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*Series of First Volumes : Number Six*

*On A Grey Thread*



ON A  
GREY THREAD

ELSA GIDLOW



CHICAGO  
WILL RANSOM  
1923

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*The Grey Thread*



*Youth*





## *Youth*

I must go down,  
Down, down,  
Below the crusts of things,  
Under the shadows,  
Into thought-haunted places  
Where few go;  
Where the road is broken  
And travelled by monsters,  
Truths with hard sphinx-faces.

I must go down  
Into the caves of life,  
Into the darkneses,  
Deep, deep,  
Below the good of things,  
Below the evil of things,  
Where the calm roots of wisdom creep.

I must tunnel  
Under the bloom of dreams,  
Under the frame-work of fancies,  
Tunnel alone.  
What if I shatter frail things,  
Break delicate flowers of myth  
Timorous dreamers have sown?

I must go down  
Below narrow roads men have made,  
Below bridging lies men have built,  
Into the caverns of truth.  
I know pain is waiting there  
Eager to break me,  
But I am strong.  
I have faith in my youth.

Living is crusted with lies.  
I want life naked,  
Laughing and young.  
Not fettered, not tamed,  
But life unashamed,  
With the cry of Desire on her tongue.

## *World Cry*

There are gods in the market place.  
Did you know there were gods there?  
Ah, yes. Gods, gods,  
There are gods everywhere.  
I think the many like gods,  
I think they like to pray and mourn.  
For a joy-song their prophets sing:  
"A new God will soon be born!"  
For a joy-song I would sing:  
"Let every god be down-torn."  
But what is the world muttering?  
Has she whispered it since life began?  
"Gods! I want none of your gods.  
Look to yourself—Man."

## *Hope*

You would win me, woo me, win me,  
To be your lover, Hope!  
You would lure me, charm me, lure me,  
With all your deathless youth!  
You would have me worship, adore you,  
Build my life for you;  
Mould my moments into hours  
Out of your careless smile!  
How you pursue me, woo me, follow,  
Like a light-headed girl.  
All the world is your willing lover:  
What do you want with me?

You are a wanton, lovely, perfect,  
A dazzling thing like day,  
Draped with silk things,  
Tasselled, jewelled,  
Hung about with veils;  
Painted with sweet lies men have blended  
Of folly and dreams and fear.  
You are a wanton, all men's mistress:  
What do you want with me?

What are your gifts worth, light bestower?  
All lips know your kiss.  
What is your word worth, soft-tongued liar?  
You have deceived all men.  
Why do you follow, woo me, follow,  
Like a light-headed girl?  
What can I give you? What can you give me?  
What do you want with me?  
Painted wanton! Tasselled Hourii!  
Gay in your dress of shame!  
You are all men's willing mistress.  
What do *I* want with you?

## *Life's Leaders*

Their clouded wine, their whited bread,  
We cannot take and call it good;  
Yet sorrier fare Life grudges us  
Who have no taste for common food.

We must go hungry long life through,  
Aching and hungry to the end;  
Betrayed by pity into chains  
Reason tries vainly to transcend.

Are we not sadly prodigal?  
We spend ourselves without restraint;  
Yea, we let Beauty break our hearts  
And bleed for love until we faint.

Yet it is not the thorns, the shame,  
Not the hurt body's weak distress:  
Our bitterest crucifixion lies  
In man's abject unworthiness.

From Life's rough cloth and flying threads,  
From dust, from passion, dreams and pain,  
From the dear madness men call love,  
From faith that lies beyond the brain,

We shape the only deathless soul  
That mortal man will ever know.  
Behold his gratitude, these stones.  
They say 'tis by the heart we grow.

Still we build quietly and wait.  
The heart may break; the heart is frail;  
But a stern, strange ecstasy  
Befriends us; and we dare not fail.

The Hand that points the solemn way  
May be a wanton hand at best;  
The great Word echoing in our souls  
May be a bored God's casual jest.

We cannot guess. We only know  
'Tis written by some awful Pen  
We must be torches sacrificed  
To light the way for lesser men.



