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# POEMS

By EDWARD SHANKS

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SONGS. 6s. net.  
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TO

J. C. STOBART

### NOTE

Certain of these pieces have appeared already in the following periodicals:—*The English Review*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Eye-Witness*, *The Westminster Gazette*, and *The Pall Mall Gazette*. One of the Songs was printed for the first time in an anthology called *Cambridge Poets*. I am indebted to the editors of these for

permission to reprint them here.

E. S.

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## SONGS

### ***Song for an Unwritten Play.***

The moon's a drowsy fool to-night,  
Wrapped in fleecy clouds and white;  
And all the while Endymion  
Sleeps on Latmos top alone.

Not a single star is seen:  
They are gathered round their queen,  
Keeping vigil by her bed,  
Patient and unwearied.

Now the poet drops his pen  
And moves about like other men:  
Tom o' Bedlam now is still  
And sleeps beneath the hawthorn'd hill.

Only the Latmian shepherd deems  
Something missing from his dreams  
And tosses as he sleeps alone.  
Alas, alas, Endymion!

### ***The Cup.***

As a hot traveller  
Going through stones and sands,  
Who sees clear water stir  
Amid the weary lands,  
Takes in his hollowed hands  
The clean and lively water,  
That trickles down his throat  
Like laughter, like laughter,

So when you come to me  
Across these parchèd places  
And all the waste I see  
Flowered with your graces,  
I take between my hands  
Your face like a rare cup,  
Where kisses mix with laughter,  
And drink and drink them up  
Like water, like water.

### ***A Rhymeless Song.***

Rhyme with its jingle still betrays  
The song that's meant for one alone.  
Dearest, I dedicate to you  
A little song without a rhyme.

The most unpractised schoolboy knows  
That quiet kisses are the sweetest.  
Safe locked within my arms you lie,  
Let not a single sound betray us.

Suppose your jealous mother came  
By chance this way and found us here...  
Be still, be still, and not a sound  
Shall give her warning that we love.

### ***Meadow and Orchard.***

My heart is like a meadow,  
Where clouds go over,  
Dappling the mingled grass and clover  
With mingled sun and shadow,  
With light that will not stay  
And shade that sails away.

Your heart is like an orchard,  
That has the sun for ever in its leaves,  
Where, on the grass beneath the trees,  
There falls the shadow of the fruit  
That ripen there for me.

### ***Who thinks that he possesses.***

Who thinks that he possesses  
His mistress with his kisses  
    Knows neither love nor her.  
Nor beauty is not his  
Who seeks it in a kiss:  
If you would seek for this  
    O seek it elsewhere!

Love is a flame, a spirit  
Beyond all earthly merit  
    And all we dream of here;  
Strive as you may but still  
Love is intangible,  
No servant to your will  
    But sovereign elsewhere.

### ***Love in the Open Air.***

I'll love you in the open air  
    But stuffy rooms and blazing fires  
And mirrors with familiar stare  
    Cloak and befoul my high desires.

The dearest day that I have known  
    Was in the fields, when driving rain  
Was like a veil around us thrown,  
    A grey close veil without a stain.

The young oak-tree was stripped and bare  
    But naked twigs a shelter made,  
Where curious cows came round to stare  
    And stood astonished and dismayed.

Let it be rain or summer sun,  
    Smell of wet earth or scent of flowers,  
Love, once more give me, give me one  
    Of these enchanted lover's hours.

### ***Fear in the Night.***

I am afraid to-night,  
We are too glad, too gay,  
Our life too sweet, too bright  
To last another day.

What hap, what chance can fall,  
What sorrow come, what schism,  
What loss, what cataclysm  
To part us two at all?

The stars with ageless fire  
In skies serene the same  
Observe our young desire  
And watch our loves aflame.

A whisper soft, a sound  
Unfollowed, unattended,  
Shakes all the branches round:  
They sleep and it is ended.

You sleep and I alone  
Torment myself with fear  
For new joys coming near  
And gracious actions done.

I am afraid to-night,  
We are too glad, too gay,  
Our life too sweet, too bright  
To last another day.

### ***An Old Song.***

The wild duck fly over  
From river to river  
And so the young lover  
Goes roving for ever.

They fly together,  
He walks alone:  
No maiden can tether  
Him with her moan.

At the bursting of blossom  
On her breast his head;  
He has left her bosom  
Ere the apples are red.

Across the valley,  
Singing he goes.  
In highway and alley  
He seeks a new rose.

Tell me, O maidens,  
You who all day  
In lyrical cadence  
Dance and play,

Why do you proffer  
Your sweets to one,  
Who takes all you offer  
And leaves you to moan?

### ***Love's Close.***

Now spring comes round again

With blossom on the tree,  
Dark blossom of the peach,  
Light blossom of the pear  
And amorous birds complain  
And nesting birds prepare  
And love's keen fingers reach  
After the heart of me.

