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Author: Rachel Annand Taylor

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HOURS OF FIAMMETTA ***

E-text prepared by Ruth Hart

THE HOURS OF FIAMMETTA

A SONNET SEQUENCE

BY

RACHEL ANNAND TAYLOR

"Thou which lov'st to be
Subtle to plague thyself"—

LONDON:
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET
MCMX

*The "Epilogue of the Dreaming Women" is reprinted by
permission of the "English Review."*

There are two great traditions of womanhood. One presents the Madonna brooding over the mystery of motherhood; the other, more confusedly, tells of the acolyte, the priestess, the clairvoyante of the unknown gods. This latter exists complete in herself, a personality as definite and as significant as a symbol. She is behind all the processes of art, though she rarely becomes a conscious artist, except in delicate and impassioned modes of living. Indeed, matters are cruelly complicated for her if the entanglements of destiny drag her forward into the deliberate aesthetic effort. Strange, wistful, bitter and sweet, she troubles and quickens the soul of man, as earthly or as heavenly lover redeeming him from the spiritual sloth which is more to be dreaded than any kind of pain.

The second tradition of womanhood does not perish; but, in these present confusions of change, women of the more emotional and imaginative type are less potent than they have been and will be again. They appear equally inimical and heretical to the opposing camps of hausfrau and of suffragist. Their intellectual forces, liberated and intensified, prey upon the more instinctive part of their natures, vexing them with unanswerable questions. So Fiammetta mistakes herself to some degree, loses her keynote, becomes embittered and perplexed. The equilibrium of soul and body is disturbed; and she fortifies herself in an obstinate idealism that cannot come to terms with the assaults of life. No single sonnet expresses absolute truth from even her own point of view. The verses present the moods, misconceptions, extravagances, revulsions, reveries—all the obscure crises whereby she reaches a state of illumination and reconciliation regarding the enigma of love as it is, making her transition from the purely romantic and ascetic ideal fostered by the exquisitely selective conspiracies of the art of the great love-poets, through a great darkness of disillusion, to a new vision infinitely stronger and sweeter, because unafraid of the whole truth.

Fiammetta is frankly an enthusiast of the things of art; and her meditations unfortunately betray the fact that Etruscan mirrors are as dear to her as the daisies, and that she cannot find it more virtuous to contemplate a few cows in a pasture than a group of Leonardo's people in their rock-bound cloisters. For the long miracle of the human soul and its expression is for her not less sacredly part of the universal process than the wheeling of suns and planets: a Greek vase is to her as intimately concerned with Nature as the growing corn—with that Nature who formed the swan and the peacock for decorative delight, and who puts ivory and ebony cunningly together on the blackthorn every patterned Spring.

The Shakspearean form of sonnet yields most readily the piercing quality of sound that helps to describe a malady of the soul. But the system of completed quatrains in that model suits more assured and dominating passion than the present matter provides. A more agitated hurry of the syllables, a more involved sentence-structure, sometimes a fainter rime-stress, seem necessary to the music of bewilderment.

CONTENTS

	THE PROLOGUE OF THE DREAMING WOMEN
I.	THE PRELUDE.
II.	PERILS.
III.	THE PEACE TO BE.
IV.	STATUES.
V.	THE WEDDING-GARMENT.
VI.	THE DEATH OF PROCRIS.
VII.	THE WARNING.
VIII.	THE ACCUSATION.
IX.	THE MEDIAEVAL MIRROR-CASES (1).
X.	THE MIRROR-CASES (2).
XI.	THE PASSION-FLOWER.
XII.	THE VOICE OF LOVE (1).
XIII.	THE VOICE OF LOVE (2).
XIV.	DREAM-GHOSTS.
XV.	MEMORIA SUBSERMA.
XVI.	A PORTRAIT BY VENEZIANO.
XVII.	THE ENIGMA.
XVIII.	THE DOUBT.
XIX.	THE SEEKER.
XX.	THE HIDDEN REVERIE.
XXI.	SOUL AND BODY (1).
XXII.	SOUL AND BODY (2).
XXIII.	THE JUSTIFICATION.
XXIV.	ASPIRATIONS.
XXV.	THE ANAESTHETIC.

XXVI.	DIVINATION.
XXVII.	SUB-CONSCIOUSNESS.
XXVIII.	SATIETY.
XXIX.	THE CONFESSION (1).
XXX.	THE CONFESSION (2).
XXXI.	COMRADES.
XXXII.	THE SUM OF THINGS.
XXXIII.	REACTION.
XXXIV.	THE IDEALIST.
XXXV.	WOMAN AND VISION.
XXXVI.	ART AND WOMEN.
XXXVII.	DESTINY.
XXXVIII.	CONFLICT.
XXXIX.	PREDECESSORS.
XL.	TRANSITION.
XLI.	THE VIRTUE OF PRIDE.
XLII.	SPELL-BOUND.
XLIII.	THE NIGHT OBSCURE OF THE SOUL.
XLIV.	THE CONQUEST OF IMMORTALITY.
XLV.	WOMEN OF TANAGRA.
XLVI.	THE INVENTORY.
XLVII.	COMFORT (1).
XLVIII.	COMFORT (2).
XLIX.	THE CHANGE.
L.	AT THE END.
LI.	THE SOUL OF AGE.
LII.	HYPNEROTOMACHIA.
LIII.	THE REVOLT.
LIV.	AFTER MANY YEARS.
LV.	TREASURE.
LVI.	THE SOUL TO THE BODY.
LVII.	THE IRONIST.
LVIII.	IN VAIN.
LIX.	RESERVATIONS.
LX.	THE NEW LOVE.
LXI.	THE WAYS OF LOVE.
	THE EPILOGUE OF THE DREAMING WOMEN

THE PROLOGUE OF THE DREAMING WOMEN

We carry spices to the gods.
 For this are we wrought curiously,
 All vain-desire and reverie,
 To carry spices to the gods.