*Market Maze*

Faces, faces . . .  
Restless faces and restless hands.  
Not the divine restlessness  
Of seeking, singing spirits.  
Not the impatient restlessness  
Of a creature mad for wings.  
But a feeble thing,  
A futile thing:  
The restlessness of the market place,  
The fever of buying and selling.



*Grain and Grapes*



## *Grain and Grapes*

This word came to me  
From one whose wisdom shapes  
The destiny of many:  
Let your thought be fruitful:  
Men like grain and grapes.

I'll not be loved of men for my gifts  
If men want grain and grapes alone:  
My thoughts are gnarled, fantastic trees,  
Grown up untended, barely pruned,  
From ancient seed I have not sown.

Their snake-mouthed roots are in my heart.  
I feel them hungrily intense  
Drawing the seething love-sap out.  
Prodigally I feed them all  
My being's vivid affluence.

But thus far they have only borne  
Veined blue buds that bloom to be  
Scarred flowers of inhuman pain,  
And little opening leaves, like eyes  
Full of a grave futility.

Strange flowers foretell strange fruit  
And gods stay breathless while they grow.  
Men call and look for grain and grapes,  
Their homely, humble earth-warm fruits;  
But heaven is silent. The gods may know.

## *Oversoul*

My laughter rings in the highest mountains,  
My mockery echoes vividly over the peaks,  
My laughter and my mockery dance lightly  
together  
Like derisive imps . . . But my soul never  
speaks.

My wisdom sits on a promontory  
And remotely overwatches the world;  
My pain stays forever in that cave  
Where the ragged ends of life come unfurled.

My love cuts downward between mountains  
Like a torrential cataract, to the deeps,  
For love, like life, is a down-going.  
But my soul is like a thing that sleeps.

It knows the remorseless depths,  
The thinnest ether of the farthest height;  
There are no lights or darkneses for its  
discovering,  
It has crawled on the earth and it knows  
the joy of flight.

It is speechless because it knows all speeches,  
Future and present and what has gone before.  
It waits sphinxlike, and I myself  
Cannot guess what it is waiting for.

*Come And Lie With Me*

Come and lie with me and love me,  
Bitterness.

Touch me with your hands a little,  
Kiss me, as you lean above me,  
With your cold sadistic kisses;

Wind your hair close, close around me,  
Pain might dissipate this blankness.

Hurt me even, even wound me,  
I have need of love that stings.

Come and lie with me and love me,  
Bitterness,

So that I may laugh at things.

## *Futility*

Under all beauty that I know,  
All vital dreams,  
Sharp loveliness,  
Under the hair, the lips of laughter,  
The dusk-dim eyes of pain,  
Lurks the single thing I fear,  
Hard-mouthed, implacable-eyed,  
The monster,  
The satyr-thing, futility.

I cannot look on loveliness  
Or burn the flame of ecstasy,  
Or even dream for very long,  
Without the annihilating fear  
That it will suddenly tear some veil  
And bare its dreadful face.

When I am light with the exaltation  
Mysteriously born of worship,  
Filled like a cup with the wine of wonder  
At some great cloudy bloom of color,  
Or learning the infinite secrets of rapture  
With bared heart held to love's lips—  
Light's eyes are suddenly blinded,  
Life gropes in empty twilight,  
And the mocking mouth of the satyr-thing  
Leers at me from a veil of dust.

Shuddering I crouch to earth,  
Trembling lest it come more near,  
Trembling lest it stretch a hand  
And touch me! Choked by an agony  
Of horror lest its deadly eyes  
Should shrivel my flaming heart of dream.  
Sometimes I think the universe,  
Mind, passion, beauty, wisdom, light,  
All fathomless life-wonders,  
Serve only for its cloak.

It lurks like death in everything  
That has a singing heart:  
In all exultant voices,  
In all desire's burning eyes,  
In youth's true soul,  
In love's slim hands.

Sometimes I think it is life's core,  
This mocking-mouth'd implacable ghost.  
Sometimes I think it is life's core.  
Sometimes I think it must be God.

*Roots*

O heavily weighing earth! O grim travail  
In sunless silence with no hope of light!  
O impotent wine! O bracken-food of pain!  
I accept you all. I accept the timeless blight  
Of crawling like a worm with unclean things,  
Of being forever a yearning voiceless root  
Bedded in this unwarmed oblivion.  
So that the great sun mellow my ultimate fruit.



