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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE VEIL, AND OTHER POEMS \*\*\*

# THE VEIL

*and other*

## POEMS

*By*

WALTER DE LA MARE



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1922

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# THE VEIL AND OTHER POEMS

'ROUSE now, my dullard, and thy wits awake;  
 'Tis first of the morning. And I bid thee make—  
 No, not a vow; we have munched our fill of these  
 From crock of bone-dry crusts and mouse-gnawn cheese—  
 Nay, just one whisper in that long, long ear—  
 Awake; rejoice. Another Day is here:—

'A virgin wilderness, which, hour by hour,  
 Mere happy idleness shall bring to flower.  
 Barren and arid though its sands now seem,  
 Wherein oasis becks not, shines no stream,  
 Yet wake—and lo, 'tis lovelier than a dream.

'Plunge on, thy every footprint shall make fair  
 Its thirsty waste; and thy foregone despair  
 Undarken into sweet birds in the air,  
 Whose coursing wings and love-crazed summoning cries  
 Into infinity shall attract thine eyes.

'No...? Well, lest promise in performance faint,  
 A less inviting prospect will I paint.  
 I bid thee adjure thy Yesterday, and say:  
 "As *thou* wast, Enemy, so be To-day.—  
 Immure me in the same close narrow room;  
 Be hated toil the lamp to light its gloom;  
 Make stubborn my pen; sift dust into my ink;  
 Forbid mine eyes to see, my brain to think.  
 Scare off the words whereon the mind is set.  
 Make memory the power to forget.  
 Constrain imagination; bind its wing;  
 Forbid the unseen Enchantresses to sing.  
 Ay, do thy worst!"

'Vexed Spectre, prythee smile.  
 Even though that yesterday was bleak and sour,  
 Art thou a slave beneath its thong to cower?  
 Thou hast survived. And hither am I—again,  
 Kindling with mockery thy o'erlaboured brain.  
 Though scant the moments be wherein we meet,  
 Think, what dark months would even one make sweet.

'Thy quill? Thy paper? Ah, my dear, be true.  
 Come quick To-morrow. Until then, Adieu.'

TWILIGHT leaned mirrored in a pool  
 Where willow boughs swept green and hoar,  
 Silk-clear the water, calm and cool,  
 Silent the weedy shore:

There in abstracted, brooding mood  
 One fishing sate. His painted float  
 Motionless as a planet stood;  
 Motionless his boat.

A melancholy soul was this,  
 With lantern jaw, gnarled hand, vague eye;  
 Huddled in pensive solitariness  
 He had fished existence by.

Empty his creel; stolen his bait—  
 Impassively he angled on,  
 Though mist now showed the evening late  
 And daylight well-nigh gone.

Suddenly, like a tongueless bell,  
 Downward his gaudy cork did glide;  
 A deep, low-gathering, gentle swell  
 Spread slowly far and wide.

Wheeped out his tackle from noiseless winch,  
 And furtive as a thief, his thumb,  
 With nerve intense, wound inch by inch  
 A line no longer numb.

What fabulous spoil could thus unplayed  
 Gape upward to a mortal air?—  
 He stoops engrossed; his tanned cheek greyed;  
 His heart stood still: for there,

Wondrously fairing, beneath the skin  
 Of secretly bubbling water seen,  
 Swims—not the silver of scale and fin—  
 But gold immixt with green.

Deeply astir in oozy bed,  
 The darkening mirror ripples and rocks:  
 And lo—a wan-pale, lovely head,  
 Hook tangled in its locks!

Cold from her haunt—a Naiad slim.  
 Shoulder and cheek gleamed ivory white;  
 Though now faint stars stood over him,  
 The hour hard on night.

Her green eyes gazed like one half-blind  
 In sudden radiance; her breast  
 Breathed the sweet air, while gently twined,  
 'Gainst the cold water pressed,

Her lean webbed hands. She floated there,  
 Light as a scentless petalled flower,  
 Water-drops dewing from her hair  
 In tinkling beadlike shower.

So circling sidelong, her tender throat  
 Uttered a grieving, desolate wail;  
 Shrill o'er the dark pool lapsed its note,  
 Piteous as nightingale.

Ceased Echo. And he?—a life's remorse  
 Welled to a tongue unapt to charm,  
 But never a word broke harsh and hoarse  
 To quiet her alarm.

With infinite stealth his twitching thumb  
 Tugged softly at the tautened gut,  
 Bubble-light, fair, her lips now dumb,  
 She moved, and struggled not;

But with set, wild, unearthly eyes  
Pale-gleaming, fixed as if in fear,  
She couched in the water, with quickening sighs,  
And floated near.

In hollow heaven the stars were at play;  
Wan glow-worms greened the pool-side grass;  
Dipped the wide-bellied boat. His prey  
Gazed on; nor breathed. Alas!—

Long sterile years had come and gone;  
Youth, like a distant dream, was sped;  
Heart, hope, and eyes had hungered on....  
He turned a shaking head,

And clumsily groped amid the gold,  
Sleek with night dews, of that tangling hair,  
Till pricked his finger keen and cold  
The barb imbedded there.

Teeth clenched, he drew his knife—'Snip, snip,'—  
Groaned, and sate shivering back; and she,  
Treading the water with birdlike dip,  
Shook her sweet shoulders free:

Drew backward, smiling, infatuate fair,  
His life's disasters in her eyes,  
All longing and folly, grief, despair,  
Daydreams and mysteries.

She stooped her brow; laid low her cheek,  
And, steering on that silk-tressed craft,  
Out from the listening, leaf-hung creek,  
Tossed up her chin, and laughed—

A mocking, icy, inhuman note.  
One instant flashed that crystal breast,  
Leaned, and was gone. Dead-still the boat:  
And the deep dark at rest.

Flits moth to flower. A water-rat  
Noses the placid ripple. And lo!  
Streams a lost meteor. Night is late,  
And daybreak zephyrs flow....

And he—the cheated? Dusk till morn,  
Insensate, even of hope forsook,  
He muttering squats, aloof, forlorn,  
Dangling a baitless hook.



## THE WILLOW

**L**EANS now the fair willow, dreaming  
Amid her locks of green.  
In the driving snow she was parched and cold,  
And in midnight hath been  
Swept by blasts of the void night,  
Lashed by the rains.  
Now of that wintry dark and bleak  
No memory remains.

In mute desire she sways softly;  
Thrilling sap up-flows;  
She praises God in her beauty and grace,  
Whispers delight. And there flows  
A delicate wind from the Southern seas,  
Kissing her leaves. She sighs.  
While the birds in her tresses make merry;  
Burns the Sun in the skies.

**I**F you would happy company win,  
Dangle a palm-nut from a tree,  
Idly in green to sway and spin,  
Its snow-pulped kernel for bait; and see,  
A nimble titmouse enter in.

Out of earth's vast unknown of air,  
Out of all summer, from wave to wave,  
He'll perch, and prank his feathers fair,  
Jangle a glass-clear wildering stave,  
And take his commons there—

This tiny son of life; this spright,  
By momentary Human sought,  
Plume will his wing in the dappling light,  
Clash timbrel shrill and gay—  
And into time's enormous nought,  
Sweet-fed, will flit away.