But now the blackthorn blows  
About the dusty lane  
And new buds peep and peer,  
I have no joy at all,  
For love draws near its close  
And love's white blossoms fall  
And in the springing year  
Love's fingers bring me pain.

### ***The Weed.***

My mother told me this for true  
That there behind the mountains,  
That wear the mists about their feet  
And clouds about their summits,  
There grows the weed Forgetfulness,  
It grows there in the gullies.

If I but knew the way thereto,  
Three days long would I wander  
And pick a handful of the weed  
And drink it steeped in honey,  
That so I might forget your mouth  
A thousand times that kissed me.

### ***Recollection.***

Hawthorn above, as pale as frost,  
Against the paling sky is lost:  
On the pool's dark sheet below,  
The candid water-daisies glow.

As I came up and saw from far  
The water littered, star on star,  
I thought the may had left its hedge  
To float upon the pool's dark edge.

### ***The Holiday.***

The world's great ways unclose  
Through little wooded hills:  
An air that stirs and stills,  
Dies sighing where it rose  
Or flies to sigh again  
In elms, whose stately rows  
Receive the summer rain,  
And clouds, clouds, clouds go by,  
A drifting cavalry,  
In squadrons that disperse  
And troops that reassemble

And now they pass and now  
Their glittering wealth disburse  
On tufted grass a-tremble  
And lately leafing bough.

Thus through the shining day  
We'll love or pass away  
Light hours in golden sleep,  
With clos'd half-sentient eyes  
And lids the light comes through,  
As sheep and flowers do  
Who no new toils devise,  
While shining insects creep  
About us where we lie  
Beneath a pleasant sky,  
In fields no trouble fills,  
Whence, as the traveller goes,  
The world's great ways uncloseth  
Through little wooded hills.

### ***Walking at Night.***

*To A. G.*

The moon poured down on tree and field,  
The leaf was silvered on the hedge,  
The sleeping kine were half revealed,  
Half shadowed at the pasture's edge.

By steep inclines and long descents,  
Amid the inattentive trees,  
You spoke of the four elements,  
The four eternal mysteries.

### ***Half Hope.***

August is gone and now this is September,  
Softer the sun in a cloudier sky;  
Yellow the leaves grow and apples grow golden,  
Blackberries ripen and hedges undress.  
Watch and you'll see the departure of summer,  
Here is the end, this the last month of all:  
Pause and look back and remember its promise,  
All that looked open and easy in May.

Nothing will stay them, the seasons go onward,  
Lightly the bright months fly out of my hand,  
Softly the leading note calls a new octave;  
Autumn is coming and what have I done?  
Even as summer my young days go over,  
No day to pause on and nowhere to rest:  
Slowly they go but implacably onwards,  
Ah! and my dreams, alas, still they are dreams.

How shall I force all my flowers to fruition,  
Use up the season of ripening sun?  
Softly the years go but going have vanished,  
Soon I shall find myself empty and old.  
Yet I feel in myself bright buds and blossoms,  
Promise of mellowest bearing to be.  
Still I have time beside what I have wasted:  
Life shall be good to me, work shall be sweet.

## ***A New Song about the Sea.***

From Amberley to Storrington,  
From Storrington to Amberley,  
From Amberley to Washington  
You cannot see or smell the sea.  
    But why the devil should you wish  
    To see the home of silly fish?

Since I prefer the earth and air,  
The fish may wallow in the sea  
And live the life that they prefer,  
If they will leave the land to me,  
    So wish for each what he may wish,  
    The earth for me, the sea for fish.

## **THE WINTER SOLDIER**

***September 1914—April 1915***

### ***The Winter Soldier.***

#### **I. TO BE SUNG TO THE TUNE OF HIGH GERMANY**

No more the English girls may go  
    To follow with the drum  
But still they flock together  
    To see the soldiers come;  
For horse and foot are marching by  
    And the bold artillery:  
They're going to the cruel wars  
    In Low Germany.

They're marching down by lane and town  
    And they are hot and dry  
But as they marched together  
    I heard the soldiers cry:  
"O all of us, both horse and foot  
    And the proud artillery,  
We're going to the merry wars  
    In Low Germany."

*August, 1914*

#### **II. THE COMRADES**

The men that marched and sang with me  
Are most of them in Flanders now:  
I lie abed and hear the wind  
Blow softly through the budding bough.

And they are scattered far and wide  
In this or that brave regiment;  
From trench to trench across the mud  
They go the way that others went.



They run with shining bayonet  
Or lie and take a careful aim  
And theirs it is to learn of death  
And theirs the joy and theirs the fame.

### III. IN TRAINING

The wind is cold and heavy  
And storms are in the sky:  
Our path across the heather  
Goes higher and more high.

To right, the town we came from,  
To left, blue hills and sea:  
The wind is growing colder  
And shivering are we.

We drag with stiffening fingers  
Our rifles up the hill.  
The path is steep and tangled  
But leads to Flanders still.