We carry spices to the gods.
 Sacred and soft as lotos-flowers
 Are those long languorous hands of ours
 That carry spices to the gods.

We know their roses and their rods,
 Having in pale spring-orchards seen
 Their cruel eyes, and in the green
 Strange twilights having met the gods.

Sometimes we tire. Upon the sods
 We set the great enamels by,
 Wherein the occult odours lie,
 And play with children on the sods.

Yet soon we take, O jealous gods,
Those gracious caskets once again,
Storied with oracles of pain,
That keep the spices for the gods.

We carry spices to the gods.
Like sumptuous cold chalcedony
Our weary breasts and hands must be
To carry spices to the gods.

I

THE PRELUDE

Thou sayest, "*O pure Palace of my Pleasures,
O Doors of Ivory, let the King come in.
With silver lamps before him, and with measures
Of low lute-music let him come. Begin,
Ye suppliant lilies and ye frail white roses,
Imploring sweetnesses of hands and eyes,
To let Love through to the most secret closes
Of all his flowery Court of Paradise.*" . . .
Sunder the jealous gates. Thine ivory Castle
Is hung with scarlet, is the Convent of Pain.
With purple and with spice indeed the Vassal
Receives her King whom dark desires constrain.
Rejoice, rejoice!—But far from flutes and dances
The cloistered Soul lies frozen in her trances.

II

PERILS

Ah! Since from subtle silk of agony
Our veils of lamentable flesh are spun,
Since Time in spoiling violates, and we
In that strait Pass of Pangs may be undone,
Since the mere natural flower and withering
Of these our bodies terribly distil
Strange poisons, since an alien Lust may fling
On any autumn day some torch to fill
Our pale Pavilion of dreaming lavenders
With frenzy, till it is a Tower of Flame
Wherein the soul shrieks burning, since the myrrhs
And music of our beauty are mixed with shame
Inextricable,—some drug of poppies give
This bitter ecstasy whereby we live!

III

THE PEACE TO BE

Quell this consuming fever, quickly give
Some drug of poppies white!—But Peace will come?
O ashen savourless alternative,
Quietude of the blind and deaf and dumb
That all swift motions must alike assuage,—
When we are exiled from youth's golden hosts
To pace the calm cold terraces of age,
With unvexed senses, being but houseled ghosts,

Wise, with the uncoloured wisdom of the souls
With whom great passions have no more to do,
Serene, since ours the dusty arles Death doles,
Oblivions dim of all there is to rue!—
Peace comes to hearts of whom proud Love has tired;
Beyond all danger dwell the undesired.

IV

STATUES

The great Greek lovers of gold and ivory things,
Austere and perfect things, albeit they wrought
Girl-shapes with driven raiment, conquering wings,
And smiling queens of Cnidos, turned and sought
A more inviolate beauty that should keep
Their secret dream. Their grave sweet geniuses
Of love and death, of rapture or of sleep,
Are delicately severed from all excess.—
Ah! suppliant, honey-white, the languor cleaves
About the dolorous weak body He,
The Dark Eros, with staunchless spear-thrust grieves;
Heavy the seal of that mortality.
No wounds disgrace the haughty acolytes
Of heavenly sorrows, of divine delights.

V

THE WEDDING-GARMENT

Thought it be blither than roses in thine eyes,
Shall I not rend this raiment of pangs and fears,
This Colchian cloth white flames ensorcelise,
This gaudy-veil distained with blood and tears?—
What praise? "*O marriage-beauty garlanded
For festival, O sumptuous flowery stole
For rites of adoration!*"—See instead
A cilice drenched with torment of my soul!
Nevertheless the fibres implicate
Proud exultations; burning, have revealed
Rich throes of triumph, sweetness passionate
As painèd lilies reared in thorn-plots yield.
Ah! silver wedding-garment of the bride,
Ah! fiery cilice, I am satisfied!

VI

THE DEATH OF PROCRIS

Come gaze on Procris, poor soon-perished child!
Why did her innocent virginity
Follow Desire within his arrowy wild?
She dies pursuing the cruel ecstasy
That keeps as mortal wounds for them that find.
Serene her pensive body lies at last
Like a mown poppy-flower to sleep resigned,
Softly resigned. The wildwood things aghast,
With pitiful hearts instinctive, sweet as hers,
Approach her now: love, death, and virgin grace,

Blue distance, and the stricken foresters,
And all the dreaming, healing, woodland place
Are patterned into tender melodies
Of lovely line and hue—a music of peace!

VII

THE WARNING

As delicate gorgeous rains of dusky gold
Heavy white lilies, Love importunate
Besets the soul,—as that wild Splendour told
Pale Danaë her haughty heavenly fate.
Not speared in burning points but spun in strands
My senses: drowsily burning webs are they
That veil me head to foot. While on mine hands
And hair and lids thy kisses die away
Through all my being their strange echoes thrill
And from the body's flowery mysticism
I draw the last white honey. What is thine ill?
What wouldst thou more of that great symbolism?
Beyond this ultimate moment nothing lies
But moonless cold and darkness. Ah! be wise!

VIII

THE ACCUSATION

Mere night! The unconsenting Soul stands by,
A moaning protestant. "Ah, not for this,
And not for this, through rose and thorn was I
Drawn to surrender and the bridal-kiss.
Annunciations lit with jewelled wings
Of sudden angels mid the lilies tall,
Proud prothalamia chaunting enraptured things,—
O sumptuous fables, why so prodigal
Of masque and music, of dreams like foam-white swans
On lakes of hyacinthus? Must Love seek
Great allies, Beauty sound her arrière-bans
That all her splendours betray us to this bleak
Simplicity whereto blind satyrs run?"—
The irony seems old, old as the sun.