*I Must Be Far*

I must be far from men and women  
To love their ways.

I must be on a mountain  
Breathing greatly like a tree  
If my heart would yearn a little  
For the peopled, placid valley.

I must be in a bare place  
And lonely as a moon  
To find the graceless ways of people  
Worthful as a flower's ways,  
A flower that lives for loveliness  
And dies when beauty dies.

I cannot find music  
On the tongues of men and women  
Unless I hear their voices  
Like echoes, silence-softened.  
Their many words mean little.  
Their mouths are blatant sparrows.

I must be far from men and women,  
As God is far away,  
To keep my faith with Beauty,  
My heart sweet towards them,  
And love them with a god's tranquility.

## *Ecstasy*

Stars, turn from your courses,  
Stars, stars, I want you,  
Spill into my hands.  
I have found a new loneliness,  
A new strong loneliness,  
That no one understands.

I know a new joy, stars,  
A joy of the still peak,  
The wonder of airs knife-sharp;  
Stars, I have learned to know them,  
I have learned the tongue they speak.  
Stars, I can understand them,  
All the words they say,  
All the subtle things.  
They teach me exaltation,  
A new intoxication  
Fine drawn as the music of harp-strings.  
Alone . . . alone . . . alone . . .  
Stars, I can hear my skin breathe,  
Hear my blood beat.  
How can flesh be so light,  
Feet walk and touch nothing,  
Thought become so fleet?

Time is a rhymeless poem  
Without any end  
Written in space,  
Here at the world's summit  
Where life-giving winds  
Sharply whip one's face.  
Life is the one reality,  
Life intensely realized,  
Life wildly felt;  
Death is an ungrasped dream,  
A vague monstrous fable,  
A puzzle still unspelt.

Alone . . . alone . . . alone . . .  
No other thing that breathes  
In this keen place.  
O my new joy,  
Joy of singing summits,  
Of endless, vibrant space!  
Stars, stars, stoop down,  
Stars, turn from your courses,  
Spill into my hands!  
Stars, you are my kindred:  
I am strong with a new loneliness  
That no one understands.

## *Youth Insatiate*

If I have wished for skies unscarred by storm,  
Shrunk from the grievous bitterness of things,  
The days' perplexities, the nights' unrest,  
The cruel, fruitless beating with clipped wings

Against the windows of the Infinite,  
And, weary with the conflict's puerile stress,  
Cried out against it all, cried out for peace,  
Even what peace the rotting dead possess,

May Life forgive me: I am stronger now,  
The play bewilders, but I know my part;  
And I have learned that Beauty is salt blood  
Pain-wrung from the unconquerable heart.

Let there be laughter then, love's wine and bread,  
The many mouths of passion, their joys, their grief;  
These are but soil and seed — for what grave growths?  
I plant and wait, (and pray the time be brief!)

Lean wisdom this, to pause and taste and pause  
Like a scared virgin who must stop for breath.  
Take the cup simply, drain it to the lees;  
Then, smiling, fling the empty cup to Death.

## *Disillusionment*

*The agonies of disillusionment  
are the growing-pains of Truth*

Now I am done with ineffectual dreams,  
Kindly play-toys of the unsure years,  
And unencumbered, proud and free and light,  
With even pulses and a lifting heart,  
I mount the future's twisting stairs.

A week ago I thought that I must die,  
Or hang forever, bitter as frost-killed fruit,  
Scarred and broken from the Tree of Life—  
Because I suddenly came into my sight  
And men walked as trees; and dreams went mute.

'Tis no small thing, to lose a dear, sure world,  
To stumble, desolate, through hideous space,  
Down unfamiliar and unfriendly roads  
That bruise your feet. And then to suddenly feel  
A great light newly shining in your face.