### IV. THE OLD SOLDIERS

We come from dock and shipyard, we come from car and train,  
We come from foreign countries to slope our arms again  
And, forming fours by numbers or turning to the right,  
We're learning all our drill again and 'tis a pretty sight.

Our names are all unspoken, our regiments forgotten,  
For some of us were pretty bad and some of us were rotten  
And some will misremember what once they learnt with pain  
And hit a bloody Serjeant and go to clink again.

### V. GOING IN TO DINNER

Beat the knife on the plate and the fork on the can,  
For we're going in to dinner, so make all the noise you can,  
Up and down the officer wanders, looking blue,  
Sing a song to cheer him up, he wants his dinner too.

March into the dining-hall, make the tables rattle  
Like a dozen dam' machine guns in the bloody battle,  
Use your forks for drum-sticks, use your plates for drums,  
Make a most infernal clatter, here the dinner comes!

### VI. ON TREK

Under a grey dawn, timidly breaking,  
Through the little village the men are waking,  
Easing their stiff limbs and rubbing their eyes;  
From my misted window I watch the sun rise.  
In the middle of the village a fountain stands,  
Round it the men sit, washing their red hands.  
Slowly the light grows, we call the roll over,  
Bring the laggards stumbling from their warm cover,  
Slowly the company gathers all together  
And the men and the officer look shyly at the weather.  
By the left, quick march! Off the column goes.

All through the village all the windows unclose:  
At every window stands a child, early waking,  
To see what road the company is taking.

### VII. LEAVING THE BILLET

Good luck, good health, good temper, these,  
A very hive of honey-bees  
To make and store up happiness,  
Should wait upon you without cease,  
If I'd the power to call them down  
Into this stuffy little town,  
Where the dull air in sticky wreaths  
Afflicts a man each time he breathes.  
But since I have no power to call  
Benevolent spirits down at all,  
I'll wish you all the good I know  
And close the chapter up and go.

### VIII. THE FAREWELL

Farewell to rising early, now comes the lying late,  
And long on the parade-ground my company shall wait  
Before I come to join it on mornings cold and dark  
And no more shall I lead it across the rimy park.

The men shall still manoeuvre in sunshine and in rain  
And still they'll make the blunders I shall not check again;  
They'll march upon the highway in weather foul and fair  
And talk and sing with laughter and I shall not be there.

### IX. ON ACCOUNT OF ILL HEALTH

You go, brave friends, and I am cast to stay behind,  
To read with frowning eyes and discontented mind  
The shining history that you are gone to make,  
To sleep with working brain, to dream and to awake  
Into another day of most ignoble peace,  
To drowse, to read, to smoke, to pray that war may cease.  
The spring is coming on, and with the spring you go  
In countries where strange scents on the April breezes blow;  
You'll see the primroses marched down into the mud,  
You'll see the hawthorn-tree wear crimson flowers of blood  
And I shall walk about, as I did walk of old,  
Where the laburnum trails its chains of useless gold,  
I'll break a branch of may, I'll pick a violet  
And see the new-born flowers that soldiers must forget,  
I'll love, I'll laugh, I'll dream and write undying songs  
But with your regiment my marching soul belongs.  
Men that have marched with me and men that I have led  
Shall know and feel the things that I have only read,  
Shall know what thing it is to sleep beneath the skies  
And to expect their death what time the sun shall rise.  
Men that have marched with me shall march to peace again,  
Bringing for plunder home glad memories of pain,  
Of toils endured and done, of terrors quite brought under,  
And all the world shall be their plaything and their wonder.  
Then in that new-born world, unfriendly and estranged,  
I shall be quite alone, I shall be left unchanged.

### ***The Pool.***

Out of that noise and hurry of large life  
The river flings me in an idle pool:  
The waters still go on with stir and strife  
And sunlit eddies, and the beautiful  
Tall trees lean down upon the mighty flow,  
Reflected in that movement. Beauty there  
Waxes more beautiful, the moments grow  
Thicker and keener in that lovely air  
Above the river. Here small sticks and straws  
Come now to harbour, gather, lie and rot,  
Out of cross-currents and the water's flaws  
In this unmoving death, where joy is not,  
Where war's a shade again, ambition rotten  
And bitter hopes and fears alike forgotten.

### ***The Dead Poet.***

When I grow old they'll come to me and say:  
Did you then know him in that distant day?  
Did you speak with him, touch his hand, observe  
The proud eyes' fire, soft voice and light lips' curve?  
And I shall answer: This man was my friend;  
Call to my memory, add, improve, amend  
And count up all the meetings that we had  
And note his good and touch upon his bad.

