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MATINS

Francis Sherman



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TO
MY FATHER

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AT THE GATE

Swing open wide, O Gate,
That I may enter in
And see what lies in wait
For me who have been born!
Her word I only scorn
Who spake of death and sin.

I know what is behind
Your heavy brazen bars;
I heard it of the wind
Where I dwelt yesterday:
The wind that blows away
Among the ancient stars.

Life is the chiefest thing
The wind brought knowledge of,

As it passed, murmuring:
Life, with its infinite strength,
And undiminished length
Of years fulfilled with love.

The wind spake not of sin
That blows among the stars;
And so I enter in
(Swing open wide, O Gate!)
Fearless of what may wait
Behind your heavy bars.

A LIFE

I.

Let us rise up and live! Behold, each thing
Is ready for the moulding of our hand.
Long have they all awaited our command;
None other will they ever own for king.
Until we come no bird dare try to sing,
Nor any sea its power may understand;
No buds are on the trees; in every land
Year asketh year some tidings of some Spring.
Yea, it is time,—high time we were awake!
Simple indeed shall life be unto us.
What part is ours?—To take what all things give;
To feel the whole world growing for our sake;
To have sure knowledge of the marvellous;
To laugh and love.—*Let us rise up and live!*

II.

Let us rule well and long. We will build here
Our city in the pathway of the sun.
On this side shall this mighty river run;
Along its course well-laden ships shall steer.
Beyond, great mountains shall their crests uprear,
That from their sides our jewels may be won.
Let all you toil! Behold, it is well done;
Under our sway all far things fall and near!
All time is ours! *Let us rule long and well!*
So we have reigned for many a long, long day.
No change can come.... What hath that slave to tell,
Who dares to stop us on our royal way?
"O King, last night within thy garden fell,
From thine own tree, a rose whose leaves were gray."

III.

Let us lie down and sleep! All things are still,
And everywhere doth rest alone seem sweet.

No more is heard the sound of hurrying feet
Athrough the land their echoes once did fill.
Even the wind knows not its ancient will,
For each ship floats with undisturbéd sheet:
Naught stirs except the Sun, who hastes to greet
His handmaiden, the utmost western hill.
Ah, there the glory is! O west of gold!
Once seemed our life to us as glad and fair;
We knew nor pain nor sorrow anywhere!
O crimson clouds! O mountains autumn-stoled!
Across even you long shadows soon must sweep.
We too have lived. *Let us lie down and sleep!*

IV.

Nay, let us kneel and pray! The fault was ours,
O Lord! No other ones have sinned as we.
The Spring was with us and we praised not thee;
We gave no thanks for Summer's strangest flowers.
We built us many ships, and mighty towers,
And held awhile the whole broad world in fee:
Yea, and it sometime writhed at our decree!
The stars, the winds,—all they were subject-powers.
All things we had for slave. We knew no God;
We saw no place on earth where His feet trod—
This earth, where now the Winter hath full sway,
Well shrouded under cold white snows and deep.
We rose and lived; we ruled; yet, ere we sleep,
O Unknown God,—*Let us kneel down and pray!*

AT MATINS

Because I ever have gone down Thy ways
With joyous heart and undivided praise,
I pray Thee, Lord, of Thy great loving-kindness,
Thou'lt make to-day even as my yesterdays!"

(At the edge of the yellow dawn I saw them stand,
Body and Soul; and they were hand-in-hand:
The Soul looked backward where the last night's blindness
Lay still upon the unawakened land;

But the Body, in the sun's light well arrayed,
Fronted the east, grandly and unafraid:
I knew that it was one might never falter
Although the Soul seemed shaken as it prayed.)

"O Lord" (the Soul said), "I would ask one thing:
Send out Thy rapid messengers to bring
Me to the shadows which about Thine altar
Are ever born and always gathering.

"For I am weary now, and would lie dead

Where I may not behold my old days shed
Like withered leaves around me and above me;
Hear me, O Lord, and I am comforted!"

"O Lord, because I ever deemed Thee kind"
(The Body's words were borne in on the wind);
"Because I knew that Thou wouldst ever love me
Although I sin, and lead me who am blind;

Because of all these things, hear me who pray!
Lord, grant me of Thy bounty one more day
To worship Thee, and thank Thee I am living.
Yet if Thou callest now, I will obey."

(The Body's hand tightly the Soul did hold;
And over them both was shed the sun's red gold;
And though I knew this day had in its giving
Unnumbered wrongs and sorrows manifold,

I counted it a sad and bitter thing
That this weak, drifting Soul must always cling
Unto this Body—wrought in such a fashion
It must have set the gods, even, marvelling.

And, thinking so, I heard the Soul's loud cries,
As it turned round and saw the eastern skies)
"O Lord, destroy in me this new-born passion
For this that has grown perfect in mine eyes!

"O Lord, let me not see this thing is fair,
This Body Thou hast given me to wear,—
Lest I fall out of love with death and dying,
And deem the old, strange life not hard to bear!

"Yea, now, even now, I love this Body so—
O Lord, on me Thy longest days bestow!
O Lord, forget the words I have been crying,
And lead me where Thou thinkest I should go!"

(At the edge of the open dawn I saw them stand,
Body and Soul, together, hand-in-hand,
Fulfilled, as I, with strong desire and wonder
As they beheld the glorious eastern land;

I saw them, in the strong light of the sun,
Go down into the day that had begun;
I knew, as they, that night might never sunder
This Body from the Soul that it had won.)

AVE!

To-morrow, and a year is born again!
(To-day the first bud wakened 'neath the snow.)
Will it bring joys the old year did not know,
Or will it burthen us with the old pain?

Shall we seek out the Spring—to see it slain?
Summer,—and learn all flowers have ceased to grow?
Autumn,—and find it overswift to go?
(The memories of the old year yet remain.)

To-morrow, and another year is born!
(Love liveth yet, O Love, we deemed was dead!)
Let us go forth and welcome in the morn,
Following bravely on where Hope hath led.
(O Time, how great a thing thou art to scorn!)
O Love, we shall not be uncomforted!

