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"Miss Radclyffe-Hall is a poet. She has a gift of expression always felicitous, not infrequently spontaneous, and her rhythms are really musical. Moreover, the level of her book is uniformly high. In writing of nature her intuition and sympathy are remarkable. Nearly every poem contains something which clings to your memory and sets you thinking.... The main note is vigorous, joyous youth, thankful for the right to exist in such a lovely world.

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A SHEAF OF VERSES

A SHEAF OF VERSES

POEMS

BY

MARGUERITE RADCLYFFE-HALL

AUTHOR OF "'TWIXT EARTH AND STARS"

**JOHN AND EDWARD BUMPUS LTD.
350 OXFORD STREET, LONDON, W.**

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A SHEAF OF VERSES

[1]

KINSHIP

Sunlight and shade,
Moorland and glade,
Evening and day,
Winter and May,
Troubadour breeze,
Amorous trees,
Pondering Hills,
Gold daffodils
Born of the Spring,
Thrushes that sing
Passionate notes
From downy throats,
Be unto me
Each one of ye
Sister or brother;
And Earth be my mother!

THE MOON'S MESSAGE

[2]

The Moon looked in at the window,
And smiled as I wrote to you,
She lay like a frail white maiden,
In shadowy folds of blue.

Her bosom was bare and tender,
And slight, for she still was young,
And down from her dainty shoulders
A mantle of starlight hung.

She wooed with a wanton ardour
The winds till they lulled to sighs,
And night was transformed with beauty,
For love of her limpid eyes.

The soul of the cloudy darkness
Awakened beneath her beams,
The sky swooned away with longing,
The Earth stirred in tender dreams.

Alas! for the moon was cruel,
Far colder than snow was she,
Her heart was a burnt-out Planet,
Her light but a fallacy:

And she looked at my open letter,
And called from her couch on high,
"Pray give my love to my Sister
Who is even more cold than I."

[3]

ON A BATTLE FIELD

[4]

Once o'er this hill whereon we stand,
Just you and I, hand clasp'd in hand
Amid the silence, and the space,
A mighty battle rent the air,
With dying curse and choking prayer;
'Mid shot and shell death stalked apace.

Is it conceivable to you—
So much at peace—because we two
Are close together, or to me?
The silent beauty of the noon
Seems like a Heaven-granted boon,
Aglow with tender ecstasy.

A little mist of hazy blue
Is slowly hiding from our view
The city's domes and slender spires,
As thro' a bridal veil the sun
Subdued and shy lights one by one
The virgin clouds with blushing fires.

[5]

The wind has fallen; very low
We hear his wings brush past, and know
He creeps away to dream and rest;
How sweet to be alone, to feel
You breathe one longing sigh, and steal
A little closer to my breast.

Is anything worth while but this?
We may not perish for a kiss,
Yet thus it were not hard to die!
War strews the earth with countless dead,
And after all is done and said,
The end is love, and you and I!

The world that thro' its vale of tears
Looks out upon Eternity
Has yet one smile for us, and we
Still youthful in the count of years,
May add our smiles, and kiss the lips
Of life, for whosoever sips
The wine within that ruddy bowl
Has quaffed defiance to the spheres.
Beloved, see, I drink thereto!
And pass the goblet on to you.

THE ALL-MOTHER'S AWAKENING

[7]

To-day the still, deep mind of the Earth
Has steeped in longing her wistful eyes,
A sense of wonder and glad surprise
Thrills thro' her heart with a thought of birth.

The grave All-Mother looks up and smiles,
Her breath comes balmy from sunlit mouth,
Her bosom bare to the ardent south
Is fanned by perfume from fruitful miles.

All winter long has the dear Earth slept
In drifts of snow, 'neath the bane of frost,
Her children sought for the Mother lost,
Yet found her not, and in anguish wept.

All winter long have my senses cried
For warmth of sun, and the blue of sky,
The hard north answered to mock my sigh,
And all the glory of life denied.

The cold mists drifting on land and sea,
Like ghosts of passions burnt out and chill,
Smote heart and soul with the fear of ill,
That cast its awfulness over me.

The dank gray sails, and the dank gray shore,
They melted each in the other's face,
With clammy kiss, in a wan embrace
That left them colder than e'en before.

And thro' the boughs of the moss-grown trees
The sap flowed sluggish, or not at all,
While here and there would a dead leaf fall,
Like thought of harrowing memories.

Then from the heart of the Universe
There rose a wail of unending woe,
An anguished prayer from the deeps below:
"Oh! Mother, lift from our souls the curse!"

"Oh! Mother, quicken thy sacred womb,
With fire that throbs in the veins of Spring,
Behold the numbness of everything,
And only thou can avert the doom."

"Oh! Mother, hear us!" But silent still
The Earth slept on, as it were in death.
Her ice-bound bosom stirred not with breath,
So fast she lay 'neath the winter's will.

I joined my prayer to the wind and trees,
I joined my cry to the striving soil,
I said, "Oh! Mother, our endless toil
Has made us sicken with miseries.

"Rise up! and help us again to live,
Rise up! uncover thy fruitful breast,
We faint in winter's unrestful rest,
We burn with longings to love and give."

And as I spoke came a voice more strong
Than all creation's, o'er land and sea
It called our Mother to ecstasy,
And lo! she stirred, who had slept so long.

She stirred, she opened her drowsy eyes,
And bending down from the dome above,
Beheld the form of embodied Love,
As Spring stepped Earthward from Paradise.

[8]

[9]

I often think that all those vast desires
For purer joys, that thrill the human heart,
Vague yearnings such as solitude inspires,
That nameless something silence can impart,

Could after all be quenched by simple things,
Whose spirits dwell within the wide-eyed flowers,
Or haunt deep glades, where scent of primrose clings
About the garments of the passing hours.

MOTH TO THE FLAME

[11]

Moth to the flame!
Fool that you be,
Life's but a game,
Love is the same,
Better go free!

Moth to the fire!
Madness your fate;
Burnt of desire,
If you expire,
Joy comes too late.

Moth to the kiss
Bringing you death!
"Gladly for this
Agonized bliss,
With my last breath
Will I adore
As ne'er before!"
Foolish Moth saith.

A TWILIGHT FANCY

[12]

Dear, give me the tips of your fingers
To hold in this scented gloom,
'Mid the sighs of the dying roses,
That steal through the breeze-swept room;

I would have you but lightly touch me,
A phantom might stir the dress,
In its passing, of some lost lover
With just such a faint caress;

Or a butterfly wan with summer
Brush thus with his down-flecked wings
The bells of the altar lilies
He touches, and lightly rings.

So give me the tips of your fingers,
Not your hand, lest I break the spell
Of the moment with too much passion,
And lose what I love so well.

THE TWO ANGELS

[13]

Once Youth and Innocence, side by side,
With flaming swords at a garden gate
Stood forth in silence, to watch and wait,
Lest lust and evil their might defied.

Love's rarest fruits in that garden grew,
And lo! a Pilgrim of pain and sin
Grown tired, would gladly have entered in,
And washed his soul in the gleaming dew.

He looked at Youth, and the Angel said:
"Behold me young, and behold me weak;
If you but crush me, the joy you seek
Shall quench desire on a rose-strewn bed,

"Yet oh! I pray you another hour,
For should you enter this Holy place,
My soul is given again to space,
And I must die as a blighted flower."

[14]

Then all the sorrow and all the shame,
That life had taught him to understand,
Rose up, and fettered the Pilgrim's hand,
And murmur'd: "Youth is a sacred name."

He looked at Innocence, nude and white,
And all unconscious she met his gaze;
Her eyes were soft as an evening haze,
Her red lips fashioned to give delight.

She sighed, "I know not the boon you ask,
But Nature sent me to guard the way
That leads to realms of Eternal day;
I may not shrink from the Mother's task.

"Yet these fair limbs that are pure as snow,
Should you but sully by thought or deed
Must droop and fade as a broken reed,
That every wind of the earth may blow."