I think and think; yet still I fail—  
Why does this lady wear a veil?  
Why thus elect to mask her face  
Beneath that dainty web of lace?  
The tip of a small nose I see,  
And two red lips, set curiously  
Like twin-born cherries on one stem,  
And yet she has netted even them.  
Her eyes, it's plain, survey with ease  
Whatever to glance upon they please.  
Yet, whether hazel, grey, or blue,  
Or that even lovelier lilac hue,  
I cannot guess: why—why deny  
Such beauty to the passer-by?  
Out of a bush a nightingale  
May expound his song; beneath that veil  
A happy mouth no doubt can make  
English sound sweeter for its sake.  
But then, why muffle in, like this,  
What every blossomy wind would kiss?  
Why in that little night disguise  
A daybreak face, those starry eyes?

(For a drawing by Dorothy Puvis Lathrop)

**T**HERE was a Fairy—flake of winter—  
Who, when the snow came, whispering, Silence,  
Sister crystal to crystal sighing,  
Making of meadow argent palace,  
Night a star-sown solitude,  
Cried 'neath her frozen eaves, 'I burn here!'

Wings diaphanous, beating bee-like,  
Wand within fingers, locks enspangled,  
Icicle foot, lip sharp as scarlet,  
She lifted her eyes in her pitch-black hollow—  
Green as stalks of weeds in water—  
Breathed: stirred.

Rilled from her heart the ichor, coursing,  
Flamed and awoke her slumbering magic.  
Softlier than moth's her pinions trembled;  
Out into blackness, light-like, she flittered,  
Leaving her hollow cold, forsaken.

In air, o'er crystal, rang twangling night-wind.  
Bare, rimed pine-woods murmured lament.

**H**ORIZON to horizon, lies outspread  
The tenting firmament of day and night;  
Wherein are winds at play; and planets shed  
Amid the stars their gentle gliding light.

The huge world's sun flames on the snow-capped hills;  
Cindrous his heat burns in the sandy plain;  
With myriad spume-bows roaring ocean swills  
The cold profuse abundance of the rain.

And man—a transient object in this vast,  
Sighs o'er a universe transcending thought,  
Afflicted by vague bodings of the past,  
Driven toward a future, unforeseen, unsought.

Yet, see him, stooping low to naked weed  
That meeks its blossom in his anxious eye,  
Mark how he grieves, as if his heart did bleed,  
And wheels his wondrous features to the sky;  
As if, transfigured by so small a grace,  
He sought Companion in earth's dwelling-place.

**D**IM-BERRIED is the mistletoe  
With globes of sheenless grey,  
The holly mid ten thousand thorns  
Smoulders its fires away;  
And in the manger Jesu sleeps  
This Christmas Day.

Bull unto bull with hollow throat  
Makes echo every hill,  
Cold sheep in pastures thick with snow  
The air with bleatings fill;  
While of his mother's heart this Babe  
Takes His sweet will.

All flowers and butterflies lie hid,  
The blackbird and the thrush  
Pipe but a little as they flit  
Restless from bush to bush;  
Even to the robin Gabriel hath  
Cried softly, 'Hush!'

Now night is astir with burning stars  
In darkness of the snow;  
Burdened with frankincense and myrrh  
And gold the Strangers go  
Into a dusk where one dim lamp  
Burns faintly, Lo!

No snowdrop yet its small head nods,  
In winds of winter drear;  
No lark at casement in the sky  
Sings matins shrill and clear;  
Yet in this frozen mirk the Dawn  
Breathes, Spring is here!

**I**N cloudy quiet of the day,  
While thrush and robin perched mute on spray,  
A spectre by the window sat,  
Brooding thereat.

He marked the greenness of the Spring,  
Daffodil blowing, bird a-wing—  
Yet dark the house the years had made  
Within that Shade.

Blinded the rooms wherein no foot falls.  
Faded the portraits on the walls.  
Reverberating, shakes the air  
A river there.

Coursing in flood, its infinite roars;  
From pit to pit its water pours;  
And he, with countenance unmoved,  
Hears cry:—'Beloved,

'Oh, ere the day be utterly spent,  
Return, return, from banishment.  
The night thick-gathers. Weep a prayer  
For the true and fair.'

'W E are not often alone, we two,'  
Mused a secret voice in my ear,  
As the dying hues of afternoon  
Lapsed into evening drear.

A withered leaf, wafted on in the street,  
Like a wayless spectre, sighed;  
Aslant on the roof-tops a sickly moon  
Did mutely abide.

Yet waste though the shallowing day might seem,  
And fainter than hope its rose,  
Strangely that speech in my thoughts welled on;  
As water in-flows:

Like remembered words once heard in a room  
Wherein death kept far-away tryst;  
'Not often alone, we two; but thou,  
How sorely missed!'



**T**HOU who know'st all the sorrows of this earth—  
I pray Thee, ponder, ere again Thou turn  
Thine hour-glass over again, since one sole birth,  
To poor clay-cold humanity, makes yearn  
A heart at passion with life's endless coil.  
Thou givest thyself too strait a room therein.  
For so divine a tree too poor a soil.  
For so great agony what small peace to win.  
Cast from that Ark of Heaven which is Thy home  
The raven of hell may wander without fear;  
But sadly wings the dove o'er floods to roam,  
Nought but one tender sprig his eyes to cheer.  
Nay, Lord, I speak in parables. But see!  
'Tis stricken Man in Men that pleads with Thee.

P ALLID, mis-shapen he stands. The world's grimed thumb,  
Now hooked securely in his matted hair,  
Has haled him struggling from his poisonous slum  
And flung him mute as fish close-netted there.  
His bloodless hands entalon that iron rail.  
He gloats in beastlike trance. His settling eyes  
From staring face to face rove on—and quail.  
Justice for carrion pants; and these the flies.  
Voice after voice in smooth impartial drone  
Erects horrific in his darkening brain  
A timber framework, where agape, alone  
Bright life will kiss good-bye the cheek of Cain.  
Sudden like wolf he cries; and sweats to see  
When howls man's soul, it howls inaudibly.

**S**TORM and unconscionable winds once cast  
On grinding shingle, masking gap-toothed rock,  
This ancient hulk. Rent hull, and broken mast,  
She sprawls sand-mounded, of sea birds the mock.  
Her sailors, drowned, forgotten, rot in mould,  
Or hang in stagnant quiet of the deep;  
The brave, the afraid into one silence sold;  
Their end a memory fainter than of sleep.  
She held good merchandise. She paced in pride  
The uncharted paths men trace in ocean's foam.  
Now laps the ripple in her broken side,  
And zephyr in tamarisk softly whispers, Home.  
The dreamer scans her in the sea-blue air,  
And, sipping of contrast, finds the day more fair.

