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IN
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HARRIET GALE CARTER



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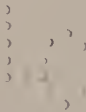
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MADNESS IN MUSIC

MADNESS IN MUSIC

BY

HARRIET GALE CARTER



MACON, GEORGIA

THE J. W. BURKE COMPANY

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TO MY MOTHER

M.V. 3/3/41

“A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs,
Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind.

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.”

—ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

The best of luck to you and your poetry,
which I honestly think is exceptionally good
and which I hope you will continue to write.

With best wishes,

JAMES E. WARREN, JR.*

*Mr. Warren was the 1937 winner of the national annual \$100 prize awarded by the Poetry Society of America for the best poem of the year written by a member, one of the most coveted awards in American literary circles. His winning contribution was his five stanza effort, "Final Lightning." Mr. Warren's verse has appeared in New York Times, New York Sun, Literary Digest, North American Review, Verse Craft, Voices, Poetry Magazine, The Golden Magazine (England) and other publications.

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I am hysterical with song, and I
Grow clamorous with life's medley. One day
My song is red; the next day it is gray,
As I see life in colors flashing by.

Into a poem wreath I twine moonlight
And darkness, sun and rain, water and wine;
Laughter and tears splash from this pen of mine—
Madness in music—this is what I write.

—THE AUTHOR.

MADNESS IN MUSIC

NOMADISM

I am thirsty for old rivers of great name—
The Danube and the Volga and the Seine;
To every harbor light I have laid claim.
I must be free as houseless stars for rain
In India has haunted me too long;
I am in love with all the world—the blue
Of Switzerland, Egyptian nights like strong
Black coffee, and French castles, grim, untrue.

Oh, I shall walk through the galleries of man,
And whet my heart upon new strange hearts
and,
So typically the cosmopolitan,
I, when I turn my face to the Last Great Land,
Shall know well, as before, in the depths of me
That I go with old curiosity.

NIGHT THOUGHT

Upon this late, cold, dripping night I hear
Rain's tiny hammers hit the far-up roof
With drowsy strokes, and I am here aloof
From worlds outside—my room a little sphere.

My walls are darkened barriers on which
Soft flickers, like slim demons, leap and dance—
My low fireplace an orangy expanse
Of molten gold, and I am snugly rich.

This bright inferno holds my drowsy gaze,
My eyes explore its glowing, deep ravines,
Its seething caverns, and the myriad scenes
And patterns in the melancholy blaze.

The blood within the embers oozes now,
The coals, like aging men, are streaked with gray;
Outside the cold wet oaks yearn on for May,
And still the meek rain soaks each lilac bough.

God, I can stand the day—the shining light,
Light—bright as silver snow and children's eyes—
But when the warm lit sky is stained with dyes
Of deep dead onyx—how I loathe the night!

In day my lustful duties grasp my brain—
Seduce it from my yet untarnished dreams,
But night, the tender rain, and firelight gleams
Bind me; I hold a tryst with love's old pain.

To memories I have whispered iron good-byes,
And prayed the mist of time would cloud the pain,
But somehow through the chaste and gentle rain,
I hear your silenced voice and see your eyes.

LIBRARY

This deep, dim library, this quiet room
Of books and shelves and shadows soft with dust,
Dreams out the afternoon in mouldy gloom.

Long twisted boughs across the windows rust
With blood-red maple leaves mellowed with age.

The sun zigzags the floor with autumn gold—
The only stir the turning of a page.

Here books, read and reread, mildewed and old,
Or new with crisp white paper sleep together

With covers like drawn blinds around themselves.
The fiery gilt-gold letters on red leather

Burn on the volumes humped up down the shelves.
And hushed within this vault, this dim archive,
A thousand souls are buried here alive.

I THANK GOD

I thank God so for everything you've meant,
I thank God for the hours we have spent,
I thank God they have brought me strange content—
I thank God!

I thank God for the memories I keep,
I thank God that you taught me love was deep,
I thank God what we've felt was never cheap—
I thank God!

I thank God for the things that knit us two—
That you fit in my moods the way you do—
But mostly for the miracle of you
I thank God!

OLD VIENNA

Hearts were more than hearts. Inconstant, vain
Vienna was unreal when chandeliers
Trembled with light in ballrooms where champagne
And light and music surged. The whirling tiers
Of silk and satin, taffeta and lace
Bent to the painted waltzes Strauss had dreamed,
Frivolous with coquetry and grace—
Warm was the ardor where the Danube gleamed.

Intoxicating ladies laughed and sighed,
And watched their wide skirts furiously spin;
Their men, moulded in uniforms, would glide
To the balcony. They stood dissolving in
Kisses that bubbled in their veins like wine,
Kisses drunk swiftly, drunk like beer from stein.

GRAIN FIELD

A tawny bay of grain, a shimmering tide
Curves inland down the meadow coast to lap
The headlands of the frontier sky. The wide
Bright country landscape is a crayoned map
A child discarded. White farm houses crouch
In puddles on the distant cluttered floor
Of farmlands. Tipsy fences reel and slouch
Against the lamp-post trees. And down the shore
Of pastureland the sunlight wades knee-deep
In grain shoals and coagulates in shade.
Stagnant as slag the grain lies coiled asleep
Sunning itself, its scales flashing like jade.
What is so blond as sunlight deep in grain,
So bright as the red clay beaches of the plain?

IF YOU SHOULD DIE

If you should die and they would bring flowers
To cover you like all our fragrant hours,

I know I should be much too stunned to cry—
But shrivel to cold stone as time went by.

How could I laugh with great finesse and hide
Tumultuous chaos raging so inside?

But oh, I'll stop to think—you're watching me!
And I shall don such shining bravery!

WHAT AN UNWORTHY TEMPLE!

What an unworthy temple, Lord, for Thee!
I am embarrassed much to ask Thee in.
Apologies are vain for what You see
Is my own fault, my lack of care, my sin,
Ill-kept—untidy—such a wretched home!
But Thou, perhaps, wilt make it new and clean,
As though washed in the pools of old Siloame,
For Thou didst ever love the low and mean
And unattractive places. Thou didst pass
Along the dirty lanes of Palestine,
Through flies blowing the sores of many an ass,
Through dogs that licked the lepers, through the
swine—
All these were blessed, anointed with Thy face.
Behold my poor vile heart and its disgrace!

PASTORAL

Hushed in a mountain meadow, green and deep,
Soft with the summer sun above the dells,
We lay and watched the slow, white clouds of sheep
Dreaming on mountainsides, heard quiet bells,
And gathered flowers in the deep, tall grass—
Cool as the still, blue sky the gentian's breath.
Tufted with snow, the mountain's jagged mass
Of granite steeples sharpened dark as death.

A shepherd piped above us. Afternoon
Faded to shadows as we rose and kissed,
Turned to the village wakeful with the moon,
And climbed down mountains webbed in lilac mist.
I knew more light than sun and moon could shed—
In your sea-blue eyes, your lovely golden head.

SPRING HAUNTS THE BATTLEFIELD

Spring haunts the battlefield—a silent ghost.
There is no thundering gun, no screaming shell,
No ugliness and hurt, no hate and hell—
Only the whispers of the grasses toast
A victory—a conquest greater far
Than armies of the earth can ever claim.
Spring mends the splintered tree. There is no maim,
No rent along the shell-torn slopes, no scar
Upon the squandered land, lonely and still.
There are no browned, scorched fields. Death is a
dream.

A peaceful bridge arches a crystal stream,
And apple blossoms softly rim a hill.
After the angry bayonet and gun,
Quietly sleep the dead under the sun.

INCRECULOUS

I want to think you love me, to believe
Your words are true, and knowing how sincere
You are, I should not doubt nor have one fear.
And yet I cannot realize, conceive
The fairy tale of your warm love for me—
It seems a thing I dreamed, a fancied glow,
Forgive me if I think it is not so—
My understanding reels and is at sea.