When I grow older and more garrulous,  
I shall discourse on the dead poet thus:  
I said to him ... he answered unto me...  
He dined with me one night in Trinity...  
I supped with him in King's ... Ah, pitiful  
The twisted memories of an ancient fool  
And sweet the silence of a young man dead!  
Now far in Lemnos sleeps that golden head,  
Unchanged, serene, for ever young and strong,  
Lifted above the chances that belong  
To us who live, for he shall not grow old  
And only of his youth there shall be told  
Magical stories, true and wondrous tales,  
As of a god whose virtue never fails,  
Whose limbs shall never waste, eyes never fall,  
And whose clear brain shall not be dimmed at all.

## **PASTORAL PIECES**

### ***The Vision in the Wood.***

The husht September afternoon was sweet  
With rich and peaceful light. I could not hear  
On either side the sound of moving feet  
Although the hidden road was very near.  
The laden wood had powdered sun in it,  
Slipped through the leaves, a quiet messenger  
To tell me of the golden world outside  
Where fields of stubble stretched through counties wide.

And yet I did not move. My head reposed  
Upon a tuft of dry and scented grass  
And, with half-seeing eyes, through eyelids closed,  
I watched the languid chain of shadows pass,  
Light as the slowly moving shade imposed  
By summer clouds upon a sea of glass,  
And strove to banish or to make more clear  
The elusive and persistent dream of her.

And then I saw her, very dim at first,  
Peering for nuts amid the twisted boughs,  
Thought her some warm-haired dryad, lately burst  
Out of the chambers of her leafy house,  
Seeking for nuts for food and for her thirst  
Such water as the woodland stream allows,  
After the greedy summer has drunk up  
All but a drain within the mossy cup.

Then I, beholding her, was still a space  
And marked each posture as she moved or stood,  
Watching the sunlight on her hair and face.  
Thus with calm folded hands and quiet blood  
I gazed until her counterfeited grace  
Faded and left me lonely in the wood,  
Glad that the gods had given so much as this,  
To see her, if I might not have her kiss.

### ***The Idyll.***

This is the valley where we sojourn now,  
Cut up by narrow brooks and rich and green  
And shaded sweetly by the waving bough  
About the trench where floats the soft serene  
Arun with waters running low and low  
Through banks where lately still the tide has been;  
Here is our resting-place, you walk with me  
And watch the light die out in Amberley.

The light that dies is soft and flooding still,  
Shed from the broad expanse of all the skies  
And brimming up the space from hill to hill,  
Where yet the sheep in their sweet exercise,  
Roaming the meadows, crop and find their fill  
And to each other speak with moaning cries;  
We on the hill-side standing rest and see  
The light die out in brook and grass and tree.

Lately we walked upon the lonely downs  
And through the still heat of the heavy day  
We heard the medley of low drifting sounds  
And through the matted brambles found a way  
Or lightly trod upon enchanted grounds  
Musing, or with rich blackberries made delay,  
Where feed such fruit on the rich air, until  
We struck like falling stars from Bignor Hill.

Down the vast slope, by chalky roads and steep,  
With trees and bushes hidden here and there,  
By circling turns into the valley deep  
We came and left behind the hill-top air  
For this cool village where to-night we sleep,  
A country meal, a country bed to share,  
With sleepy kisses and contented dreams  
Over a land of still and narrow streams.

The light is ebbing in the dusky sky,  
The valley floor is in the shadow. Hark!  
With rushing and mysterious noises fly  
The bats already, looking for the dark  
With blinking still and unaccustomed eye.

Now over Rackham Mount a steady spark  
Burns, rising slowly in the rising night,  
And pledges peace and promises delight.

Now from the east the wheeling shade appears  
And softly night into the valley falls,  
Soft on the meadows drop her dewy tears,  
Softly a darkness on the crumbled walls.  
Now in the dusk the village disappears,  
Men's songs are hushed there and the children's calls,  
While night in passage swallows up the land  
And in the shadow your hand seeks my hand.

Only the glimmering stars in heaven lie  
And unseen trees with rustling still betray  
How all the valley lives invisibly,  
Where dim sweet odours, remnants of the day,  
Float from the sleeping fields to please and die,  
Borne up by roaming airs, that drift away  
Beyond our hearing, vagabond and light,  
To visit the cool meadows of the night.

### ***The Pursuit of Daphne.***

Daphne is running, running through the grass,  
The long stalks whip her ankles as she goes.  
I saw the nymph, the god, I saw them pass  
And how a mounting flush of tender rose  
Invaded the white bosom of the lass  
And reached her shoulders, conquering their snows.  
He wasted all his breath, imploring still:  
They passed behind the shadow of the hill.

The mad course goes across the silent plain,  
Their flying footsteps make a path of sound  
Through all the sleeping country. Now with pain  
She runs across a stretch of stony ground  
That wounds her soft-palmed feet and now again  
She hastens through a wood where flowers abound,  
Which staunch her cuts with balsam where she treads  
And for her healing give their trodden heads.

Her sisters, from their coverts unbetrayed,  
Look out in fright and see the two go by,  
Each unrelenting, and reflect dismayed  
How fear and anguish glisten in her eye.  
By them unhelped goes on the fleeting maid  
Whose breath is coming short in agony:  
Hard at her heels pursues the golden boy,  
She flies in fear of him, she flies from joy.