**D**ID these night-hung houses,  
Of quiet, starlit stone,  
Breathe not a whisper—'Stay,  
Thou unhappy one;  
Whither so secret away?'

Sighed not the unframing wind,  
Chill with nocturnal dew,  
'Pause, pause, in thy haste,  
O thou distraught! I too  
Tryst with the Atlantic waste.'

Steep fell the drowsy street;  
In slumber the world was blind:  
Breathed not one midnight flower  
Peace in thy broken mind?—  
'Brief, yet sweet, is life's hour.'

Syllabled thy last tide—  
By as dark moon stirred,  
And doomed to forlorn unrest—  
Not one compassionate word?...  
'Cold is this breast.'

I NERT in his chair,  
In a candle's guttering glow;  
His bottle empty,  
His fire sunk low;  
With drug-sealed lids shut fast,  
Unsated mouth ajar,  
This darkened phantasm walks  
Where nightmares are:

In a frenzy of life and light,  
Crisscross—a menacing throng—  
They gibe, they squeal at the stranger,  
Jostling along,  
Their faces cadaverous grey.  
While on high from an attic stare  
Horrors, in beauty appalled,  
Down the dark air.

A stream gurgles over its stones,  
The chambers within are a-fire.  
Stumble his shadowy feet  
Through shine, through mire;  
And the flames leap higher.  
In vain yelps the wainscot mouse;  
In vain beats the hour;  
Vacant, his body must drowse  
Until daybreak flower—

Staining these walls with its rose,  
And the draughts of the morning shall stir  
Cold on cold brow, cold hands.  
And the wanderer  
Back to flesh house must return.  
Lone soul—in horror to see,  
Than dream more meagre and awful,  
Reality.

WHO'S that? Who's that?...  
Oh, only a leaf on the stone;  
And the sigh of the air in the fire.  
Yet it seemed, as I sat,  
Came company—not my own;  
Stood there, with ardent gaze over dark, bowed shoulder thrown  
Till the dwindling flames leaped higher,  
And showed fantasy flown.

Yet though the cheat is clear—  
From transient illusion grown;  
In the vague of my mind those eyes  
Still haunt me. One stands so near  
I could take his hand, and be gone:—  
No more in this house of dreams to sojourn aloof, alone:  
Could sigh, with full heart, and arise,  
And choke, 'Lead on.'

WELCOME! Enter! This is the Inn at the Cross Roads,  
Sign of the *Rising Sun*, of the *World's End*:  
Ay, O Wanderer, footsore, weary, forsaken,  
    Knock, and we will open to thee—Friend.

Gloomy our stairs of stone, obscure the portal;  
Burdened the air with a breath from the further shore;  
Yet in our courtyard plays an invisible fountain,  
    Ever flowers unfading nod at the door.

Ours is much company, and yet none is lonely;  
Some with a smile may pay and some with a sigh;  
So all be healed, restored, contented—it is no matter—  
    So all be happy at heart to bid good-bye.

But know, our clocks are the world's; Night's wings are leaden,  
Pain languidly sports with the hours; have courage, sir!  
We wake but to bring thee slumber, our drowsy syrups  
    Sleep beyond dreams on the weary will confer.

Ghosts may be ours; but gaze thou not too closely  
If haply in chill of the dark thou rouse to see  
One silent of foot, hooded, and hollow of visage,  
    Pause, with secret eyes, to peer out at thee.

He is the Ancient Tapster of this Hostel,  
To him at length even we all keys must resign;  
And if he beckon, Stranger, thou too must follow—  
    Love and all peace be thine.

**H**OW shall I know when the end of things is coming?  
The dark swifts flitting, the drone-bees humming;  
The fly on the window-pane bedazedly strumming;  
Ice on the waterbrooks their clear chimes dumbing—  
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

The stars in their stations will shine glamorous in the black;  
Emptiness, as ever, haunt the great Star Sack;  
And Venus, proud and beautiful, go down to meet the day,  
Pale in phosphorescence of the green sea spray—  
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

Head asleep on pillow; the peewits at their crying;  
A strange face in dreams to my rapt phantasma sighing;  
Silence beyond words of anguished passion;  
Or stammering an answer in the tongue's cold fashion—  
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

Haply on strange roads I shall be, the moorland's peace around me;  
Or counting up a fortune to which Destiny hath bound me;  
Or—Vanity of Vanities—the honey of the Fair;  
Or a greybeard, lost to memory, on the cobbles in my chair—  
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

The drummers will be drumming; the fiddlers at their thrumming;  
Nuns at their beads; the mummers at their mumming;  
Heaven's solemn Seraph stoopt weary o'er his summing;  
The palsied fingers plucking, the way-worn feet numbing—  
And the end of things coming.



**T**HE last of last words spoken is, Good-bye—  
The last dismantled flower in the weed-grown hedge,  
The last thin rumour of a feeble bell far ringing,  
The last blind rat to spurn the mildewed rye.

A hardening darkness glasses the haunted eye,  
Shines into nothing the watcher's burnt-out candle,  
Wreathes into scentless nothing the wasting incense,  
Faints in the outer silence the hunting cry.

Love of its muted music breathes no sigh,  
Thought in her ivory tower gropes in her spinning,  
Toss on in vain the whispering trees of Eden,  
Last of all last words spoken is, Good-bye.

**A**LAS, O Lovely One,  
 Imprisoned here,  
 I tap; thou answerest not,  
 I doubt, and fear.  
 Yet transparent as glass these walls,  
 If thou lean near.

Last dusk, at those high bars  
 There came, scarce-heard,  
 Claws, fluttering feathers,  
 Of deluded bird—  
 With one shrill, scared, faint note  
 The silence stirred.

Rests in that corner,  
 In puff of dust, a straw—  
 Vision of harvest-fields  
 I never saw,  
 Of strange green streams and hills,  
 Forbidden by law.

These things I whisper,  
 For I see—in mind—  
 Thy caged cheek whiten  
 At the wail of wind,  
 That thin breast wasting; unto  
 Woe resigned.

Take comfort, listen!  
 Once we twain were free;  
 There was a Country—  
 Lost the memory ...  
 Lay thy cold brow on hand,  
 And dream with me.

Awaits me torture,  
 I have smelt their rack;  
 From spectral groaning wheel  
 Have turned me back;  
 Thumbscrew and boot, and then—  
 The yawning sack.

Lean closer, then;  
 Lay palm on stony wall.  
 Let but thy ghost beneath  
 Thine eyelids call:  
 'Courage, my brother,' Nought  
 Can then appal.

Yet coward, coward am I,  
 And drink I must  
 When clanks the pannikin  
 With the longed-for crust;  
 Though heart within is sour  
 With disgust.

Long hours there are,  
 When mutely tapping—well,  
 Is it to Vacancy  
 I these tidings tell?  
 Knock these numb fingers against  
 An empty cell?

Nay, answer not.  
 Let still mere longing make  
 Thy presence sure to me,  
 While in doubt I shake:  
 Be but my Faith in thee,  
 For sanity's sake.

