

# EBONY-FLAME

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EBONY

FLAME

VINCENT

STARRETT



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CHICAGO





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*Vincent Starrett*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*For courteous permission to reprint my far-scattered verses, a number of which have appeared over pseudonyms, I am grateful to many editors. Particular acknowledgment is made to the Bookman, the Smart Set, the Midland, the International, the Reviewer, the Double Dealer, the Magnificat, the Freeman, All's Well, Wayside Tales, the Chicago Evening Post and the Bookfellows.*

V. S.

To the W. G. A.

L. M. S.

B. J. S.

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EBONY FLAME

Now, if you do not like the thoughts I think,  
Blame him who dwells within my well of ink:  
A wicked genie, with an evil eye . . .  
Who meets his gaze must either write or die.

And, if you do not like the way I write,  
Remember that 'tis cousin to the night,  
To darkness (I, a simple messenger),  
When only does my dark companion stir.

But, if this black connection you admire,  
Here is my hand, your chair beside the fire.  
Look! As I poise a pen and cry his name . . .  
Out of the pit, a tongue of ebon flame!

## MAVIS

I shall call my daughter Mavis  
When, if ever, I have a daughter;  
That is a sweet and happy name,  
And I have loved it long and well.  
I am so pleased by the name of Mavis  
That I would give something very valuable—  
A bracelet, or a string of emeralds,  
Or a rare first edition of George Moore—  
To anyone who would conjure me a daughter named  
Mavis.

I would teach her the splendor of her name,  
So that she would pronounce it as I wished,  
With just that shade of tenderness  
And just that shade of triumph.  
Early in the morning I would call her, "Mavis!"  
And then at intervals throughout the day  
Until at dark I said, "Good night, my Mavis!"  
And when she lay in slumber I would whisper  
"Mavis" until I, too, had fallen asleep,  
Lulled by the magic syllables of "Mavis."

If she were here to-day,  
Already grown, and lovely as a rainbow,  
I should walk with her in the sunny streets,  
She leaning upon my arm and brightly smiling,  
And I should call her "Mavis . . . Mavis . . . Mavis."  
So that all them that passed  
Would marvel at the wonder of her name,

And envy me, gray-haired and proudly parental,  
Beside that miracle of nomenclature.

She would perhaps dislike the name  
After the long years of my adoration,  
And tire of being called without a purpose  
Other than to allow my voice its pleasure;  
She would wish that her name were anything but Mavis—  
Edith, or Grace, or Katherine, or Mary;  
But I should reward her with a thousand presents  
Labeled with little cards, "With love to Mavis,"  
So that I might find pleasure new and fragrant  
Writing down "Mavis" for my lovely daughter.

Maker of lovely things, custodian of all wisdom.  
Give me a daughter  
That I may call her Mavis!

## PAN PIPES

The bank which in my wanderings  
Sometimes I chance to pass,  
Has handsome crystal chandeliers  
And doors of polished brass . . .

*O once I had a copper cent;  
I didn't have it long.  
I spent my penny for a pipe  
And piped a little song.*

And many pass with eager tread  
Into the banker's place,  
And drop their dollars in his box,  
With shining eyes and face . . .

*O once I piped a little song  
For tired little men:  
But still they put their dollars in  
And take them out again.*



## CHIMNEYS

My window looks across a field  
Of leaping chimney-stalagmites;  
And some by others are concealed,  
And some arise to splendid heights;  
And over every house and tree  
There hangs a gas barrage of coke;  
But one small stack blows up to me  
A wistful question-mark of smoke.

I cannot see the folks who light  
The fires beneath this masque of flues;  
Their deeds by day, their acts of night,  
Nor what the brand of coke they use;  
But from a window just below  
One little stack, most every day  
There looks a girl I do not know  
Who quickly turns her head away.

## PANORAMA FROM AN "L" TRAIN

Two sudden feet project beyond a sill;  
A whiff of factory pickles fills the air;  
Madeline's mother summons, fiercely shrill;  
In a back window Susan dries her hair.  
Crooning, a child hangs from a balcony:  
Now, in a panic, it is snatched within,  
And a quick flash of startled lingerie  
Conjures a passing, backward-glancing grin.

A fog of smoke drifts upward from a train  
Roaring beneath; a sparrow swears and scolds.  
Needle-like cinders tap upon the pane . . .  
"Dr. Tarr's Honey Bothers Coughs and Colds!"  
The black belt—shabby houses, row on row—  
Its second stories level with the eye,  
Wheels darkly past, and in a yard below  
A nigger mammy hangs white clothes to dry.

VERITAS PRAEVALEBIT!

The glory that was Vansittart  
Lies underneath a ton of sod.  
There were no secrets to impart  
When he stepped off to meet his God.  
The whole town knew his history,  
And some were glad and others lied;  
But only little Kitty Cree  
Knew why he wept before he died.

The splendor that was Kitty Cree  
A tarnished memory became  
When Vansittart's *diablerie*  
Was but a jest-inducing name.  
Her suicide set tongues a-tick;  
They wagged like pendulums about her,  
And said with pious rhetoric  
There always had been cause to doubt her.

## AN IRON DOG

In Memory Street, an iron dog  
Stands guard upon a rusted lawn:  
He looms up through a shifting fog  
Like leaping conscience in the dawn;  
But why he stands, and what he guards,  
The old policeman does not know,  
Though other dogs from other yards  
Smile wisely as they come and go.