Then all the goodness that he had missed,
Each dream of sweetness that passed him by,
Rose up, and cried: "Thou shalt still deny
Thyself"—and Innocence stood unkissed.

IN THE HARDT WALD

[15]

A road disused these many years,
O'er which the grass has grown
Between two rows of silent pines,
That stretch in straight, unbroken lines
Away to plains unknown.

Long ruts that passing wagons made
In days whose records die
Form trenches for the frailer flowers,
That timid of more open bowers
Secure in hiding lie.

And in those deep impressions there,
Where patient beasts have trod,
With stems in dainty green array,
And faces turned to meet the day,
Grow sprays of golden-rod,

'Mid sunbeams slanting thro' the wood
The ardent Afternoon
Steals like a lover fond, and dumb,
Upon his mistress Earth, o'ercome
With many a tender boon;

[16]

And that she sooner shall respond
To his awakening fires,
He summons from each fairy glade
Wee winged things, to serenade
This nymph of his desires.

So full of mystic power and life
Is this forgotten place
That I may scarcely dare intrude
My presence and my lighter mood,
Lest stepping I deface

Some masterpiece of moss or bloom,
That Dryad hands have wrought,
Perchance my very humanness
May make this potent charm the less,
That solitude has taught.

I fear to tread upon a branch,
For if beneath my feet
It breaks 'twould thus affright the bird
Whose tender music I have heard
In yonder green retreat;

[17]

And who am I that I should dare
Gainsay the Noon's behest;
Or penetrate this peaceful sphere,
And bring an agony of fear
To some dumb creature's breast?

Within this forest night and day
An endless hymn of praise
From out the heart of Nature wells,
That once again perfection dwells
In her profanèd ways,

That living green conceals the scars
Made by relentless man,
While in the deepest sylvan glades
Sound faint and far thro' emerald shades
The crystal pipes of Pan.

I sought at dawn for the sweet white heather,
In hiding among the blue,
The earth was warm with the summer weather,
The flowers still damp with dew.

I moved a stone with my foot in walking,
A lizard ran out in fear,
Two tiny streams to each other talking
Complained that I came so near.

And all alone on the side of the mountain
I spoke to the new-born Day,
Oh! help me to gather some rare white heather
Sweet Morning, show me the way!

A big stag beetle crawled close in wonder,
A grasshopper chirped of rain,
A bee just pushing some flowers asunder
Buzzed loud in his vast disdain.

The pines swayed gently, as though with laughter,
They knew what I came to seek!
A thistledown that the breeze ran after
Brushed lightly against my cheek.

And all alone on the side of the mountain
I spoke to the new born Day,
Oh! help me to gather some rare white heather,
Sweet Morning, show me the way!

A trout jumped high with a rainbow shudder,
To see how the mortals look,
Then swayed his tail like a silver rudder,
And swam away in the brook.

I think I heard all the Pixies saying
"No heather that's white you'll find!"
I know I saw little Gnome-folk playing
Where shadowy boughs reclined—

And all alone on the side of the mountain
I spoke to the new born Day,
O help me to gather some rare white heather,
Sweet Morning, show me the way!

Alas! alas! for the fairy flower,
My feet grew weary in vain,
I sought for luck thro' each sunlit bower,
To find it truant again.

Then while I paused on the side of the mountain
The stillness was cleft apart,
And Morning cried "He who seeks white heather
Must find it deep in his heart!"

[19]

[20]

ONE NIGHT

[21]

I stood beside you in the dark,
And felt the magic of the night
Steal o'er my senses, 'til they swooned,
And mists of passion dimmed my sight.

The stillness made me dumb, those words
I dared not utter choked my breath,
Each crushing each, as mad with life
They rose, to die a silent death.

My lips grew dry beneath the fire
Of kisses that they feign would give,
And every pulse, with answering beat,
Throbbled in its eagerness to live.

A WELCOME

[22]

Dear Ghost, across a wind-swept sphere
You wander back again to me,
And I am not afraid, for see
I bid you rest beside me here!

I press your icy lips to mine,
Since you and I are almost one
Can I condemn what you have done
To render fruitless the divine?

Some day perchance our weary task
May finish, and we two will stand
Before the Maker, hand in hand,
There will be much that we shall ask!

WHITE BUTTERFLIES

[23]

SCHWARTZ WALD

The heat of the mid-day has smitten the forest-land dumb!
The mountains are closing their eyes in a languorous dream,
The boulders stand stark, where the torrents once hastened to come,
For Earth in her passion is wholly consuming their stream.

The ardour and terror of living is rife in the air,
The air that is breathless, and stranger to motion or sound,
A rapture so potent it seems near akin to despair
Is drawing the life-blood in mist, from the sun-ravished ground.

And out thro' this region grown tense with creation's desire,
Inconsequent, fragile as thistledown wafted by breeze,
Two butterflies flutter, like snow-flakes that fall upon fire,
Far into the flame-land, that stretches away from the trees.

[24]

White butterflies, innocent-looking and soft as a sigh,
In quest of what blossoms, what mystical pleasures, who knows?
Close one to the other they hover now low and now high,
Like thoughts that are breathed from the heart of an opening rose.

Vague spirits that drift o'er the infinite tide of the earth,
As jewels of foam, on the passion-torn breast of the sea,
They know not the hour of their ending, the cause of their birth,
A moment of time or a year, they rejoice but to be!

Around them the problem of life, with its pain and its joy,
Impregnates the noon with a sense of some marvellous power,
Above them, grown potent with strength to create or destroy,
The shafts of the sun, that have smitten and withered the flower.

[25]

And still with frail bodies unmoved by the vastness of things
These fairy white butterflies flutter like spirits of light,
They pause for an instant, then spreading their tremulous wings,
Fly into the infinite, fading away from my sight.

THOUGHTS

[26]

A drop of dew that on a rose-bud clings,
A ray of sunshine in a world of Springs,
A bird, who singing from some hidden tree,
Is bathed in streams of endless melody,

An open flower you trod on as you passed,
The purple shadow that your passing cast,
A breath of wind that lingered on your brow,
An emerald leaf fresh shaken from the bough,

A smile of hope on lips that you delight,
A grateful word from one whom you requite
For some small service, or a little sigh
That fans your senses as it flutters by,
These things to you how much they mean!
While I?...

THE CLOUD AND THE MOUNTAIN

[27]

A little white Cloud loved the Mountain,
She hung in the sky all day,
And gazed with rather a timid smile
To where, beneath her full many a mile,
The earth and the loved one lay.

The Mountain was silent and lonely,
And grim in the light of dawn,
And ever and aye he cast his eyes
In longing hope to the distant skies
Where little white clouds are born.

Till a breeze in the evening passing
Took pity upon her vow,
And very tenderly lifted down
The virgin Cloud, till her fleecy crown
Was set on the Mountain's brow.

And they loved with a silent ardour
So great that she soon was slain,
And drop by drop from her tender breast
The life-blood flowed o'er his rock-bound crest,
And fell to the earth in rain.

[28]

But she left him to keep for ever,
As solace in endless woe
Her soul, and now through the changing years,
Come shine, come shade, or come smiles, or tears,
It lies on his breast as snow.

Hot with the ardour of the sun,
Whose burning lips had slain the noon,
The golden pallor of the moon
Was but an added fire, o'ercome
With memories she swooned away,
While I, grown weary with the day
Sought on my balcony to find
Some solace for my groping mind,
But lo! the awful night was fraught
With anguish, from the noontide caught;
The dark was breathless, and the skies
Filled with a thousand prying eyes
But scoffed to see my soul's despair,
And flung me back my tortured prayer.

**SPRING HOPES
SONG**

[30]

Dear, perchance 'neath the frost and snow
One little golden flower is sleeping,
You shall find it, for you will know
Whither at dawn the sun goes peeping.