Besides, your ardor should be spent on one
More lovely and more worthy of your charms—
A gift by gross mistake thrust in my arms.
You are my own? I am confused and stunned.
As Heaven seems impossible, too grand,
So are your words, your earnest eyes, your hand.

AFTERNOON

I have known the afternoon, the changing light,
The copper sun, the gilded, stagnant hours,
The hot air swimming with the molten showers
Of sun-drops, smouldering and pale and bright.
Like a ripple of vague white fire, the thin sun smirks
Behind the heart-shaped leaves, mad with a whim
To dive through lilaced windows of some dim
Damp library flaking gold where darkness lurks,
Or thrust an arm of dusty light down through
Tall stained-glass windows of a church—an aisle
For angel feet. Then with the quavering smile
Of ancient age it sickens down the blue—
Faded and arrogant, dropped on its knees,
Drooping its rose-red plumes down through the
trees.

TAPS

My flags waved bravely high the day you came—
A drum beat constantly—it was my heart;
And strangely, though I didn't know your name,
Some voice inside me hinted of love's start.

And now a bugle blows at dusk as you
Depart—it's my lone cry to God above,
A plea to understand sunset—dark blue—
An evening star—a song—an ended love.

LET US HAVE LAUGHTER

Let us have laughter like the earth imparts,
One song of bright exuberance to sing,
One holiday of humor for our hearts,
Like the abandoned mirth of dancing spring.

For everywhere is high hilarity—
A prattling brook, the repartee of birds,
The radiant smile of dogs, the sun, the sea—
Let us have laughter twining through our words.

INDIAN SONG

Lovely and wild she ran like rain and rivers
Barefooted through the forest. Swift and lean,
A brave pursued her through the deepening green.
Ruddy and strong and slick he gleamed. Bright
slivers

Of laughter curled across the drowsy hills
As breathless she was captured in his arms,
Copper and smooth and warm with all the charms
Of the Indian evening soft with whippoorwills.

Smoke from the wigwams writhed skyward and slow,
And twilight was a legend. Through its sleep
Remote drums chanted anguishedly and deep.
The lover's black eyes softened. She bowed low
Her head upon his naked breast and he
Trampled her mouth with his in one long plea.

THE IDLER

You are a rushing and an anguished one,

Spending your fuel in the pushing crowds;

I am an old disciple of the sun,

I lie and watch the pantomime of clouds.

KISSES

Kisses are such funny things!

They flutter down like birds—
But off they flit on sudden wings
More volatile than words.

How memory forgets the taste,

And clamors to encore it!

But oh, it's such a wretched waste—

With nothing to show for it!

STRANGE BORDER-LAND

Strange border-land between the soul and God!

Whereon we set our faces, gauge our days,
And dare approach it boldly, courage-shod,
Uncertain of the vague, the unproved haze.

Oh dim horizon, shadowed, empty verge!

Out of a void of death we waked in birth—
Now we return, yet staunchly, for we merge
Our essence more with God than with the earth.

WHEN YOU PASS BY

To look up suddenly into your face

I am a spirited colt inside, and oh,
My slow, deliberate heart sets such a pace

I think it may leap from me! You may know
This strange, quick change and think it just a riddle,

But if you guessed my love you might know why
I throb just like the plucked strings of a fiddle,
Quite giddy and upset when you pass by.

A torch flares up within me, and the blaze

Burns higher every moment you are near,
And lower as you walk out of my gaze.

I watch you go, and when you disappear,
The fire goes out except a curling trace
Of smoke that is the memory of your face.

TENNIS COURT

The sun drizzles through leaves of trees
And pours in torrents
On the flat tan court,
Riotously.
It looks for a moment
Abrupt—
Intent—
And with final decision
Lies down in the sand
In a great white heap—
Sound asleep.
I think it loves the quiet court
By its crazed, wild surge—
And the brown players in white.
It searches their quick, tense eyes
With a brazen white stare,
And slides down
Polished bronze muscles
Of crouched, expectant legs.

The soft whack of balls
Is the single sound
That invades
The sleepy afternoon stillness—
Stillness like syrup.
Somehow
The moon strangely loves the court—
With a cold, white, passionless devotion,
And with magnificent dignity—
(Quite unlike the impetuous sun).
The regal moon
Lays her soft cheek
Against the tired sand,
And smooths out its wrinkles
With her limp, swan-like hands,
Sheer
Like fragile magnolias,
And sweeps off
Like a great lady
To let down her long white hair
On the tops of trees.

And the net across the court—
Slumping a little—
Is a ghostly yarn
Of spun spider lace—
Thin,
Motionless,
And vaguely white
In the dark.

AFTER

After love is gone and the débris stands
Bleak, alone, there is a strange calm peace
Like desperate prayer brings; and with willing hands
One fashions life anew. Resigned release
Of dreams and tears, excitement and the pain,
Makes love seem quite impossible—unreal;
One feels so tranquil, dignified, and sane—
No more indignant for the wounds will heal.

After the thrill is dead and the pain remote,
There's a pensive looking back with a little smile
Of mellow understanding to denote
Amusement, perhaps, or the great long while.
After the storm has left an awful track,
There is the quiet, hopeful building back.

I TURN TO YOU

I turn to you if living is all pain—
If all I do seems useless and in vain,
And I have more than one heart can contain,

Dear friend,
I turn to you.

And then I turn to you if I'm bubbling
With sudden joy, when winter is made spring,
And I must have someone to hear me sing,

Dear friend,
I turn to you.

I need to see your eyes—to feel your hand—
To watch your slow smile—hear your voice so
bland;

God bless you, dear, you always understand,

That's why
I turn to you.

PRAYER BEFORE AN OPERATION

God hear my prayer and quiet all my fright
As I go in an ether purgatory
And trust my life to bending men in white,
Whose flashing knives will presently grow gory
In silent hands. Those rubber-gloved, strong hands
Will need Thee, too, God. Let them never slip.
Guide nurses listening to low, brief commands
And give them steady and unflustered grip.

If there is shipwreck in that opal mist,
And I cannot emerge—cannot awake
Among white walls and strange fumes I've a tryst
With Thee—this much I know without mistake.
It is Thy choosing now which life is mine,
And if I wake up in a world divine.

VIGNETTE: LOVE

Love is a poor little urchin
Crying at the kitchen door
Of a human heart.

And oh, there are big open doors
With sunlight rippling through
On the clean-swept floors,
Where the tired little beggar
In rags and dirt—
Cold and hurt—
Finds full sustenance.

And oh, there are great selfish mansions
With deaf, closed doors—
Cold and immovable—
Where he exhausts himself
Crying for food.
No answer.
He will not stay and starve;
He moves on
To another door
Hungry.

TOSCANINI

Wild thunder in the hills in anguished roar,
And avalanches mighty, treacherous,
Uncouthly crashing down more riotous
Than city traffic and more rude, will soar
At Toscanini's will, and violin bows
Will grow articulate with sheer, thin sighs.
A dream from their small, tender souls soon flies
On treble wings pleading and pensive. Those
Chords dragging heavy feet thickly stop short.
A burst of jubilation, a mad snort
Flares boisterously and dissolute. Then flows
The tranquil horns. Sunbeams skip down a hill,
And morning on the meadow lies so still.

INVASION

Oh, must you come into my heart

And take me unawares—

Suddenly leaving in your wake

A thousand little cares?

Yours is a flaming victory,

I grandly fought and fell;

Claim me, or next time I shall build

A mighty citadel!

MADISON, GEORGIA

All yesterday and all tomorrow's here.

Behold these vain white columns, these austere
Old mansions of the strong but sheltered hearts—
With what erectness in their drear veneer.

With what humility small houses speak
Along the lanes. Their fresh red bricks are meek
And lenient, yet proud, for they embrace
A race that war and waste could not make weak.

