  
Down to the banquet table set about  
With pigmy men. Two trains of servitors  
Were ever moving, antlike, one that bore  
The loaded dishes by dissolving clouds  
Of fragrance followed, and the other stream  
Hurried away the fragments of the feast—  
The boar's huge skeleton with hollow ribs,  
The broken goblets. Many an hour that feast  
Had dured and still would sound, for Pellam gave  
it.

With awe the lady pointed where he sat

## BALIN

At the long table's head. Behind him rose  
An apse upon whose wall a rich mosaic  
Pictured the Pharaonic host destroyed  
In tumult of the water, chariots,  
Ensigns, steeds of battle and warriors  
Rolled in confusion, and against this glory  
The sprawling body of the king was raised  
On cushions in a throne of white. His robe  
Of silk was also white, his face was pale  
And large with flesh, while in his misty eyes  
A light gleamed as each mighty dish arrived,  
Or at a drunkard's laughter, a fall of glass,  
Or when the nasal loure discordant whined  
Above the music. Neither would he speak  
Nor eat, but for his drink a noble page  
Held on a salver near the throne a cup  
Of sweetened water. If it chanced he pointed,  
Two negro mutes arose to pour the wine  
Of Pellam for the chosen guest—a dame  
Who all too daintily had sipped her cup  
And now must quaff the goblet of the king  
Perforce, or youthful peer already dazed  
Was plunged in torpor by the royal draught.  
All this Sir Balin saw, but chiefly marked

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## BALIN

In seats of honor two of lofty form  
And manner stark, each like to each in beard  
And eyes. They seemed to eat, they seemed to  
drink,

But neither tasted food nor drank the wine.  
Anon their solemn eyes would meet and hold  
And slowly turn away. Beneath the twain  
Down the long table stretched a rich array  
Of robber barons and their paramours  
With eyes that dwelt on men as thievish hands  
Dwell on a purse, and like to forgers false  
They coined their smiles of metal base and made  
Them current with warm looks and velvet words  
Of flattery. Flowers unfragrant are not flowers  
And woman without modesty is not woman,  
Yet each of these with flashing eyes and jewels  
Like pooléd light, came queenly on the eye,  
For all were fair, and all were gay, and some,  
Alas, were lovable. And Nerys cried:  
“Ah, Balin, wast thou ever under roof  
With such a host of noble knights and throng  
Of Ladies bright?”

“Thou innocent, the mists  
Of England fade them to an angel white,

[ 72 ]

## BALIN

But at the heart, God wot, a gust of wind,  
A whisper of dead leaves. Now mark—a song!”

Three times the minstrel struck his  
harp. The trains  
Of servitors were halted; silence grew.  
He sang:

“A true tale is proper for those who think  
Of saints and martyrs and men of ink  
But never, I wot, where goodfellows drink.

“Gather a circle by tavern fires,  
Herbalists, pardoners, mendicant friars,  
Mighty drinkers, mighty liars.

“The day is enough for sweating and sighing,  
Living, laboring, moaning, dying,  
So leave us the night for loving and lying.”

Loud, loud they shouted in applause,  
Laughing in one another's eyes, the lords  
And ladies, but Sir Balin saw the smile  
Of Nerys wane.

“Dear lady, let us go.  
I ween these damsels with their cloaks have left

## BALIN

Their sober reputations." "Nay, Sir Balin,  
Thou art my shield to cover me from shame."  
"But men are storms, my Nerys, and in thee  
The faint, religious light of womanhood  
Is like a taper—they the braying wind  
To quench it." "Nay, thou seest, when they lift  
Their heads the glance of Balin chills their hearts  
As it hath chilled mine, many a time." "My  
ways

Are rough, sweet child. No squire of dames am  
I,

But for thy sake I rooted up a vow  
And I foreswore a quest, and who shall say  
If God hath marked mine unaccomplished oath?  
Therefore I keep thee sacred as an urn  
Of holy water. In thy presence, Nerys,  
My soul is churched, and every time you smile  
A sin is shrived."

Murmuring into his words  
Music arose within a gallery,  
Whistling recorders, rebecs humming through—  
The guitar-fiddles drew a snoring burden,  
The wild loure rang above. At Balin's side  
Was one who kept the rhythm with nodding head.