Come then sweetheart, we two will go
Hand in hand, and a truce to weeping,
If, in spite of the winter's woe,
Safe in Nature's maternal keeping
Under the frost rime and under the snow,
One little primrose is daintily sleeping.

MY CHOICE

[31]

I have chosen a hill very solemn and tall,
To shelter me.
I have chosen a home very humble and small,
Where I would be.

I have chosen a wind very fragrant and gay,
To kiss my mouth.
I have chosen a view, stretching ever away,
When I look south.

I have chosen a glow that the sunlight shall bring
When morning calls.
I have chosen a choir of the thrushes to sing
When twilight falls.

I have chosen a shrine where my spirit may pray,
Blessing its birth.
I have chosen a breast where my head I can lay,
Sweet Mother Earth!

IN COUPLES

[32]

There are two happy birds in the tree,
There are two happy stars in the sky,
There are two happy waves in the sea,
There are two happy clouds drifting by,
There are two happy mortals, since we
Are together, just you dear, and I.

HOUSE HUNTING

[33]

Where shall we make us a cosy home,
Up in a high pine tree?
Suppose the squirrel deserts his nest,
And we could only grow small and rest
Under the twigs, laid so daintily,
Up in the high pine tree!

Where shall we build us a lovely house,
Under the Ocean deep?
Suppose the fishes would swim away,
And leave a palace of coral gay,
With seaweed gardens where moonbeams sleep,
Under the Ocean deep!

Where shall we find an enchanted spot,
Up in the fields of sky?
Suppose the rainbow bends slowly down,
And we walk over to Cloudy Town,
Golden with beams from the morning's eye,
Up in the fields of sky!

[34]

How shall we live out our days, we two,
Safely where no harm parts?
Suppose we fetter our lives with love,
More fair than ocean, or skies above,
And learn to dwell in each other's hearts,
Safely where no harm parts.

RE-INCARNATION

[35]

Meeting you I felt a thrill,
Strangely sad, and strangely sweet!
Some compelling force of will,
Sprung from sympathies complete,
Sympathies, that rose again
After death's ennobling pain.

ODE TO SAPPHO

[36]

If not from Phaon I must hope for ease,
Ah! let me seek it from the raging seas:
To raging seas unpitied I'll remove;
And either cease to live or cease to love.

OVID'S *Heroic Epistle*, XV.

Immortal Lesbian! canst thou still behold
From some far sphere wherein thy soul doth sing
This earth, that once was thine, while glimmered gold
The joyous beams of youth's forgotten spring?

Can thine unfathomed eyes embrace this sea,
Whose ebb and flow once echoed in thy brain?
Whose tides bear record of thine ecstasy
And thy despair, that in its arms hath lain?

Those love-burnt lips! Can death have quenched their fire?
Whose words oft stir our senses to unrest?
Whose eager ardour caught and held desire,
A searing flame against thy living breast?

Passion-wan Lesbian, in that awful place
Where spirits wander lost without a name
Thou still art Sappho, and thine ardent face
Lights up the gloom with love's enduring flame.

Oh! Goddess, woman, lover, all divine
And yet divinely mortal, where thou art
Comes not as cadence from some song of thine
Each throbbing beat that stirs the human heart?

Canst thou forget us who are still thy friends,
Thy lovers, o'er the cloudy gulf of years?
Who live, and love, and dying make amends
For life's short pleasures thro' death's endless fears?

Once thou didst seek the solace of thy kind,
The madness of a kiss was more to thee
Than Heaven or Hell, the greatness of thy mind
Could not conceive more potent ecstasy!

Life was thy slave, and gave thee of her store
Rich gifts and many, yet with all the pain
Of hopeless longing made thy spirit sore,
E'en *thou* didst yearn, and couldest not attain.

Oh! Sappho, sister, by that agony
Of soul and body hast thou gained a place
Within each age that shines majestic'ly
Across the world from out the dusk of space.

Not thy deep pleasures, nor thy swiftest joys,
Have made thee thus, immortal and yet dear
To mortal hearts, but that which naught destroys,
The sacred image of thy falling tear.

Beloved Lesbian! we would dare to claim
By that same tear fond union with thy lot;
Yet 'tis enough, if when we breathe thy name
Thy soul but listens, and forgets us not.

[37]

[38]

INCOMPATIBLE

[39]

To-day I hate that bitter creed,
Whereby the groaning soul is taught
That God Almighty finds the need
Of pain, ere true salvation's wrought!

Dear God, who did create the trees,
The scented flowers, the misty view,
The uplands' breezy ecstasies,
The Ocean's iridescent blue,

The arches of the endless sky,
The magic of a day in Spring,
The down upon a butterfly,
The anthem that the skylarks sing.

All perfect growing harmonies,
Each tuneful sound and beauteous sight,
That lifts us from our miseries
To raptures of supreme delight,

Can I believe that Thou hast willed
Each bitter moment I have spent?
Whereby in anguish were fulfilled
Thy hard decrees of punishment?

To-day is June! Since early dawn
My heart has felt the sun's caress,
I bless the hour that I was born
To witness so much loveliness.

And I would have a *God* of love,
A tender God, who looks and smiles
From some not distant throne above
Upon His fair created miles.

I know not who has placed the thorns
That pierce, on our human brow,
But I would pray on these sweet morns.
Dear God, Oh! Let it not be Thou.

CONFIDENCE

[41]

The faintness of my heart
When strife and evil rose,
The worse and lesser part
Which it for ever chose,
God knows.

The passions that have bound
My soul with chains of earth,
The sorrows that have found
Their home with me since birth,
The dearth

Of all these nobler things
That make existence fair,
The stain of sin that clings
Until we cease to care
For prayer,

All this must I atone:
And though eternal woes
My banished soul alone,
Must bear without repose,
Yet I am not afraid
To know God knows.

[42]

FOUND WANTING

[43]

I turn'd to you, the sky was amber gold,
Blue haze and flaming bracken stretched away
In undulating mystery to the day,
Reclining that the evening might behold
And hide her softly 'neath his starlit wings.
A trembling breeze caressed the nearer things
About us, pausing now and then to play
Within the tender shadows of your hair,
Across the sky, like darts flung high in air
A flight of swallows struck against the glow
An instant, ere they melted quite away,
Like thoughts consumed by passion, and the lay
Of home birds grew emotional and low.
My very soul came forth and sought your eyes,
But in their depth no raptured awe took birth,
You stood indifferent to the throb of earth,
You gazed unseeing at the burning skies,
And all it meant you could not realize!

* * * * *

A little shiver crept along my heart—
For you and I were strangers, far apart.

IN DARKNESS

[44]

Oh! that the night were passed, and morn,
Made lovely by the joy of spring,
Would flood these sombre clouds with dawn,
Oh! that some hopeful bird would sing,
And in his tiny feathered throat
Contain the answer vast, remote,
My spirit seeks in endless spheres
Of thought, and prayer, yet never hears!

BROTHER FILIPPO

[45]

Ring on! Oh endless vesper bell!
What can you know of that deep Hell
Upon this Earth, where men may dwell.

Ring on! Your calling is in vain,
What holy rite can lull the pain
Of mortal Sin's Immortal stain.

* * * * *

It was the heavy hour of noon,
When Nature still as in a swoon
Reclines beneath the spell of June.

I left the Monastery gate,
And sought the forest shade, to wait
For even hour, and meditate.

Upon the beads hung from my side
A silver Christus crucified.
God mocked, and scourgèd, and denied!

[46]

My missal in my hand I took,
And read within the Holy Book
How vain the joys a monk forsook.

I thought of Heaven, and all therein
I hoped by penitence to win;
My heart was free from mortal sin.

When lo! as of enchanted spheres
A languid music smote my ears,
With vast delight, and vaster fears.

It was as if all deadly wrong
Grown honied sweet in magic song
Caressed my senses, deep and long.

My eyes upon the missal bent
Sprang upward, and in ravishment
Beheld a gaze on me intent.