His arrows scattered on the countryside,  
His shining bow deserted, he pursues  
Through hindering woodlands, over meadows wide  
And now no longer as he runs he sues  
But breathing deep and set and eager-eyed.  
His flashing feet disperse the morning dews,  
His hands most roughly put the boughs away,  
That cross and cling and join and make delay.

Across small shining brooks and rills they leap  
And now she fords the waters of a stream;  
Her hot knees plunge into the hollows deep  
And cool, where ancient trout in quiet dream;  
The silver minnows, wakened from their sleep  
In sunny shallows, round her ankles gleam;  
She scrambles up the grassy bank and on,  
Though courage and quick breath are nearly done.

Now in the dusky spinneys round the field,

The fauns set up a joyous mimicry,  
Pursuing of light nymphs, who lightly yield,  
Or startle the young dryad from her tree  
And shout with joy to see her limbs revealed  
And give her grace and bid her swiftly flee:  
The hunt is up, pursuer and pursued  
Run, double, twist, evade, turn, grasp, elude.

The woodlands are alive with chase and cry,  
Escape and triumph. Still the nymph in vain,  
With heaving breast in lovely agony  
And wide and shining eyes that show her pain,  
Leads on the god and now she knows him nigh  
And sees before her the unsheltered plain.  
His hot hand touches her white side and she  
Thrusts up her hands and turns into a tree.

There is an end of dance and mocking tune,  
Of laughter and bright love among the leaves.  
The sky is overcast, the afternoon  
Is dull and heavy for a god who grieves.  
The woods are quiet and the oak-tree soon  
The ruffled dryad in her trunk receives.  
Cold grow the sunburnt bodies and the white:  
The nymphs and fauns will lie alone to-night.

## MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

### *Ode on Beauty.*

Infinite peace is hanging in the air,  
Infinite peace is resting on mine eyes,  
That just an hour ago learnt how to bear  
Seeing your body's flaming harmonies.  
The grey clouds flecked with orange are and gold,  
Birds unto rest are falling, falling, falling,  
And all the earth goes slowly into night,  
Steadily turning from the harshly bright  
Sunset. And now the wind is growing cold  
And in my heart a hidden voice is calling.

Say, is our sense of beauty mixed with earth  
When lip on lip and breast on breast we cling,  
When ecstasy brings short bright sobs to birth  
And all our pulses, both our bodies sing?  
When through the haze that gathers on my sight  
I see your eyelids, know the eyes behind  
See me and half not see me, when our blood  
Goes roaring like a deep tremendous flood,  
Calm and terrific in unhasty might,  
Is then our inner sight sealed up and blind?

Or could it be that when our blood was colder  
And side by side we sat with lips parted  
I saw the perfect line of your resting shoulder,  
Your mouth, your peaceful throat with fuller-hearted,  
More splendid joy? Ah poignant joys all these!  
And rest can stab the heart as well as passion.  
Yea, I have known sobs choke my heart to see  
Your honey-coloured hair move languorously,  
Ruffled, not by my hands, but by the breeze,  
And I have prayed the rough air for compassion.

Yea, I have knelt to the unpiteous air  
And knelt to gods I knew not, to remove

The viewless hands whose sight I could not bear  
Out of the wind-blown head of her I love.  
Ecstasy enters me and cannot speak,  
Seizes my hands and smites my fainting eyes  
And sends through all my veins a dim despair  
Of never apprehending all so fair  
And I have stood, unnerved and numb and weak,  
Watching your breathing bosom fall and rise.

Ah no! This joy is empty, incomplete,  
And sullied with a sense of too much longing,  
Where thoughts and fancies, sweet and bitter-sweet,  
And old regrets and new-born hopes come thronging.  
Man can see beauty for a moment's space  
And live, having seen her with an unfiled eye,  
If all his body and all his soul in one  
Instant are tuned by passion to unison  
And I can image in your kissing face  
The eternal meaning of the earth and sky.

### ***Song in Time of Waiting.***

Because the days are long for you and me,  
I make this song to lighten their slow time,  
So that the weary waiting fruitful be  
Or blossomed only by my limping rhyme.  
The days are very long  
And may not shortened be by any chime  
Of measured words or any fleeting song.  
Yet let us gather blossoms while we wait  
And sing brave tunes against the face of fate.

Day after day goes by: the exquisite  
Procession of the variable year,  
Summer, a sheaf with flowers bound up in it,  
And autumn, tender till the frosts appear  
And dry the humid skies;  
And winter following on, aloof, austere,  
Clad in the garments of a frore sunrise;  
And spring again. May not too many a spring  
Make both our voices tremble as we sing!