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## BALIN

He had the shallow eye that children love  
And while fair Nerys dreamed into the music,  
Of him Sir Balin asked what were the twain  
Solemn and silent near the king? At that  
His smile went out.

“They must be more than beggars,  
But thou, sir stranger, tell me how thou redest  
The mighty men sitting beside our king?”

“I read them dangerous enemies,” said Balin,  
“And dangerous friends, perchance.” The  
anxious doubt

Departed slowly. Like a frightened gossip  
He whispered: “Mark ye those, the lofty men,  
Merten and his twin brother, Dinas le Noir,  
Are nephews of King Pellam and the heirs  
To Listeneise. Age cometh on the king.  
Of old he kept the lists against hard riders,  
His drinking song hath rung above the chorus,  
And now, although he cannot taste the wine,  
He keepeth ghosts of other years alive.  
All day he holdeth revel and in the night  
Continual music murmuring lest he wake  
In silence. Noise of life must never stop  
In joust or feast or at the banquet board,

## BALIN

The fool becoming king, the king a fool.

Meantime Lord Merten and black Dinas wait  
For death and mark the pouring of the wine,  
Blood from the body of their heritage.  
And when old Pellam dieth, God protect  
Fair Listeneise!" Therewith he drowned his  
grief  
In a deep cup.

Meantime the feast grew wild.  
Thick wine of Spain or golden wine of France  
In goblets shook like yellow flame or red  
That rose and fell again. High overhead  
The drunken music laughed in reeling measures  
While the blind beast arose in every chair,  
That stream  
Of sharpening voices to the Lady Nerys  
Was hardly more than the dull roar of ocean,  
The thousand-throated; rather she beheld  
The gleaming board. She watched with lovely  
awe  
How the bright peacock in his feathers sat,  
Or fish with foolish eyes, or capons brown  
And gold, or fruit on moon-bright silver heaped.  
Till Balin, following, by a reach of mind

## BALIN

Looked far into the crystal truth of her  
So that her smile fell on him with a hurt  
Of pity for her beauty and his sins.

He said: "When Garlon dies, we ride anew,  
But whither?" Lo, she lifted up her eyes:  
"Wherever Balin wills," and to the knight  
Her voice was like the first sweet minstrel note  
That silences the hall and in the silence  
He knew she loved him. "There is a place I  
know;

Far south, far south the vineyards climb the hills  
In ranks, well-drilled. Along the plain the wheat  
Is taller than my sword, and overhead  
God hangs a bluer sky for Italy.  
There is the place for thee. Ay, there's the place  
Where the white road is tossing in the hills  
And the wind bringeth singing from the village."  
He raised his hand as if, into his mind,  
The Italian quiet poured, the Italian song.  
Upon the passion of his warrior face  
The lady dreamed; she, too, had heard the music,  
And Balin whispered: "Nerys, in my hands  
Time is a treasure pouring; and yet I fear!  
Behold, I love thee so I think of death,



## BALIN

Thou art so spiritlike. Thou seemest one  
Whose journey on the dark earth is nearly ended,  
For dimly on thy face the light is playing.”  
And she: “Ah, Balin, Balin, thou hast let  
The music flow upon thy heart and thence  
Re-echo into words. Tell me no more,  
For a great tide is setting towards thee, setting  
Beyond my power to stem it.” While he leaned  
To gather every word that formed and fell  
On those red lips, behold, her glance was fixed  
As one who wakens with the nightmare great  
Within his eyes. She whispered: “There he  
stands!

He with the black face speaking to the king—  
Garlon, and Pellam smiles!” Sir Balin looked  
And saw a stark man by the throne,  
A tall and mighty man, his body bright  
In crimson velvet and in purple cloaked;  
The value of a barony was poured  
In glittering jewels encrusted on his robe  
And when he turned, the long hilt by his side  
Burned sanguine red with rubies. In the throne  
The monster Pellam lolled indulgent towards  
him

## BALIN

As one awaiting stories in accord  
With his own mind; but him the warrior  
Regarded not, turning impatient eyes  
About the table. As the towering hawk  
Disdains to stoop at field mice, so his glance  
Hungry and scornful lingered on the faces  
Until it reached Sir Balin. There it stopped  
And their eyes clashed like thrusting blades. He  
spoke