Here in the hush of cotton fields is peace
And warmth and slow life like their whitening
fleece;
Here ancient oaks make tunneled avenues
Of green tranquillity that will not cease.

This sundial in this garden, that town clock
Atop the courthouse tower counts to lock
Away all pain in piled magnolia leaves,
And time and fury in a buried crock.

Oh, here the changeling and the valorous one
May find a shrine to break their hearts upon;
And rise uncringing, dauntless, and as strong
As Bona Hall and sovereign Thurlston.

WORDLESS

There never was a poem that I made
In tenderness but what I cast my scroll
At the dear feet of you—a serenade
Of words up to the window of your soul.

I want to love you, dear, in words—in words!
No candles have I that your eyes might see
Into my heart's deep room. Though thoughts in
herds
Stampede my brain they won't come out of me.

INSEPARABLE

Lodged immovable
In the soft mud
Of my soul—
The deep still mire—
Like ships off islands,
Are full moons and you—
Inseparable.
Bowls of yellowish-white
Brimming at the edge
Spill into the dark
A vague whiteness—
And below
The crooked, calloused fingers of trees
That joust with each other—
Like maddened knights—
Clutch and reach
To hold in their hands
The sallow face above;
And buds—
Half-open—

On leafless pecans
Peep around branches—
Like elves—
Their impudent heads
Drenched
In the curdling cold
Of wind,
While restless clouds—
Young snowy nothingness—
Like swift ice-bergs
In a gray sea—
Glide
Amoeba-like
Over the unblinking white
Of moon.
I imagine you are beside me,
At my window—
Seeing this—
Our souls talking,
Our bodies
Blended in blackness,
And the moon is putting silk
Into your uplifted eyes.

Yet
There are centuries of moons,
Interminable moons,
They are running—
Running—
Like pick-pockets
Racing through crowds of clouds
Down the lamplit streets
Of sky.

And I am running—
With a pulse-pounding madness,
Reaching out frantic fingers
For your love.

You are a vapor
Like those clouds—
A moon
That I can never touch.

EVERYONE I MEET

Let me find God in everyone I meet,
Even in those who keep the lowest level,
Knowing such poor, weak hearts are indiscreet,
For man was made half God and half the devil.

I am so quick to judge with such unkind,
Cruel sentences. Oh, let me understand—
Let me be tolerant. I am so blind,
And it is hard to see on some His brand.

Let me respect all those who pass my door—
Those half-angels in differing degrees;
Let me have faith in mankind more and more—
Christ walks abroad within “the least of these”.

PAGLIACCI

Under my laughter
Who knows the pain?
The cold in the heart,
The beat of the rain.

Under my laughter
Far out of sight,
Wails a lone child
Frightened with night.

Over my laughter
This is my crown:
The lunatic mask
Of a hideous clown.

THE CALM WORLD

Never forsake the calm world, oh my heart,
For to abandon it is to sell the soul.
Listen to beauty's idyll, read her scroll,
For the chameleon dawn is more than art,
And woodland meadows by a peaceful stream
That plaits a silver braid of flowing hair
Will rest the weary traveler like a prayer.
The silent places and a time to dream—
These are true luxury, the only gain.
The coming dusk soothes with its quiet repose,
A book of poems cools the brow of woes,
And mystic, moonlit nights are kind to pain,
Who leaves the calm world and its gentle fold
Knows poverty and famine and great cold.

SECRET

It's strange the way that I conceal
This love I have for you—
Why, everything I ever feel
I tuck away from view.

I speak to you in careless tones,
You never guess that I
Have placed you on a million thrones,
And set you in the sky.

I talk of petty, trifling things—
The weather or new books;
My hand that clasps yours never clings—
I cast such casual looks.

My grave thoughts I have hidden, too—
You see me flippant, gay;
I never once look back at you
When I saunter away.

Sometimes I meet you as I go
About—we smile and part;
And so you pass and never know
That lightning struck my heart!

THE FLEETING

A plane hoisted in sunset like black sails—
An instant pattern for one glimpse allowed—
Wantonly crossing blue and red-gold trails,
Clinging around the armpits of a cloud.

Now it is gone, a shining leaf soon whirled
Off unpossessed, a startled deer that sped;
So is it on this grounded human world—
The heart's fingers stretch out for what has fled.

MOOD

I wish you were a mood of mine
To come and soon depart;
But oh, without one farewell sign
You hang around my heart!

I cannot lose you though I've tried
So very, very hard—
You're one mood that with all my pride
I just cannot discard.

You're my worst habit that I would
Break quickly, but today
I can't forget that you have stood
Inside my heart's doorway.

SMILE NEVER!

Smile never! You who turn on me and shine—
Your face a lovely, outspread, painted fan
Unfolding barren sunrise before mine.
No luminary soul is in its span.
Why, when I walk into the zone of you,
Should you hand me an empty cup to share,
Or rum of shimmering eyes that is untrue,
When there's no healing and no blessing there?

You have not bothered yet to leave the door
Of your strange heart ajar. I cannot feel
That it's a stove to warm my hands before.
Oh, do not flood me with a fire unreal
When I know and you feel that it's a task!
Better the cold, cruel phrase than the actor's mask.

MEMORIES

Memories were meant for rainy nights.
They dream deep in the molten gold of embers
And sputter into flame. The heart remembers
Still with a little sting when all the lights
Are out for then the red-gold hearth becomes
A sunset long ago. Thus memory
Cobwebs a volume of old poetry
Whose binding rats have almost knawed to crumbs;
It is a dusty aura on the pages
Of yellowed letters, and it softly hangs
On city parks at night with little pangs,
And mellowed gardens dreaming out the ages.
So much awakens at a smile—like one
That once meant all the world and all the sun.

WINTER LANDSCAPE

Crystal trees like diamond chandeliers

Lie shattered in the lane. Oh what sweet pang
To stare on lawn shrubs statuesque with tiers
Of snow, to glimpse the world topped with me-
ringue!

ONE DAY WITH LOVE

One day with love is like a thousand springs.
One is forever haunted by those hours
Of laughter down a path of sunlit flowers,
When, swift as darting cardinals, little stings
Shot through two hearts so tremblingly aware
Of the lovely truth they shyly left unnamed,
When only flashes of the eyes proclaimed
Sweet dreams, or when love shimmered in a stare.

That was a poignancy nothing can transcend!
One stood in the midst of time and thought, "Oh,
 here,
Here for a golden moment he is near,
Soon he will go, and this enchantment end".
Oh to imprison all the fragrant musk
Of one day's love, its sacred dawn and dusk!

TO RUPERT BROOKE

I sat in grief, your book upon my knees,
And turned the pages musing on each leaf
Bewildered, and I thought: so young, so brief
In beauty till you scarce had time for these—
And now by iridescent fields of sea
You sleep, the scattered chaff, and this the wheat.
But no—much more than wheat. Here on this sheet
Are children of your soul, posterity
Of all you knew, and these can never die.
Your breath is in their lungs and no defeat
Can bruise their heels nor turn them in retreat.
And now I cannot sigh and say you lie
On Skyros island like a fallen god,
The poetry of your bone in scrolls of sod.

PRIDE

You have your pride and I have mine,
So let us smile and part;
The stubborn two cannot combine—
Not for a broken heart.

So strong the barriers inside,
Our proud hearts cannot yield;
Be glad there is no hurt to hide—
Pride is a mighty shield.

WORLDLY WOMAN

Tinseled and tenuous, you know but little
Of rose-gardenia life. Your hard, bright genus
Is city-bred, a flower vain and brittle,
A night-club anemone, a gaudy Venus
Of chiseled steel gone mad with lights and laughter
And screaming traffic where the spangled night
Strews city-lights like sequins. You lust after
A counterfeit existence bubble-bright.