The figure of a tender maid,
Within the larches' trembling glade
Clothèd in sunlight and in shade—

Was bending o'er me, and her breast
Full worthy of a King's behest
She offered, that my head might rest.

[47]

She was most pale, and frail, and white,
Like moonlit mist on Summer's night,
Like memory of wan delight.

And thro' the tendrils of her hair
There blew a breath of scented air,
Of all sweet things from everywhere.

A limpid magic were her eyes,
Two mountain lakes, where sunlight lies
Enamoured, and of passion dies.

From out her lips proceeded words
More soft than distant pipe of herds,
More tender than the song of birds.

I know not what the tongue she spake,
But all my senses leapt to ache
With longing, for her asking's sake.

As in a dream I rose and pressed
Her bending slimness to my breast:
With eager kiss my mouth caressed

The flaming redness of her own,
All else on earth had nothing grown,
Save that we two were there alone.

[48]

within my ears the rush of streams,
My vision shot with lurid gleams,
My spirit bathed in burning dreams!

A vital fragrance round her clung,
As if from earth's deep veins was wrung
The sap of springs for ever young.

It turned my blood to living fire,
The universe immense, entire,
Was bound in me, and my desire.

No mortal man was I, while still
I kissed and wreaked my ardent will
Upon that form of tender ill.

She cast her magic over me,
Her spell of Immortality,
That lost my soul Eternity.

The sunlight faded, and the day
As one affrighted fled away,
Suddenly tremulous and gray.

An icy wind sprang up, and blew
A shuddering breath along the dew,
It chilled my body thro' and thro'.

I sought the shelter of her hair,
But lo! my sinful breast was bare,
My arms outstretched to empty air.

I wept aloud, in anguish cried,
The echoes hastened to deride!
She came no longer to my side.

And in her stead, with agony
Of dumb regret, most bitterly
My soul came forth, and looked on me!

* * * * *

Within the forest's depth a bird
Began to twitter, and I heard
Trees stirring at its tender word.

I woke as from a searing dream,
Beside my feet a little stream
Grew rosy with a sunset beam.

The earth gave forth her fragrant store;
Obedient to Eternal law,
All things were even as before,

All things save I, who moaned, and stood
A stranger, in the tranquil wood.
My spirit shrank away, nor could

Refresh itself at Nature's breast,
Its lips were burnt, defiled, caressed
Of sin, unholy and unblessed!

I knew it then! fulfilled desires
Are in themselves Hell's deepest fires,
And man when highest he aspires

The more may fall beneath his lust.
And yet, ah! Heaven, the while I thrust
My sense in penitential dust

I knew that thro' my misery
A tremor stole persistently,
Of rapture at her memory.

Shall I confess with spirit bent
That hour of awful ravishment?
Dear God, but *should I not repent?*

'Twere better that we two should die

[49]

[50]

I WERE BETTER THAT WE TWO SHOULD DIE
A thousand deaths, my soul and I,
Than live an everlasting lie!

Oh soul! What would you have me say,
To Him whose hand shall never stay
Its vengeance on this woeful day!

* * * * *

Ring on! oh endless vesper bell!
What can you know of that deep Hell
Upon this earth where men may dwell,
And God, does He know? Who can tell—

[51]

AN AUTUMN RIDE

[52]

MALVERN

The world's a beautiful world to-day,
A flame of gold and a dusk of gray,

Where Autumn leaves toss their gaudy crests
O'er still deep lanes, where the twilight rests.

Just overhead as I ride along
A hopeful thrush charms his thought to song,

And all that's joyous within me springs
To meet the promise of which he sings.

Away to Heaven the melting view
Is soft with raptures of endless blue;

The trees and meadows, the hills and plains,
Like music woven of countless strains

[53]

Submerge, entwine, till the eye can see
No shade that is not a harmony.

As part of nature's most perfect whole
Each humble object conceives a soul,

No tiny flower in the distance lost,
But gives its colour, nor counts the cost;

No drop of dew, but its feeble ray
An atom cast in the pearly gray

Is shining there, unperceived, content,
A dim star set in earth's firmament.

My horse treads gently, and makes scarce sound,
His hoofs sink deep in the marshy ground,

Yet 'neath the touch of my curbing rein
I feel the youth in his veins complain,

He lifts his head, and his eager eyes
Gaze far away where the moorland lies,

He whinnies often, as though to say
I would be free on this perfect day!

[54]

He too is filled with a happiness
His dumb soul treasures but can't express,

And in that gladness of wind and sun
I know my beast and myself are one.

The way is lonely, no passer by
Disturbs the stillness, my horse and I

Possess the earth, and the rippling air
Divine elixir to banish care

Has brought new strength to my heart and mind

has brought new strength to my heart and mind,
And swept all sorrowful things behind.

Oh! Joy of living when youth is ours!
Oh! Earth my Mother, thy fragrant bowers

Could they be fairer if Angels trod
Beneath their trees at the will of God?

Could fabled Heaven e'er compensate
For one such day, when the year is late,

And all the Summer has come to dwell
In long warm moments of dim farewell?

When skies are pale with the tears that bless
The soil, in falling for happiness?

And winds are fragrant with scent that flows
From out the bosom of some lone rose?

And brooks are drowsy with dusty gleams,
And languid thoughts of their winter dreams?

The fields are vital, and nude, and gray
With future promise of fruitful clay?

Ah! no, my being could not believe,
My heart desire, nor my soul conceive,

A world more perfect, more dear, more true,
Than this fair Eden I'm riding through.

[55]

BEFORE DAWN

MALVERN

I rose, ere yet the eager light
Had wrested from the grasp of night
The trembling spirit of the world.
The dusk of dawn with wistful eyes
Stole timidly across the skies,
A little cloud its edges curled
By passing winds sped soft and bright
Towards some Eastern Paradise.

No bird was yet awake to sing,
And silence kissing everything
Compelled my doubting soul to rest.
While yet I slept a fall of snow
Had whitened all the hills, and lo!
Above the nearest summit's crest,
A pendent star, as though to bring
God's blessing to His Earth below,
Shone like a thought benign, and kind,
Within the vast Eternal Mind.

[56]

MY CASTLE

[57]

Ah! why have I built my Castle
On the shifting golden sand?
On the shores of the hungry ocean
Instead of the safe highland?

I ask myself, and I answer
These sands are the sands of youth,
And these waves are the surfs of passion
Of life,—and of death forsooth!

And I know in my heart I'd rather
Exist for but one short day
Where the breakers of life wash highest,
Love, live, and be swept away.

MALVERN
July 23rd, 1906

[58]

Across the hills a tender shadow stole,
Like thought upon the face of one loved well,
And thro' the silence rang some distant bell,
A vague sweet music in its every toll.

Glimmers of sunlight flecked with purple shade
Upon the nearer summits, and the view
Grown dim, unearthly, 'neath the silver-blue
Of incense mist, that rose while nature prayed.

Two stars with tremulous emotion shone
Close side by side, in the encircling dome,
While drifting clouds, their edges soft as foam,
Made couches, which the moon might rest upon.

In thro' the open window came the scent
Of lime trees, in the garden underneath,
And from my cigarette a little wreath
Of memories, to meet their fragrance went.

It was an evening full of bygone things,
That mingled with emotions newly born
As night will ever clasp and kiss the dawn,
And leave those kisses on her ardent wings.

[59]

TO MY LITTLE COUSIN

[60]

You're just as pretty as the Day,
That young and pink above the hills
Trips daintily along her way,
With little breezy thrills.

I know that when she steps to earth
And sees the blueness of your eyes
She'll think that thence she took her birth,
And quite desert the skies!

TREPIDATION

[61]

This valley now in sun, and now in shade,
Is like the musings of your tender mind,
That pauses, bathed in joy, yet half afraid
To look before, and then to gaze behind.