A word in Pellam's ear, who leaned to watch,  
Grinning, while Garlon stalked around the table.  
Meantime the Lady Nerys breathed: "Arise  
And bring me hence, for if he see my face  
There will be wicked work. Ah, swiftly, Balin!"  
But Balin touched her hand and in his beard  
He spoke: "If he escape me now our work  
Is wasted. If I stab him in the hall  
Of Pellam I am lost. The fiend advise me!"  
So Garlon came and bent his gloomy head.  
"Wherefore dost thou behold me? Eat thy  
food,"

He said, "do that thou camest for, and keep  
Thy staring eyes on humbler faces, knave!"  
His velvet glove, brocaded heavily,

## BALIN

He struck in Balin's face, while lord and lady  
Suspended their bright goblets to behold,  
But Balin felt only the heart of Nerys  
Beating in fear beside him. For her sake  
He must endure. He raised his hand. A thread  
Of gold had pricked his mouth; his fingertip  
Was bright with blood that seemed, in his fierce  
eyes

To blur with crimson the hushed banqueters,  
And Nerys, gentle Nerys, was forgotten.  
"Garlon," he said, "art thou not wolf enough  
To smell a death in this? Look now behind me,  
And see the ghost of Perin, murderer,  
Slayer by dark." Before he ended, bright  
The sword of Garlon issued and he struck  
In murderous silence. No firm-handed parry  
Could turn the bent of that prodigious stroke  
But Balin slipped aside as a dead leaf  
Avoids the beating hand. Beside him poured  
The solid flash of the descending steel  
That struck the chair and shattered it. The  
blade

Was lodged in massy oak; no wise it skilled  
Sir Garlon that he strained far back and shrieked

## BALIN

At the flash and silver brightness of the death  
That balanced now upon the blade of Balin,  
Then slid into his bosom. Loosely he fell,  
And falling snapped the sword-blade at the hilt  
And lay immense and shapeless on the floor.

Quiet of midnight came, and every face  
A midnight ghost. The music stopped, but  
seemed

Far off, still playing, and the servitors  
In mid-step hung. The lady paused—half-risen,  
Like the graceful reed bowed in the steady  
wind—

Above his wineglass with enormous eyes  
The drunkard stared, and the wild jester's laugh  
To horror froze. The ring of the breaking sword  
Hummed to a distance and was still—the spell  
At once dissolved. The lady veiled her eyes,  
The drunkard spilled his wine, the jester shrieked  
And rising from his throne with shining robes  
Of white about him blowing, Pellam ran  
With a grim weapon caught above his head.  
“Vengeance is mine!” he cried. “No other  
strike!”

Then Balin cast away the unbalanced pommel,

## BALIN

Gathered the face of Nerys to his heart  
With a last look, and fled.

### IV

First to the door  
Through which he entered Balin ran, but lo,  
Before his coming the lofty panels wheeled  
Together. In their midst he cast his weight  
And the stout oak shuddered and flung him back  
Under the sway of Pellam's sword. He veered  
Like a dust-column in a pool of wind.

Tumult poured through the hall,  
with flash of steel  
And rush of color save where Dinas sat,  
And Merten, the dark brothers, all unmoved.  
Yet in the outcry and the gleam of weapons  
A path opened to Balin to a door  
Guarded by snarling lions in red stone.  
Through this he sprang. Behind, the sea of noise  
Which washed from wall to wall of the banquet-  
room  
Roared far away, but ever Pellam came  
With jarring footfall.

[ 82 ]

## BALIN

Then a poniard small  
Had been a treasure in Sir Balin's hand  
While through chambers of whispering tapestries  
He rushed, and halls of rich mosaic work  
Like precious jewels inlaid. By seven kings  
Old Listeneise was builded. Seven times  
The treasures of a generation drained  
And stored by kings; as milk-white hands may  
drop

Among the shadows of the jewel-casket  
Emeralds, bleeding rubies, liquid drops  
Of moonlight men call pearls—so kingly hands  
In Listeneise dropped treasure. Under foot  
Of Balin lights in polished marble lived  
As stars in black, black water. On each side  
The placid statues looked upon his flight;  
The hero frowned, the bearded thinker pondered,  
The nymph gathered her icy robes and smiled.  
He saw her as a dream, and all the wealth  
Poured past him like a vision. Only the voice  
Of Pellam thundering, the rushing feet  
And the deadly emptiness of his hands was real.