**W**HY hath the rose faded and fallen, yet these eyes have not seen?  
Why hath the bird sung shrill in the tree—and this mind deaf and cold?  
Why have the rains of summer veiled her flowers with their sheen  
And this black heart untold?

Here is calm Autumn now, the woodlands quake,  
And, where this splendour of death lies under the tread,  
The spectre of frost will stalk, and a silence make,  
And snow's white shroud be spread.

O Self! O self! Wake from thy common sleep!  
Fling off the destroyer's net. He hath blinded and bound thee.  
In nakedness sit; pierce thy stagnation, and weep;  
Or corrupt in thy grave—all Heaven around thee.

'O thy flamed cheek,  
Those locks with weeping wet,  
Eyes that, forlorn and meek,  
On mine are set.

'Poor hands, poor feeble wings,  
Folded, a-droop, O sad!  
See, 'tis my heart that sings  
To make thee glad.

'My mouth breathes love, thou dear.  
All that I am and know  
Is thine. My breast—draw near:  
Be grieved not so!'

**I**SLED in the midnight air,  
Musked with the dark's faint bloom,  
Out into glooming and secret haunts  
The flame cries, 'Come!'

Lovely in dye and fan,  
A-tremble in shimmering grace,  
A moth from her winter swoon  
Uplifts her face:

Stares from her glamorous eyes;  
Wafts her on plumes like mist;  
In ecstasy swirls and sways  
To her strange tryst.

**N**O, no. Guard thee. Get thee gone.  
Not that way.  
See; the louring clouds glide on,  
Skirting West to South; and see,  
The green light under that sycamore tree—  
Not that way.

There the leaden trumpets blow,  
Solemn and slow.  
There the everlasting walls  
Frown above the waterfalls  
Silver and cold;  
Timelessly old:  
Not that way.

Not toward Death, who, stranger, fairer,  
Than any siren turns his head—  
Than sea-couched siren, arched with rainbows,  
Where knell the waves of her ocean bed.

Alas, that beauty hangs her flowers  
For lure of his demoniac powers:  
Alas, that from these eyes should dart  
Such piercing summons to thy heart;  
That mine in frenzy of longing beats,  
Still lusting for these gross deceits.  
Not that way!

I know a pool where nightshade preens  
Her poisonous fruitage in the moon;  
Where the frail aspen her shadow leans  
In midnight cold a-swoon.

I know a meadow flat with gold—  
A million million burning flowers  
In noon-sun's thirst their buds unfold  
Beneath his blazing showers.

I saw a crazèd face, did I,  
Stare from the lattice of a mill,  
While the lank sails clacked idly by  
High on the windy hill.

**S**TAGNANT this wintry gloom. Afar  
The farm-cock bugles his 'Qui vive?'  
The towering elms are lost in mist;  
Birds in the thorn-trees huddle a-whist;  
The mill-race waters grieve.  
Our shrouded day  
Dwindles away  
To final black of eve.

Beyond these shades in space of air  
Ride extraterrestrial beings by?  
Their colours burning rich and fair,  
Where noon's sunned valleys lie?  
With inaudible music are they sweet—  
Bell, hoof, soft lapsing cry?

Turn marvellous faces, each to each?—  
Lips innocent of sigh,  
Or groan or fear, sorrow and grief,  
Clear brow and falcon eye;  
Bare foot, bare shoulder in the heat,  
And hair like flax? Do their horses beat  
Their way through wildernesses infinite  
Of starry-crested trees, blue sward,  
And gold-chasm'd mountain, steeply shored  
O'er lakes of sapphire dye?

Mingled with lispings speech, faint laughter,  
Echoes the Phoenix' scream of joyance  
Mounting on high?—  
Light-bathed vistas and divine sweet mirth,  
Beyond dream of spirits penned to earth,  
Condemned to pine and die?...

Hath serving Nature, bidden of the gods,  
Thick-screened Man's narrow sky,  
And hung these Stygian veils of fog  
To hide his dingied sty?—  
The gods who yet, at mortal birth,  
Bequeathed him Fantasy?



(To Edward Thomas)

**T**HE haze of noon wanned silver-grey  
The soundless mansion of the sun;  
The air made visible in his ray,  
Like molten glass from furnace run,  
Quivered o'er heat-baked turf and stone  
And the flower of the gorse burned on—  
Burned softly as gold of a child's fair hair  
Along each spiky spray, and shed  
Almond-like incense in the air  
Whereon our senses fed.

At foot—a few sparse harebells: blue  
And still as were the friend's dark eyes  
That dwelt on mine, transfixed through  
With sudden ecstatic surmise.

'Hst!' he cried softly, smiling, and lo,  
Stealing amidst that maze gold-green,  
I heard a whispering music flow  
From guileful throat of bird, unseen:—  
So delicate the straining ear  
Scarce carried its faint syllabbling  
Into a heart caught-up to hear  
That inmost pondering  
Of bird-like self with self. We stood,  
In happy trance-like solitude,  
Hearkening a lullay grieved and sweet—  
As when on isle uncharted beat  
'Gainst coral at the palm-tree's root,  
With brine-clear, snow-white foam afloat,  
The wailing, not of water or wind—  
A husht, far, wild, divine lament,  
When Prospero his wizardry bent  
Winged Ariel to bind....

Then silence, and o'er-flooding noon.  
I raised my head; smiled too. And he—  
Moved his great hand, the magic gone—  
Gently amused to see  
My ignorant wonderment. He sighed.  
'It was a nightingale,' he said,  
'That *sotto voce* cons the song  
He'll sing when dark is spread;  
And Night's vague hours are sweet and long.  
And we are laid abed.'

**B**E not too wildly amorous of the far,  
 Nor lure thy fantasy to its utmost scope.  
 Read by a taper when the needling star  
 Burns red with menace in heaven's midnight cope.  
 Friendly thy body: guard its solitude.  
 Sure shelter is thy heart. It once had rest  
 Where founts miraculous thy lips endewed,  
 Yet nought loomed further than thy mother's breast.

O brave adventure! Ay, at danger slake  
 Thy thirst, lest life in thee should, sickening, quail;  
 But not toward nightmare goad a mind awake,  
 Nor to forbidden horizons bend thy sail—  
 Seductive outskirts whence in trance prolonged  
 Thy gaze, at stretch of what is sane-secure,  
 Dreams out on steeps by shapes demoniac thronged  
 And vales wherein alone the dead endure.

Nectarous those flowers, yet with venom sweet.  
 Thick-juiced with poison hang those fruits that shine  
 Where sick phantasmal moonbeams brood and beat,  
 And dark imaginations ripe the vine.  
 Bethink thee: every enticing league thou wend  
 Beyond the mark where life its bound hath set  
 Will lead thee at length where human pathways end  
 And the dark enemy spreads his maddening net.

Comfort thee, comfort thee. Thy Father knows  
 How wild man's ardent spirit, fainting, yearns  
 For mortal glimpse of death's immortal rose,  
 The garden where the invisible blossom burns.  
 Humble thy trembling knees; confess thy pride;  
 Be weary. O, whithersoever thy vaunting rove,  
 His deepest wisdom harbours in thy side,  
 In thine own bosom hides His utmost love.