IX

THE MEDIEVAL MIRROR-CASES

I

Rondels of old French ivory to-day
(Poor perished beauty's deathless mirror-cases!)
Reveal to me the delicate amorous play
Of reed-like flowering folk with pointed faces.
Lovers ride hawking; over chess delight;
The Castle of Ladies renders up its keys,
Its roses all being flung; a gracious knight
Kneels to his garlander mid orchard-trees.
Passionate pilgrims, do ye keep so fast
Your dream of miracles and heights? Ah, shent
And sore-bewildered shall ye couch at last

In bitter beds of disillusionment.
In the Black Orchard the foul raven grieves
White Love, on some Montfauçon of the thieves.

X

THE MIRROR-CASES

II

O treasonable heart and perverse words,
Ye darken beauty with your plots of pain!
What languors beat through me like muted chords?
I know indeed that suffering shall profane
These lovers, sweet as viols or violet-spices.
Strangely must end their dreamy chess-playing,
Strange wounds amaze their broidered Paradises,
And stain the falconry and garlanding.
Their bodies must be broken as on wheels,
Their souls be carded with implacable shame,—
Molten like wax, be crushed beneath the seals
Of sin and penance. Yet, with wings aflame,
Love, Love more lovely, like a triumphpher,
Shall break his malefactor's sepulchre.

XI

THE PASSION-FLOWER

The passion-flower bears in her violet Cup
The senses of her bridal, and they seem
Symbols of sacred pangs,—Love lifted up
To expiate the beauty of his dream.
Come and adore, ye crafty imagers,
This piece of ivory and amethyst.
Let Music, Colour, decorated Verse,
Meditate, each like some sad lutanist,
This Paten, and the marvels it uncovers,
Identities of joy and anguish. Rod,
Nails, bitter garlands, all ecstatic lovers
Blindly repeat the dolours of a God.
Subdue this mournful matter unto Art,
Ivory, amethyst, serene of heart.

XII

THE VOICE OF LOVE

I

"Mine, mine!" saith Love, "Deny me many times.
Yet mine that body wherein mine arrow thrills,
And mine the fugitive soul that bleeding climbs
Hunting a vision on the frozen hills.
Mine are her stigmata, sad rhapsodist.—
And when to the delighted bridal-bowers
They bring thee starlike through the silver mist
Of music and canticles and myrtle-flowers,
And the dark hour bids the consentless heart
Surrender to disillusion, since in all

The labyrinth of deed no counterpart
Can pattern Passion's archetype, nor shall
The chalice of sense endure her flaming wine,
Superb and bitter dreamer, thou most art mine."

XIII

THE VOICE OF LOVE

II

"Mine, mine!" saith Love, "Although ye serve no more
Mine images of ivory and bronze
With flute-led dances of the days of yore,
But leave them to barbarian orisons
Of dull hearth-loving hearts, mistaking me:
Yet from mine incense ye shall not divorce
Remembrance. Fools, these recantations be
Ardours that prove you still idolators;
And, though ye hurry through the circling hells
Of bright ambition like hopes and energies,
That haste bewrays you. My great doctrine dwells
Immortal in those fevered heresies,
And all the inversions of my rites proclaim
The mournful memory of mine altar-flame."

XIV

DREAM-GHOSTS

White house of night, too much the ghosts come through
Your crazy doors, to vex and startle me,
Touching with curious fingers cold as dew
Kissing with unloved kisses fiercely
That dwell, slow fever, through my veins all day,
And fill my senses as the dead their graves.
They are builded in my castles and bridges? Yea,
Not therefore must my dreams become their slaves.
If once we passed some kindness, must they still
Sway me with weird returns and dim disgust?—
Though even in sleep the absolute bright Will
Would exorcise them, saying, "These are but dust,"
They show sad symbols, that, when I awaken,
I never can deny I have partaken.

XV

MEMORIA SUBMERSA

Can souls forget what bodies keep the while?
Is this among their dark antinomies?
The spiritual joy is volatile:
The flesh is faithful to her memories.
This living silk, this inarticulate
Remembrance of the nerves enwinds us fast:
Delicate cells, obscure and obstinate,
Secrete the bitter essence of the Past.
Ah! Was the fading web of rose and white
All macerated by the kisses of old
As rare French queens with perfume? (So, by night,

They lived like lilies mid their cloth-of-gold.)
Within the sense, howe'er the soul abjure,
Like flavours and fumes these ancient things endure.

XVI

A PORTRAIT BY VENEZIANO

Strange dancing-girl with curls of golden wire,
With strait white veil, and sinister jewel strung
Upon your brows, your sombre eyes desire
Some secret thing. Garlanded leaves are young
Around your head, and, in your beauty's hours,
Venice yet loved that joy's enthusiast
Be frail, fantastic as gilt iris-flowers.
O startling reveller from out the Past,
Long, long ago through lanes of chrysophrase
The Dark Eros compelled his exquisite
Evil apostle. This painter made your praise,
A piece of art, a curious delight.
But your ghost wanders. Yesterday your sweet
Accusing eyes challenged me in the street.

XVII

THE ENIGMA

Eternally grieving and arraigning eyes,
Why vex my heart? What is it I can do?
Can I call back the hounds of Time with sighs,
Or find inviolate peace to bring you to,
Pluck frenzy from the amazed soul of man,
Or curb the horses of raging poverty
That trample you until—escape who can,—
Or spill the honey from rich revelry
And strip the silken days?—Alas! alas!
I am so dream-locked that I cannot know
Why it is not much easier to pass
To death than let love's haughty cloister show
A common hostel for such taverners.—
Ye know, who are perhaps my ransomers.