Far through a crooked corridor he fled  
Up to a bolted oaken door with script

## BALIN

Of antique Latin legended. That way  
Was closed, and fierce behind the mountain-bulk  
Of Pellam came full lightly with his beard  
Divided by the wind of running. Rage  
Had nerved him; glorying he came and swung  
The long blade at a balance for the stroke.  
Behind was many a silken, hurrying foot .  
And overhead, like sparks blown from his cloak,  
Poniard and falchion gleamed in the dim hall.

Anguish got hold on Balin, for he thought  
Of stalwart warriors talking at their wine  
Of battle-glory and of battle-death  
In the open field, but famous Balin stabbed  
Like a poisonous rat and thrown out to the  
wolves

Without the rites of burial, the priest  
In sable and the holy candles wan  
Which light the way to heaven. Out of grief  
Came goodly might. He seized the latch and  
heard

The groan of iron, the rending of stout oak—  
The door flew wide.

It showed a marvel rare,  
A noble room with the green samite hung

## BALIN

And golden fringes deep. Upon a bed  
Lay one with fleshless hands and shadow eyes.  
A silver table shone on either side  
With Persian fretwork delicate. The one  
A lighted taper bore that touched with yellow  
The curtain-folds and glimmered on the fringe;  
The other raised a vase of midnight blue,  
The lapis lazuli with gold enwrought,  
And a spear leaned beside it, short of haft,  
Ponderous. That he seized and from his heart  
Gave up deep thanks. Curiously the shaft  
Was weighted, overlaid from butt to head  
With golden figures moving in a frieze  
That twisted scrollwise. Little heed he gave  
To that mysterious processional  
For now King Pellam, shouting, passed the door  
And Balin smote the hollow of his throat  
Through flesh and sinew, choking the deep shriek  
With which he fell and died, and all the throng  
With shouts that set the corridor bellowing  
Rushed to avenge their king.

No fear was thine,  
O Balin, in that hour of dread. Thy heel  
Was based on Pellam's breast; thy dripping spear



## BALIN

Tugged forth thou shookest high and cast the  
    spray  
Of crimson in their faces pale. They shrank  
As though before a blinding thunderbolt,  
Crying: "The lance that pierced the Lord—the  
    spear  
That slew the Christ!"

    Up the storm-blackened cliff  
So roars the wave, then falls away in whispers—  
The solid light of weapons split apart,  
The quivering swords fell down. Behold, they  
    kneeled  
And watched and spoke not. Deadly silence held  
The castle save the breathing of the wind  
Far off, and evermore the living eyes  
And the dead face of him upon the bed  
Were pouring fear on Balin till he fled  
As armies flee at night—blind through the crowd  
And blindly through the palace till he reached  
An outer court and, crossing, climbed the wall  
Above the moat.

    Thereby the panic left his brain  
For he saw the distant shining of the stars  
And looking down their images lay cold

## BALIN

And quiet in the water. The wall was high,  
Narrow the moat, and in the perilous leap  
His safety hung. Meantime the court gave  
voice

Below where the pursuit was flooding thick  
And the wild torchlight darted upon spear  
And helmet-spike, and in the lofty night  
At the red casements shadows flickering  
That shook their weapons at him. Into the  
court

He flung the spear and saw the clamoring throng  
Close over it like wolves over the dead,  
Yelling, and Balin turned him for his leap.  
Two memories stood beside him: Lady Nerys,  
And that great day of battle when his lance  
Had slain a king whose fall destroyed a host  
And with those memories making great his heart  
He sprang, a dizzy fall that blurred the stars,  
Clove through the cold black water, and crushed  
his side

Upon the rocks beneath. With feeble arms,  
Wavering and slowly Balin rose and lay  
Among the surface slime. There, gasping deep,  
He drank the blessed air. Meantime the wall

## BALIN

Was crested by a multitude of lights  
And voices calling, but anon they left  
The water to give up its dead by day.  
The torches dwindled from the height; he heard  
No sound except the far off mustering  
Of men. The quavering chorus of the frogs  
At last began, and night closed placidly.