**W**ITHIN my mind two spirits strayed  
From out their still and purer air,  
And there a moment's sojourn made;  
As lovers will in woodlands bare.  
Nought heeded they where now they stood,  
Since theirs its alien solitude  
Beyond imagination fair.

The light an earthly candle gives  
When it is quenched leaves only dark;  
Theirs yet in clear remembrance lives  
And, still within, I whispered, 'Hark!'  
As one who faintly on high has heard  
The call note of a hidden bird  
Even sweeter than the lark.

Yet 'twas their silence breathed only this—  
'I love you.' As if flowers might say,  
'Such is our natural fragrantness;'  
Or dewdrop at the break of day  
Cry 'Thus I beam.' Each turned a head,  
And each its own clear radiance shed  
With joy and peace at play.

So in a gloomy London street  
Princes from Eastern realms might pause  
In secret converse, then retreat.  
Yet without haste passed these from sight;  
As if a human mind were not  
Wholly a dark and dismal spot—  
At least in their own light.

## THE CORNER STONE

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**S**TERILE these stones  
By time in ruin laid.  
Yet many a creeping thing  
Its haven has made  
In these least crannies, were falls  
Dark's dew, and noonday shade.

The claw of the tender bird  
Finds lodgment here;  
Dye-winged butterflies poise;  
Emmet and beetle steer  
Their busy course; the bee  
Drones, laden, near.

Their myriad-mirrored eyes  
Great day reflect.  
By their exquisite farings  
Is this granite specked;  
Is trodden to infinite dust;  
By gnawing lichens decked.

Toward what eventual dream  
Sleeps its cold on,  
When into ultimate dark  
These lives shall be gone,  
And even of man not a shadow remain  
Of all he has done?

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## THE SPIRIT OF AIR

**C**ORAL and clear emerald,  
And amber from the sea,  
Lilac-coloured amethyst,  
Chalcedony;  
The lovely Spirit of Air  
Floats on a cloud and doth ride,  
Clad in the beauties of earth  
Like a bride.

So doth she haunt me; and words  
Tell but a tithe of the tale.  
Sings all the sweetness of Spring  
Even in the nightingale?  
Nay, but with echoes she cries  
Of the valley of love;  
Dews on the thorns at her feet,  
And darkness above.

RARE-SWEET the air in that unimagined country—  
 My spirit had wandered far  
 From its weary body close-enwrap in slumber  
 Where its home and earth-friends are;

A milk-like air—and of light all abundance;  
 And there a river clear  
 Painting the scene like a picture on its bosom,  
 Green foliage drifting near.

No sign of life I saw, as I pressed onward,  
 Fish, nor beast, nor bird,  
 Till I came to a hill clothed in flowers to its summit,  
 Then shrill small voices I heard.

And I saw from concealment a company of elf-folk  
 With faces strangely fair,  
 Talking their unearthly scattered talk together,  
 A bind of green-grasses in their hair,

Marvellously gentle, feater far than children,  
 In gesture, mien and speech,  
 Hastening onward in translucent shafts of sunshine,  
 And gossiping each with each.

Straw-light their locks, on neck and shoulder falling,  
 Faint of almond the silks they wore,  
 Spun not of worm, but as if inwoven of moonbeams  
 And foam on rock-bound shore;

Like lank-legged grasshoppers in June-tide meadows,  
 Amalillios of the day,  
 Hungrily gazed upon by me—a stranger,  
 In unknown regions astray.

Yet, happy beyond words, I marked their sunlit faces,  
 Stealing soft enchantment from their eyes,  
 Tears in my own confusing their small image,  
 Harkening their bead-like cries.

They passed me, unseeing, a waft of flocking linnets;  
 Sadly I fared on my way;  
 And came in my dream to a dreamlike habitation,  
 Close-shut, festooned and grey.

Pausing, I gazed at the porch dust-still, vine-wreathèd,  
 Worn the stone steps thereto,  
 Mute hung its bell, whence a stony head looked downward,  
 Grey 'gainst the sky's pale-blue—

Strange to me: strange....

O restless fingers—not that music make!  
Bidding old griefs from out the past awake,  
And pine for memory's sake.

Those strings thou callest from quiet mute to yearn,  
Of other hearts did hapless secrets learn,  
And thy strange skill will turn

To uses that thy bosom dreams not of:  
Ay, summon from their dark and dreadful grove  
The chaunting, pale-cheeked votaries of love.

Stay now, and hearken! From that far-away  
Cymbal on cymbal beats, the fierce horns bray,  
Stars in their sapphire fade, 'tis break of day.

Green are those meads, foam-white the billow's crest,  
And Night, withdrawing in the cavernous West,  
Flings back her shadow on the salt sea's breast.

Snake-haired, snow-shouldered, pure as flame and dew,  
Her strange gaze burning slumbrous eyelids through,  
Rises the Goddess from the wave's dark blue.

**L**ISTEN, I who love thee well  
Have travelled far, and secrets tell;  
Cold the moon that gleams thine eyes,  
Yet beneath her further skies  
Rests for thee, a paradise.

I have plucked a flower in proof,  
Frail, in earthly light forsooth:  
See, invisible it lies  
In this palm: now veil thine eyes:  
Quaff its fragrances.

Would indeed my throat had skill  
To breathe thee music, faint and still—  
Music learned in dreaming deep  
In those lands, from Echo's lip ...  
'Twould lull thy soul to sleep.



U NTO blest Melancholy's house one happy day  
 I took my way:  
 Into a chamber was shown, whence could be seen  
 Her flowerless garden, dyed with sunlit green  
 Of myrtle, box, and bay.

Cool were its walls, shade-mottled, green and gold,  
 In heavy fold  
 Hung antique tapestries, from whose fruit and flower  
 Light had the bright hues stolen, hour by hour,  
 And time worn thin and old.

Silence, as of a virginal laid aside,  
 Did there abide.  
 But not for voice or music was I fain,  
 Only to see a long-loved face again—  
 For her sole company sighed.

And while I waited, giving memory praise,  
 My musing gaze  
 Lit on the one sole picture in the room,  
 Which hung, as if in hiding, in the gloom  
 From evening's stealing rays.

Framed in fast-fading gilt, a child gazed there,  
 Lovely and fair;  
 A face whose happiness was like sunlight spent  
 On some poor desolate soul in banishment,  
 Mutely his grief to share.

Long, long I stood in trance of that glad face,  
 Striving to trace  
 The semblance that, disquieting, it bore  
 To one whom memory could not restore,  
 Nor fix in time and space.

Sunk deep in brooding thus, a voice I heard  
 Whisper its word:  
 I turned—and, stooping in the threshold, stood  
 She—the dark mistress of my solitude,  
 Who smiled, nor stirred.

Her ghost gazed darkly from her pondering eyes  
 Charged with surmise;  
 Challenging mine, between mockery and fear,  
 She breathed her greeting, '*Thou*, my only dear!  
 Wherefore such heavy sighs?'