Your lush and blood-red mouth absently browzes
Slow languid cigarettes and pink champagne,
Where orchestras blare loud and a crowd carouses
Till you with metal boredom show disdain.
Is this your creed with innocence unused?
Then simple, precious things make you amused.

MY DEATH BED

Slow, flickering like faded music, I
Shall pause before I watch the sun go out,
And call you to my bed that I may lie
Liquid and crumbling within your brown, stout,
Trembling arms with my pillow your breast.
Death will be sparkling then and the brittle tick
Of the stern, unyielding clock may try its best
To harass me with its eternal click.

More mystical than death is horrible
The grandeur of your love will flood me while
In the aching silence, dark and merciful,
You watch noon flee my face, and with a smile
You'll sing to me, as usual, with great
Bells in your throat until the hour is late.

EAGLE NESTS

Eagle nests on balconies of rocks
Stand high like fortresses from sudden gusts
Of tortured wind and all the weather's lusts,
And calmly house their puzzled eaglet flocks.

Eagle nests sit proud and adamant,
Knowing a home of strength, a granite tower,
Begets compelling victors with swift power
Long pent-up for the grounded supplicant.

ISAAC AND REBEKAH

He watched the golden caravan depart

Laden with gifts, and prayed it would not falter.

Rebekah was the name etched on his heart—

His bride for Sarah's tent, his love's young altar.

Soon she would walk among the herds and flocks

Of Hebron and sit long beneath the oaks,

And she would flash her smile and shake her locks,

And softly, gently she would lift the yokes

Of all his cares. One day across the sand

The camels loomed. He lifted up his eyes.

She shimmered there among the dusky band—

Lo! She! the young, the beautiful, the wise,

Who blushed and dropped her veil. Trembling he

ran

Across the fields to hail the caravan.

MIRROR LESSON

“I am a brave woman,” I said with pride,
“One with a soul of steel to bear all things!”
I marveled at my citadel inside—
Invincible and ironclad to life’s stings.
Care, Drudgery, and Pain had made me so—
And it seemed Worry picked me to harass.
I had borne more than all the world could know;
I saw a strong face in my looking-glass.

That very day a great wind gushed along
And swept the flowers that I loved away.
Bewildered, stripped of dreams, a woman strong
Wept bitterly and humbly and that day
Passing the mirror caught sight of a tear;
The glass breathed out, “Look at yourself, my
dear!”

RAINBOW

I watched a rainbow through my human tears,
Stretching its peacock's tail across the sky
And, seemingly, across my futile years.

It came as God's magnificent reply

To one whose heart was whimpering with rain,
And blazed a trail to Him, a pastel aisle,
Victorious and brave above my pain—
And over my defeat I placed a smile.

MARIE ANTOINETTE

She pauses on the gilded, broad staircase,
Dainty in her rose and gray brocade.
The courtiers bow with handkerchiefs of lace
Sweeping to the floor. She stands arrayed
With sculptured, powdered hair. Her coquette smiles
Flash like her jewelled breast. And down the stairs
She glides out to the maze of garden aisles,
Ablaze with red and yellow flowered squares.

A fountain thrusts its sword-blade in the sun,
And echoes laughter of a music-box.
On marble seats she sits—a gilded one,
A painted pastoral with powdered locks—
And sighs between the flutters of her fan,
And dreams of minuets—perhaps a man.

STRANGE DAWN

I watched spell-bound the strange dawn in your eyes
Of candles that I never thought would burn;
Old lights had fled; instead I could discern
A thousand holy stars flicker and rise.

My head was mad as rhumbas; and my throat
Ached dully; all the dreams that I exiled
Rushed back, hot, eager, panting, young and wild;
In those still lakes I saw your soul afloat.

There was the quiet of old English lanes
Within them and the cool of twilight seas;
But oh, the torches there refused to freeze,
Or lose the tinselled shine of poured champagnes.

I turned and sought the night, the trees, to stand
In black lace shadows—and as tenderly
As if a crucifix I held to me—
Your love was resting in my trembling hand.

PHOENIX

There is a glory in recovery—
The convalescence of a broken heart,
For courage was designed first by the art
Of bitterness—and strength was never free.

How beautiful the brave, the valiant ones!
Their white hair and their faces etched and lined
Like charts! How loving, tolerant and kind!
Across the hour of need their calm strength runs.

Most dreamers fall to earth with a broken wing,
And blind men grope awhile starving for light—
But break of day strikes through the long black
 night,
And God who raged with winter soothes with spring.

FAITH

I have a faith in love—a faith in love
Untainted as white Mary, rose of God,
Pure, clean as holy water, and above
All, sheltered from man's sacrilege. Like sod
Is its freshness, solid abiding strength;
It stands like rocks at sea from hands of fools;
Eternity is meager by its length,
And it is deep as moonlight in dark pools.

Gentle and sensitive, it rises tall
As a poet's soul, and no less lovelier—
And fragile as a woman's heart with all
The beauty of the motherhood of her.
I have a faith in love—love without loss—
Though once my love hung helpless on a cross.

I LOVE TO HEAR

I love to hear a child's low prayers,
And laughter floating down the stairs,
A waltz, a violin that grieves,
The taffeta rustle of dry leaves,

A surgeon's clanking instruments,
And boughs scraping on canvas tents,
Wind in the trees before the rain,
Sleet bombarding my windowpane,

And birds at dawn, a fire alarm,
Wild city traffic, "Liebestraum",
A plane, and Negroes who rejoice,
Low thunder in the sea, your voice.

LAKE AT DAWN

Pink in the marble lake the cold dawn quivers
Across the trembling ripples to the line
Of the tall, stiff grasses and the deep woodbine.
A broad-hipped oak humped up and sagging shivers
And swaggers in the wind. The cat-tails rust,
Their scepters brown with dust. The hanging vines
Immerse their muscled arms and crooked spines,
Leaning too low across the water's crust.

The stars have dropped into the lake and drowned
In the darkness, and sky is buried deep
In the pale gray soul of it. You are asleep—
Drowned in your' dreams, your hair waving around
Your pillow in a pool. Soon you will wake,
And it will stir and ripple like this lake.

TO A PHILOSOPHER

You are a harbor that the gales have blown,
And in your yearless heart white gulls have flown
And silvered in the sunlight there. The tired,
Slow homing boats have made your lone port
known.

And in your breast you keep old sailor's tales
Ready to tell, and songs to sing of sails
Leathered from wind and storm upon their skins,
And of great fish, the killer sharks and whales.

You are a kindly beacon on the vast
Uncertain tides, and I shall turn my mast
And harken to your light and pass the reef;
For I am not the first and not the last.

DISTANCE

The distance to this evening star is less
Than that which stands between us. Undressed space
Floats measureless, and far beyond—your face—
A light surrounded by dark loneliness.

No cosmic miracle can yet impress
That heart that it is loved untouched, unseen—
The universe that stands gaping between
Divides our worlds, and mine the wilderness.

BACK TO NATURE

I shall turn my back on the world of man's veneer,
With its hard bright lights and tawdry neon signs,
With its painted bill-boards where the high-ways
smear
Long woodland hills with artificial lines.

I shall spurn with a stern disdain man's gaudy world,
For the gloom of deepening woods and spicy sod,
For the sunny meadows by a stream unfurled—
I shall turn my steps into the gardens of God.

SPRING

Today spring breathed fresh green onto my lawn.

I shall sit on my terrace listening to
The white song of dogwoods. This speechless dawn
Of new life wandered down my avenue
Unheard. I turned to see the squill's blue heads,
Blond sunlight splashing on white porches—now
Lying in pools in saintly iris beds,
Vines in chaos, and a new apple bough.

And you are spring to me—all that it means

To a faded winter world. You are new green
To my dry brown soul. And my spirit leans

To yours as lithe buds seek the sun to glean
Its gold. Oh, I pray to the God of all
Springs, "Keep our love this—let not winter call".