Along the fragrant meadows slowly steal,
The pensive, drifting shadows, purple blue,
As o'er your heart, that shrinks the while to feel
The kiss of promise wonderful and new.

Look upward, Child, to where across the skies
Float happy clouds, aglow with morning light!
It is *their* shadow that before you lies
Upon the plain, and see, the clouds are white!

AT MEISSEN

[62]

June 29th

Beneath the lime trees in the garden
High above the town,
The scent of whose suspended bloom
Entranced the air with warm perfume
I stood, and watched the river flowing,
Flowing smooth and brown.

The heat of all the summer sunshine
Centred in the skies,
Beneath its spell the city's towers
Grew dreamy, and the climbing flowers
Upon the balconies hung limply
Down, with closing eyes.

Some drowsy pigeons cooed together
On the nearer eaves,
Gnats danced, and one big foolish bee
Grown honey-drunk, bumped into me,
And ere he buzzed a lazy protest
Fell amid the leaves.

A bell began to chime, I watched it
Swinging to and fro,
It made a solemn, pious sound,
While flippant swallows, darting round
To peer within the ancient belfrey
Soared now high, now low.

Time passed, and still I stayed to ponder
Through the afternoon,
Within my brain the golden haze
Wrought magic musings, and my gaze
Bent inward could behold no image
Save the form of June.

[63]

The world has grown unreal to-day
Far out upon the Zuyder Zee!
We drift towards a mystic isle,
With scarce a breath of wind the while.
I hear the murmur of the tide,
I hear you breathing at my side,
Far out upon the Zuyder Zee.

The dreariness of this inland sea!
Doomed thus to lie eternally
A fettered slave, grown old between
The dykes and marshes low and green,
Devoid of wind to stir the deep
Forgotten heart, so long asleep,
Oh! sorrow-laden Zuyder Zee!

This awful hush engulfing things!
The noon-tide hangs with outspread wings
Above the ship, all motionless.
The penitential sails confess
Their sad inertness, damp and brown,
From silent masts they ripple down
Towards the lifeless Zuyder Zee.

[65]

I almost think that you and I
Are floating on a haze of sky,
This is an unknown sphere of dreams,
Or else some region where the beams
Of daylight that have died unblessed
By some kind thought stray seeking rest,
Along the wastes of Zuyder Zee.

How strange to know that youth is ours!
That do we choose a world of flowers
And sunlight waiting to our hand
Is calling for some gladder land,
So easy to attain, yet lo!
We drift amid the mist and woe
Of winter on the Zuyder Zee.

Is there a subtle charm, when sad
Despairing nature makes the glad
Rejoicing spirit pause to think,
Of those dim depths to which may sink
The soul immortal? Where the mind
May grow as sodden as a wind
That dies upon the Zuyder Zee?

[66]

When all our loving and our will
To love for ever can't fulfil
Love's promises for age and death?
That like a hushed, unwholesome breath,
From off the marshes in the night
Steals forth, and all our past delight
Is colder than the Zuyder Zee?

The very thought that death is near
Perchance makes life seem doubly dear,
And love more urgent, since they two
May some day fade away, and *you*
Become a spectral memory,
Devoid of joy! and what of me
Oh! wise, world-weary Zuyder Zee?

Your endless depth of stark despair
But renders sunlit things more fair,
But makes the craving heart more strong
To grasp its pleasures, short or long,
While yet it is To-day, nor wait
Upon the will of doubtful fate,
Lest all emotion rendered numb
With long suppression should become
As you are, soulless Zuyder Zee!

The thought of you has filled the night with wonder,
The dawn with praise,
Till all my senses thrill, like roses under
The morning's rays.

This love of ours has clad with new-found splendour
The hills and streams,
No forest glade but sighs of vast surrender,
In noontide dreams,

No star in heaven but grants a starry lover
Some tender boon,
No drifting cloud but longs to clasp and cover
His lady Moon.

No song of bird that is not song of mating,
In sylvan shade,
No sigh of wind that is not sigh of waiting
For bliss delayed.

The world itself a garden, where we wander
'Mid passion flowers,
Or pause to kiss a while, and fondly ponder
This joy of ours.

A COMPLAINT

[68]

Oh! why let all these wingèd days slip past us!
Will you not give me leave with those dear eyes,
To taste the sweets of our new paradise,
Beyond the outer dark where fate has cast us?

Must we for ever see the golden portal
Yet ne'er in glad abandon enter in?
Dear heart, if loving be so great a sin
Why have the gods decreed that man be mortal!

And why were you created in their likeness,
And why was I ordained to be your slave,
If in the twilight I must dig a grave,
Wherein to hide my heart from morning's brightness?

I tell you no! I will not leave untasted
One drop of sweetness life may hold for me:
Who scorns the present for eternity
I count that soul a sorry fool and wasted.

THE LAYING OF GHOSTS

[69]

Oh! weary ghosts, be still!
Sad spectres of long dead delights,
Wan spirits of the days and nights
Wherein of joy we drank our fill,
Lie deep beneath the sod of years.
To-day, to-day is mine!
Ye shall not blight its fragrant flowers,
Nor mar the passing of its hours,
That love has rendered all divine,
By woeful sighs and falling tears.

This is the sphere of life,
Wherein the long forgotten dead
Unwelcome should forbear to tread,
Within my veins hot blood runs rife,
But ye are colder than the grave!
What would ye have of me?
What price that penance did not pay,
What sacrifice of human clay?

What sacrifice of human clay,
Must my delight again set free
Be tethered to a witless slave?

[70]

While still upon this earth
Ye lived, and 'neath the joyous sun
Were warm and fair to look upon,
I blest the hour that gave ye birth,
And all my life laid at your feet.
The homage of my youth
I daily offered at your shrine,
Nor counted dear those gifts of mine
Which sapped the very strength of truth,
And left her poor and incomplete.

Nor did condemn the lust,
The soul destroying tyranny,
With which ye wrought my misery,
For in my heart was endless trust,
My spirit, dauntless, knew no fear.
Ye cry that ye were slain
Alas! it was not I who slew,
For all my hopes were buried too
Within that hour of death and pain,
And there remained not e'en a tear.

Nay, it was fate whose hand
Upraised to strike the awful blow
Decreed that ye must die, and go
Lamented to that shadow land
Of lost illusions perished soon!
Wherein the once-time-young
Thro' countless ages seek, nor find,
Their vanished youth; with wandering mind
They sing the songs that once they sung,
But never may complete the tune.

[71]

Hence—hence! it is not yet
The hour wherein I too must pass,
The sand runs still within the glass,
And I would live and fain forget
Those bygone things that once ye were.
My lips have touched the rose,
And in its perfumed breast the dew
Has quenched my thirst; and lo! anew
The petals of my heart unclose,
My pulses throb, my senses stir.

Ye shall not steal this day,
For love has risen to my aid,
See, I am brave and undismayed!
Hence—hence! all things must pass away,
Back to your graves, obscure and deep!
I read aloud love's prayer,
Lift not again your haunting eyes
T'wards my new-found Paradise,
Lie still beside my lost despair,
And I command you—Sleep, Sleep, Sleep!

TO A BABY

[72]

Baby, with those solemn eyes
And that yellow hair
You are very, very wise,
Baby dear, I'll swear!

Give me, sweet, your chubby hand,
Whisper in my ear,
Since you seem to understand
Much that is not clear.

If you'll sit upon my knee,
Baby, for awhile,
All that's sad shall go from me,
Vanquish'd by a smile.

Very humbly will I learn
That which you can teach,
Life's great problems, each in turn
Solved in lisping speech.

You're so near to God, I feel
Poor and incomplete,
Just as though I ought to kneel,
Dear, and kiss your feet.

O LADY MINE

[73]

SONG

"O Lady mine!" one day I cried,
"Pray make for me a posy,
That I may think when from your side
On your young mouth so rosy."

"Nay, gentle sir," the damsel said,
"The blossoms I deny you,
But take my willing lips instead,
If they will satisfy you!"