THE FOREIGNER

He walked by me with open eyes,
And wondered that I loved it so;
Above us stretched the gray, gray skies;
Behind us, foot-prints on the snow.

Before us slept a dark, dark wood.
Hemlocks were there, and little pines
Also; and solemn cedars stood
In even and uneven lines.

The branches of each silent tree
Bent downward, for the snow's hard weight
Was pressing on them heavily;
They had not known the sun of late.

(Except when it was afternoon,
And then a sickly sun peered in
A little while; it vanished soon
And then they were as they had been.)

There was no sound (I thought I heard
The axe of some man far away)
There was no sound of bee, or bird,
Or chattering squirrel at its play.

And so he wondered I was glad.
—There was one thing he could not see;
Beneath the look these dead things had
I saw Spring eyes agaze at me.

CADENCES

(Mid-Lent)

The low, gray sky curveth from hill to hill,
Silent and all untenanted;
From the trees also all glad sound hath fled,
Save for the little wind that moaneth still

Because it deemeth Earth is surely dead.

For many days no woman hath gone by,
Her gold hair knowing, as of old,
The wind's caresses and the sun's kind gold;
—Perchance even she hath thought it best to die
Because all things are sad things to behold.

(Easter Morning)

She cometh now, with the sun's splendid shine
On face and limbs and hair!
Ye who are watching, have ye seen so fair
A Lady ever as this one is of mine?
Have ye beheld her likeness anywhere?

See, as she cometh unrestrained and fleet
Past the thrush-haunted trees,
How glad the lilies are that touch her knees!
How glad the grasses underneath her feet!
And how even I am yet more glad than these!

EASTER-SONG

Maiden, awake! For Christ is born again!
And let your feet disdain
The paths whereby of late they have been led.
Now Death itself is dead,
And Love hath birth,
And all things mournful find no place on earth.

This morn ye all must go another way
Than ye went yesterday.
Not with sad faces shall ye silent go
Where He hath suffered so;
But where there be
Full many flowers shall ye wend joyfully.

Moreover, too, ye must be clad in white,
As if the ended night
Were but your bridal-morn's foreshadowing.
And ye must also sing
In angel-wise:
So shall ye be most worthy in His eyes.

Maidens, arise! I know where many flowers
Have grown these many hours
To make more perfect this glad Easter-day;
Where tall white lilies sway
On slender stem,
Waiting for you to come and garner them;

Where banks of mayflowers are, all pink and white,
Which will Him well delight;

And yellow buttercups, and growing grass
Through which the Spring winds pass;
And mosses wet,
Well strown with many a new-born violet.

All these and every other flower are here.
Will ye not draw anear
And gather them for Him, and in His name,
Whom all men now proclaim
Their living King?
Behold how all these wait your harvesting!

Moreover, see the darkness of His house!
Think ye that He allows
Such glory of glad color and perfume,
But to destroy the gloom
That hath held fast
His altar-place these many days gone past?

For this alone these blossoms had their birth,—
To show His perfect worth!
Therefore, O Maidens, ye must go apace
To that strange garden-place
And gather all
These living flowers for His high festival.

For now hath come the long-desired day,
Wherein Love hath full sway!
Open the gates, O ye who guard His home,
His handmaidens are come!
Open them wide,
That all may enter in this Easter-tide!

Then, maidens, come, with song and lute-playing,
And all your wild flowers bring
And strew them on His altar; while the sun—
Seeing what hath been done—
Shines strong once more,
Knowing that Death hath Christ for conqueror.

THE RAIN

O ye who so unceasing praise the Sun;
Ye who find nothing worthy of your love
But the Sun's face and the strong light thereof;
Who, when the day is done,
Are all uncomforted
Unless the night be crowned with many a star,
Or mellow light be shed
From the ancient moon that gazeth from afar,
With pitiless calm, upon the old, tired Earth;
O ye to whom the skies
Must be forever fair to free your eyes
From mortal pain;—
Have ye not known the great exceeding worth

Of that soft peace which cometh with the Rain?

Behold! the wisest of you knows no thing
That hath such title to man's worshipping
As the first sudden day
The slumbrous Earth is wakened into Spring;
When heavy clouds and gray
Come up the southern way,
And their bold challenge throw
In the face of the frightened snow
That covereth the ground.
What need they now the armies of the Sun
Whose trumpets now do sound?
Alas, the powerless Sun!
Hath he not waged his wars for days gone past,
Each morning drawing up his cohorts vast
And leading them with slow and even paces
To assault once more the impenetrable places,
Where, crystal-bound,
The river moveth on with silent sound?
O puny, powerless Sun!
On the pure white snow where are the lightest traces
Of what thy forces' ordered ways have done?
On these large spaces
No footsteps are imprinted anywhere;
Still the white glare
Is perfect; yea, the snows are drifted still
On plain and hill;
And still the river knows the Winter's iron will.

Thou wert most wise, O Sun, to hide thy face
This day beneath the cloud's gray covering;
Thou wert most wise to know the deep disgrace
In which thy name is holden of the Spring.
She deems thee now an impotent, useless thing,
And hath dethroned thee from thy mighty place;
Knowing that with the clouds will come apace
The Rain, and that the rain will be a royal king.
A king?—Nay, queen!
For in soft girlish-wise she takes her throne
When first she cometh in the young Spring-season;
Gentle and mild,
Yet with no dread of any revolution,
And fearing not a land unreconciled,
And unafraid of treason.
In her dark hair
Lieth the snow's most certain dissolution;
And in her glance is known
The freeing of the rivers from their chainings;
And in her bosom's strainings
Earth's teeming breast is tokened and foreshown.

Behold her coming surely, calmly down,
Where late the clear skies were,
With gray clouds for a gown;
Her fragile draperies
Caught by the little breeze
Which loveth her!
She weareth yet no crown,

Nor is there any sceptre in her hands;
Yea, in all lands,
Whatever Spring she cometh, men know well
That it is right and good for her to come;
And that her least commands
Must be fulfilled, however wearisome;
And that they all must guard the citadel
Wherein she deigns to dwell!