## V

Then Balin dragged him from the slime in pain  
And like a reptile crushed in half its length  
He labored down the slope until he came  
Between two houses. One was tall and proud  
And one a hut, but through its open door  
The hearthlight stepped a pace into the night.  
Sir Balin thought: "This man hath many a  
place  
To hide me, but his place is built aloft  
And every day he trembleth for his fall.  
Yonder is one whose back hath felt the whip;  
He will be tender unto pain." He went  
With straining shoulders. In the muddy yard  
The swine came, grunting, and a trembling cur

## BALIN

Sniffed at his wound, and whined. He reached  
the door

And saw the family squatting on the earth,  
A sire with forelock dropping past his eyes,  
A mother famine thin, and three tall sons,  
A mighty growth out of so meager soil.  
A pot smoked in their midst and in its depths  
They reached in hungry silence till the crone  
Saw Balin and cried out. Thereat they shrank  
And the five shadows melted on the wall  
Into one quivering monster. Feebly spoke  
Sir Balin, for the bleeding drained his life:  
“Comrades, I flee the king and die. Give help  
In Jesus name!” Alas, through tangled hair  
Their eyes glittered; the shadow on the wall  
Grew thick as a bunched spider. Then arose  
The eldest son. He was a man of mark.  
His form was large, his brow was wide and calm,  
He had an eye that glanced into the mind;  
He stood as in a marsh of rotted shrubs  
One soundly rooted tree. “My lord, what  
strength  
Have we to shield thee? Turn ye elsewhere.”  
Now weakness took Sir Balin. On his ear

## BALIN

Their voices dropped in murmurs and the fire  
Became a star shining through rosy mist.  
Still through the gathering gloom he saw that  
face

Wherein the spirit rose. To him he cried,  
Putting his fortune in the single cast:  
“Come to me, lad, I bleed!” Lo, through the  
dark

That noble youth drew near, and Balin felt  
Strong hands. Then all the light went out.

He lay

In sleepy madness of delirium  
With visions of young Nerys by the hands  
Of foes beset, or of a nightmare world  
Of mighty falling cities, towers and walls  
That melted in a storm of cries.

He woke.

The hand he raised was thin. The beard he  
touched

Was wild. Sure he had wandered long in sleep  
For he was weak and to himself was strange,  
And as a brook may fill a forest old  
With voices, so a thought possessed him ever  
Of Nerys melancholy, Nerys lost.

## BALIN

The woman of the hovel gave him food.  
He saw a wonder thing, that while he slept  
Her hair had blanched and that her lips were  
locked.

Even when he questioned why her sons and  
spouse

Remained so long away, her very eyes  
Were dumb; and all the days they spent in silence.

The town was silent also. Never a horn  
blew from the castle nor wains moved in the  
street

Nor busy voices traded all the day.

At eventime cross-legged in the door

The woman sat, first looking to the height

Then down upon the valley till he asked

What things she saw and how the misty night

Was drifting over yellow harvest fields

And wherefore neither cattle lowed nor cocks

Were crowing from the barnyard. She was  
silent.

He dragged him with long labor to the door.

Behold! the donjon keep and solid towers

Of Listeneise were vanished from the sky.

A granite lintel vast lay near the hut

## BALIN

And a huge rubble of fire-blackened stone  
Rolled down the hill and washed across the  
town

Where ruins were pitched headlong at the feet  
Of standing skeletons. For nothing lived,  
And all the valley, all the autumn bronze  
Of grain and flush of orchards ripe was dust  
Of ashes.

Then the woman spoke. She told  
How Merten and black Dinas by the stroke  
That slew the king were loosed upon the realm,  
Gathering armies; so her men were taken,  
And the princes battled across Listeneise.  
Each what he could not hold would fain destroy,  
Trailing in his retreat a screen of fire,  
Then, rallied to some desperate night assault  
The fugitive became the conqueror,  
And the combatants roved, marking their steps  
with flames  
Of villages, field, and forest. While she talked  
He saw pale smoke against the far horizon  
And bowed his heart, for every column white  
That melted in the sky rose from the death  
Of Pellam. God assoil him of that sin!

## BALIN

By small degrees and slow his strength  
returned.

Upon a day it chanced, roving afield,  
He came upon the ruins of a home  
Whereby a charger mourned, a lofty steed  
Black as midnight, saddled and trapped for war.  
Haply he left his master on the field  
Of battle and now waited for his voice  
In the old place. He came to Balin's hand  
And the knight took him as a sign from God.  
He found in ruined Listeneise a store  
Of armor rusted thin, a battered shield,  
A shapeless helmet dinted by many a blow,  
And having clad himself in tarnished mail  
Mounted the horse and bade the crone farewell.  
But she, looking beyond, where Listeneise  
Was crumbling, nodded and muttered to herself  
And heard him not. Thereat he loosed the reins  
And the black horse ran freely down the valley.