## *The Hole in My Curtain*

*It is because of the hole in my curtain.*

I have stared through the torn space  
Into Life's tortured face  
As she leaned low and treadled her loom,  
Watching, watching for the inevitable doom.  
And I have seen the haggard shadows flit  
Over the tapestries she wove, bit by bit,  
Feverishly, her lips shrieking gay lies;  
And always the tired song in her endless eyes.  
I have watched the Form with his weary  
    cynical face,  
His pale smile, his definite, measured pace,  
Gliding forward and gliding back like a  
    thing condemned  
And calmly slitting Life's woven cloths  
    from end to end.



And they have wondered that I should laugh!  
Marvelled at the potent wines I quaff.  
Marvelled that I should dance on their God's  
    dried flesh,  
Shape a lute from a bone of His; weave a mesh  
Of mirthless melody; that I should find Sin fair,  
Circle her body and sleep in her odorous hair.  
They have marvelled that I should mock the day,  
Throw my veil over the sun and smile at Fate's  
    old play;  
Lead my soul down the ribald, flowered path.  
They have marvelled . . . they have wondered  
    that I should laugh.

*I have looked too long through the hole  
    in my curtain.*

## *Despair*

I can laugh now.  
Have you not heard my laughter?  
It leads the winds:  
They come tumbling and bubbling after.

I have learned to laugh.  
I have learned to laugh with my spirit  
And with my soul.  
Listen. Do you not hear it?

I shall quench the world.  
I shall sear the stars with my laughter;  
Shrivel the moon and the sun  
And make new ones after.

For life's skeleton  
I shall make flesh from desires;  
Then of my mounting laughter  
Build it a temple with mocking spires.

I shall laugh to heaven.  
I shall laugh below hell and above.  
I shall laugh forever.  
It was laughter God died of.



*Declaration*

I am a seed in the dust,  
A live root bedded in night,  
And I am filled with a lust  
For something the worms call light.

From what seed-pod I was blown  
Matters little to me,  
Why and by whom I was sown  
Or what the reaping may be.

I only wait for my hour  
When I shall be done with night,  
When I shall thrill into flower  
And drink till I die of light.

## *The Poet*

We are given pain to balance every joy,  
We tragic-eyed divinities in dust.  
Many the hearts life bleeds with little wounds,  
The souls bewildered between God and lust.

We know the way of pity and pity's pain;  
We know the unlit, endless street called Doubt;  
And few but walk a black way at the end,  
The piteous, hope-lit candles dead, burned out.

Yet these are mortal wounds of mortal thorns:  
What of the few who suffer deadlier scars?  
They are worse wounded than any in the world  
Who bruise their lifted heads against the stars.

*Inner Chamber*



## *Love's Acolyte*

Many have loved you with lips and fingers  
And lain with you till the moon went out;  
Many have brought you lover's gifts;  
And some have left their dreams on your doorstep.

But I who am youth among your lovers  
Come like an acolyte to worship,  
My thirsting blood restrained by reverence,  
My heart a wordless prayer.

The candles of desire are lighted,  
I bow my head, afraid before you,  
A mendicant who craves your bounty  
Ashamed of what small gifts he brings.

*From the Top of the World*

Come to me at the top of the world,  
O Mine, before the years spill  
Our rare love into Time's cup  
And give our will to Time's will.

My wide basin is full of starlight,  
My moon is lighted with new fire,  
I have lit every sun in the firmament  
With the hurting flame of my desire.

The worms there in the valley  
Die — to forget death!  
But here at the top of the world  
I laugh under my breath.

There is pain here, and tears,  
Bitter, terrible tears;  
But the joys have warm mouths, and madness  
Dances downwards with the years.

Come to me at the top of the world,  
O Mine. The valley is deep,  
The valley is full of the dying,  
And with those that sleep.

But here wonderful winds blow  
And the pines sing *one song*.  
Come to me at the top of the world,  
Come soon. I have waited too long.

## *Episode*

I have robbed the garrulous streets,  
Thieved a fair girl from their blight,  
I have stolen her for a sacrifice  
That I shall make to this mystieried night.

I have brought her, laughing,  
To my quietly sinister garden.  
For what will be done there  
I ask no man's pardon.

I brush the rouge from her cheeks,  
Clean the black kohl from the rims  
Of her eyes; loose her hair;  
Uncover the glimmering, shy limbs.