And so, even now, her feet pass swiftly over
The impressionable snow
That vanisheth as woe
Doth vanish from the rapt face of a lover,
Who, after doubting nights, hath come to know
His lady loves him so!
(Yet not like him
Doth the snow bear the signs of her light touch!
It is all gray in places, and looks worn
With some most bitter pain;
As he shall look, perchance,
Some early morn
While yet the dawn is dim,
When he awakens from the enraptured trance
In which he, blind, hath lain,
And knows that also he hath loved in vain
The lady who, he deemed, had loved him much.
And though her utter worthlessness is plain
He hath no joy of his deliverance,
But only asketh God to let him die,—
And getteth no reply.)
Yea, the snows fade before the calm strength of the rain!

And while the rain is unabated,
Well-heads are born and streams created
On the hillsides, and set a-flowing
Across the fields. The river, knowing
That there hath surely come at last
Its freedom, and that frost is past,
Gathereth force to break its chains;
The river's faith is in the Spring's unceasing rains!

See where the shores even now were firmly bound
The slowly widening water showeth black,
As from the fields and meadows all around
Come rushing over the dark and snowless ground
The foaming streams!
Beneath the ice the shoulders of the tide
Lift, and from shore to shore a thin, blue crack
Starts, and the dark, long-hidden water gleams,
Glad to be free.
And now the uneven rift is growing wide;
The breaking ice is fast becoming gray;
It hears the loud beseeching of the sea,
And moveth on its way.
Surely at last the work of the rain is done!
Surely the Spring at last is well begun,
O unavailing Sun!

O ye who worship only at the noon,

When will ye learn the glory of the rain?
Have ye not seen the thirsty meadow-grass
Uplooking piteous at the burnished sky,
And all in vain?
Even in June
Have ye not seen the yellow flowers swoon
Along the roadside, where the dust, alas,
Is hard to pass?
Have ye not heard
The song cease in the throat of every bird
And know the thing all these were stricken by?

Ye have beheld these things, yet made no prayer,
O pitiless and uncompassionate!
Yet should the sweeping
Of Death's wide wings across your face unsleeping
Be felt of you to-night,
And all your hair
Know the soft stirring of an alien breath
From out the mouth of Death,
Would ye not then have memory of these
And how their pain was great?
Would ye not wish to hear among the trees
The wind in his great might,
And on the roof the rain's unending harmonies?

For when could death be more desired by us
(Oh, follow, Death, I pray thee, with the Fall!)
Than when the night
Is heavy with the wet wind born of rain?
When flowers are yellow, and the growing grass
Is not yet tall,
Or when all living things are harvested
And with bright gold the hills are glorious,
Or when all colors have faded from our sight
And all is gray that late was gold and red?
Have ye not lain awake the long night through
And listened to the falling of the rain
On fallen leaves, withered and brown and dead?
Have none of you,
Hearing its ceaseless sound, been comforted
And made forgetful of the day's live pain?
Even *Thou*, who wept because the dark was great
Once, and didst pray that dawn might come again,
Has noon not seemed to be a dreaded thing
And night a thing not wholly desolate
And Death thy soul's supremest sun-rising?
Did not thy hearing strain
To catch the moaning of the wind-swept sea,
Where great tides be,
And swift, white rain?
Did not its far exulting teach thy soul
That of all things the sea alone is free
And under no control?
Its liberty,—
Was it not most desired by thy soul?

I say,
The Earth is always glad, yea, and the sea

Is glad always
When the rain cometh; either tranquilly
As at the first dawn of a summer day
Or in late autumn wildly passionate,
Or when all things are all disconsolate
Because that Winter has been long their king,
Or in the Spring.
—Therefore let now your joyful thanksgiving
Be heard on Earth because the Rain hath come!
While land and sea give praise, shall ye be dumb?
Shall ye alone await the sun-shining?
Your days, perchance, have many joys to bring;
Perchance with woes they shall be burthensome;
Yet when night cometh, and ye journey home,
Weary, and sore, and stained with travelling,
When ye seek out your homes because the night—
The last, dark night—falls swift across your path,
And on Life's altar your last day lies slain,
Will ye not cry aloud with that new might
One dying with great things unfinished hath,
"O God! if Thou wouldst only send Thy Rain!"

A MEMORY

You are not with me though the Spring is here!
And yet it seemed to-day as if the Spring
Were the same one that in an ancient year
Came suddenly upon our wandering.

You must remember all that chanced that day.
Can you forget the shy awaking call
Of the first robin?—And the foolish way
The squirrel ran along the low stone wall?

The half-retreating sound of water breaking,
Hushing, falling; while the pine-laden breeze
Told us the tumult many crows were making
Amid innumerable distant trees;

The certain presence of the birth of things
Around, above, beneath, us,—everywhere;
The soft return of immemorial Springs
Thrilling with life the fragrant forest air;

All these were with us then. Can you forget?
Or must you—even as I—remember well?
To-day, all these were with me, there,—and yet
They seemed to have some bitter thing to tell;

They looked with questioning eyes, and seemed to wait
One's doubtful coming whom of old they knew;
Till, seeing me alone and desolate,
They learned how vain was strong desire of you.

AMONG THE HILLS

Far off, to eastward, I see the wide hill sloping
Up to the place where the pines and sky are one;
All the hill is gray with its young budding birches
And red with its maple-tips and yellow with the sun.

Sometimes, over it rolls a purple shadow
Of a ragged cloud that wanders in the large, open sky,
Born where the ploughed fields border on the river
And melting into space where the pines are black and high.

There all is quiet; but here where I am waiting,
Among the firs behind me the wind is ill at ease;
The crows, too, proclaim their old, incessant trouble,—
I think there is some battle raging in the surging trees.

And yet, should I go down beside the swollen river
Where the vagrant timber hurries to the wide untrammelled sea,
With the mind and the will to cross the new-born waters
And to let the yellow hillside share its peace with me,

—I know, then, that surely would come the old spring-fever
And touch my sluggish blood with its old eternal fire;
Till for me, too, the love of peace were over and forgotten,
And the freedom of the logs had become my soul's desire.