UNTAMED

Barefooted I was one lamplit and strong,
Detached from adult cares, modeled for play,
Intrepid, marking time to childhood's song
With mischief and a will not to obey.

Shoeshod I struggle disciplined and set
In strict appointment with the day's duty;
And in bound, weary ceremony yet
The child, the little beast, blurts out in me.

FUNERAL

This is your funeral. You died today,
Although you walk and smile and toss your head,
You are a corpse to my eyes—you are dead.
At last my insane love has flown away.

Oh many the times you brought tears to my eyes,
But now I can not weep. There is no pain.
When love is killed, its life knows no regain—
Love has no resurrection once it dies.

WHEN I AM OLD

When I am old it will be good to rest—
A dusty, cracked antique set in my niche
Somewhere about the house. I shall be rich
Reading neglected books. I shall be blessed
To sleep long in the sun, my head sunk back
On the strong male shoulders of a great armchair.
Life will be soft and still and like a prayer.
Out in the garden roses shall not lack
My care in dewy mornings, and the dog
And I will meet outside the garden gate
To take long walks. Then by my window late
At sundown I shall watch the sad gray fog
Veil all the city lights, and it will creep
Over my memories and give me sleep.

LEST THE FRAGRANCE FAINT

Love knows not reason. Why explain, define
Its fabulous design, its very germ?
But let it burst in bloom and freely twine,
For the most precious spurns the labelled term.

Oh never analyze your love, my heart,
Inquire not for the mystic formula,
Nor seeking tear the petalled rose apart,
Lest all the fragrance faint, the beauty scar.

EVENTIDE

Slowly the walls of sky burn down and gloam,
Lank grasses in the wind salaam and nod—
As herds in the lap of fields file off for home,
My heart at twilight finds the fold of God.

MUSE ON A BEACH

There is a moon-aisle in the sea tonight—

A flashing, twinkling trail—a road of stars
Down through a sweep of water black and bright;

These last lone winds are sad, whining guitars,
Oh sweet, forsaken winds—they are my balms.

I watched the sea soak up the sun today,
Till twilight smoked the tousled heads of palms—

This hungry sea soon nibbled off each ray.

And now I walk the beach—far in the night,

Breathing to stars how much I want your love;
I feel it more tonight, and with the might

Of sea—great as this blue prairie above.

O heart, only a dreamer understands

You and your silly love—these foam-fringed sands.

STEPPING STONES

I walk on islands in a sea of grass,
On white rocks that have weathered rain and sun;
And every blurring twilight time I pass
I count the silly series one by one.

Within my home I shut the door and pause
To curse this horrid soul of muddy clay,
Repenting, counting—while the hot pain gnaws—
The many hearts I've walked on through the day.

REMINISCENCE

Down on my father's farm when I was young,
I watched the autumn moon settle upon
The chicken yard. Frosty and red it hung
There framed in peach tree limbs. Then one by one
The white hens in the shed turned specter hosts
As moonbeams touched them, and two turkeys
bold
Stood tall above the arbor like black ghosts.
I watched their silhouettes against the cold
Night sky and marveled at that moon-struck pair.
And I recall the gourd vines sketched upon
The fences like strange skeletons put there
To scare my childish heart—I would not run.
I could not go to bed and leave the sight—
That silver-tipped and chill October night.

TROUT STREAM

The mountains stand and dream but never they—

These strong young children from the wilds of
dawn,

Who bounding up the stairs of falls and spray

Have claimed a cold clear stream where they may
spawn.

I think some clueless planet knew the reign

Of this quartz race now here in caravan,

That they like flash of swords should so disdain

The monarchy of artful, unkind man.

LIST

Here is a list of what a woman loves :

Geraniums red as sunrise, sea-shore sand,
The strong, coarse scent of ground coffee, and pray-
er,

Eyes, and their eloquence, the shocking glare
Of sunlight after sleep, the way men stand,
Carrots with mermaid bodies, children's swings,
And children playing in the garden trees,
Vows, deep wine-red plush, and after these—
Perfumes, discreet and soft—dear, ancient things—
Antiques, and the rich, lush feel of draperies,
The gentle things—the parted lips of flowers,
Whispers of night-rain, and the deep, still hours
Of love and longing, poems, melodies,
And kitchen sights—red jam, the dimpled pores
In cheese, the even teeth of corn on cobs,
And kitchen sounds—especially the sobs
Of dripping water faucets—little chores
That fill days to the brim, cookbooks, and then
The jingle of ice in glasses, the clenched fists
Of cabbage—memories that come in mists—
The strange soul of a room—and, perhaps, men.

SOLITARY WALK

I walk alone when the world's alone and still,
When evening deepens down the moors of sky,
And crags of lathered clouds swirled westward lie
Like island slopes. A rail fence climbs a hill.
The sun burns out and leaves me here alone
To raise my own voice in me. I am free
To hear the beat of heart and feet, and be
An undivided thing. I am my own.

Night, cold and whispering, suffuses gloom.
A clock with two bright eyes against the sky
Stares like a lover from afar. The high,
Dark world is a mausoleum, an empty womb.
I loiter in the lane for as I pass,
I hear God breathing deeply in the grass.

DESIRE IN MOONLIGHT

The moon's solemnly white

And shining sadly,

I want you so tonight—

So very badly!

My heart would be a kite

Up flying gladly,

If you loved me—and quite

A little madly.

GOD BENDS ABOVE THE BATTLEFIELD

God bends above the battlefield, so still
And anxious through the silent, starlit night—
Spreading his saving love across the chill
Of trembling hearts that knock and pound with
fright.

God hovers on the hours before a raid,
To comfort all the timorous who start
At the cannon's flare, the static serenade
Of grim machine guns. So His mighty heart
Keeps vigil on the fields breathless with death,
And as the darkened moments pass He hears
The prayers of men poured out with quick, tense
breath.

How He must long to free them from their fears!
And looking deep into their earnest eyes,
Surely God turns His head and softly cries.

PARTING

A door closed—closing out the very sun,
Not one peek can I have. It's tightly barred
Against more entrances, for what begun
Was ornamental flame so bright it charred.

Oh, I should shrug my shoulders, think it best,
And grunt amusedly, or sigh a bit—
But why should I forever without rest
Hunt for a key when none are made to fit!

SO MUCH TO LOVE

Life has the strangest little ways,
But who can fret and sigh,
When so much beauty fills our days
With songs of earth and sky.

Life has a thousand naughty whims—
Its notions curse or bless;
But all along our path there brims
A world of loveliness.

When life goes laughing through the earth,
And smiles in skies above,
Who cannot sing with joy and mirth
When there's so much to love.

THE CONNOISSEUR

I am a connoisseur of every love—
The warm security and strength, the blessed,
The bitter loss, the tragic second best,
The love of virtue, plain and yet above
The love of beauty with its stricken eyes,
The transient and the tarrying, the bold
And shy, the understood and the untold
Mystery of love beyond surmise.

And suddenly it is not worth the while—
The insane bliss, anxiety and fears,
Perhaps indifference and midnight tears,
And thinking of it thus I only smile—
But meeting you I, who was wiser then,
Unravel all this madness once again.

A CHILD'S FOURTH OF JULY

We were just children finding an excuse
To celebrate and play a newer game—
Such little hearts could not have known of truce
And independence. Ah, but just the same
There never were such patriots as we—
We marched in tom-tom time, and we would start
The national anthem (just a bit off-key),
Our strange newspaper hats coming apart—
But even then our solemn grand parade
Down all the side-walks in the neighborhood
Had majesty. It was a real brigade.
Flags wagged their tails above us. It was good
To prate of peace not knowing and not glum,
To sing and march when Johnny spanked his drum.

TO MY FUTURE HUSBAND

I shall marry you because of this :

We think and feel the same ; your heart and mine
Are much akin—not for the way you kiss,

That your soft eloquence is past divine,
Or that your touch makes me electric. These

I shan't consider. There's a greater thing.
Your looks, however stunning, will not please
Me, nor the way you laugh or dance or sing.