And then she kissed me where I stood,
And may the saints defend her—
Ne'er grew a flower in field or wood
One half so sweet and tender.

BUTTERFLY

[74]

SONG

Butterfly, butterfly, where are you going?
"Over the roses into the sky."
Butterfly, butterfly, there is no knowing
When you'll come back again, so good-bye!

Butterfly, butterfly, summer is glowing,
But with the winter you too must die,
And your frail soul will be gently blowing
Upward to God on a rose's sigh.
Butterfly, butterfly, butterfly!

TO —

[75]

Our little love is newly born,
And shall I say good-bye?
For if I go, perchance ere dawn
Our little love will die!

I'd better stay and help it grow,
Since it is yours and mine,
Until this little love we know
Becomes a love divine.

A WINDY JUNE

[76]

The wind has shaken the lilac trees,
And scattered their purple bloom,
The wind has harassed the honey bees,
And robbed the flowers of their melodies,
The wind has gathered a host of clouds,
And smitten the earth with gloom.

The wind has blown out the golden lights
That hang from laburnum boughs,
Till nude and stripped of their past delights
The branches sigh through the stormy nights,
Like nuns who weep for their buried youth,
And murmur their mournful vows.

The wind has covered the hills with mist,
And hidden my favourite view,
The wind has torn at my garden beds
Where sad young roses have hung their heads,
And ah! the pity, that one slim stem
Is withered, and snapped right through.

The wind has driven the birds afar,
The starling who reared her young
Above the door in the empty cot
Has flown away, and to-day there's not
A single twitter from hungry throats,
One minstrel, of all who sung.

The wind has stolen the warmth of June,
So how shall I pass my time?
I'll go indoors with my pen and book,
Beside the fire seek a cosy nook,
Then when I'm sure that he can't get in,
I'll write of his sins in rhyme!

[77]

HOLLYHOCKS

[78]

I saw a row of hollyhocks,
Demure and stately-tall,
They peep'd above a hedge of box,
Like maidens in brocaded frocks,
Who nodded one and all.

Some dress'd in pink, and some in white,
And some in purple blue,
They seemed abrim with gay delight,
To beckon shyly, and invite
The passer-by to view.

A mottled thrush cast bold black eyes
Upon this fair array,
He swell'd his little throat with sighs,
And tender notes of glad surprise
He sang in wistful lay.

But ne'er a stately head was turned
Towards his lonely tree,
Altho' with ardent words he burned,
Those dainty maids for whom he yearn'd
Had only smiles for me.

THE TRUTH

[79]

Oh! why is the world as it is, we ask,
With tears in our voice, and a sigh:
For nothing remains but an unfinished task,
While beauty is only hypocrisy's mask,
The end of it all—but to die.

Believe me, the world is a place full of joy,
And happiness stretches afar:
Alas! that the workings of man should destroy
The meaning of God, with the deeds they employ,
Oh! why are *we* all as we are?

A MOUNTAIN PATH

[80]

Alone upon the little path that led
Along the mountain-side towards the sun
I pondered o'er those passions that are dead,
I counted all your kisses one by one;
I spoke aloud the memory of each word
My heart had heard.

The scent of pines was heavy in the noon,
The air most happy with the song of streams,
Above the forest hung an early moon,
But I was gazing at my perished dreams,
And in that moment, while my soul was brave,
I dug their grave.

I folded each within a golden shroud,
Torn from the shining garments of my youth,
I did not weep, but very gently bowed
My aching spirit to the yoke of truth,
Then in the stillness of the fading day
I knelt to pray.

A PEARL NECKLACE

[81]

Go, cold white pearls, with your luring eyes,
The woman is waiting who longs to win
But the rainbow light that within you lies,
But the soft cool touch of your satin skin.
You are undefiled, and the price of sin
Has passed you by, what the heart denies
Can your whiteness, fettered and bound within
This necklet's space, ever realise?
You were snatched away from the deep, sad sea,
From the Mother's womb to the miser's pile;
You are bartered now for a phantasy,
For the hopeless hope in a woman's smile.

Roses, I hate you! since you still can bloom
Contentedly, where living love is not!
Can fling wan fragrance thro' this empty room,
Lift languid petals shimmering 'mid the gloom
Where love is not.

Roses, I hate you! that you do not die
Disconsolate, since love himself is dead.
These ghosts of burnt-out kisses drifting by,
Have they no power to hurt, to terrify,
Since love is dead?

And all these spectral words that haunt the air
With hollow sounds, grown awful, meaningless!
Can you still blossom passionately fair
Within this region, frigid with despair?
Where all is dead?

ON THE SEA-SHORE

[83]

Can nothing last?
No deep, intense emotion?
Have all things passed,
Can nothing last?
"Yes," sighs the wind,
"My passion for the Ocean
Must always last."

Is nothing True?
No words of protestation?
Love cries anew
"Is nothing True?"
"Yes," sobs the sea,
"My endless adoration
For yonder rock is true!"

Will nothing stand
Against the stress of weather?
Storms sweep the land,
Will nothing stand?
"Yes," says the rock,
"For God and I together,
We two will stand."

MY VALLEY

[84]

Oh! my valley of shade and dreams!
Golden lights 'mid the distant blue,
Sun that pauses to kiss the dew,
Dew that trembles beneath its beams—

Fain were I but a bird above,
Floating, drifting on waves of air!
Ah! the life of the birds is fair,
For they wing to the spheres they love.

And if I could but fly and sing
Thro' the sweetness of this dear day,
I would bring all the hope of May,
To thy heart, that is wan for Spring.

What a lonely little corpse our love is lying,
Very cold, and very still, and very drear!
Yet he throbbed with passion there was no denying,
And we thought his every word divinely dear!
Have we both grown old, that neither sheds a tear?
Have our hearts grown dry perchance with too much sighing?
We are standing by the bed,
At the foot and at the head,
Very solemnly!—What, dearest, are you crying?

FINIS

[86]

And so we closed the book, wherein we wrote
How many words of ecstasy and pain,
How oft repeated passion's deep refrain,
Like ebb and flow of tide, whose echo smote
Upon the hearing of our listening sense.
These pages will become the prey of years,
And time, who stretches forth an envious hand,
Shall make impossible to understand
Our burning words, that shine with unshed tears,
Ay, and we two may offer no defence!

The early mornings of awakening Spring
That smote our inspiration and desire
They still shall call, yet find no answering fire
Within the eyes of two at least, who bring
But wormwood, from the once so flowering path.
And limpid winter twilights when we gazed
Thro' frosted panes across the purpling snow,
Or turned our eyes towards the cheerful glow
Of logs, whose kindly voices cracked and blazed
With invitation to the sheltered hearth—

[87]

They too shall come in season as before,
Yet we be absent, and within the room
Our vacant places cast a little gloom;
Then shall there fall a shadow on the floor,
As of one passing, who is yet unseen.
Perchance a pilgrim wind will pause to look
Within this volume where our tale unfolds,
And sorry at the text he there beholds,
Rustle with sighs the vellum of this book,
But leave no trace of where his breath has been.

Perchance a rose that through the casement bent,
Might cast her ardent eyes upon this lay,
And being touched, hide one soft leaf away
Between its pages, out of sentiment,
Then toss her wanton fragrance to the South.
Aye, many roses shall be born to grace
The garden, and the day will still rejoice,
Yet never at the echo of thy voice,
Nor shall a rose lift up its longing face
That we may cool our lips upon its mouth.

[88]

And side by side with petals and with sighs,
With overweening tenderness and trust,
Shall rest the deadly layer of choking dust:
A weary skull, its sockets bare of eyes,
With grinning pathos from the title page
Will bear stark record of its master Death.
Sightless, yet seeing all Eternity,
With silent voice that rings more truthfully
Than any words we quickened with our breath
More full of wisdom than the speech of sage.