'But this?' One instant lids her scrutiny veiled;  
 Her wan cheek paled.  
 'This child?' I asked. 'Its picture brings to mind  
 Remembrance faint and far, past thought to find,  
 And yet by time unstaled.'

Smiling, aloof, she turned her narrow head,  
 'Make thou my face thy glass,' she cried and said.  
 'What would'st thou see therein—thine own, or mine?  
 O foolish one, what wonder thou did'st pine?

Long thou hast loved me; yet hast absent been.  
 See now: Dark night hath pressed an entrance in.  
 Jealous! thou dear? Nay, come; by taper's beam  
 Share thou this pictured Joy with me, though nought but a dream.'

**H**EARKEN—NOW the hermit bee  
Drones a quiet thren dy;  
Greening on the stagnant pool  
The criss-cross light slants silken-cool;  
In the venomed yew tree wings  
Preen and flit. The linnet sings.

Gradually the brave sun  
Drops to a day's journey done;  
In the marshy flats abide  
Mists to muffle midnight-tide.  
Puffed within the belfry tower  
Hungry owls drowse out their hour....

Walk in beauty. Vaunt thy rose.  
Flaunt thy transient loveliness.  
Pace for pace with thee there goes  
A shape that hath not come to bless.

I thine enemy?... Nay, nay.  
I can only watch and wait  
Patient treacherous time away,  
Hold ajar the wicket gate.

'ARE you far away?'  
'Yea, I am far—far;  
Where the green wave shelves to the sand,  
And the rainbows are;  
And an ageless sun beats fierce  
From an empty sky:  
There, O thou Shadow forlorn,  
Is the wraith of thee, I.'

'Are you happy, most Lone?'  
'Happy, forsooth!  
Who am eyes of the air; voice of the foam;  
Ah, happy in truth.  
My hair is astream, this cheek  
Glistens like silver, and see,  
As the gold to the dross, the ghost in the mirk,  
I am calling to thee.'

'Nay, I am bound.  
And your cry faints out in my mind.  
Peace not on earth have I found,  
Yet to earth am resigned.  
Cease thy shrill mockery, Voice,  
Nor answer again.'  
'O Master, thick cloud shuts thee out  
And cold tempests of rain.'

SOUNDLESS the moth-flit, crisp the death-watch tick;  
Crazed in her shaken arbour bird did sing;  
Slow wreathed the grease adown from soot-clogged wick:  
The Cat looked long and softly at the King.

Mouse frisked and scampered, leapt, gnawed, squeaked;  
Small at the window looped cowled bat a-wing;  
The dim-lit rafters with the night-mist reeked:  
The Cat looked long and softly at the King.

O wondrous robe enstarred, in night dyed deep:  
O air scarce-stirred with the Court's far junketing:  
O stagnant Royalty—A-swoon? Asleep?  
The Cat looked long and softly at the King.

SIGHEd the wind to the wheat:—  
'The Queen who is slumbering there,  
Once bewildered the rose;  
Scorned, "Thou un-fair!"  
Once, from that bird-whirring court,  
Ascended the ruinous stair.  
Aloft, on that weed-hung turret, suns  
Smote on her hair—  
Of a gold by Archiac sought,  
Of a gold sea-hid,  
Of a gold that from core of quartz  
No flame shall bid  
Pour into light of the air  
For God's Jews to see.'

Mocked the wheat to the wind—  
'Kiss me! Kiss me!'

... And burned the topless towers of Ilium

**S**TRANGE fabled face! From sterile shore to shore  
O'er plunging seas, thick-sprent with glistening brine,  
The voyagers of the World with sail and heavy oar  
Have sought thy shrine.  
Beauty inexorable hath lured them on:  
Remote unnamèd stars enclustering gleam—  
Burn in thy flowered locks, though creeping daybreak wan  
Prove thee but dream.

Noonday to night the enigma of thine eyes  
Frets with desire their travel-wearied brain,  
Till in the vast of dark the ice-cold moon arise  
And pour them peace again;  
And with malign mirage uprears an isle  
Of fountain and palm, and courts of jasmine and rose,  
Whence far decoy of siren throats their souls beguile,  
And maddening fragrance flows.

Lo, in the milken light, in tissue of gold  
Thine apparition gathers in the air—  
Nay, but the seas are deep, and the round world old,  
And thou art named, Despair.

**S**CREAMED the far sea-mew. On the mirroring sands  
Bell-shrill the oyster-catchers. Burned the sky.  
Couching my cheeks upon my sun-scorched hands,  
Down from bare rock I gazed. The sea swung by.

Dazzling dark blue and verdurous, quiet with snow,  
Empty with loveliness, with music a-roar,  
Her billowing summits heaving noon-aglow—  
Crashed the Atlantic on the cliff-ringed shore,

Drowed by the tumult of that moving deep,  
Sense into outer silence fainted, fled;  
And rising softly, from the fields of sleep,  
Stole to my eyes a lover from the dead;

Crying an incantation—learned, Where? When?...  
White swirled the foam, a fount, a blinding gleam  
Of ice-cold breast, cruel eyes, wild mouth—and then  
A still dirge echoing on from dream to dream.

## MOURN'ST THOU NOW?

**L**ONG ago from radiant palace,  
Dream-bemused, in flood of moon,  
Stole the princess Seraphita  
Into forest gloom.

Wail of hemlock; cold the dewdrops;  
Danced the Dryads in the chace;  
Heavy hung ambrosial fragrance;  
Moonbeams blanched her ravished face.

Frail and clear the notes delusive;  
Mocking phantoms in a rout  
Thridded the night-cloistered thickets,  
Wove their sorceries in and out....

Mourn'st thou now? Or do thine eyelids  
Frame a vision dark, divine,  
O'er this imp of star and wild-flower—  
Of a god once thine?



'TELL me, tell me,  
Unknown stranger,  
When shall I sight me  
That tall ship  
On whose flower-wreathed counter is gilded, *Sleep?*'

'Landsman, landsman,  
Lynx nor kestrel  
Ne'er shall descry from  
Ocean steep  
That midnight-stealing, high-pooped galliass, *Sleep.*'

'Promise me, Stranger,  
Though I mark not  
When cold night-tide's  
Shadows creep,  
Thou wilt keep unwavering watch for *Sleep.*'

'Myriad the lights are,  
Wayworn landsman,  
Rocking the dark through  
On the deep:  
She alone burns none to prove her *Sleep.*'

'TELL us, O pilgrim, what strange She  
Lures and decoys your wanderings on?  
Cheek, eye, brow, lip, you scan each face,  
Smile, ponder—and are gone.

'Are we not flesh and blood? Mark well,  
We touch you with our hands. We speak  
A tongue that may earth's secrets tell:  
Why further will you seek?'

'Far have I come, and far must fare.  
Noon and night and morning-prime,  
I search the long road, bleak and bare,  
That fades away in Time.