My dear, the inner you, the heart, the mind

Beyond your outer charms will fascinate
Me always. And some mornings you will find

Fond poems I have slipped into your plate,
For if you love all truth and gentle beauty,
My loving you will never be a duty.

ELMS

Oh for the elms, sculptored in music, deep
In reverie! A surf of quivering jade
Tangled with sun-silt, dim with cloistered shade
Around the monk-like bark. Lordly they sleep
Like old philosophers in brooding dreams—
A confidence in great eternal things
Upon them, and a courage in their wings—
A sermon and a poem with the themes
And texts man fashions all his mute creeds with.
Cool lifted hand beseeching with green prayers!
My heart and I stand serious. Awe flares
And smothers me like some enchanted myth.
Lift, lift, my faith in April! Overwhelm
My spirit like the quiet soul of an elm.

MY CROSS

Down in the little church in me,
The cloister deep within,
You were my shrine, my Calvary,
And, ah, you were my sin.

But softly down the arching way
Of my cathedral heart,
My dreams, like monks, will chant and pray
And stealthily depart.

So hard the road, so long the climb—
Without you it is so:
I stagger up the ways of Time—
Beneath a cross I go.

APRIL SHOWER

This silver rain is one great ticking clock.
Spring told me that its music is no dirge,
But that behind a white, slumped garden rock
Some snowy Easter lilies would emerge.

This white-gold rain is one low, sleepy chant—
A mumbled lullaby from April's lips;
I know God's beauty soon will run rampant—
Like Christ be resurrected from deep crypts.

This bright quartz rain has taken full command
All down my block, and it is cruel to rinse
The ants' brick-red volcanoes in the sand
Away; but oh, it brings gardens of chintz!

LOQUACITY

The thousand tongues of heart and mind
Stay busy with their views,
Like gossiping old ladies armed
With sewing-circle news.

And listening to their voices,
And their incessant din,
I talked myself right into love,
And then right out again.

GRANDMOTHER'S TALES

I listened patiently to every tale
Grandmother told, and gallantly I bore
Monotony. So many times before
I'd heard them from her lips till they were stale—
She was forgetful, being eighty-seven,
And talked of the Civil War and life back then
Until I'd hate to hear of it again.
She loved the sorrows and the trace of heaven
That streaked those days with little frowns and
smiles.

And yet, until I took her dear, worn hand,
And stepped into that musty, magic land
Of dreams, until I walked across the miles
Of years, I did not know what life can bring,
And how the past is such a lovely thing.

ECSTASY

Your soul is a cloud of moonlight, gray and deep,
A fog of dream-smoke beautiful and fleet
That trembles over me opaque as sleep,
Breathing on my heart opium-sweet.

Your soul is an ancient garden, dim with shade,
Elaborate as roses by a pool—
You creep on me like moss on marble sprayed
With fountain-silver—sad, perfumed and cool.

Oh, I inhale you, faded as you are,
With your bright disintegration, and your lush
Ripe wormwood thoughts, your mind's gay, rich
bazaar,
Our moments elegant and red as plush.

When you are near I whirl in rose-gray mist,
I form and I dissolve a thousand times,
And stagger with your hand that I have kissed,
And drown within your laughter, low as chimes.

Gather me to your palace with your eyes,
Your brocade hair, your alabaster hands.
Oh do not pour me out with many sighs,
And turn my feet to more plenteous lands.

Your spirit stifles me like minor tones
Of a piano softly touched as blue,
Dusk shadows deepen while the twilight moans,
And my being aches with ecstasy of you.

AS THE WIND IS BORN

Dark weariness is charioted on arms
 Protesting and religious and so pale
With dead sapphires, and crys high over farms
 And swamps and fields. Blue tyranny of hail
Will smash down lattices of black-green moss
 Long stitched to cracks in gray, unhurried walls.
I am indignant as I watch the loss,
 And walk dazed up and down my sheltered halls.

Red, faithless banners of left, tattered leaves
 Must throb on warrior limbs, and thin, gray
 streams
Must shudder in stiff ringlets. What sky grieves
 In moaning black that wind makes smoking dreams
Soon splatter into mangled mud? All dies
As the wind is born—worn laughter and dim sighs.

WHAT YOU'VE TAUGHT ME

You have taught me more
Than any book could teach me;
What you are
Has done more for me
Than any sermon
I ever heard.

Silently
You have made me bigger,
Higher than I was;

Silently
I am grateful.
My life was a ditty
That you made a symphony,
Because I stopped for a moment
And listened
To the music of yours.

My life was prose
That you made poetry,
Because through your eyes
I saw beauty
In the obscure places.

Unknowingly
You have sculptored my soul
With your kind, lovely hands.
You have carved the rude, rough part of it
Into symmetry—
The unlovely into the lovely.
What others would have done
With hammer and chisel
You have done
By being the person you are.
All this you have wrought in my nature—
And more,
Because—
No, I do not know why,
I cannot say,
Unless
It is because
You are the one I love.

THE SOUL OF A DOG

A dog has a soul and a seed of God,
His love is his faith and creed—
But Heaven has not one place for dogs,
And I think it's unfair indeed!

A dog has not half man's vice and sin,
His pride nor his hate nor greed—
But Heaven has not one place for dogs,
And I think it's unfair indeed!

A dog is as meek as the lowly Christ,
As ready to die or bleed—
But Heaven has not one place for dogs,
And I think it's unfair indeed!

NOCTURNE

The swaying moonlight lulls the world to gray.

Here is a moment on a hidden height

For two lone souls before the savage day

Steals this cloud-thing from out the glistening
night.

Remote and vague, caught high above the earth,

We stand like shadowed echoes—hushed and
steep;

Oh, your love cannot bear dawn's violent birth—

Through sacred trees I count dreams like dead
sheep.

HUMAN FALLIBILITY

The heart is so irrational!
I'd live more perfect days
If logical precision
Could regulate its ways.

A passion can upset it,
A weakness take command—
It's wayward pulse will rise and fall
Like sea against the land.

I envy an existence
Unbroken in accord—
Life would have no surprises,
But there'd be more reward.

Some only need be shown a thing,
They do it and they love it—
I always know just what to do,
But oh! the doing of it!

SPRING TREES

Once more young starlit leaves flutter and fly,
 Quivering like moth-wings on the thin, new spires
Of nervous limbs that sway against the sky,
 Now irritable with birds long in their choirs.

Summer will have a deeper, sane design,
 But the subtle, the illusive has begun—
In lace and organdy the spring trees shine,
 Shaking their curled, blond ringlets in the sun.

HOUSEWIFE'S PRAYER

Give me Thy face, O Christ, to wear today,
Lest I should frown if my roast burns—Thy joy
That every salesman, beggar, grocer boy
Will see Thy smile—and children in from play.

Thy calm white patience, kindness, love, I ask—
And sympathy to soothe my neighbor's grief;
O Lord, I do not ask a screen or mask,
But Thy spirit as sunlight through a leaf.

POET'S WISH

If I had one brave, understanding heart—
Just one with whom I could philosophize,
And count our little thoughts, our how's and why's,
And measure with our souls life's science and art,
I would give up the field's gay plaids, the woods
Fresh from the outbreak of spring green and walk
There never, quite content to sit and talk
As serious as shattered rain. Our moods

Would not be tragic, but our feelings strong
As lighthouses above blue stars. A church,
A sanctuary we would build and search
The heart of humankind. But oh, why long?
My soul held your soul close one afternoon;
Then you were gone—but soon came down the moon.

COUNTRY WALK

A grosgrain ribbon splits a lustrous hill
Into and parts the shaggy manes of grass
That spring has polished overmuch. I pass.
A long imprisoned cadence drops down shrill.

And damp plowed ground smells cool, fragrant, and
fresh.