XVIII

THE DOUBT

I am pure, because of great illuminations
Of dreamy doctrine caught from poets of old,
Because of delicate imaginations,
Because I am proud, or subtle, or merely cold.
Natheless my soul's bright passions interchange
As the red flames in opal drowse and speak:
In beautiful twilight paths the elusive strange
Phantoms of personality I seek.
If better than the last embraces I
Love the lit riddles of the eyes, the faint
Appeal of merely courteous fingers,—why,
Though 'tis a quest of souls, and I acquaint
My heart with spiritual vanities,—

Is there indeed no bridge twixt me and these?

XIX

THE SEEKER

Curious and wistful through your soul I go.
With silver-tinkling feet I penetrate
Sealed chambers, and a puissant incense throw
Upon the smouldering braziers, love and hate:
And chaunt the grievèd verses of a dirge
For dying gods, remembering flutes and shawms:
With perverse moods I trouble you, and urge
The sense to beauty. Give me some sweet alms,
Some reverie, some pang of a damasked sword,
Some poignant moment yet unparalleled
In my dream-broidered chronicles, some chord
Of mystery Love's music never knelled
Before;—but nought of the rough alchemy
That disillusion all felicity.

XX

THE HIDDEN REVERIE

The life of plants, rising through dim sweet states,
Cloisters the rich love-secret more and more,
Gathers it jealously within the gates
Of the hushed heart; but, mightier than before,
The mystery prevails and overpowers
Stem, leaf, and petal. So the passion lies
In this tranced flowery being which is ours
Like to a hidden wound; yet softly dyes
With dolorous beauty all the stuff of life,
Each dream and vision and desire subduing
With muted pulses, that great counter-strife
Of soul with its own rhythmic pangs imbuing.
Deny it and disdain it. Lo! there beat
Red stigmata in heart and hands and feet.

XXI

SOUL AND BODY

It may be all my pain is woven wrong,
And this wild "I" is nothing but a dream
The body exhales, as roses at evensong
Their passionate odour. Verily it may seem
That this most fevered and fantastic wear
Of nerves and senses is myself indeed,
The rest, illusion taken in that snare.—
But still the fiery splendour and the need
Can bite like actual flame and hunger. Ah!
If Sense, bewildered in the spiral towers
Of Matter, dreamed this great Superbia
I call the Soul, not less the Dream hath powers;
Not less these Twain, being one, are separate,
Like lovers whose love is tangled hard with hate.

XXII

SOUL AND BODY

II

Sometimes the Soul in pure hieratic rule
Is throned (as on some high Abbatial chair
Of moon-pearl and rose-rubies beautiful)
Within the body grown serene and fair:
Sometimes it weds her like a lifted rood;
But she endures, and wills no anodyne,
For then she flowers within the mystic Wood,
And hath her lot with gods—and seems divine:
Sometimes it is her lonely oubliet,
Sometimes a marriage-chamber sweet with spice:
It is her triumph-car with flutes beset,
The altar where she lies a sacrifice.—
Cold images! The truth is not in these.
Both are alive, both quick with rhapsodies.

XXIII

THE JUSTIFICATION

Life I adore, and not Life's accidents.
A garlanded and dream-fast thurifer
My Soul comes out from beauty's purple tents
That incense-troubled Love may grieve and stir,
Be ransomed from satiety's sad graves,
And go to God up the bright stair of Wonder.
Since passion makes immortal Time's tired slaves
I am of those that delicately sunder
Corruptions of contentment from the breast
As with rare steel. Like music I unveil
Last things, till, weary of earthen cups and rest,
You seek Montsalvat and the burning Grail.
Ah! blindly, blindly, wounded with the roses,
I bear my spice where Ecstasy reposes.

XXIV

ASPIRATIONS

Light of great swords, banners all blazoned gold,
Bright lists of danger where with trumpets pass
Riders like those for whom bride-bells are bold
To beautiful desperate conflict, Michaelmas
Of golden heroes, how my sad soul saith
Your praise! Nor does to you her love deny,
Solemn strange Cups that carry dreamy death
To quench those fevers when they flame too high.
But now the Victories have broken wings;
The spirit of Rapture from the day of deeds
Is banished, and must spend on sorcerous strings
Her heart that perishes of splendid needs.—
Saints, lovers, high crusaders, give me too
Some simple and impassioned thing to do.

XXV

THE ANAESTHETIC

Like a white moth caught heavily, heavily,
In the honeyed heart of some white drowsy flower,
I lay behind the leaves of apathy,
Where not the reddest pang has any power.
Then, like one drowning, I rose and lapsed again
On dim sweet tides of the great anodyne.
Why must they hale me back to drink the pain
That seethes in consciousness, an evil wine?
I love the closing trances, howsoever
Their seals be broken: they are wise and kind.
If death can give such fumes of poppy, never
Shall I revile him. Oh! uncertain mind!
Hast thou an equal pleasure in the proud
Flame-builed pillar, and the pillar of cloud?

XXVI

DIVINATION

I weary of your hesitating will;
This flicker of "should" and "should not" crazes me.
Rest from these vain debates of good and ill:
Let me your secret swift diviner be.
In the memorial blue dusk of sense,
Where, spirals of doves or wreaths of ravens, rise
Auguries sweet or dread, the blue dusk whence
The cresseted houses of the stars surprise
The heart with their mysterious horoscopes,
I know the issues ere great battles begin,
The ashen values of bright-burning hopes,
The ultimate hours of sacrifice or sin.
Do I obey the Wisdom? If I list,
I too, beloved, can play the casuist.