TO SUMMER

Summer! I praise thee, who art glorious!
For now the sudden promise of the Spring
Hath been fulfilled in many ways to us,
And all live things are thine.
Therefore, while all the earth
Is glad, and young, and strangely riotous
With love of thee, whose blood is even as wine,
I dare to sing,
Worshipping thee, and thy face welcoming;
I, also a lover of thy most wondrous worth.

Yet with no scorn of any passed days
Come I,—who even in April caught great pleasure,—
Making of ancient woes the stronger praise;
Nor build I this new crown
For my new love's fair head
Of flowers plucked in once oft-travelled ways,
And then forgot and utterly cast down;
But from the measure
Of a strange, undreamt-of, undivided treasure
I glean, and thus my love is garlanded.

Yea, with a crown such as no other queen
That ever ruled on earth wore round her hair,
And garments such as man hath never seen!

The beauty Heaven hath
For thee was magnified;
I think the least of thy bright gold and green
Once lived along God's best-beloved path,
And angels there

Passed by, and gathered those He called most fair,
And, at His bidding, dressed thee for Earth's bride.
How at thy coming we were glad again!
We who were nigh to death, awaiting thee;
And fain of death as one weary of pain.
Life had grown burthensome,
Till suddenly we learned
The joy the old brown earth has, when the rain
Comes, and the earth is glad that it has come:
That ecstasy
The buds have, when the worn snow sets them free,
The sea's delight when storm-time has returned.

O season of the strong triumphant Sun!
Bringer of exultation unto all!
Behold thy work ere yet thy day be run.
Over thy growing grain
How the winds rise and cease!
Beheld these meadows where thick gold lies spun—
There, last night, surely, thy long hair must have lain!
Where trees are tall,
Hear where young birds hold their high festival;
And see where shallow waters know thy peace.

Will any of these things ever pain thine eyes,
Summer, that thou shouldst go another way
Than ours, or shouldst our offerings despise?
Come with me further still
Where, in sight of the sea,
This garden liveth under mellow skies;
Of its dear odors drink thine utmost fill,
And deign to stay
A moment mid its colors' glad array,—
Is not this place a pleasant one for thee?

Yea, thou wilt ever stay, I know full well!
Why do I fear that thou wilt pass from us?
Is not this earth thy home wherein to dwell?
The perfect ways thereof
Are thy desired ones;
Earth hath no voice but of thy worth to tell.
Therefore, as one who loves might praise his love,
So, even thus,
I hail thee, Summer, who art glorious,
And know thy reign eternal as the Sun's!

THE PATH

Is this the path that knew your tread,

Once, when the skies were just as blue
As they are now, far overhead?
Are these the trees that looked at you
And listened to the words you said?

Along this moss did your dress sweep?
And is this broken stem the one
That gave its flower to you to keep?
And here where the grasses knew the sun
Before a sickle came to reap
Did your dear shadow softly fall?
This place is very like, and yet
No shadow lieth here at all;
With dew the mosses still are wet
Although the grass no more is tall.

The small brown birds go rustling through
The low-branched hemlock as of old;
The tree-tops almost touch the blue;
The sunlight falleth down like gold
On one new flower that waiteth you.

THE LAST FLOWER

O golden-rod, well-worshipped of the sun!
Where else hath Summer tarried save in thee?
This meadow is a barren thing to see,
For here the reapers' toil is over and done.
Of all her many birds there is but one
Left to assail the last wild raspberry;
The buttercups and daisies withered be,
And yet thy reign hath only now begun.
O sign of power and sway imperial!
O sceptre thrust into the hands of Fall
By Summer ere Earth forget her soft foot's tread!
O woman-flower, for love of thee, alas,
Even the trees have let their glory pass,
And now with thy gold hair are garlanded!

AFTER HARVEST

O Earth, O Mother, thou hast earned our praise!
The long year through thou hast been good to us.
Forgive us were we ever mutinous
Or unbelieving in thy strange, sure ways.
Sometimes, alas, we watched with wild amaze
Thy passing, for thou wert imperious
Indeed; and our estate seemed perilous,
And we as grass the wind unseeing sways.
Then, we were blind: the least among us sees,
Now, in each well-stripped vine and barren field,
Each garden that is fast a-perishing,

The promise April surely had revealed
Had we had grace to bend our stubborn knees
Who seek thee now with humble thanksgiving.

HEAT IN SEPTEMBER

And why shouldst thou come back to us, July,
Who vanished while we prayed thee not to pass?
Where are thy sunflowers? Where thine uncut grass?
Thy still, blue waters and thy cloudless sky?
Surely, to-day thy very self is nigh;
Only the wind that bloweth in, alas,
Telleth of fire where many a green tree was;
And the crimson sun at noonday standeth high.
Must I, like him who, seeing once again
The long-awaited face of his lost love,
Hath little strength to thank the gods above
(Remembering most the ancient passion's pain),
Yet striveth to recall the joys thereof,—
Must I, like him, beseech thee to remain?

ON THE HILLSIDE

October's peace hath fallen on everything.
In the far west, above the pine-crowned hill,
With red and purple yet the heavens thrill—
The passing of the sun remembering.
A crow sails by on heavy, flapping wing,
(In some land, surely the young Spring hath her will!)
Below, the little city lieth still;
And on the river's breast the mist-wreaths cling.
Here, on this slope that yet hath known no plough,
The cattle wander homeward slowly now;
In shapeless clumps the ferns are brown and dead.
Among the fir-trees dusk is swiftly born;
The maples will be desolate by morn.
The last word of the summer hath been said.

SUMMER DYING

Last night the heavy moaning wind
Bore unto me
Warning from Him who hath designed
That change shall be.

Beneath these mighty hills I lay,
At rest at last,
And thinking on the golden day
But now gone past;

When softly came a faint, far cry
That night made clear,
*"Thy reign is over, thou must die;
Winter is near!"*

"Winter is near!" Yea, all night long
Reëchoed far
The burden of that weary song
Of hopeless war.