I break wild roses, scatter them over her.  
The thorns between us sting like love's pain.  
Her flesh, bitter and salt to my tongue,  
I taste with endless kisses and taste again.

At dawn I leave her  
Asleep in my wakening garden.  
(For what was done there  
I ask no man's pardon.)

## *Experience*

Now you are gone I kiss your dented pillow  
And wonder if it hungers like my breast  
For the dear head we both have held in rest.

I said once: Love alone cannot assuage  
My thirst, my hunger, love has no reply  
For that wild questioning, for this fierce cry.

I said: there is no kiss can feed me now.  
Perhaps love is life's flower: I seek the root.  
Yea, I have loved and love is dead sea fruit.

Yet I lie here and kiss your dented pillow,  
A trembling girl who loves you overmuch—  
A harp in anguish for the player's touch.



*This Is Not Love*

This is not love: we cannot call it love.  
Love would make me aware of infinite things,  
Drive me down the spirit's vast abyss  
And through the narrow fastnesses of pain.  
This is not love. Yet it holds loveliness  
Beyond mere pleasure. Peace and passion both  
Grow from the kiss with which I paint drab hours.  
It is not love: love is for the gods  
And our more godlike moments. Yet when stars  
Withhold their splendour, why should we not light  
Candles to warm with kindly mortal flames  
The all-enfolding, cold, immortal night?

## *A Happy Song*

Heaped sweets and a treasure  
For a new sin to play with,  
To pass a night and day with—  
Heaped sweets for a pleasure.

Who and who will win them?  
Who will carry virtue's pall?  
Of what use are sins at all  
If someone does not sin them?

Who will take the treasure?  
Run and run on light-winged feet;  
Who will buy my sweetest sweet  
With a new found pleasure?

*As Usual*

You say you will not think of me:  
You shut me out and count your beads,  
The chaplet of your rules and doubts,  
But lovers never think of creeds.

You'll fill your mind with serious things:  
You'll think of God or Infinity,  
Of a lover whose last charm is gone,  
Of anything in the world but me.

Yet every thought will lead you back,  
Infinity grow far and dim,  
And God, with His sense of irony,  
Will never let you think of Him.

## *The Artist*

Let us leave off loving, Madonna:  
You have kissed me grey  
And still I have no peace.  
We thought we could make the night  
A tapestry of passion.  
Dear Love! What a vain caprice.

Where's the immortal design  
We thought we had splashed on the indigo cloth?  
And where is the cloth?  
Dawn is forever the cynic.  
He shows us love is the flame,  
Our flesh the eternal moth.

Madonna . . . loose me and rise.  
We are brief as apple-blossom  
And I am heart-weary with thought of the end.  
Creation is all.  
The hours are thieves, Time a beggar,  
And we have little to spend.

I ache for the brush in my hand.  
The thrall of the compliant pigment  
Governs my blood.  
I will paint you, Madonna,  
The afterlove glow in your face;

I would deify you if I could  
With enchantments of color,  
Bind you with fetters of terrible beauty  
Fast to my canvas forever,  
Give you the eternality God has denied you,  
Bind you to life with art's sacred chains  
That death cannot sever.

Love has betrayed us enough with its  
treacherous wonder:

Let us go now while we ache with the magic  
Or what is the gain?  
Art is our one immortality,  
All we may win from the gods  
In exchange for our labor and pain.

## *Sudden Friendship*

Yesterday we walked apart,  
Separate and cold and mortal.  
Now the mystic kiss has joined us,  
Now we stand inside the portal

That permits of no returning,  
And my heart is strangely burning.

I know not what the word may be,  
Or what the charm, or what the token,  
That has filled us with this glory.  
But never let the charm be broken.

Let it stay a mystery  
For all time to be.

Yesterday, with lighter joys,  
We wantoned at the outer portal.  
Now, with love's old alchemy,  
We have made ourselves immortal.

## *Love Song*

My love, you destroy me, you rend,  
You tear me apart.

You are a wild swan I have caught  
And housed in my heart.

My sister, my love, I am shattered,  
Broken, dismayed.

The live wings, the wild wings are beating,  
They make me afraid.