The days are empty, empty, and the nights  
Are cold and void; there is no single gleam  
Across the space unpeopled of delights,  
Save only now and then some thin-blood dream,  
Some stray of summer weather;  
The tedious hours like slow-foot laggarts seem,  
When you and I, my love, are not together  
And when I hold you in my arms at last  
The minutes go like April cloudlets past.

And yet no hidden charm, no desperate spell  
Can make these minutes longer, those less long:  
No force there is that yearning can impel  
Against the callous years which do us wrong.  
No words, no whispered rune,  
No witchery and no Thessalian song  
Can make that far-off, misty day more soon.  
The bravest tune, the most courageous rhyme  
Fall broken from the bastions of time.

A long and dusty road it is to tread;  
Few are the wayside flowers and far apart  
And are no sooner plucked than withered,  
When yearning heart is torn from yearning heart.  
A weary road it is  
And yet far off I see clear waters start  
And clean sweet grass and tangled tracteries  
Of whispering leaves, that laugh to see us come,

And there one day ... one day shall be our home.

The day will come. O dearest, do not doubt!  
It is not born as yet but I shall see  
Some day the fearless sunrise flashing out  
And know the night will give you up to me.  
O heart, my heart, be glad,  
Because the time will come at last when we  
Shall leave all grief and unlearn all things sad  
And know the joy than which none sweeter is  
And I shall sing a happier song than this.

### ***Sonnets on Separation.***

#### **I.**

The time shall be, old Wisdom says, when you  
Shall grow awrinkled and I, indifferent,  
Shall no more follow the light steps I knew  
Or trace you, finding out the way you went,  
By swinging branches and the displaced flowers  
Among the thickets. I no more shall stand,  
With careful pencil through the adoring hours  
Scratching your grace on paper. My still hand  
No more shall tremble at the touch of yours  
And I'll write no more songs and you'll not sing.  
But this is all a lie, for love endures  
And we shall closer kiss, remembering  
How budding trees turned barren in the sun  
Through this long week, whereof one day's now done.

#### **II.**

The time is all so short. One week is much  
To be without your deep and peaceful eyes,  
Your soft and all-contenting cheek, the touch  
Of well-caressing hands. O were we wise  
We would not love too strongly, would not bind  
Life into life so inextricably,  
That the dumb body suffers with the mind  
In a sad partnership this agony.  
For death will come and swallow up us two,  
You there, I here, and we shall lie apart,  
Out of the houses and the woods we knew.  
Then in the lonely grave, my dust-choked heart  
Out of the dust will raise, if it can speak,  
A threnody for this lost, lovely week.

#### **III.**

Is there no prophylactic against love?  
Can I with drugs not dull the ache one night?  
The rain is heavy and the low clouds move  
Over the empty home of our delight  
And find me in it weeping. You are far  
And you are now asleep. The night's so thick,  
Not even one stooping and compassionate star  
Shines on us both departed. O be quick,  
Torturing days and heavy, turn your hours  
To minutes, melt yourselves into one day!  
... The cold rain falls in swift assailing showers,



Darkness is round me and light far away.  
I'm in our well-known room and you're shut in  
By strange unfriendly walls I've never seen.

#### IV.

Lovers that drug themselves for ecstasy  
Seek love too closely in an overdose,  
When the sweet spasm turns to agony  
And the quick limbs are still and the eyes close.  
I too, a fool, desired—to make love strong—  
Absence and parting but the measure's brimmed,  
The dose is over-poured, the time's too long  
Already, though two nights have hardly dimmed  
My lonely eyes with the elusive sleep.  
O I'll remember, I'll not wish again  
To go with ardent limbs into this deep  
Sea of dejection, this dull mere of pain:  
We'll love our safer loves upon the shore  
And quest for inexperienced joys no more.

#### V.

Through the closed curtains comes the early sun,  
First a pale finger, prelude to the hand.  
Outside more certainly the day's begun,  
Where bright and brighter still the chestnuts stand,  
Broad candles lighting up at the first fire.  
I stir and turn in my uneasy sleep  
But in my sorrow sleep's my whole desire.  
About the still room small lights move and creep  
Silently, stealthily on wall and chair,  
Till to strong rays and shining lights they grow,  
Which with their magic change the waiting air  
And all its sleeping motes to gold and throw  
A golden radiance on your empty bed,  
Which wakes me with vain likeness to your head.

#### VI.

To-morrow I shall see you come again  
Between the pale trees, through the sullen gate,  
Out of the dark and secret house of pain  
Where lie the unhappy and unfortunate.  
To-morrow you will live with me and love me,  
Spring will go on again, I'll see the flowers  
And little things, ridiculous things, shall move me  
To smiles or tears or verse. The world is ours  
To-morrow. Open heaths, tall trees, great skies,  
With massive clouds that fly and come again,  
Sweet fields, delicious rivers and the rise  
And fall of swelling land from the swift train  
We'll see together, knowing that all this  
Is one great room wherein we two may kiss.