## VI

He went as straight as birds out of the north  
Winging to summer lands, for now he rode  
To keep a tryst, knowing where Nerys waited.



## BALIN

He went with ashes blowing from the fields  
Upon him. In the empty eventide  
The smoke of pillage wavered spirit-thin  
Across the coming stars, and on the road  
Were solitary ancients with their staffs  
Or women with starved children at their skirts  
Drew back and watched the armored man in  
fear;  
And all of this came from the death of Pellam.  
If God beheld the deeds of man, in truth  
A curse must follow!

Glad he was to pass  
From Listeneise into the wilderness  
Until he reached the chapel at the crossing  
Where Perin slept. Here Nerys keepeth tryst,  
Be sure! The priest was singing in the garden  
But seeing Balin, cast aloft his arms:  
“Ah, Jesus, mercy, are the dead arisen?”  
“Good father, she is here!” “Yea, brother, yea,  
She lieth here.” Loudly Sir Balin laughed.  
“Ye saints behold me. Priest, look up! I vow  
A noble abbey in this place shall rise  
And thou the father abbot. Ah, my heart!”  
Therewith he ran, and bursting wide the doors

## BALIN

A wind behind him entered with dead leaves.  
And Balin crying: "Nerys, my Lady Nerys!"  
Out of the sudden silence of the chapel  
An echo struck at him, and from his niche  
The saint with downward eyes and praying hands  
Commanded quiet. Then he saw a grave  
Where seven bayberry candles lately burned,  
But with the wind of Balin's coming dead,  
From every candle rose a ghost of white  
And went among the shadows of the dome  
Like seven thoughts between the day and night.  
A fragrance from the tapers grew, no breath  
Of churchly incense meaning burial  
But earthly pure and perfume of the earth  
When after rain a blessed scent of life  
Goes up from whispering lawns that still are  
drinking,  
Cold wild flowers and the hawthorn hedges wet.  
Then Balin groaned and stretched his empty  
hands  
For now, behold the pallid candle-smoke  
Attending her like seven prayers to heaven  
And he was left below. Nay, in his thought  
She stood behind him and with aching heart

## BALIN

He listened to a pause and stir of breath  
Until, in agony, he dared not turn.  
Something of her was near but oceans broad  
Between them mourned and cold infinity  
Of stars. So God had judged him.

Then he rose.

He left the chapel, he saw the garden bloom  
And the naked autumn forest piled in mist  
Glorious with morning like his lady's face.  
The white road gleamed upon the distant hills  
Where they had ridden together. Yonder lark  
That whistled in the sky, lo, how her eyes  
Went up to follow it!

Let this be known,

That God gives wisdom to the comforter.  
The gentle priest spoke not of mortal change  
And common destiny, but like a child  
He told how Nerys came, a weary woman,  
And neither bread she ate nor wine she drank  
But water only from the holy well.  
Ever she murmured: "Father, he is dead  
For me that was the salt and savor of life;  
Balin is dead, and for him I shall die."  
He told her, weeping, this was mortal sin,

[ 96 ]

## BALIN

But then she smiled and raised her hand as one  
Lessoning a child. "Dear father, every day  
The Lord poureth His will upon the world;  
Sorrow unlocked my heart and let the rain  
Of quiet enter. Foolish man, be sure  
I heard the wish of God." And so she reached  
A twilight, wasting slowly. At the end  
She felt those arms about her that are death  
And took a waxen taper from his hand  
And as she died, raised it as though to light  
Her first step in the dark.

## VII

All day he kept  
A vigil in the pleasant garden walks.  
At night the stars looked through the naked  
forest  
And he was open to the cold eyes of God.  
He thought in vain of glories old, and praise.  
The horns that sounded once on famous fields  
Blew thin and far. The knights in noble ranks  
Rode shadowlike upon his memory.  
Nerys was dead, and through his fingers poured  
His life, loose sand.

[ 97 ]

## BALIN

About the middle hour  
Of night the moon arose. It made the woods  
Both tall and black and through the forest went  
A white road, winding. Then Sir Balin mounted  
And the good priest beheld him take the way  
And follow it over the eastern-hill  
Where the road vanished in a silver mist.



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