Fold your wings, brood like a dove,  
Be a dove I can cherish

More calmly, my dear, my tempestuous love,  
Or I perish.

*Late Autumn Afternoon*

Grey, fingered with flickering threads  
of light;  
Silence broken by restless quavers  
of music.  
Greyness, music,  
A playing thought of slumber.  
And on my lips faintly disturbing fingers,  
And at my heart love's hand like a  
child's hand  
Stirring me half awake.



*Philosophy*

Since we must soon be fed  
As honey and new bread  
To ever-hungry Death:  
O, love me very sweet  
And kiss me very long  
And let us use our breath  
For song.  
Nothing else endures  
Overlong.

*You Are Not She*

You are not she I loved. You cannot be  
My wild, white dove,  
My tempest-driven dove that I gave house,  
You cannot be my Love.

She died. I used to hold her all night long;  
Come awake  
At dawn beside her. Try to ease with loving  
A thirst too deep to slake.

O, it was pain to keep her shut against me.  
Honey and bitterness  
To taste her with sharp kisses and hold her after  
In brief duress.

You cold woman, you stranger with her ways,  
Smiling cruelly,  
You tear my heart as never her wild wings'  
beating  
Wounded me.

## *Love Sleep*

Watch my Love in sleep:  
Is she not beautiful  
As a young flower at night  
Weary and glad with dew?

Pale curved body  
That I have kissed too much,  
Warm with slumber's flush;  
Breasts like mounded snow,  
Too small for children's mouths;  
Lips a red spring bud  
My love will bring to bloom.

How restlessly she moves!  
She, no more than a child,  
Stirs like a woman troubled  
With guilt of secret sins.

Twin furtive tears  
Glide from the shadows,  
Her eyes' shadowed blue.  
Her dreaming must be sad.

What grief to watching love  
That it is impotent,  
For all its reckless strength,  
When the sleep gates close.

*When Love Becomes a Stranger*

When Love becomes a stranger  
In the temple he has built  
Of remembered nights and days,  
When he sighs and turns away  
From the altar in the temple  
With unreturning feet,  
When the candles flicker out  
And the magical-sweet incense  
Vanishes . . .  
Do you think there is grief born  
In any god's heart?

## *Of a Certain Friendship*

Odd how you entered my house quietly,  
Quietly left again.

While you stayed you ate at my table,  
Slept in my bed.

There was much sweetness,  
Yet little was done, little said.

After you left there was pain,  
Now there is no more pain.

But the door of a certain room in my house  
Will be always shut.

Your fork, your plate, the glass you drank from,  
The music you played,

Are in that room

With the pillow where last your head was laid.

And there is one place in my garden

Where it's best that I set no foot.

## *Constancy*

You're jealous if I kiss this girl and that.  
You think I should be constant to one mouth.  
Little you know of my too quenchless drouth.  
My sister, I keep faith with love, not lovers.

Life laid a flaming finger on my heart,  
Gave me an electric golden thread,  
Pointed to a pile of beads and said:  
Link me one more perfect than the rest.

Love's the thread, my sister, you a bead,  
An ivory one, you are so delicate.  
These first burned ash-grey—far too passionate.  
Farther on the colors mount and sing.

When the last bead's painted with the last design  
And slipped upon the thread, I'll tie it so,  
Then smiling quietly, I'll turn and go  
While vain Life boasts her latest ornament.

## *Mnasidika*

I shall not harm you at all nor ask you  
for anything,  
You need have no fear;  
I am only very tired and would like to  
rest awhile  
With my head here  
And play with the long strands of your  
loosed hair,  
Or touch your skin,  
Feel your cool breath on my eyes,  
watch it stir  
Those rising hills where your breasts begin;  
And listen to your voice whispering  
tender words  
Until, perhaps, I fall asleep;  
Or feel you kiss my forehead to comfort me  
a little  
If I should weep.  
That is all, just to lie so beside you  
Till dawn's lamp is lit.  
You need not fear me. I have given  
too much of love  
Ever to ask for it.