XXVII

SUB-CONSCIOUSNESS

Sometimes as Martha suddenly stood amazed
By Mary's mystic eyes, and sometimes as
That very dreamer Mary might have gazed
Upon the Daughter of Herodias,
The conscious Soul that other Soul discovers,
The strange idolator who still regrets
Golden Osiris, Tammuz lord of lovers,
Attis the sad white god of violets.
In jasper caves she lies behind her veils;
And jars of spice, and gilded ears of corn,
And wine-red roses and rose-red wine-grails
Feed her long trances while the far flutes mourn.
She lies and dreams daemonic passionate things:
Cherubim guard her gates with monstrous wings.

XXVIII

SATIETY

Ah! love me not with honey-sweet excesses,
With passionate prodigalities of praise,
With wreaths of daisied words and quaint caresses,
Adore me not in charming childish ways.
This pastoral is beautiful enough:
But never shall it antidote my drouth:
I want a reticent ironic Love
With smiling eyes and faintly mocking mouth.
Sweetness is best when bitterly 'tis bought:
So in Love's deadly duel I would not be
Victorious, and the peace I long have sought,
Sure knowledge of his great supremacy,
Would buy with pangs, like that bright cuirassier,
The queen-at-arms that knew the Peliad's spear.

XXIX

THE CONFESSION

I

I am initiate,—long disciplined
In delicate austerities of art:
The clear compulsions of the sovran mind
Constrain the dreamy panics of my heart.
Plato and Dante, Petrarch, Lancelot,
Revealed me very Love, flame-clad, august.
Also I strove to be as we are not,
Loyal, and honourable, and even just.
My webs of life in reveries were dyed
As veils in vats of purple: so there stole
Serene and sumptuous and mysterious pride
Through the imperial vesture of my soul.—
And lo! like any servile fool I crave
The dark strange rapture of the stricken slave.

XXX

THE CONFESSION

II

I have a banner and a great duke's way,
I have an High Adventure of my own.
Yet would I rather squire a knightlier,—Nay!
Be the least harper by his red-hung throne.
I am not satisfied with any love
Till I can say, "O stronger far than I!"
Is it a shame to hide the aching of,
A sacred mystery to justify?
Through all our spiritual discontents
Thrills the strange leaven of renunciation.—
Ah! god unknown behind the Sacraments
Unfailing of the earthly expiation,
Lift up this amethyst-encumbered Vine,
Crush from her pain some ransom-cup of Wine.

XXXI

COMRADES

Yet for the honourable felicity

Of comradeship I can be chivalrous,
And through love's transmutations fierily
Constant as the gemmed paladin Sirius
To that fair pact. We go, gay challengers,
Beneath dark rampires of forbidden thought,
Thread life's dim gardens masked like revellers
Where dreams of roses red are dearly bought.
We shall ride haughtily as bright Crusaders,
As hooded palmers fare with humbled hearts,
And we shall find, adoring blithe invaders,
The City of Seven Towers, of Seven Arts.—
Then the Last Quest, (lead you the dreadful way!)
Among the unimagined Nebulae!

XXXII

THE SUM OF THINGS

TO ANOTHER WOMAN

Well, I am tired, who fared to divers ends,
And you are not, who kept the beaten path;
But mystic Vintagers have been my friends,
Even Love and Death and Sin and Pride and Wrath.
Wounded am I, you are immaculate;
But great Adventurers were my starry guides:
From God's Pavilion to the Flaming Gate
Have I not ridden as an immortal rides?
And your dry soul crumbles by dim degrees
To final dust quite happily, it appears,
While all the sweetness of her nectaries
Can only stand within my heart like tears.
O throbbing wounds, rich tears, and splendour spent,—
Ye are all my spoil, and I am well content.

XXXIII

REACTION

Give me a chamber paved with emerald
And hung with arras green as evening skies,
Broidered with halcyons, moons, and heavily thralled
White lilies, cold rare comfort for the eyes.
Of triumph built was radiant yesterday:
Like an imperial eagle to the sun
My soul bare up her dreams the glorious way
Through flagrant ordeals august, and won
To burning eyries, till beneath her wing
Rankled the shaft. Her Archer was abroad;
And hooded with strange darkness, shuddering
Down pain's dull spiral, sank she on the sod.
Close round, green dusk of dews! No more we dare
The blue inviolate castles of the air.

XXXIV

THE IDEALIST

For such an one let lovers cry, Alas!
Since passion's leaguer shall break through in vain
To that cold centre of bright adamas.—
Storm through her being, rapturous spears of pain!
Ye shall not wound that queen of gracious guile,
The soul that with immortal trance keeps troth:
For Helen is in Egypt all the while,
Learning great magic from the Wife of Thoth.
Throned white and high on red-rose porphyry,
And coifed with golden wings, she lifts her eyes
O'er Nile's green lavers where most sacredly
The Pattern of the myriad Lotos lies,
Unto those clear horizons jasper-pale
Her heavenly Brethren ride in silver mail.

XXXV

WOMAN AND VISION

Vainly the Vision of Life entreats those eyes
Where stars of glamour mock at revelations.
But singular fiery moments do surprise
With dreadful or delicious divinations
The whorls of our blue Labyrinth: the sweet
Blind sense of touch tells like an undersong
Marvellous matters. What though snared feet,
And wounded hands, and ravelled coils of wrong,
Plead that the solemn Vision might make whole
Our imperfection?—Fevered second-sight,
Audacious wisdom of the blinded soul,
Dim delicate auroras of delight
That thrill the Dark from startled finger-tips,
Are ye less precious an Apocalypse?