We two have loved, and have outlived the laws
Of love, e'en as these bones survive their flesh
With awful vigour gleaming strangely fresh
Amid the ruin of their natal cause,
A peg on which the gods may hang their wit!

We two have cast each other in the flame
Of searing passion, that we deemed was life.
Alas! those fiery billows flowing rife
Upon the sand, they have defaced love's name,
And there remains no smallest trace of it.

And yet we live, and walk upon the earth,
Beneath the pall of dusk the dome of dawn,
And all created creatures being born
Must do, and thus atone their hour of birth,
A living sacrifice to what! Who knows?
Poor futile things, we make our little moan,
And clasp our puny hands in useless prayers
To that which neither wots of us nor cares,
And in our grief behold, we stand alone,
Till our complaining lips in anguish close.

[89]

My eyes shall still behold the stars above,
And you, how oft will count the hosts of night,
But never, never can we feel delight
In them together, swearing that our love
Is more enduring than eternal things!
Oh! blessed madness that possessed the heart,
Oh! sweet unreason that could cloud the mind,
Alas! that we have left you far behind,
And growing wise must lose the dearer part,
Of which not even the faintest perfume clings.

What would we not surrender overjoyed,
To hear once more the music that is still;
We sweep the strings, but lo! no answering thrill
From shattered harps, that eager hands destroyed,
From souls whom ravishment has smitten dumb.
Oh! for one hour snatched from the throbbing past,
Replete with its embodied ecstasy!
How little would we count Eternity,
How ready be, to know that hour, our last,
No matter what the penalty to come.

[90]

Oh! bitterness, that we ourselves did write
These pages with heart's blood, yet cannot feel
To-day one little tremor o'er us steal
Save of regret for so much past delight!
The cup is spilt of which we two partook.
For this last time, oh! once beloved, stay
Close here beside me, while my drying pen
Has still the strength to write our last Amen.
'Tis written ... there is nothing left to say,
And so together ... thus, we close the book.

OLD VERSES

[91]

I made a little funeral pyre,
And on it laid my youthful rhymes,
Those thoughts of innocent desire,
Dear foolish words of childhood times.

Poor things they were, misspelt and crude,
Yet void of guile or vain pretence,
They seemed like children thin and nude,
And unashamed through innocence.

And so, the while I struck the light
That should consume their humble bier
I kissed them, and as funeral rite
I mingled with the flame a tear.

ON THE ROAD TO TENNALEY TOWN MARYLAND, U.S.A.

[92]

Over the hills to Tennaley Town,
When the leaves are red, and the leaves are brown,
Under a limpid sky!
Oh! it's good to be young to-day,
Strong, and young, on this lonely way,
Happy my thoughts and I!

Far below where the mists are blue
Runs the river, and damp with dew
Glimmers the golden corn,
Crickets sing in the wayside grass,
Beetles drone, as I pause and pass
On thro' the Autumn morn.

"Winter's coming," the winds have said,
Shall I weep for a time that's dead?
Foolish to weep, not I!
Over the hills near Tennaley Town,
When the leaves are red, and the leaves are brown,
I'm here, alive, walking swiftly down,
Then what matters the by and bye!

A LITTLE DIRGE

[93]

What so dead as my love for you,
What so terribly dead!
Lay it low 'neath the grass and dew,
Bury it deep in an earthy bed,
Then put a tombstone over its head
With the words "And this love was true."

I weave my verses of smiles and tears,
Gathered and shed for you,
I bind them up in the hopes of years,
Dear, will you read them through?

I write my ballads of joy and pain,
Cast at your heedless feet,
I set the words to a lost refrain,
Sing it but once, my Sweet!

I breathe my life into rhyme and song,
What shall I gain thereby?
The verse is poor, and the tune is wrong,
Kiss them and let them die.

A NIGHT IN ITALY

[95]

Time hangs suspended 'mid the perfumed dusk,
With limpid wings, o'er which the first pale star
Gleams like a tear, within the tender, far
Desirous eyes of love-lorn Destiny.
The earth is dumb, the scents of many flowers
Flow out from petalled lips upon her breast,
In one unending sigh of happy rest.
The halting pageant of the passing hours
Unfurls its misty pennants to the sea.
The Nightingale has swooned for ecstasy,
And hides away amid the vine-clad bowers
Upon the terrace; Oh! impassioned dusk!
Speechless with longing, throbbing with delight
To fling thy beauty in the arms of night,
Thy rare, dim beauty sweet with breath of musk,
Thou shalt not know thy joy nor him requite
With tender ardour, ere there comes to me
Adown thy paths from out eternity,
My soul's twin soul, mine embodied bliss,
Torn from the countless ages by a kiss.

HANDS AND LIPS

[96]

Give me your hands to hold,
For the night and the wind are cold,
And the year's growing sad and old,
So give me your hands to hold.

Give me your lips to press,
For the light of the moon grows less,
And the sky's full of dreariness,
So give me your lips to press.

Dear hands, dear lips, all mine!
Let the moon and her beams decline,
Let the night and the storm combine,
If your hands and your lips are mine.

WE TWO

[97]

What have we missed, we two—
You and I—I and you—
Of sorrow, and pain, and tears,
Of doubt, and of passionate fears,
Of madness, and badness, these years!
And what have we missed, we two!

But what have we missed, we two—
You and I—I and you—
Of rapture, and vast delight,
Of loving, and living, of right
To surrender, that love may requite,
How much have we missed, we two!

TO —

[98]

The sun has set; Beloved see that star,
Wan with desire, pale in the afterglow,
Above the hill top hanging very low,
As though she stooped from her high regions far
To kiss this earth, because she loved it so!

While I, I feel the trembling touch of you,
Feel the dim magic of your eyes on me,
As though *two* stars had fallen in the sea,
And drowned themselves in his rejoicing blue,
Lighting his soul through all eternity!

NORTH AND SOUTH

[99]

Come with me, sweetheart, into Italy,
And press the burning goblet of the south
To those cold northern lips, until thy mouth
Relents beneath its draft of ecstasy.

Drink in the sun, made liquid in the breasts
Of purple grapes crushed lifeless for thy wine,
Until those over tranquil eyes of thine
Glow like twin lakes, on which the noontide rests.

Drink in the airs, those languid, vapoury sighs
Of Goddesses, whose souls live on in love,
Those amorous zephyrs, soft with plaint of dove
From flowery trees of Pagan Paradise:

Until thy brain grows hazy 'neath the fumes
Of pale camellias, passionately white,
Of scarlet roses dropping with delight
Their wanton petals in a shower of bloom.

[100]

Drink in the music of some ardent song,
Poured forth to die upon the wide, still lake,
Until the darkness seems to throb and break
In fiery stars whose pulses yearn and long.

And then drink in my love; the whole of me,
In one deep breath, one vast impassioned kiss,
That come what may, thou canst remember this:
That thou hast lived and loved *in Italy*.

ON THE HILL TOP

[101]

What is the end of all sweet things,
Of these dawns and twilights and golden springs?
Of the rose that climbs, and the scent that clings?
Of the breeze that sighs, and the thrush that sings?
Dust and ashes and death?

No, my dearest! for you and I
Here on the hill's summit under the sky
Have found a magic, time cannot deny
To make immortal what else must die,
The magic of Love's warm breath.

THE MOON

[102]

The moon has risen from her cloudy bed,
And soared serenely into cloudless blue,
White as a lily in a haze of dew,
Pale lady, to the Summer Darkness wed—
She leaves her nuptial couch, by breezes spread,
And seeks her virgin solitude anew;
While all the being of the Dark thrills through
With memories, the while her stately head
She lifts above him to the purer height,
Nor heeds the restless anguish of desire
With which he seeks to turn to living fire
The icy splendour of her luring light.
She drifts, and smiles into his ardent eyes,
With cold disdain, and smiling still denies.