I prayed unto the fixed King
Of changing Time
For longer life, till sun-rising
And morning's prime,

And while to-day I watched the sun
Rise, slant, and die;
And now is night the stronger one.
Again the cry

Comes, louder now,—*"Thy reign is o'er!"*
Yes, Lord, I know;
And here I kneel on Earth's cold floor
Once, ere I go,

And thank Thee for the long, long days
Thou gavest me,
And all the pleasant, laughing ways
I walked with Thee.

I have been happy since the first
Glad day I rose
And found the river here had burst
Through ice and snows

While I had slept. Blue places were
Amidst the gray,
Where water showed; and the water
Most quiet lay.

Upon the ice great flocks of crows
Were clamoring—
Lest my blue eyes again should close—
The eyes of Spring.

I stepped down to the frozen shore—
The snow was gone;
And lo, where ice had been before,
The river shone!

With loud, hoarse cries back flew the birds
To the tall pines;
These were the first of Spring's faint words
And Summer's signs.

And now I hear Thee—*"Thou must die!"*
Ah, might I stay,
That I might hear one robin's cry
Bringing the day;

That I might see the new grass come
Where cattle range;
The maples bud, wild roses bloom,
Old willows change;

That I might know one night in June
Two found most fair,
And see again the great half-moon
Shine through her hair;

Or under rough, gnarled boughs might lie,
Where orchards are,
And hear some glad child's laughing cry
Ring loud and far;

Or even, Lord, though near my end
It surely be,
Couldst Thou not hold Time back, and send
One day to me,

One day—October's brown and red
Cover the hills,
And all the brakes and ferns are dead,
And quiet fills

One place where many birds once sang?
Then should I go
Where heavy fir-trees overhang
Their branches so,

And slim white birches, quivering,
Loose yellow leaves,
And aspens grow, and everything
For Summer grieves.

Ah, there once more, ere day be done,
To face the west,
And see the sure and scarlet sun
Sink to its rest

Beyond the ploughed field sloping sheer
Up to the sky;
To feel the last light disappear
And silent die;

To see faint stars.... Yea, Lord, I come;
I hear Thy call;
Reach me Thy hand and guide me home,
Lest I should fall....

Back, Winter! Back! ... Yea, Lord, I, dead,
Now come to Thee;
I know Thy voice, and Thou hast said
"Let Winter be!"

I wonder why my love for him
Should grow so much these last three days,
While he but stares as if some whim
Had been discovered to his gaze;

Some foolish whim that brings but shame
Whatever time he thinks thereof,—
To him my name is now the name
Of some old half-forgotten love.

And yet I starve for his least kiss
And faint because my love is great;
I, who am now no more than this,—
An unseen beggar at his gate....

*She watched the moon and spake aloud.
The moon seemed not to rise, but hung
Just underneath the long straight cloud
That low across the heavens swung,*

*As if to press the old moon back
Into its place behind the trees.
The trees stood where the hill was black;
They were not vexed by any breeze.*

*The moon was not as it had been
Before, when she had watched it rise;
It was misshapen now, and thin,
As if some trouble in the skies*

*Had happened more than it could bear,
Its color, too, was no more red;
Nor was it like her yellow hair;—
It looked as if its soul were dead.*

I, who was once well-loved of him,
Am as a beggar by his gate
Whereon black carved things look grim
At one who thinks to penetrate.

I do not ask if I may stray
Once more in those desired lands;
Another night, yet one more day,
For these I do not make demands;

For when the ripened hour is past
Things such as these are asked in vain:
His first day's love,—were that the last
I were repaid for this new pain.

Out of his love great joy I had
For many days; and even now
I do not dare to be but glad
When I remember, often, how

He said he had great joy of me.
The while he loved, no man, I think,
Exceeded him in constancy;

My passion, even, seemed to shrink

Almost to nothing, when he came
And told me all of love's strange things:
The paths love trod, love's eyes of flame,
Its silent hours, its rapid wings....

*The moon still waited, watching her
(The cloud still stretched there, close above;
The trees beneath); it could not stir,
And yet it seemed the shape thereof,*

*Since she looked first, some change had known.
In places it had burned away,
And one side had much thinner grown;
—What light that came from it was gray.*

*It was not curved from east to west.
But lay upon its back; like one
Wounded, or weary of some quest,
Or by strong enemies undone.*

*Elsewhere no stars were in the sky;
She knew they were burned out and dead
Because no clouds went, drifting by,
Across the light the strange moon shed.*

Now, I can hope for naught but death.
I would not stay to give him pain,
Or say the words a woman saith
When love hath called aloud in vain

And got no answer anywhere.
It were far better I should die,
And have rough strangers come to bear
My body far away, where I

Shall know the quiet of the tomb;
That they should leave me, with no tears,
To think and think within the gloom
For many years, for many years.

The thought of that strange, narrow place
Is hard for me to bear, indeed;
I do not fear cold Death's embrace,
And where black worms draw nigh to feed

On my white body, then, I know
That I shall make no mournful cry:
But that I should be hidden so
Where I no more may see the sky,—

The wide sky filled with many a star,
Or all around the yellow sun,
Or even the sky where great clouds are
That wait until the rain be done,

—That is an evil thing for me....
Across the sky the cloud swung still

*And pressed the moon down heavily
Where leafless trees grew on the hill.*

*The pale moon now was very thin.
There was no water near the place,
Else would the moon that slept therein
Have frightened her with its gray face.*

How shall I wish to see the sky!
For that alone mine eyes shall weep;
I care not where they make me lie,
Nor if my grave be diggéd deep,

So they leave loose my coffin's lid
And throw on me no mouldy clay,
That the white stars may not be hid:
This little thing is all I pray.

Then I shall move me wearily,
And clasp each bone that was my wrist,
Around each slender bony knee;
And wind my hair, that once he kissed,

Around my body wasted thin,
To keep me from the grave's cold breath;
And on my knees rest my poor chin,
And think of what I lose by death.