The furrows in a corduroy tide
Have unsuspected maxims to confide
To me, their dust kin, child of their own flesh.

THE ENEMY IN WAR

Naturally one hates the enemy—

The merciless deserve no sympathy.

And yet deep in the hostile ranks they go—

The good, the kind, the beautiful—no foe.

Although majorities may lust to kill,

A man or two must fight against his will.

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MARY'S CHILD

(A Christmas Poem)

My child and Mary's—let them be playmates,
Though all the children of the neighborhood
Should whisper in my child's ear, "Goody-good!"
He will not mind; but silly, childish hates
Will go with this new little Play-mate near,
Whose father was a carpenter. He's strong,
And brave, and not a sissy. He's along
When toes are stumped to wipe away each tear.

My child and Mary's—let them grow up how
They should. Let my child take the stress and strife
As soldier-like as his Chum all through life.
Oh, let them be such close comrades, and now
As Junior sleeps among his Christmas toys,
God, let him dream he's like the Boy of boys.

LUXURY

Luxury is not spiritless gain—

 Insipid wealth that rusts while it yet gleams;
It is the time one takes and takes in vain
 To sit down and parade one's little dreams.

DEEP WONDER

Oh what could make a sky so hugely tall,
A germ so microscopically small,

And earth on such a vast, tremendous scale,
Designed minutely to the last detail?

I cannot think it mere coincidence—
It shows an architect's intelligence.

This Thing, this Being—some, perhaps, would call
It nature reasoning that God is all

Too mystical, impractically odd.
Then nature is another name for God.

In doubtful moments when I would decide
That death ends all it quickly is denied—

The world is so impossible to me,
If earth is so, oh what can heaven be!

LOVELORN

I am in love with life
And life with me—
But life is a careless lover,
I can see.

For he would leave me
With the slightest whim,
Yet I would cling
Eternally to him.

I would forgive his faults
That cause me tears,
If I could share his presence
Through the years,

But like most lovers
Life and I must part—
Oh can you blame my tears,
My breaking heart!

LINES FOR ELIZABETH BARRETT
BROWNING

Delicate you were, and frail; but strong
The spirit and the fire that lit your being.
Through hours long with pain a dreamer's song
Embroidered with a woman's subtile seeing
Was made as much immortal as its theme.
Cloistered your life until he came, and dim
Your silent, darkened room. The only beam
Of daylight was the quickening spark of him—

Him who stirred your depths and opened wide
The closed shutters of heart with but a note
Or word—who, calling on you, could not hide
Immaculate emotions. So you wrote
With trembling fingers in the candle light
What all love feels but only you could write.

RETURN

It's been so long—so long since I have prayed.
Somehow I turned my back and walked away
Briskly from God's throne. I left quite gay
And independent, strangely unafraid.

My footsteps echoed on the palace floor—
I did not care. Head high I walked down through
The courtyard, past the gates, vanished into
The shifting mob that mills outside God's door.

Ah, it took pain to bring me back to Him—
Footsore and weary, in a beggar's state,
One day I reappeared outside the gate,
Stumbled along the courtyard sadly grim.

A rose lifted a recognizing face,
The fountain spun a twinkling web of song;
Hot, tired and weak I slowly trudged along
To the King's chamber, fearful of my disgrace.

I fell at His feet. "Lord, I feel my wrong—
I am a traitor", I tried to explain;
God said, "I did not want to cause you pain;
I've just not seen your face, child, in so long".

RAIN

Let the rain pat my cheeks
With its slim, frail hands—
I like it.

I shall throw back my head
Far.

While the silly people
Flee to their porches,
I know that every rain-drop
Holds a star.

It will curl my hair
And canter over
My damp forehead
With its tiny wet hoofs;
I shall kiss
Its cool, dainty fingertips,
And watch
Molten silver
Pouring off roofs.
So it is with tears.

I shall rise
Kite-like
Above the earth—
Soaring exultant
Through rain
For here are strands
Of gray-blue thread
Spun with silver—
Yards and yards
Unfolding,
Crumpling and shimmering
On the ground.
I shall rise
Triumphant
While the world of men flees—
Crying
For the sun.

DRAMA

To watch the seasons merge from spring to winter,
Who hasn't, in that pageant, felt so small
A spectator to see spring's actors enter,
And summer play until the cue for fall.
What breathless dramas move upon the stage
Of wheat-fields where high balconies of clouds
Above them ache with summer rain and rage.
Then slowly down the uplands creep the shrouds
Of blue mist, and the brown leaves softly shatter
On lawns like crisp, spilled cereal. Demure,
Slow snow-drops start their stealthy little patter,
And snow puts dust-sheets on the furniture
Of a deserted world, and someone leaves
The icicles, like prisms, on the eaves.

TO HITLER

Should you conquer Earth you would be small;
Worlds innumerable reel by too tall

For your ambitions. You cannot invade
The boundaries of space, the barricade

That shields the stars and scorns your battle-cry,
And what are plains of earth to those of sky?

Should you shatter Earth you would be nil;
Death will defeat your steel, intemperate will.

Time is the conqueror and time will fell
The savage god to a forgotten hell.

Only the seas on German shores will raise
Their arms and whisper "Heil" and roar your
praise.

Batter the citadel of God and beat
With the angry iron and witness the defeat

Of man warring on God—for in an age
Children in school will idly scan your page

Of history. These will be your remains:
Paper the hero—paper his campaigns.

ORGAN AT TWILIGHT

Where is the man whose soul is not set free,
When through soft twilight come slow organ notes
Set in a sacred hymn's old melody
Full, gushing from the pipes, its throbbing
throats?

Tones quivering like tiny frightened birds
Come winging trembling flights like some sad plea,
And thrill with power of impassioned words
The lover of such sanctified beauty.

Through fields in blurring twilight gently floats
A shawl of song like dusk that clothes each hill
With trailing tassels of long lingering notes;
And all the shadowed valleys echoes fill.

Low, soothing, with a touch as soft as love,
And woven like the fabric of a dream,
They flutter down and hover like a dove—
Unlocking flood-gates of dim memory's stream.

Except from heaven's choir of angels bright,
I think there is no sweeter music known;
If there's a man not flushed with warm delight
At this, he's not a being but a stone.

INFANTILE VERACITY

Bright noisy elves on sudden wings—
O children are unsubtile things!

And no adult hypocrisy
Cheapens their aristocracy,

And yet how children can devise
Lies staggeringly great in size!

EXIT

God cast me
In His magnificent drama—
A new actor,
Before an audience
Kind and critical—
A new actor,
Spoiled and inexperienced,
To play
Tragedy and comedy—
A new actor,
Oh, I have played so many parts—
Persons:
Gentle and arrogant,
Erudite and ignorant,
Sane and ridiculous,
Niggard and noble;
And some were over-done,
And some lacked feeling—
So it went
To the last act.

I knew as the curtain fell
I played with blunders,
But there roared
A waterfall of applause—
And then,
Flowers,
Flowers,
Flowers,
I was tired.
I did not mind
If the footlights were extinguished,
The costumes hung up,
The grease paint packed neatly away
In the little tin kit,
If the show was over,
If there was stillness
In the dark, empty theater,
My Director said to me,
“Well done,
Good and faithful!”

THE HOUSE LOVE BUILT

Love built a little house for me,
And when I enter in,
No earthly thing can touch me there
Where love has been.

The rooms were made for cozy nights,
The hearth is snug and warm,
The walls were built so straight and high
To stand the storm.

So let the wind and rain beat down,
And let the storm clouds soar—
I run into my little house
And shut the door.

WAR

Acorns will fall. Pine needles will not halt.
Nor shift of violet sands in desert sun.
White shores will be washed clean by surf of salt
And ruff of foam. The world is not yet done.

But Death slinks through green meadows past the
sheep,
And hides his face behind an apple tree,
To crush the quiet houses in their sleep
Till little towns are shattered pottery.