'On the world's brink its wild weeds shake,  
And there my own dust, dark with dew,  
Burns with a rose that, sleep or wake,  
Beacons me—"Follow true!"

'Her name, crazed soul? And her degree?  
What peace, prize, profit in her breast?'  
'A thousand cheating names hath she;  
And none fore-tokens rest.'

I N sea-cold Lyonesse,  
When the Sabbath eve shafts down  
On the roofs, walls, belfries  
Of the foundered town,  
The Nereids pluck their lyres  
Where the green translucency beats,  
And with motionless eyes at gaze  
Make minstrelsy in the streets.

And the ocean water stirs  
In salt-worn casemate and porch.  
Plies the blunt-snouted fish  
With fire in his skull for torch.  
And the ringing wires resound;  
And the unearthly lovely weep,  
In lament of the music they make  
In the sullen courts of sleep:

Whose marble flowers bloom for aye:  
And—lapped by the moon-guided tide—  
Mock their carver with heart of stone,  
Caged in his stone-ribbed side.

'HAST thou then nought wiser to bring  
Than worn-out songs of moon and rose?'  
'Cracked my voice and broken my wing,  
God knows.'

'Tell'st thou no truth of the life that *is*;  
Seek'st thou from heaven no pitying sign?'  
'Ask thine own heart these mysteries,  
Not mine.'

'Where then the faith thou hast brought to seed?  
Where the sure hope thy soul would feign?'  
'Never ebb'd sweetness—even out of a weed—  
In vain.'

'Fool. The night comes.... 'Tis late. Arise:  
Cold lap the waters of Jordan stream.'  
'Deep be their flood and tranquil thine eyes  
With a dream.'

**S**INK, thou strange heart, unto thy rest.  
Pine now no more, to pine in vain.  
Doth not the moon on heaven's breast  
Call the floods home again?

Doth not the summer faint at last?  
Do not her restless rivers flow  
When that her transient day is past  
To hide them in ice and snow?

All this—thy world—an end shall make;  
Planet to sun return again;  
The universe, to sleep from wake,  
In a last peace remain.

Alas, the futility of care  
That, spinning thought to thought, doth weave  
An idle argument on the air  
We love not, nor believe.

## BITTER WATERS

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**I**N a dense wood, a drear wood,  
Dark water is flowing;  
Deep, deep, beyond sounding,  
A flood ever flowing.

There harbours no wild bird,  
No wanderer strays there;  
Wreathed in mist, sheds pale Ishtar  
Her sorrowful rays there.

Take thy net; cast thy line;  
Manna sweet be thy baiting;  
Time's desolate ages  
Shall still find thee waiting

For quick fish to rise there,  
Or butterfly wooing,  
Or flower's honeyed beauty,  
Or wood-pigeon cooing.

Inland wellsprings are sweet;  
But to lips, parched and dry,  
Salt, salt is the savour  
Of these; faint their sigh.

Bitter Babylon's waters.  
Zion, distant and fair.  
We hanged up our harps  
On the trees that are there.

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# WHO?

1ST STRANGER. WHO walks with us on the hills?

2ND STRANGER. I cannot see for the mist.

3RD STRANGER. Running water I hear,  
Keeping lugubrious tryst  
With its cresses and grasses and weeds,  
In the white obscure light from the sky.

2ND STRANGER. *Who walks with us on the hills?*

WILD BIRD. Ay!... Aye!... Ay!...

**T**HE mild noon air of Spring again  
Lapped shimmering in that sea-lulled lane.  
Hazel was budding; wan as snow  
The leafless blackthorn was a-blow.

A chaffinch clankt, a robin woke  
An eerie stave in the leafless oak.  
Green mocked at green; lichen and moss  
The rain-worn slate did softly emboss.

From out her winter lair, at sigh  
Of the warm South wind, a butterfly  
Stepped, quaffed her honey; on painted fan  
Her labyrinthine flight began.

Wondrously solemn, golden and fair,  
The high sun's rays beat everywhere;  
Yea, touched my cheek and mouth, as if,  
Equal with stone, to me 'twould give  
Its light and life.

O restless thought  
Contented not. With 'Why' distraught.  
Whom asked you then your riddle small?—  
'If hither came no man at all

'Through this grey-green, sea-haunted lane,  
Would it mere blackened nought remain?  
Strives it this beauty and life to express  
Only in human consciousness?'

Oh, rather, idly breaks he in  
To an Eden innocent of sin;  
And, prouder than to be afraid,  
Forgets his Maker in the made.



WHAT if to edge of dream,  
When the spirit is come,  
Shriek the hunting owl,  
And summon it home—  
To the fear-stirred heart  
And the ancient dread  
Of man, when cold root or stone  
Pillowed roofless head?

Clangs not at last the hour  
When roof shelters not;  
And the ears are deaf,  
And all fears forgot:  
Since the spirit too far has fared  
For summoning scream  
Of any strange fowl on earth  
To shatter its dream?

(To Colin)

C RASHED through the woods that lumbering Coach. The dust  
Of flinted roads bepowdering fellow and hood.  
Its gay paint cracked, its axles red with rust,  
It lunged, lurched, toppled through a solitude

Of whispering boughs, and feathery, nid-nod grass.  
Plodded the fetlocked horses. Glum and mum,  
Its ancient Coachman recked not where he was,  
Nor into what strange haunt his wheels were come.

Crumbling the leather of his dangling reins;  
Worn to a cow's tuft his stumped, idle whip;  
Sharp eyes of beast and bird in the trees' green lanes  
Gleamed out like stars above a derelict ship.

'Old Father Time—Time—Time!' jeered twittering throat.  
A squirrel capered on the leader's rump,  
Slithered a weasel, peered a thieflike stoat,  
In sandy warren beat on the coney's thump.

81

Mute as a mammet in his saddle sate  
The hunched Postilion, clad in magpie trim;  
Buzzed the bright flies around his hairless pate;  
Yaffle and jay squawked mockery at him.

Yet marvellous peace and amity breathed there.  
Tranquil the labyrinths of this sundown wood.  
Musking its chaces, bloomed the brier-rose fair;  
Spellbound as if in trance the pine-trees stood.

Through moss, and pebbled rut, the wheels rasped on;  
That Ancient drowsing on his box. And still  
The bracken track with glazing sunbeams shone;  
Labourled the horses, straining at the hill....

But now—a verdurous height with eve-shade sweet;  
Far, far to West the Delectable Mountains glowed.  
Above, Night's canopy; at the horses' feet  
A sea-like honied waste of flowers flowed.

There fell a pause of utter quiet. And—  
Out from one murky window glanced an eye,  
Stole from the other a lean, groping hand,  
The padded door swung open with a sigh.

82

And—*Exeunt Omnes!* None to ask the fare—  
A myriad human Odds in a last release  
Leap out incontinent, snuff the incensed air;  
A myriad parched-up voices whisper, 'Peace.'

On, on, and on—a stream, a flood, they flow.  
O wondrous vale of jocund buds and bells!  
Like vanishing smoke the rainbow legions glow,  
Yet still the enravished concourse sweeps and swells.