XXXVI

ART AND WOMEN

The Triumph of Art compels few womenkind;
And these are yoked like slaves to Eros' car,—
No victors they! Yet ours the Dream behind,
Who are nearer to the gods than poets are.
For with the silver moons we wax and wane,
And with the roses love most woundingly,
And, wrought from flower to fruit with dim rich pain,
The Orchard of the Pomegranates are we.
For with Demeter still we seek the Spring,
With Dionysos tread the sacred Vine,
Our broken bodies still imagining
The mournful Mystery of the Bread and Wine.—
And Art, that fierce confessor of the flowers,
Desires the secret spice of those veiled hours.

XXXVII

DESTINY

The great religions of the Rose and Grape
Have bound us in to their sad Paradise:

We dream in crucial symbols, nor escape
The cypress-garden where the slain god lies.
Daughters of lamentation round the Cross
Where Beauty suffers garlanded with thorn,
Remembrancers through all the Night of Loss,
We bear the spikenard of the Easter Morn.
The yearning Springs, the brooding Autumns seethe
Like philtres in our veins. O dark Election,
Are then the sacrificial doors we wreath
With lilies fiery gates of Resurrexion?
And does the passion of our spices feed
Love's bright Arabian miracle indeed?

XXXVIII

CONFLICT

Why should a woman find her dream of love
Irised by the strange ecstasy of Art?
Is not Eros a terrible lord enough
That she must bear both Hunters of the heart,
The Golden Archer and the Scarlet too?
Then bitter anomalies annul her choir
Of puissant and subtle instincts, rended through
By gorgeous dualisms of vain-desire.
For Love outrages Art's clear disciplines,
And Art lures Love to guilt of cryptic treason:
The spirit of imagination pines,
Captive in webs of exquisite unreason.
Alas for this translated soul of hers,
The rose's, that must be the garlander's!

XXXIX

PREDECESSORS

Faëry of Sheba, idol moulded in
Onyx milk-white, moon-mailed and casqued with gems;
Ye gold-swathed queens of Egypt, Isis' kin,
With bright god-hawks and snakes for diadems;
Serene masque-music of Greek girls that bear
The sacred Veil to that Athenian feast;
Hypatia, casting from thine ivory chair
The gods' last challenge to the godless priest;
Fantastic fine Provençals wistfully
Hearkening Love, the mournful lute player;
Diamond ladies of that Italy
When Art and Wisdom Passion's angels were—
Ye give this grail (touch with no mad misprision!)
Of Beauty's rose-red miracled tradition.

XL

TRANSITION

But these recoil in riddles and reserves.—
The dream's untuned. Ah! vanished chords thereof!
Ah! keen divisions of the jangled nerves
That strung so long the gracious lutes of love!—

Hurry to sell old magian Lamps for new,
Though beauty's moonlike domes dissolve and pass:
If all things change, ye would be changing too,
Crazed hearts that know not your desire, alas!
Still, through these wintry treasons that forswear
The lovely bitter bondage of our god,
Rare perennations of the soul prepare—
And Music yet shall seal the period
With some new star,—with sad pure hands unveil
For ransomed eyes again the gilded Grail.

XLI

THE VIRTUE OF PRIDE

My troubled bosom shall be cinct with pride,
Girdled with red asterias. Is it sin
If I have cast lover and friend aside,
Scorning them as myself who cannot win
The strengths of beauty, the heavenly altitudes?—
O sad and sacred Spirit of Disdain,
What penances upon thine ivory roods
Within the burning Castles of thy pain!—
Thy mystic will no motion ever knew
Outwith the splendid danger of extremes;
Thy sorrowful refusals pass thee through
The great concentrics of star-built dreams,
Unto the crypt of absolute ecstasy,
To God or Nothing—where thine heart would be.

XLII

SPELL-BOUND

I have been frozen. Once I was not cold.
But I have strayed within some glittering
Night Of Lapland miracle, have leagued of old
With glaives and banners of wild Polar light.
Yet if I could dissolve in tears this core
Of ice, my heart, undo these crystal spells,
We should be sisters of incense evermore
Like the crowned Lover of the Canticles.
Through the great honeycomb of my soul should steep
The secrets of the lilies, and her fire
Be ambergris, her agate flagons keep
The sorcelled hydromel which brings Desire
To that mysterious Dark where still prevails
The dream of roses and of nightingales.

XLIII

THE NIGHT OBSCURE OF THE SOUL

When the Soul travails in her Night Obscure,
The nadir of her desperate defeat,
What heavenly dream shall help her to endure,
What flaming Wisdom be her Paraclete?
No curious Metaphysic can withhold
The heart from that mandragora she craves:—

Unreasonable, old as Earth is old,
The blind ecstatic miracle that saves.
Far off the pagan trumpeters of Pride
Call to the blood.—Love moans.—Some fiery fashion
Of rapture like the anguish of the bride
Leaps from the dark perfection of the Passion,
Crying: "O beautiful God, still torture me,
For if thou slay me, I will trust in Thee."

XLIV

THE CONQUEST OF IMMORTALITY

Ah! not in earthy dull durations I
Mine heirdom of Eternity implore.
Give one star-drunken moment ere I die,
Then doom me dreadless to the implacable Door.
That mystical Assumption shall disown
Time's haughtiest lieges. Grey mortality
Will disenchant the jewel-bred throne
Of Cassiopeia when more burningly
My deed exults with angels. I will borrow
From continuity no larva-lease:
Through sworded crises and great compts of sorrow
I seek the splendour that shall never cease
Though Death coin from my soul through endless years
Dim drachmas of his infinite arrears.