And further on the pitted cheeks of earth
Are scarred the more. And ground creaks with
great guns.
And dirt reeks with the dead—and still more birth
Of swords from ploughshares for the stumbling
sons.

Oh why are men so cheap and scorned and brief?

Why must there be the pain and dread that grips
The loved ones with their fearful dared belief,
And dying groans from kissed and much-loved
lips?

Here where the calm chrysanthemums still nod
Yellow and shaggy I on bended knees
Ask with the wonder of the Christ, "My God,
My God, oh why hast Thou forsaken these?"

WOMAN OR LADY?

One day I flung these questions to my mind;
What is a lady? What art, what design
Lifts her above the rest of womankind?
And so I wondered. I could not define
A lady. And that very afternoon
I had tea with an heiress. Luxury
Was all around. Oil paintings. Etchings. Soon
I mused: here, surely, is a born lady.

And then she criticized a friend. To hear
Such catty, cruel remarks! I'm sure I frowned.
But reaching home I heard my kind maid cheer
The sad cook. In that drawing-room I found
A woman—wealthy, cultured, and presumed,
In my kitchen—a lady unassumed!

FOR GOD AND ME

There's only room for God and me
When sunset stills the world,
Before the brunette night bends down
Where once the long light curled.

No one shall speak but God and me,
The sunset and the birds—
No other voices shall intrude
To break the spell with words.

I cannot look enough. I ache,
I burst with lover's pain
To clutch the sky against my breast,
And never let go again.

The beauty of the sun-red sky
Is so beyond our bearing,
We shall be selfish, God and I,
Alone, aloof, unsharing.

A HANDSHAKE

A handshake is a brief circuit set up
For a staid belief that anchors and imparts
An upheld trust, a code, a lifted cup—
A treaty signed and sealed with hands and hearts.

MIRTH IN MY DIRGE

I am swift, sapless metal—and tameless
Of all but the one dark pestilence;
I, light-winged and quivering with loveliness,
Shall shudder proudly, but the blind, intense
Tears trumpeted on earth I shall not know.
Dancing and dreaming, mad as autumn leaves,
I shall be tangled, but with mirth I go,
And like a vision caught as the green sea heaves.

Ashes and sparks of me will rest in moss—
Mighty and withered—unextinguished still;
And so perhaps some tree will moan the loss
Of a wild, bright bird—impetuous and shrill;
Lightning I was, but now a muffled glow,
For I am caged—laughing—but none can know.

THIS HUMAN STRENGTH

I wandered on until the haggard length
Spent my strength.

Sleepless I wandered, unassured and tired—
Uninspired.

Until I gave God intimate control
Of this soul.

Awe-struck I mused why I did not at first
Quench my thirst.

ENVIRONMENT

Valleys are by nature gay and snug,
Designed to shut away the cares of earth;
All snuggled deep and warm within the hug
Of mountains, their philosophy is mirth.

Mountains tall in white turbans of snow
Hold quiet peace and calm for they conclude
That solitude is kind to wounds and woe,
And to the mortal ills of mind and mood.

SCIOLISM

There is so much to learn, so much to know
Of science and art of all the world's great store—
Deep knowledge one must arduously stow,
And find it sneaking out the mind's back-door.

Of earthly erudition my own share
Is one infinitesimal vain part;
Lovers of books, can any dark despair
Equal it! Oh how it breaks the heart!

GOD, YOU ARE STRANGE

God, You are strange with Your great empty face,
All made of clouds and of sky and of space.

God, You are vague—but when I was a child
I saw You well in my fancies wild.

You sat like a king on the Great White Throne,
And judged all the people who came to atone.

But Your face was so blurred, like a piece of space,
And You looked like a man with a phantom's face.

But now I can only look up at the sky
To wonder how You are so wide and so high—

And I am so tiny, and I am so small,
God, You are strange—strange to see me at all!

YOUR VOICE

Your voice! Your voice! The violins in your voice
Will haunt my heart long after they have fled
Into the wind and lost themselves. Unsaid,
Bold rapture rises in me to rejoice!
When words waltz off your lips my listening hands
Gather them all like flowers, so they'll bloom
When velvet still hangs scent-like in my room,
And in some pensive world my lone heart stands.

Oh you are music! Body, soul, and all
Of you! You strike an unsung chord in me
That sets my being throbbing like the sea
Until I shake like elms along the wall.
Like silver splinters fall in slants of rain,
Your lovely voice comes singing down my brain.

NO RESENTMENT

Though life is impudent
And bullies me,
I don't resent such
Rude effrontery.

Today I saw a blind man
With his cup
Smile limp, dull eyes
And lift those starved things up.

A GREEN SWEATER

A green sweater that once embraced brown skin
Has long hung in the closet of my heart,
For I remember it more than your grin;
It felt the beating heart of you. A part
Of you it was—a thing as colored, warm,
And rough as you were, till I surely thought
I'd never see the day that time could harm
The funny thing, but I was then untaught.

How moth-eaten in spite of what I said!
Though it meant more than all the others wore;
Amusing how I loved its every thread.
Today I opened wide my closet door
And how I laughed aloud! That thing! I threw
Your sweater out and hung up something new!

AS FRIENDS WE COME

As friends we come—the gentle Christ and I—
Just friends who sit down in a shady place
Beside an ancient well—He from the sky
And I the dust but there's no caste. His face
Erect and ruddy turns to mine. My wall
Of sin is Jericho again. His hand
Rears pyramids of gold thought and lets fall
White flakes of hope like manna on the sand.

Too long I pushed Him on a throne so high
I could not climb to it. "Wilt Thou descend?"
I proffered. Thus it was he drew quite nigh.
We talk as man to man and friend to friend,
Until the desert sun stretches red wings
And folds them into black and useless things.

EVACUATION

I walked into your room when you had gone,
Looking for dust and cobwebs of some part
Of you that I thought hovered there. Black dawn
Burst on me; a cruel shiver wrung my heart.

I flinched to see that room—once so costumed
In the gay tinsel of you—parched, lifeless, bare,
And robbed of all it held. I had assumed
This never could be—because you lived there.

Stunned, numbed, I touched the curtains and the lamp
Over your bed where you would nightly chase
Dreams past stars; and your window where the damp
Fragrance of rain hung on your sleeping face.

I knew your lovely hands had touched it all,
But the guilt was dim; and not even pungence
Of your old laugh came streaming down the wall—
No remnant left of all your refulgence.

I shut the door, with voices in my head,
And dragged myself agedly down the stair—
Defeated, hollow, desolate, and dead,
Speechlessly withered—for you were not there.

LOST POEM

Think. Life must echo soon in soulless dust—
And we, bewildered, seek to understand;
Vain bones must gallantly submit to rust,
And men must melt their music with the sand.

The sun spins on an endless tale of light,
While storms of passion dwindle in the plush
Of kindness in the pith of men; how trite
The life that lacks love's bubble-tone—and crush.

When insincere applause dies in the wind,
And our last domiciles have roofs of grass;
One with the dead I shall regret I've sinned
Through centuries by letting warm dreams pass.

There is a perfect song that we must sing,
A soft still moment—now before decay;
Two souls must rhyme around a wisp of spring
For we shall be a lost poem one day.

Now, I have sung my songs—mad, mellow things,
And you have passed the portals of their pages.
Poems are butterflies blown down the ages,
The winds of time will waste their wanton wings,
But I shall share them as stale crumbs of bread
Now from my scanty cupboard. May they bless
Your holy hunger for life's loveliness;
No heart, good comrade, is too fully fed.

I trust you have not been barrenly bored;
The amethyst and gold and sapphires blue,
Enough to break the lovely heart of you,
And what riches I had, I did not hoard.
And this my epilogue: set them apart;
Dear reader, we have met here—heart with heart.

—THE AUTHOR.

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