*The Friend Departs*

'Tis not alone that you have gone from me:  
All the hungry, fragile roots of hope  
Are blasted by a Thing I cannot name;  
And I am desolate remembering

The rare kiss, the intimate silent climbing  
From passion to a breathless comprehension.  
Even my peace of heart, born of long pain,  
Dies, drowned in a turbulence of passion.

Life today is like a glass reflecting  
Nothing more than my own grieving eyes,  
Or like a goblet that I sit and stare at,  
Empty of all but stains of last night's wine.



*I, Lover*

I shall never have any fear of love,  
Not of its depth nor its uttermost height,  
Its exquisite pain and its terrible delight.  
I shall never have any fear of love.

I shall never hesitate to go down  
Into the fastness of its abyss  
Nor shrink from the cruelty of its awful kiss.  
I shall never have any fear of love.

Never shall I dread love's strength  
Nor any pain it might give.  
Through all the years I may live  
I shall never have any fear of love.

I shall never draw back from love  
Through fear of its vast pain  
But build joy of it and count it again.  
I shall never have any fear of love.

I shall never tremble nor flinch  
From love's moulding touch:  
I have loved too terribly and too much  
Ever to have any fear of love.

## *Relinquishment*

Go her way, her quiet, quiet way,  
Her way is best for one so wistful-tired.  
My three-months' lover, go with your  
    world-sick heart,  
Your love-bruised flesh. I am no sanctuary.

This hot mouth, these ardent, out-reaching arms,  
This hollow between my breasts, these  
    hungry limbs,  
They are a cradle, a cradle of living flame;  
No haven for you, saddening after peace.

I am not certain, no, nor soothing-safe.  
Mine is the shifting, perilous way of life.  
Pitiless, ever-changing, hazardous,  
My love insatiate and mutable.

Go her way, her quiet, well-path'd way,  
Sit by her hearth-fire; let her keep you safe.  
Mine the unharbored heart, the uncharted  
    passions;  
Mine, at the end a more than common peace.

*In Passing*



*The Face in the Rain*

O form! O face!  
Elfin face in the crowd!  
Form, face, white throat,  
Pale throat wound with a scarf  
Poppy red,  
Blood-like, red,  
Pale throat wound with a poppy scarf  
Gleaming out of the crowd.

Background of grey,  
A rain-wet street;  
Shuffling, shambling  
Beating feet,  
Past the corner where four ways meet.

O face, O throat!  
Crimson and white  
Splashed on grey:  
I have thought of nothing else all day.

Misted streets,  
A scarf-wound throat,  
Fay-like face  
That seemed to float  
Through the crowd  
Like a wisp of song:  
I have thought of them all day long.

*Grey Skies*

I like grey skies,  
At least they tell the truth;  
Grey skies,  
Reflective skies  
That do not laugh at all  
Nor weep vain tears.  
Unpromising,  
Unhoping,  
Cold.

Grey skies,  
No fear in them  
Nor any joy,  
No tragedy,  
All grey.  
I like grey skies,  
Unweeping, smileless skies.  
They do not lie.

## *Chant of Spring*

Like an unhappy woman Earth frees herself  
    from the arms of Winter,  
Surely Winter, her indifferent Lord,  
Whose touch is death to her passionate body,  
And, weeping, yields to Spring, the  
    wooing maiden,  
The slim girl who kisses her with  
    awakening kisses,  
Burning her lips and eyelids with flaming mouth  
    loosed upon them,  
Renewing her body with wildness  
    of young caresses,  
Holding her close while the reckless hours dance  
    to death.

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Wan passion flowers growing in hidden places,  
Memories,  
Kisses given by the slim maiden.  
Wan passion flowers,  
All that is left to Earth of her maddest lover.

## *Dawn*

Dawn opens like a great gold flower,  
Petal by monstrous petal,  
Quivering minute by minute,  
Hour by hour.  
Stretches great live leaves over hundreds  
of hills,  
Scatters flakes of pollen dust into a  
few valleys,  
Drops a loose petal down where a slender  
waterfall spills.

Morning opens like a gold flower,  
Stirs and quivers singingly at the feet of day;  
Shoots transparent light into a moving mist  
That twists spirally  
Like a butterfly at play.

In the heart of the mist, morning opens, a  
gold flower,  
Superbly, like a dawning passion.  
Can night be the consummation  
Of this expectant white hour?