SPECULATION

[103]

If at some future day we two should meet,
Stand face to face before the staring crowd,
And pull from Love's dead form the decent shroud
That time has wound about from head to feet—
I scarcely know what words would come to greet
Your presence, if they would be soft or loud,
Would your head be held high or humbly bowed,
And would the moment bitter be or sweet
To me, as you pushed back the long past years,
Would I rejoice, perhaps, at this new pain?
At least 'twould mean that I could live again,
And had not washed away my soul with tears.
I think there might be much that I could bless
In that deliverance out of nothingness.

THE MEETING

[104]

To meet almost as strangers, who have been
Such lovers in the past! no glad delight
To thrill our senses, till the wrong seems right,
For very joy—I wonder will your mien
Be happy? it seems years since I have seen
You smiling! I shall take you to the light,
And trace new lines upon your brow, and right
Above them may be some gray hairs, your clean
Strong profile, will it look the very same?
Are your hands wrinkled? Oh! my perfect hands!
Be not less lovely now that passion stands
Aloof, and dare not kiss you into flame—
I could not bear it! Time can never blight
Such marvels, so divinely slim and white.

TO SOME ONE!

[105]

Why kinder to the breeze than unto me?
For oft you let him play within your hair,
Blow its soft curls about, and find it fair,
The while he whispers low and tenderly
Into your ear; and yet how cold is he!
And loves you not, but only frolics there;
Sometimes I wish *I* might be turned to air,
And thus be rid of my humanity,
That finds no favour in your haughty eyes.
Were I a breeze you'd fling your windows wide,
And give me welcome, as I swept aside
The curtain, kissing all pride now denies,
Your lips, your cheeks, your eyes, your throat, your breast,
Until with kissing spent I sank to rest.

OUT AT SEA

[106]

The sea was witness of the words you said:
She hushed her every tide that she might hear
Your whispered love, and while you bent so near
My bosom, laying down your weary head
To rest thereon—the corals in their bed
Stirred with emotion, shaken as with fear,
And foam grew paler, passionately drear
As some wan smile, upon a face that's dead.

I took your hand in mine, your living hand!
And pressed it closer, closer in mine own.
A nameless terror shocked me while I scanned
Your ardent face; there rose a stifled moan
To part my lips; I saw the future stand
Before me, and behold! I was alone.

FAITH

[107]

Ah! Faith, I'd barter all I own to know
But one brief moment of your magic charm,
Whereby my spirit freed from earthly woe,
Might spread its wings towards immortal calm.
Is there no wisdom but it steals our peace?
No knowledge but it leads us to unrest?
My mind is weary, and would seek release
From thoughts terrestrial; those indeed are blessed
Upon whose hearts all simple holy things
Fall without question, as a drop of dew
Lights on a rose, and, though she gently swings,
Falls not to earth! ah! rose, if I were you,
I would thrice bless your dumbness, since thereby
Your fragrant lips may never question why.

THE SCAR

[108]

Upon my life I bear one precious scar:
Each night I kiss it, till anew it bleeds,
And tell each drop of blood, as hallowed beads
Are told by those dear few who faithful are.
To me it seems to beautify, not mar,
My inner self, for from that deep wound leads
A path to gained respect, my secret needs
Quenched by the bleeding of that fountain are.

The fiery contest when that wound was won,
Still burns within my brain, and robs of life,
And terror, every lesser hurt that's done
To heart or spirit; let all harm run rife.
I shall not fear again to look upon
The gleaming edges of Fate's sharpest knife.

COMPARISON

[109]

Without what desolation! mist and rain,
And weeping trees, and roses that decay
While still in blossom, till the autumn day
Lies low, and speechless, and benumbed with pain.
An early twilight hides the gentle plain
With mournful dusk, while meadows melt away
Like echoes of those tunes we used to play,
Ere time had turned them to a lost refrain.

But leave the window, turn towards the room,
So soft with firelight on the time-worn beams
A friendly spirit lurks within the gloom
Of dim oak corners, while a host of gleams
Await your fingers on our fancy's loom,
To weave them into happy fireside dreams.

AN INTERLUDE

[110]

I

Crush these voluptuous grapes between your teeth,
Your small, strong teeth! and let their purple pain
Be offered in a sacrificial rain
Of sun-warmed essence; while I twine a wreath
Of all their leaves, and place it just beneath
Your high-combed curls, to rest upon the plain
Of your white temples: though the Nymphs disdain
To grace our modern banquet, they bequeath
A sylvan fancy to my wayward dream.
This glint of candles on the silver round
Is yellow moonlight, mirrored in lone stream,
These flowers are springing from the sensuous ground,
And we are Dryads, 'tis a fitting theme
For you to sing; come—thrill the night with sound.

II

The shaded lamps that make the room seem dim
Scarcely revealing pictures on the wall;
Yet one so placed to let a halo fall
Upon your hair; you smile! yes, it's a whim
A Poet's fancy with a moonlit rim
Perhaps—and yet a harmless wish withal.
Don't quarrel with it, just sit there, those tall
White lilies make a background for your slim
Young body. Let the blinds be up, and night
Gaze through the windows with her purple eyes,
Dropping some ardent star from out its height
For very eagerness of glad surprise
At so much beauty, till your song's delight
Shall waft it back into the listening skies!

[111]

III

Where shall I find a corner in this room
Almost in darkness? Ah! that deep recess
Of languid cushions, eager to caress
My weary limbs! from out its dreaming gloom
Made holy by the incense of perfume,
All unobserved and happy I'll confess
My senses to those roses, passionless,
And listening in their bowl of silver doom.
Sing, sing, sweet friend, but soft, though eagerly!
With tender pauses in between the notes
Filled up with little sighs, unconsciously—
These rose-dropped petals, they are fairy boats
Our souls may sail on lakes of melody
Adown whose ripples youth eternal floats.

[112]

IV

Oh! burning silence! when the very air
Is warm with memories of sounds we love!
You cease to sing, yet from below, above,
Around me, in me, of me, everywhere,
That Music's spirit, tremulously fair
Flutters and flutters, like a wounded dove,
And cannot fly beyond this earthly groove!
Midway it pauses, hanging throbbing there.
I will not speak, lest it should seem profane
In such a presence; idle words of praise
Ye are but mortal sounds, with no refrain
That can endure beyond our passing days,
And so be silent! silent with the pain
Of all deep feeling, that can find no phrase.

V

Kiss me good night, sweet minstrel, on the stairs!
I love your lips, they're neither pale nor red,
But like an after-glow, when day lies dead
Upon the mountains. Do they say soft prayers,
Those languid lips? to God, a God who cares,
And gathers such dear follies thread by thread
As each is woven in your mind, and shed
Like gold spun silk upon His field of tares?
You're silent! let it pass; who knows but you,
So strong in weakness, may compel God's ear
To listen for the smallest drop of dew
That all our thunders would disdain to hear:
And so, Sweet, *if* you pray, repeat anew
To God, that while you sang I wept a tear!

[113]

VI

This morning while I light my cigarette
In this dim study with its endless view
Stretching away to hills whose eyes are blue
With secret thoughts, *my* thoughts are all regret,
Regret for broken interludes! and yet—
If it were otherwise, who knows but you
Might grow to pall, as things familiar do,
While now it seems worth while to not forget!
And so good-bye, my friend, drift out in smoke,
Vague, and intangible, a fleeting joy
That some stray match of fate in passing woke,
To burn awhile, like this small soothing toy
Between my lips: Time's galling iron yoke
Is not for us, we made and we'll destroy.



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The following poems from "TWIXT EARTH AND STARS," by MARGUERITE RADCLYFFE-HALL, have been set to music:

BY MR. HUBERT BATH

"A SONG." *Chappell and Co.*

"ITALIAN SPRING." *Boosey and Co.*

"ON THE LAGOON." *Boosey and Co.*

BY MR. EATHORPE MARTIN

"SHALL I COMPLAIN?" *Metzler and Co.*

Transcriber's Notes

Minor punctuation and printer errors repaired.

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