#### VII.

We're at the world's top now. The hills around  
Stand proud in order with the valleys deep,

The hills with pastures drest, with tall trees crowned,  
And the low valleys dipt in sunny sleep.  
A sound brims all the country up, a noise  
Of wheels upon the road and labouring bees  
And trodden heather, mixing with the voice  
Of small lost winds that die among the trees.  
And we are prone beneath the flooding sun,  
So drenched, so soaked in the unceasing light,  
That colours, sounds and your close presence are one,  
A texture woven up of all delight,  
Whose shining threads my hands may not undo,  
Yet one thread runs the whole bright garment through.

### ***The Morning Sun.***

Perhaps you sleep now, fifty miles to the south,  
While I sit here and dream of you by night.  
The thick soft blankets drawn about your mouth  
Have made for you a nest of warm delight;  
Your short crisp hair is thrown abroad and spilled  
Upon the pillow's whiteness and your eyes  
Are quiet and the round soft lids are filled  
With sleep.

But I shall watch until sunrise  
Creeps into chilly clouds and heavy air,  
Across the lands where you sleep and I wake,  
And I shall know the sun has seen you there,  
Unmoving though the winter morning break.  
Next, you will lift your hands and rub your eyes  
And turn to sleep again but wake and start  
And feel, half dreaming, with a dear surprise,  
My hand in the sunbeam touching at your heart.

### **Persuasion.**

Still must your hands withhold your loveliness?  
Is your soul jealous of your body still?  
The fair white limbs beneath the clouding dress  
Are such hard forms as you alone could fill  
With life and sweetness. Such a harmony  
Is yours as music and the thought expressed  
By the musician: have no rivalry  
Between your soul and the shape in which it's drest.  
Kisses or words, both sensual, which shall be  
The burning symbol of the love we bear?  
My art is words, yours song, but still must we  
Be mute and songless, seeing how love is fair.  
Both our known arts being useless, we must turn  
To love himself and his old practice learn.

### ***Apology.***

Have I slept and failed to hear you calling?  
Cry again, belov'd; for sleep is heavy,  
Curtaining away the golden sunlight,  
Shutting out the blue sky and the breezes,  
Sealing up my ears to all you tell me.

Cry again! your voice shall pierce the clumsy  
Leadens folds that sleep has wrapt about me,  
Cry again! accomplish what the singing,  
Hours old now on all the trees and bushes,  
And the wind and sun could not accomplish.  
Lo! I waste good hours of love and kisses  
While the sun and you have spilt your glory  
Freely on me lying unregarding.  
In the happy islands, where no sunset  
Stains the waters with a morbid splendour,  
Where the open skies are blue for ever,  
I might stay for years and years unsleeping,  
Living for divinest conversation,  
Music, colour, scent and sense unceasing,  
Entering by eye and ear and nostril.  
Ah, but flesh is flesh and I am mortal!  
Cry again and do not leave me sleeping.

### ***The Golden Moment.***

Along the branches of the laden tree  
The ripe fruit smiling hang. The afternoon  
Is emptied of all things done and things to be.  
Low in the sky the inconspicuous moon  
Stares enviously upon the mellow earth,  
That mocks her barren girth.

Ripe blackberries and long green trailing grass  
Are motionless beneath the heavy light:  
The happy birds and creeping things that pass  
Go fitfully and stir as if in fright,  
That they have broken on some mystery  
In bramble or in tree.

This is no hour for beings that are maiden;  
The spring is virgin, lightly afraid and cold,  
But now the whole round earth is ripe and laden  
And stirs beneath her coverlet of gold  
And in her agony a moment calls...  
A heavy apple falls.

### ***Bramber.***

Before the downs in their great horse-shoes rise,  
I know a village where the Adur runs,  
Blown by sweet winds and by beneficent suns  
Visited and made ripe beneath kind skies.  
Light and delight are in the children's eyes  
And there the mothers sit, the fortunate ones,  
Blest in their daughters, happy in their sons,  
And the old men are beautiful and wise.

There stand the downs, great, close, tall, friendly, still,  
Linked up by grassy saddles, hill on hill,  
And steep the village in unending peace  
And to the north the plains in order lie,  
Heavy with crops and woods alternately  
And lively with low sounds that never cease.

### ***Now would I be.***

Now would I be in that removed place  
Where the dim sunlight hardly comes at all  
And branches of the young trees interlace  
And long swathes of the brambles twine and fall;  
A space between the hedgerow and a road  
Not trod by foot of any known to me,  
Where now and then a cart with scented load  
Goes sleepy down the lane with creaking axle-tree.

And there I'd lie upon the tumbled leaves,  
Watching a square of the all else hidden sky,  
And made such songs a drowsy mind believes  
To be most perfect music. So would I  
Keep my face heavenwards and bless eternity,  
Wherein my heart could be as glad as this  
And lazily I'd bid all men come hither  
And in my dreams I'd tell them what they miss,  
Living in hate and work and all foul weather.