## *Poppy Song*

Love in a garden of poppies  
Playing at living life,  
Love with smiles in her speech,  
Love dancing at dawn  
In a garden of flushed pink poppies.

Love, unsmiling now,  
At noon in the garden of poppies,  
With a laugh under her eyelids,  
Fear deep in her eyes,  
And tangled with her hair,  
Sighs and a struggling joy.

Love, with a dim, strained face,  
At night in the garden of poppies,  
Her lips crushing the bloom  
From the fairest flower there.  
Love drunk with the wine  
She has drawn from the poppy's heart:  
Love with death at her breasts.

Love at the end of night  
Shaded by drooping poppies;  
Love with scattered hair  
And strange stains on her lips.  
Love with death at her breasts.

*To a Young Dancing Girl*

Golden-eyed girl, do you see what I see?  
Do you see behind the veil that Life  
    laughs through?

Golden-eyed girl, I would like to laugh  
    with you.

But my veil is torn, and I see things pass  
Like shadows in the depths of a crystal glass.

Golden-eyed girl, you are young as springtime,  
Your great eyes are dreamful, your rare  
    lips sweet.

Shadows matter little to youth with dancing feet.  
All of Life's skeletons wear gay dresses  
And youth is deceived by even Death's caresses.

Golden-eyed girl, you have years to dance and  
    wonder

Before your Life's curtain will wear into holes  
And let you see the hopelessness hidden in souls.  
You have many moons of laughter, many  
    years to go

Before you'll learn how heavy dancing feet  
    can grow.

## *Chance*

Strange that a single white iris  
Given carelessly one slumbering spring midnight  
Should be the first of love,  
Yet life is written so.

If it had been a rose  
I might have smiled and pinned it to my dress:  
We should have said Good Night indifferently  
And never met again.  
But the white iris!  
It looked so infinitely pure  
In the thin green moonlight.  
A thousand little purple things  
That had trembled about me through  
    the young years  
Floated into a shape I seem always to have known  
That I suddenly called Love!

The faint touch of your long fingers on mine  
    wakened me.  
I saw that your tumbled hair was bright  
    with flame,  
That your eyes were sapphire souls with  
    hungry stars in them,  
And your lips were too near not to be kissed.

Life crouches at the knees of Chance  
And takes what falls to her.

## *Loneliness*

This loneliness encaged in me  
That has no curious heart for life,  
No ribald blood, no treacherous flesh  
Nor golden wickedness of song,  
This loneliness that prays in me,  
Is it not somewhat like a nun?

See the clasped hands, the secret eyes,  
The lips pressed close for fear of love!  
What if I make her drunk one day  
With wine or some unholy need  
Then leave the cell door open wide—  
Think you she might be tempted out?

## *Before Sleep*

There is an autumn sadness upon me,  
A sadness of bared trees,  
And mist and delicate death of flowers.  
There is an autumn sadness upon me,  
A falling of leaves in my soul.

There is an autumn sadness upon me,  
A dreamfulness in my heart,  
And a wistful sense of longing.  
There is faint moaning music  
Like cries of departing birds.

There are trembling hands on my eyelids,  
A dim foreknowledge of tears  
And dreams, patterning ultimate slumber.  
There is an autumn sadness upon me,  
A falling of leaves in my soul.

## *A Thought*

There are more songs in the far corners  
of my soul  
Than I shall ever be able to sing.  
I shall go away long before they are  
all expressed  
And they will wait for another life, for  
more suffering,  
To give them birth; another life and many  
more tears  
And love, to make them open their eyes to  
the light.  
It will take many lives to express all  
the songs  
I hear singing to themselves day and night.

*Epilogue*





## *Epilogue*

*Why are you laughing, Poet?  
I much prefer your sighs.  
I myself have just read one of your songs  
And tears are biting my eyes.*

And why should I not laugh?  
I cleaned my heart of its dust,  
Swept my spirit clear of its cobwebs,  
Gathered them up and thrust  
Them from me. And then  
Men passing, found the whole,  
Called them songs and sang them and exulted.  
They thought they had found my soul.

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