I shall be happy, being dead....
*The moon, by now, had nearly gone,
As if it knew its time was sped
And feared the coming of the dawn.*

*It had not risen; one could see
The cloud was strong to keep it back;
It merely faded utterly,
And where it was the sky grew black.*

*Till suddenly the east turned gray,
Although no stars were overhead;
And though the moon had died away,
There came faint glimmerings of red;*

*Then larger waves of golden light
Heralded that the day was born,
And on the furthest eastern height
With swift feet came the waited morn.*

*With swift feet came the morn, but lo!
Just as its triumph was begun,
The first wild onset of the snow
Strangled the glad imperial sun!*

Lord of Love, Thy servant thus doth pray:
Abide Thou where my Lady deigns to stay,
Yet send Thy peace to lead me on my way;

Because the memories of the things that were—
That little blessed while with Thee and her—
Make me a heavy-hearted traveller.

And so, when some plain irks, or some steep hill,
I—knowing that Thy will was once our will—
Shall be most sure Thou livest with her still,

And only waitest—Thou and she alone—
Until I know again as I have known
The glory that abideth near our throne.

BETWEEN THE BATTLES

Let us bury him here,
Where the maples are red!
He is dead,
And he died thanking God that he fell with the
fall of the leaf and the year.

Where the hillside is sheer,
Let it echo our tread
Whom he led;
Let us follow as gladly as ever we followed who
never knew fear.

Ere he died, they had fled;
Yet they heard his last cheer
Ringing clear,—
When we lifted him up, he would fain have
pursued, but grew dizzy instead.

Break his sword and his spear!
Let this last prayer be said
By the bed
We have made underneath the wet wind in the
maple trees moaning so drear:

"O Lord God, by the red
Sullen end of the year
That is here,
We beseech Thee to guide us and strengthen our
swords till his slayers be dead!"

THE QUIET VALLEY

They pity me who have grown old,—
So old, mine eyes may not behold

If any wolf chance near the fold.

They pity me, because, alas!
I lie and dream among the grass,
And let the herds unheeded pass.

They deem I must be sorrowing,
Because I note not when the Spring
Is over me and everything.

They know not why I am forlorn,—
How could they know?—They were not born
When he rode here that April morn.

They were not living when he came
Into this valley, swift like flame,—
Perchance they have not heard his name!

My men were very valiant men—
(Alas, that I had only ten!
These people were not living then.)

But when one is not yet awake
His banner is not hard to take,
His spears are easy things to break.

And dazed men are not hard to slay
When many foes, as strong as they,
With swords and spears come down their way.

This valley now has quiet grown;
And I lie here content, alone,
Dreaming of things that I have known;

And count the mounds of waving grass—
(Ten,—yea, and ten more, by the Mass!)
And let the restless cattle pass.

THE KINGFISHER

*Under the sun, the Kingfisher
From his high place was watching her.*

He knew she came from some far place;
For when she threw her body down,
She seemed quite tired; and her face
Had dust upon it; and her gown,
That had been yellow, now was brown.

She lay near where the shadows lie
At noontime when they meet the sun.
The water floated slowly by
Her feet. Her hair was all undone,
And with the grass its gold was spun.

The trees were tall and green behind,
And hid the house upon the hill.
This place was sheltered from the wind,
And all the little leaves were still,
And every fern and daffodil.

Her face was hidden in her hands;
And through the grass, and through her hair,
The sunlight found the golden bands
About her wrists. (It was aware,
Also, that her two arms were bare.)

*From his high branch, the Kingfisher
Looked down on her and pitied her.*

He wondered who that she could be,—
This dear, strange lady, who had come
To vex him with her misery;
And why her days were wearisome,
And what far country was her home.

Her home must be far off indeed,
Wherein such bitter grief could grow.
Had there been no one there to plead
For her when they had wronged her so?
Did none her perfect honor know?

Was there no sword or pennoned lance
Omnipotent in hall or field
For her complete deliverance?
To make them cry, "We yield! we yield
Were not her colors on some shield?

*Had he been there? the Kingfisher,
How he had fought and died for her!*

A little yellow bird flew by;
And where the water-weeds were still,
Hovered a great blue dragon-fly;
Small fishes set the streams a-thrill
The Kingfisher forgot to kill.

He only thought of her who lay
Upon the ground and was so fair,—
As fair as she who came one day
And sat long with her lover there.
The same gold sun was in her hair.

They had come down, because of love,
From the great house on the hillside:
This lady had no share thereof,
For now this place was sanctified!
Had this fair lady's lover died?

Was this dear lady's lover dead?
Had she come here to wait until
Her heart and soul were comforted?
Why was it not within her will
To seek the lady on the hill?

She, too, was lonely; for he had
Beheld her just this morning, when
Her last kiss made her lover glad
Who went to fight the heathen-men:
(He said he would return again!)

That lady would have charity
He knew, because her love was great;
And this one—fairer even than she—
Should enter in her open gate
And be no more disconsolate!

*Under the sun, the Kingfisher
Knew no one else might comfort her.*

THE CONQUEROR

I will go now where my dear Lady is,
And tell her how I won in this great fight;
Ye know not death who say this shape is his
That loometh up between me and the light.

As if death could wish anything of one
Who hath to-day brought many men to death!
Why should it not grow dark?—Surely the sun
Hath seen since morning much that wearieth.

Dead bodies; red, red blood upon the land;
Torn sails of scattered ships upon the sea;
And dead forgotten men stretched on the sand
Close to the sea's edge, where the waves are free;

What day hath seen such things and hath not fled?
What day hath stayed, hearing, for frequent sounds,
The flashing swords of men well-helmeted,
The moans of warriors sick of many wounds?

Ye know not death; this thing is but the night.
Wherefore I should be glad that it is come:
For when I left my Lady for this fight,
I said, "At sunset I am coming home."

"When you return, I shall be here," she said,
"God knows that I must pray a little while."
And as she put my helmet on my head,
She kissed me; and her blue eyes tried to smile.

And still she waiteth underneath the trees.
(When we had gone a little on our way
I turned and looked; she knelt there on her knees:
I heard her praying many times to-day.)

Nay, nay, I need no wine! She waiteth still
Watching and praying till I come to her.
She saw the sun drop down behind the hill

And wondereth I am a loiterer.

So I must go. Bring me my shield and sword!
(Is there no unstained grass will clean this stain?)
This day is won;—but now the great reward
Cometh! O Love, thy prayers were not in vain!