XLV

WOMEN OF TANAGRA

Have these forgotten they are toys of Death
That in his sad apheleions of desire
They still regret the joy that perisheth,
And Spring's great reveries that exceed and tire,—
Faintly accusing Love's unmercied yokes
With almost wanton grace, the craft and art
Of precious frailty that with subtle strokes
Of sweetness finds the core of Passion's heart?
They carry fans and mirrors, or make fast
The mournful flute-like cadence of a veil.
Slight fans that winnowed souls, mirrors that glassed
The burning brooding wings which never fail!
Still in such lovely vanities to-day
The gods their secret wisdom hide away.

XLVI

THE INVENTORY

TO HER FRIEND

I love all sumptuous things and delicate,
Ethereal matters richly paradised
In Art's proud certitudes. I love the great
Greek vases, carven ivory, subtilised
Arras of roses, Magians dyed on glass,
Graven chalcedony and sardonyx,
Nocturnes that through the nerves like fever pass,

Arthurian kings, Love on the crucifix,
All sweet mysterious verse, the Byzantine
Gold chambers of Crivelli, marble that flowers
In shy adoring angels, patterned vine
And lotos, and emblazoned Books of Hours,—
*And you, whose smiling eyes to ironies
Reduce both me and mine idolatries.*

XLVII

COMFORT

I

I sang the Dolorous Stroke of Disillusion,
Yet never have I broken faith with Joy:
Flame-broidered trance and starless cold confusion
Of slain and flying dreams shall not destroy
The radiant oath to that bright Suzerain
Whose lightning-lovely succour ambushed lies
Even in the most impossible strait of pain.
Mystical paradox, divine surprise
Of rapture! By intensities alone
Their spirits enter in to exultation
For whom the burning winds of their sad zone
Bear down the Dove of the Imagination,
Who suffer superbly, *in scarlet violettèd,*
As the Sacred Kings of the Lillie mourned their dead.*

* See Favine's "Book of Chivalry."

XLVIII

COMFORT

II

And that is marvellous comfort;—and yet poor
To what mere woman-mystery can give,
The strange simplicity that will endure
The pangs of death, most resolute to live.
This God of riddles that shaped a thing so frail
For his worst torment hid mysterious powers
Within her breast who can like lilies prevail
Through rains of doom that conquer brassy towers.
Her heart lies broken; when some trivial chord
Of sweetness chimes reveille through the sense,—
A rose, a song, a smile, a courtly word.
She wakes, and sighs, and softly passes thence
Back to the masquers, though her soul's veiled Pyx
Enclose the solemn fruits of the Crucifix.

XLIX

THE CHANGE

I spun my soul about with soft cocoons
Of pleasure golden-pale. For me, for me
Were precious things put forth by crescent moons,
Of pearl and milky jade and ivory.

Grave players on ethereal harpsichords,
My senses wrought a music exquisite
As patterned roses, all my life's accords
Were richer, ghostlier than peacocks white.
So in my paradise reserved and fair
I grew as dreamlike as the Elysian dead;
Until a passing Wizard smote me there,
And suddenly my soul inherited
Some gorgeous terrible dukedom of desire
Like those in bright Andromeda's realms of fire.

L

AT THE END

The fiery permutations of the soul
Are infinite, but how to be revealed?
On what impassive matter must the whole
Inveterate coil of good and ill be sealed!
How much too simple all the tale of deeds
To pattern out these labyrinthine things,
These knots of bright unreason, ghostly bredes
Veiled weavers weave, moving with silver wings
Within the duskling sense. Most diverse visions
Their visionaries darkly reconcile
At one sad end. Fate's delicate derisions
Through the same hell of penance may beguile
Two women, who meet with alien eyes downcast;
Yet one stand first with Love, and one the last.

LI

THE SOUL OF AGE

I have seen delicate aged women wrought
Most tenderly by Time, their passionate past
By the wise vigils of forgiving thought
Amerced of pain, mere beauty at the last.
So may my soul be chaste, serene, enriched
Like an Etruscan mirror one has found
In kind oblivions, graciously bewitched
With precious patinas, a various round
Of milky opal, or turkis, or emerald,
Glistered with rubies faint and smoky pearls,
Where swirls of incised pattern have enthralled
Figures of sweet archaic gods and girls,
And I shall say: "Thou art a curious toy,
O soul that mirrored Love and Wrath and Joy!"

LI I

HYPNEROTOMACHIA

Ah! Pride and Wrath and Mirth and Pain and Pity,
Some amethystine day at last will be,
When your bright guard and Phantasy's hill-city
Shall be like wonders on a tapestry;
And we shall touch between tired orisons
The symbolism of those freaked crowns and wings,—

Then gaze across the falling Avalons,
The resignations of autumnal things,
And see among the pointed cypresses
The one god left, the smiling perverse god,
The Love that will not leave the loverless,
Contending with the Stranger of the Rod,—
Until these twain become as one, and all
The Soul and Sense be starrily vesperal.

LIII

THE REVOLT

Not so, my Soul? Rather for thee the fate
Of those hieratic Carthaginian queens
Who needs must vanish through the gods' own gate,
Even holy Flame, with music and great threnes
Idolatrous, as on soft gorgeous wings,
If Time's least kiss had subtly disallowed
Their beauty's sacred unisons?—Fair things
Desire their revel-raiment be their shroud.
Yet, fierce insurgent, cease vain wars to wage!
Art thou so pure as to decline, forsooth,
These penitential usages of age
That expiate proud cruelties of youth,
And bring thee to the last and perfect art,
To love the lovely with a selfless heart?