And still my happy dreams would go,  
Like children in a cowslip field  
Chasing rich-winged insects to and fro  
To see what rare delights they yield....

... O I am tired of working to be cheated  
And sick of barriers that will not fall,  
Of ancient prudent words too much repeated  
And worn-out dreams that come not true at all.  
I know too well what things they are that ail me;  
To fight is nothing but to see  
Thus at the last my own hand fail me  
Is agony.

O for that corner by the hummocked marshes,  
Visited hardly by the cynic sun,  
Where nothing clear and nothing bright or harsh is,  
Where labour and the ache of it are done,  
Where naught is ended and where naught begun!

### ***Midwinter Madness.***

A month or twain to live on honeycomb  
Is pleasant—but to eat it for a year  
Is simply beastly. Thus the poet spake,  
Feeling how sticky all his stomach was  
With hivings of ten thousand cheated bees.  
O wisdom that could shape immortal words  
And frame a diet for dyspeptic man!  
But what of turnips? Come, a lyric now  
Upon the luscious roots unsung as yet,  
(Not roots I know but stalks; still, never mind,  
Metre and sauce will suit them just as well)  
Or shall we speak of omelettes? Muse, begin!  
To feed a fortnight on transmuted eggs  
Would doubtless be both comforting and cheap  
But oh, the nausea on the fourteenth day!  
I'd rather read a book by Ezra Pound  
Then choke the seven hundredth omelette down,  
Just as I'd rather read some F. S. Flint  
Than live a month or twain on honeycomb.

O Ezra Pound! O omelette of the world!  
Concocted with strange herbs from dead Provence,  
Garlic from Italy and spice from Greece,  
Having suffered a rare Pound-change on the way,  
How rarely shouldst thou taste, were not the eggs  
Laid in America and hither brought

Too late. I don't like omelettes made with fowls.  
 Take hence this Pound and put him to the test,  
 Try him with acid, see if he turn black  
 As will the best old silver, when enraged  
 At touching fungi of the baser sort.  
 (Forgive digression. These similitudes  
 Entrance me and I lose myself in them,  
 As schoolboys, picking flowers by the way,  
 Escape the angry usher's vigilance  
 And then, concealed behind a hedge or shed,  
 Produce the awesome pipe or thrice-lit fag  
 And make themselves incredibly unwell.)  
 My brain is bubbling and the thoughts will out,  
 But, Ezra Pound! they turn again to thee,  
 As surely as the lode-stone to the Pole  
 Or as the dog to what he hath cast up  
 (A simile of Solomon's, not mine)  
 And your shock head of damp, unwholesome hay,  
 Such as, the cunning farmer oft declares,  
 When stacked, will perish by spontaneous fire,  
 Frequents my dreams and makes them ludicrous.  
 Thou most ridiculous sprite! Thou ponderous fairy!  
 Bourgeois Bohemian! Innocent Verlaine!  
 I read in *The Booksellers' Circular*  
 That, in the University of Pa.  
 (Or Kans. or Col. or Mass, or Tex. or Ont.  
 —A line of normal pattern, Saintsbury)  
 You hold a fellowship in (O merciful gods!)  
 Romanics, which strange word interpreted  
 Means, I suppose, the Romance languages.  
 Doubtless they read Italian in Pa.  
 And some may speak French fluently in Ont.  
 But German, Ezra! There's the bloody rub,  
 It's not Romance and it is hard to learn  
 And Heine, though an easy-going chap,  
 Would doubtless trounce you soundly if he knew  
 The sorry hash that you have made of him.  
 But no! you're not for immortality,  
 Not even such as that of Freiligrath,  
 Enshrined, together with his *Mohrenfurst*,  
 In unrelenting amber. I hold you here,  
 In a soap-bubble's iridescent walls,  
 The whimsy of a long midwinter night,  
 And give you immortality enough.  
 Thou sorry brat! Thou transatlantic clown!  
 That seek'st to ape the treadless Ariel  
 And out-top Shelley in an aeroplane,  
 Take the all-obvious padding from your pants  
 And cut your hair and go to Pa. again  
 (Or Kans. or Col. or Mass, or Tex. or Ont.  
 Or even Oomp. if such a place exist)  
 And take with you the poets you admire,  
 Both Yeats and Flint to charm the folk of Oomp.  
 And write again for *Munsey's Magazine*  
 Of your good brother Everyone. (Just God!  
 Am even I of his relationship?)  
 So end as you began or even worse:  
 No matter, so 'tis in America.

### ***At a Lecture.***

The lecturer took his place and looked  
 At the eager women's faces,  
 Then he cleared his throat and he jetted out  
 A stream of commonplaces.

He fondled Wordsworth and patted Shelley  
 And said with his hand on his heart  
 He would brook no interference from morals

In any matter of art.

He finished at last and strode away  
Over the naked boards,  
Erect in his conscious majesty  
Back to the House of Lords.

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