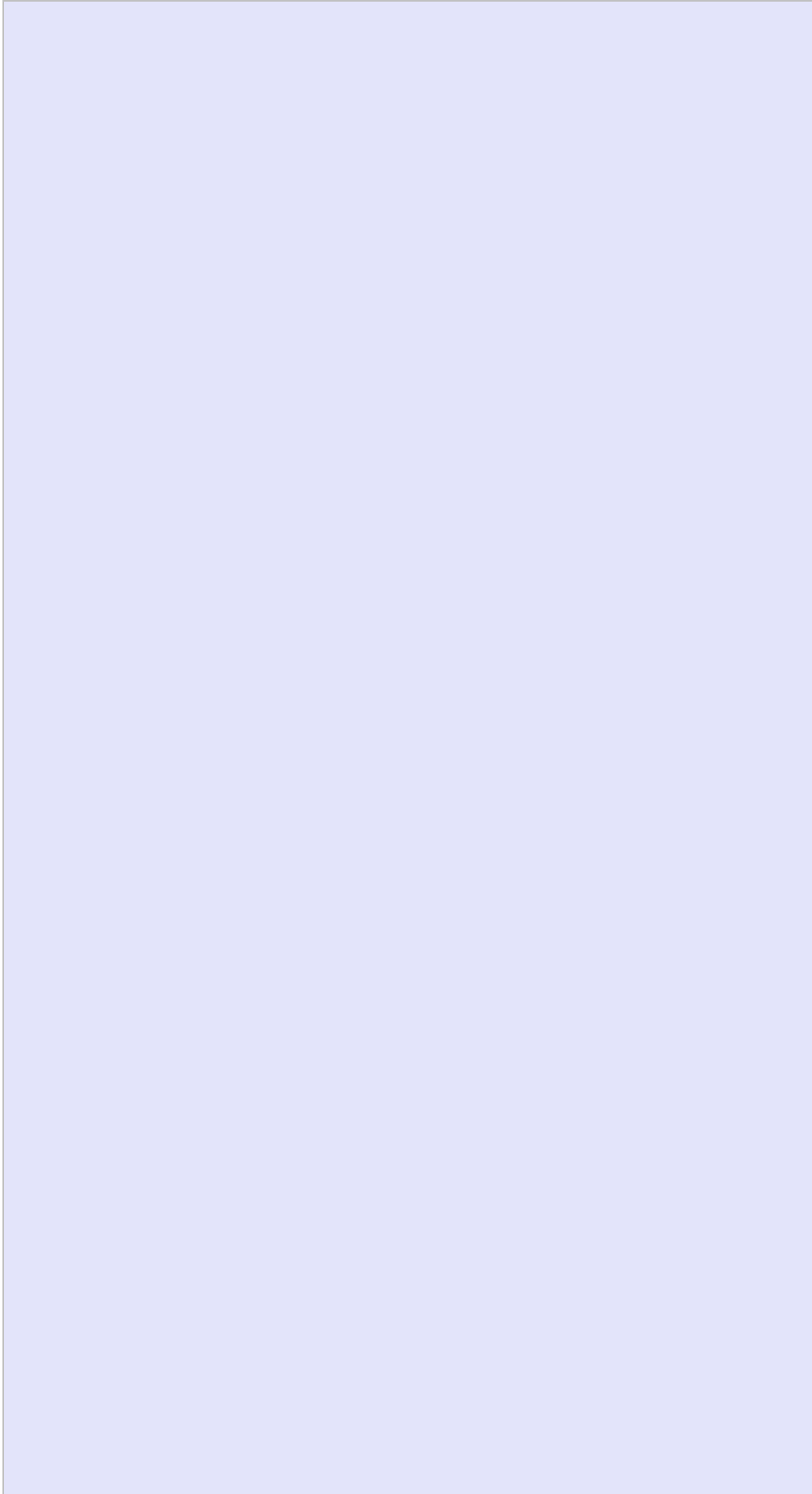
All journeying done. Rest now from lash and spur—  
Laughing and weeping, shoulder and elbow—'twould seem  
That Coach capacious all Infinity were,  
And these the fabulous figments of a dream.

Mad for escape; frenzied each breathless mote,  
Lest rouse the Old Enemy from his death-still swoon,  
Lest crack that whip again—they fly, they float,  
Scamper, breathe—'Paradise!' abscond, are gone....

83

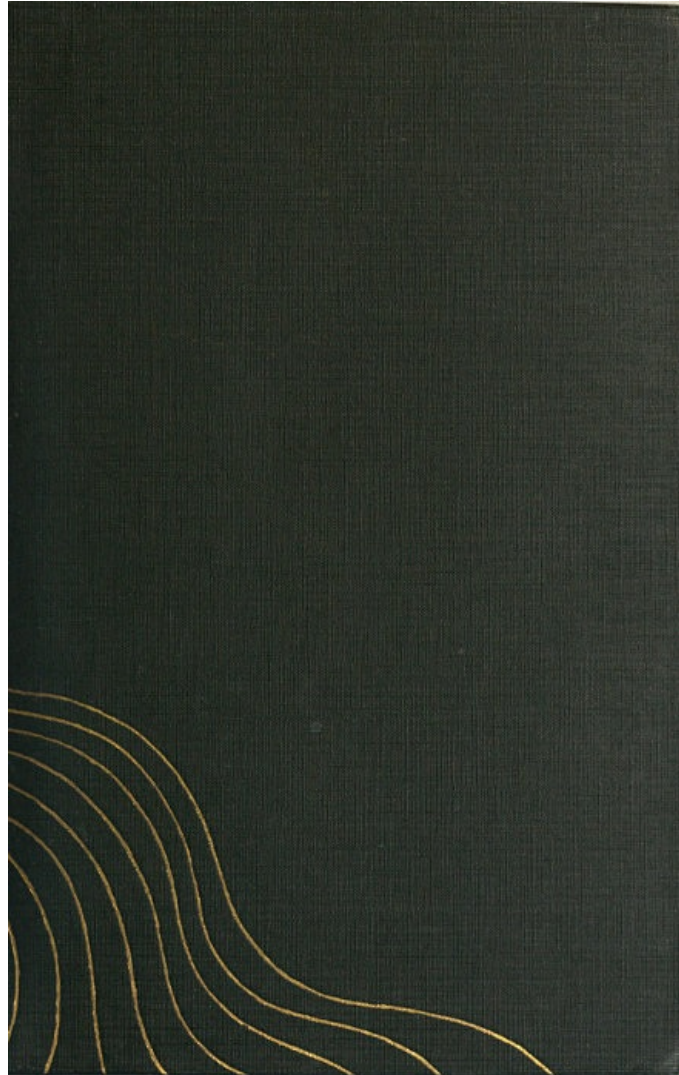
## AN EPITAPH

**L**AST, Stone, a little yet;  
And then this dust forget.  
But thou, fair Rose, bloom on.  
For she who is gone  
Was lovely too; nor would she grieve to be  
Sharing in solitude her dreams with thee.



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