LIV

AFTER MANY YEARS

By mute communions and by salt sad kisses,
By Pity's webs that still with fiery strands
Wove us together, by the unplumbed abysses
Where we have gazed and never loosened hands,
By holy water we have given each other
At Beauty's blessed doors, and by the hearts
Of sweet Delight and Agony her brother,
By bright new marriages in all great arts,
By the rare wisdom like miraculous amber
Won by the desolate grey sound of tears,
By wedding-music of the flute and tambour
Prevailing o'er Time's cruel plot of years,
By all the proud prayers granted and denied us,
Fate has no sword at all that can divide us.

LV

TREASURE

Not mine the silver ride of the redeemer,
Not mine the secret vision of the saint,
Not mine the martyrdoms of Truth's dark dreamer
Nor bitter beatitudes of Art. O quaint
Undoing of youth's horoscope! No splendours
Nor laurels, nor wisdom in a myrrhine bowl!
Here is the treasure that the past surrenders,
A spoil of roses coffered in the soul,—

Much like another woman's! Rare perfumes
And cleaving thorns, faded pathetic store
Of kisses and sighs, would those heroic dooms
I craved of old have yet enriched me more?
I have not dwelt in Galilee nor Tyre
Nor Athens. But I have my heart's desire.

LVI

THE SOUL TO THE BODY

I know thou hast a secret of thine own
Which I desire. But once I broke with thee
And walked among the asphodel alone:
Therefore thou wilt reserve this reverie,
Like sumptuous flame closed up in alabaster.
They half betray, these curious magian hands:
Faint music of thy breast has throbb'd the faster,
If I have touched it with my charming-wands.
And yet,—the wonder any woman knows
Thou dost deny the proud Soul that has fed
Among the lilies of the White Eros.—
Ere I go down among the witless Dead
Give, give the secret, for my bliss or rue,
Lest lack of that should craze my wisdom through.

LVII

THE IRONIST

Among high gods the absolute ironist
Is Love. Therefore, when some cleft lightning mocks
Thine arrogant rapture, sad idealist,
Admire the wild play of his paradox.
Great satires of reversal have astounded
His bigots: proud fine dreamers confident
Before an idol in their image are hounded
Through comedies of disillusionment.
Not heavenly Plato, not the Florentine,
Not any mage of Epipsychidion
Can the true nature of the god divine.
Heresiarchs like Heine and like Donne,
Bitter and sweet, and hot and cold, know best
The incomparable anguish of his jest.

LVIII

IN VAIN

I said: "Confession's bitter cautery
Shall fierily search my soul, destroy her ill."
Natheless, the wounded wasting malady
Is her unexorcised sad sovran still.
Oh! that alembic fever of interwed
Desire and dream and sense, rapture and rue!
As soon as my sincerest words are said
And heard they seem apostate and untrue.
For only speech more richly dubious
Than shoaling water, or a ringdove's breast,

Than lighted incense more miraculous
With fumes of strange remembrance, could attest
The morbid beauty of that wasting ill
Whereof I am the cureless lover still.

LIX

RESERVATIONS

Though cold clear cruelties like diamond
Burthen this silken text of dim surmise,
Surely thou knowest I am pity's bond
If one but look at me with stricken eyes.
If like a herald I have blazoned Pride,
I am Humility's own renegade.
For fruits of good and evil have I sighed?
If Love forbid them, Love shall be obeyed.
Though the wroth soul may excommunicate
Her body, yet I see the flagrant strife
Of earthy and heavenly elements create
Colour, change, music. For the Tree of Life
Burns with this precious mystery of sorrows
That Love the Phoenix find immortal morrows.

LX

THE NEW LOVE

Ah! what if thy last canticle be said,
Bright Archer of illusion adored of old,
Thou dream-fast Love in raiment burning-red,
Wreathed with white doves, quivered with burning gold?
Pass with thy Triumph of Lovers, Aucassin,
Tristram, and Pharamond, and Lancelot,
Dante, and Rudel, all thy haughty kin,
Princes in that high heaven, as we are not.—
With some gilt couchant sphinx both casqued and crowned,
All mailed in amethyst the new god comes,
Whose brooding beautiful eyes at last have found
Our uncanonical dark martyrdoms,
Who from the sombre catacombs of these
Brings his great miracles and mysteries.

LXI

THE WAYS OF LOVE

Hail the implacable Iconoclast
Whose images of ivory and gold
Make proud the dust that his enthusiast
In her dark trance may very God behold.
From the clear music of his delicate
Peripheries and porches of delight
He draws her down through cruel gate on gate,
Through immemorial, blind, implacable rite
That strips her of her dream-branched veils of youth,
And naked, agonised like trodden grapes,
Drags her before the imperishable Truth,
The flaming Ecstasy wherefrom he shapes

Real myth and doctrine. Therefore I lift up
My heart like some great jubilant scarlet Cup.

THE EPILOGUE OF THE DREAMING WOMEN

Take back this armour. Give us broideries.
 Against the Five sad Wounds inveterate
In our dim sense, can that defend, or these?
 In veils mysterious and delicate
Clothe us again, in beautiful broideries.

Take back this justice. Give us thuribles.
 While ye do loudly in the battle-dust,
We feed the gods with spice and canticles.
 To our strange hearts, as theirs, just and unjust
Are idle words. Give graven thuribles.

Keep orb and sceptre. Give us up your souls
 That our long fingers wake them verily
Like dulcimers and citherns and violes;
 Or at the burning disk of ecstasy
Impose rare sigils on your gem-like souls.

Give mercies, cruelties, and exultations,
 Give the long trances of the breaking heart;
And we shall bring you great imaginations
 To urge you through the agony of Art.
Give cloud and flame, give trances, exultations.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HOURS OF FIAMMETTA ***

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