I am well rested now.—Nay, I can rise
Without your help! Why do ye look at me
With so much pain and pity in your eyes,
Who gained with me to-day this victory?

I think we should be glad we are not dead,
—Only, perchance, no Lady waiteth you,
No Lady who is all uncomforted,
And who hath watched and prayed these long hours through.

Yea, I must go.—What? Am I tired yet?
Let me lie here and rest my aching side.
The thought of her hath made me quite forget
How sharp his sword was just before he died.

THE KING'S HOSTEL

Let us make it fit for him!
He will come ere many hours
Are passed over. Strew these flowers
Where the floor is hard and bare!
Ever was his royal whim
That his place of rest were fair.

Such a narrow little room!
Think you he will deign to use it?
Yes, we know he would not choose it
Were there any other near;
Here there is such damp and gloom,
And such quietness is here.

That he loved the light, we know;
And we know he was the gladdest
Always when the mirth was maddest
And the laughter drowned the song;
When the fire's shade and glow
Fell upon the loyal throng.

Yet it may be, if he come,
Now, to-night, he will be tired;
And no more will be desired
All the music once he knew;
He will joy the lutes are dumb
And be glad the lights are few.

Heard you how the fight has gone?
Surely it will soon be ended!
Was their stronghold well defended

Ere it fell before his might?
Did it yield soon after dawn,
Or when noon was at its height?

Hark! his trumpet! It is done.
Smooth the bed. And for a cover
Drape those scarlet colors over;
And upon these dingy walls
Hang what banners he has won.
Hasten ere the twilight falls!

They are here!—We knew the best
When we set us to prepare him
Such a place; for they that bear him
—They as he—seem weary too;
Peace! and let him have his rest;
There is nothing more to do.

BETWEEN THE WINTER AND THE SPRING

Between the Winter and the Spring
One came to me at dead of night;
I heard him well as any might,
Although his lips, un murmuring.
Made no sweet sounds for my delight;
Also, I knew him, though long days
(It seemed) had fallen across my ways
Since I had felt his comforting.

It was quite dark, but I could see
His hair was yellow as the sun;
And his soft garments, every one,
Were white as angels' throats may be;
And as some man whose pain is done
At last, and peace is surely his,
His eyes were perfect with great bliss
And seemed so glad to look at me.

I knew that he had come to bring
The change that I was waiting for,
And, as he crossed my rush-strewn floor,
I had no thought of questioning;
And then he kissed me, o'er and o'er,
Upon the eyes; so I fell
Asleep unfrightened,—knowing well
That morning would fulfil the Spring.

And when they came at early morn
And found that I at last was dead,
Some two or three knelt by my bed
And prayed for one they deemed forlorn;
But he they wept for only said
(Thinking of when the old days were),
"Alas that God had need of her
The very morning Spring was born!"

THE MOTHER

The long dark night crawled slowly on;
I waited patiently,
Knowing at last the sudden dawn,
Sometime, would surely be.

It came,—to tell me everything
Was Winter's quiet slave:
I waited still, aware that Spring
Was strong to come and save.

And then Spring came, and I was glad
A few expectant hours;
Until I learned the things I had
Were only withered flowers

Because there came not with the Spring
As in the ancient days—
The sound of his feet pattering
Along Spring's open ways;

Because his sweetly serious eyes
Looked into mine no more;
Because no more in childish-wise
He brought his gathered store

Of dandelions to my bed,
And violets and grass,—
Deeming I would be comforted
That Spring had come to pass.

And now these unused toys and I
Have little dread or care
For any season that drifts by
The silences we share;

And sometimes, when we think to pray,
Across the vacant years
We see God watching him at play
And pitying our tears.

THE WINDOW OF DREAMS

It was quite dark within the room
Wherein the Lady Alice sat;
One had not seen, who looked thereat,
The gathered dust upon her loom,
There was such gloom.

And though the hangings on the wall
Were wrought so well and cunningly

That many had come far to see
Their glory once (for they were all
Of cardinal,

And gold, and silk, and curious glass)
The ladies with the long red hair
Thereon, the strong men fighting there,
The little river edged with grass,—
Were now, alas,

As if they had been always gray.
Likewise the lily, whose perfume
Had once been over all the room,
In which dark corner now it lay,—
What man might say?

She did not see these things, or know
That they had changed since she had seen.
She liked it best to sit between
Two little firs (they used to grow,
Once, long ago!)

That stood each in an earthen pot
Upon the window's either side.
They had been green before they died,
But like the rest fell out their lot,—
To be forgot.

Yet what cared she for such as these,
Whose window was toward the sun
At sun-rising? There was not one
Of them so strong and sure to please,
Or bring her ease,

As what she saw when she looked through
Her window just before the dawn.
These were the sights she gazed upon:
*Sir John, whose silken pennon flew,
Yellow and blue,*

*And proud to be upon his lance;
The horse he rode being gray and white;
A few men, unafraid to fight,
Followed (there were some men in France
Were brave, perchance!)*

*And they were armed with swords and spears;
Their horses, too, were mostly gray.
—They seemed not sad to go away,
For they were men had lost their fears
With their child-years.*

*They had such hope, there was but one
Looked back: Sir John had strength to look.
His men saw not that his lance shook
A little, for though night was done,
There was no sun.*

And so they rode into the dawn

*That waited just behind the hill;
(In France there were some men to kill!)
These were the things she looked upon
Till they were gone.*

* * * * *

The room was dark, and full of fear;
And so the Lady Alice stayed
Beside the window. Here she prayed
Each morning, and when night drew near,
Year after year.

Beside her lay some unused things:
A trumpet that had long been mute;
A vellum book; a little lute
That once had ten unruined strings;
And four gold rings;

A piece of faded cloth-of-gold;
And three black pennies that were white
As silver once:—the great delight
She had of all these things of old
Was now quite cold.

Only the things that she could see
Out of the window gladdened her;
After the morning, those things were
A ship that rode triumphantly
(This sight would be

Plainest a little ere the noon)
*On wide blue waters, with the wind
Strong from the west that lay behind;
Its sail curved like a slender moon,
Born into June.*

*An empty ship beside the shore
Of some unconquered foreign land;
Some brave men fighting on the sand
As they had never fought before
In any war;*

*A few men fleeing to the hills
(This came a little after noon),
God, but the fight was ended soon!
They were not hard to wound and kill!
A trumpet shrill*

*Echoes, and many knights pursue!
And on the hillside dead men lie,
Who learned before they came to die
The yellow flags the victors flew
Were crossed with blue!*

* * * * *

No wonder that this window-place
Could make the Lady Alice glad,
When sights like these were what she had!
Yet there was one that made her face
For a little space

Grow like a face that God has known.
I think she was the happiest
When the sun dropped into the west;
This was the thing she then was shown,
And this alone:

*A laden ship that followed fast
The way the setting sun had led;
In the east wind her great sail spread;
A brave knight standing near the mast;
The shore at last!*

Of all things, this the best did seem.
And now the gathering darkness fell;
The morn would bring him, she knew well;
She slept; and in her sleep, I deem,
She had one dream.

* * * * *

Against the window-side she slept.
This window-place was very strange;
Since it was made it had known change.
Beneath it once no women wept,
And no vines crept

And twisted in the broken glass.
Some time ago, the little tree
That she had planted tenderly
Was not much higher than tall grass;
But now, alas,

Its branches were the greatest where
Her window looked toward the sun.
One branch, indeed, its way had won
Into her room,—it did not bear
Green leaves in here.

Above the window, and inside,
Great spider-webs were spun across.
Where stone was, there was wet green moss
Wherein small creeping things did hide
Until they died.

The leaves that looked toward the room
Were hardly anything but veins;
They had been wasted by the rains,
Like some dead naked girl in the gloom
Of some old tomb.

But those outside were broad and green,
And lived between the sun and shade.

A perfect bower they had made,—
Beneath them there should sit some queen,
Born to be seen!

* * * * *

It was quite dark within the place
Wherein the Lady Alice slept.
I heard the girls below who wept,
But God did not (of His good grace)
Show me her face.

THE RELIEF OF WET WILLOWS

*Now this is the ballad of seven men
Who rode to Wet Willows and back again.*

It was only an hour before the dawn
When they deemed it best to awaken Sir John.

For they knew his sword long years had hung
On the wall, unhandled. (Once he was young,—

They did not remember; the tale had been told
To them by their fathers, ere they grew old—

And then his sword was a dreaded thing
When the men from the North came a-warfaring!)

But the women said that the things they knew
Were best made known to their master, too:

How, down at Wet Willows, there lay on the ground
Some men who were dead and some who were bound

And unable to succor the women who wept
That the North-King had come while their warriors slept.

* * * * *

So it came to pass, with the wind of the dawn,
Six men with their armor girded on

Had ridden around to the Eastern gate;
It was there that Sir John had told them to wait.

And when he came they were unafraid,
And knew no envy for those who stayed

Where the walls of the castle were strong and high;
There were none save some women to bid them good-by,

And they saw, as the sky in the East grew gray,

That Sir John and his men were some miles on their way.

* * * * *

*These things were heard and seen by the sun
When noon at Wet Willows was nearly done.*

After the battle, the King from the North
Bade his men lead the seven horses forth,

And bind, one on each, the Southern man
Who had dared to ride it when day began.

The words that the Northern King had said
Sir John and his men heard not, being dead;

(Nor heard they the sobs of the women who knew
That Sir John's son's son in the East was true

To the cross that was white on the shield that he had);
Nor knew they their home-going horses were glad;

Nor did they remember the trees by the way,
Or the streams that they crossed, or the dead leaves that lay

By the roadside. And when the moon rose, red and near,
They saw not its splendor; no more did they hear

The wind that was moaning from hill unto hill:
Their leader,—his will was his horse's will.

* * * * *

In the Eastern sky faint streaks of gray
Were changed to red, and it was day.

The women had waited all night long
Where the castle tower was high and strong;

And now, at last, they beheld Sir John,
And his men, and the horses they rode upon,

Just crossing the brow of the nearest hill.
The women's cries rose loud and shrill,

And in their joy they pitied not,
The men Sir John and his men had fought

And slain at Wet Willows. (Sir John was not young
They knew well; but the might of his sword as it swung,

In the old fighting days, was a thing they well knew,—
A shield was but glass as it clove its way through!)

* * * * *

So they who had waited and watched and prayed
The long night through were no more afraid

To open the gate,—for Sir John and his men
Who had fought at Wet Willows were home again.

THE BUILDER

Come and let me make thee glad
In this house that I have made!
No where (I am unafraid!)
Canst thou find its like on Earth:
Come, and learn the perfect worth
Of the labor I have had.

I have fashioned it for thee,
Every room and pictured wall;
Every marble pillar tall,
Every door and window-place;
All were done that thy fair face
Might look kindlier on me.

Here, moreover, thou shalt find
Strange, delightful, far-brought things:
Dulcimers, whose tightened strings,
Once, dead women loved to touch;
(Deeming they could mimic much
Of the music of the wind!)

Heavy candlesticks of brass;
Chess-men carved of ivory;
Mass-books written perfectly
By some patient monk of old;
Flagons wrought of thick, red gold,
Set with gems and colored glass;

Burnished armor, once some knight
(Dead, I deem, long wars ago!)
Its great strength was glad to know
When his Lady needed him:
(Now that both his eyes are dim
Both his sword and shield are bright!)

Come, and share these things with me,
Men have died to leave to us!
We shall find life glorious
In this splendid house of love;
Come, and claim thy part thereof,—
I have fashioned it for thee!

I will praise God alway for each new year,
Knowing that it shall be most worthy of
His kindness and His pity and His love
I will wait patient, till, from sphere to sphere,
Across large times and spaces, ringeth clear
The voice of Him who sitteth high above,
Saying, "Behold! thou hast had pain enough;
Come; for thy Love is waiting for thee here!"
I know that it must happen as God saith.
I know it well. Yet, also, I know well
That where birds sing and yellow wild-flowers dwell,
Or where some strange new sunset lingereth,
All Earth shall alway of her presence tell
Who liveth not for me this side of death.

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