When sunlight streams about the place,  
The boys who make the present crowd  
Ride on his back, and slap his face,  
And play his bark is fierce and loud;  
But in the rain or in the fog  
He seems to listen and to wait.  
He is a very faithful dog . . .  
And there are scratches on my gate!



## PARADOX

My thoughts to-night are lone and far;  
One rang against a distant star.  
I thought the star plunged to the sea,  
And felt the waves rush over me.

Then one who fished with silken net  
Drew forth the star, all shining wet,  
And flung it swiftly to the sky;  
And, lo! the fisherman was I.

So, thoughts are strange, and life is queer,  
And stars are often very near;  
And fishermen with nets of dream  
Snare more than pebbles in the stream.

## CRESCENT MOON

The sight, I think, is more than odd . . .  
Outside the roadhouse kept by God  
The lounging stars, with youthful din,  
Shout down the banqueting within,  
And with their socialistic roar  
Persuade the Landlord to the door.

The stars with mocking laughter fly  
Across the prairies of the sky,  
While after the vexatious gang  
God hurls a silver boomerang . . .  
I hope it will not turn and strike  
A kind old Gentleman I like.

## AMBITION

Then to be dead on plains of sonant glory!—  
To kneel, myself beside, with strangled breath;  
To bear away the litter—spread the story—  
And cry above the bier that shining death!

Mutely to stand, a multitude of mourners,  
Head bared, with somber eyes upon the road,  
Where, flag-draped, past the deeply-breathing corners,  
Slowly I pass to my strait, dim abode.

To be the banner's boast, the bugle's sorrow;  
The volley o'er the mounded earth, the tread  
Of marching feet; the silence of the morrow,  
When, with a shock, I read that I am dead.

To be the quill that lusters famous pages,  
The hand that drives the pen, the eyes that see  
The worship and the wonder of the ages . . .  
To be the grief, the joy, the mystery!

## TRAIN WRECK

Around me were the tortured masks of men,  
The torn, sad shapes of women whose low cries  
Struck terribly into the heart . . . Again  
I shuddered, and with swift and fearful eyes  
Sought that familiar face I feared to find;  
Then cried out as, unharmed, I saw her kneel  
With wet, sweet face, now agonized and lined,  
Beside a broken form whose mute appeal  
Seemed somehow antecedently to be  
Part of the deepest thought and soul of *me*.

But, as I would have hurried to her side  
With quick assurance, eager arms apart,  
A kindly hand persuaded me to bide  
A moment, and a voice that stilled my heart  
Spoke words of old affection, low and sweet;  
And he, my long-wept friend, was strangely near,  
Who with a little smile restrained my feet,  
Saying, "Dear fellow, wait! She cannot hear!"  
"Roger!" I cried in terror, "you are dead!"  
His fine smile held my eyes . . . "And you?" he said.



## HIEROGLYPHICS

The way that smoke twists upward in the sky,  
The form a cloud takes, slowly drifting by,  
The dimness hanging over distant hills,  
The shapes of snowflakes on the window sills;  
The haunting faces flowers lift at dawn,  
The furtive tears I find upon my lawn . . .  
Little, familiar things in alien guise  
That overwhelm with breathless, swift surmise.

The song a kettle sings upon the fire,  
The solemn finger of a sudden spire,  
The drone of bees and water, faintly heard,  
The silver query of a secret bird;  
The gaze of friendly beasts, a curious shell,  
The second echo of a far-off bell . . .  
Tremendous trifles! Bell and wing and glow!  
What do they mean? Sometimes I almost know.

## CHANGELING

The gallows tree is straight and tall  
Save for the jutting single limb . . .  
And from a spot across the road  
I watched the tortured legs of him  
Who dangled there . . .

The hangman laughed

So merry was the sight withal.  
The hangman's daughter, standing near,  
Was lovely as a waterfall.  
Her yellow hair streamed over her;  
Her symmetry was starkly limned . . .  
I loathed and loved her, and it seemed  
Her scarlet roses glowed and dimmed  
As my wild eyes upon her fed.  
Her glance was free and bold, I thought . . .  
Our tryst was secret, when the dark  
Had fallen, where the corpse hung taut  
In the red moon . . .

The curséd babe

Was hideous as Hell, and we  
Shrieked as we knew the twisted face  
Of him who decked the gallows tree.

## ENCOUNTER

Along the dead white boulevards of Time,  
Littered with dying hopes and grinning fears,  
I thought I saw my Past stalk forth one day  
Upon adventure bent . . . and as it trod the years  
A smile of exquisite bitterness sat upon  
The cynic lips, and a low laugh maliciously  
Taunted the shattered dreams along the way,  
Erstwhile a part of its own ecstasy . . .

And then a-down the months the other way,  
Stepping from misty darkness into light,  
A fearsome figure strode . . . I saw my Future stand  
Upon the dim frontier of coming night,  
With glittering eyes . . . And that first traveler  
Who scornfully the charnel way had trod,  
Grew limp before the menace of its gaze  
And fell to shrieking for a spurnéd God.

## EXERCISE FOR LEFT HAND

Never rides a bark to shore  
Fair as at sea,  
Nor ever shines a sail  
White as across blue water.

Never blooms a rose so red  
As that caressed  
And idly thrown away  
One knows not where.

Nor ever comes a day  
Happy as one sweet other;  
Nor love  
Fragrant as love long past...

Black barks in harbor,  
Silver sails close furled,  
Breath of dead roses  
Stealing my strength away!

.... Long vanished day!

O Love,  
That sweetest love should always be  
The love of yesterday!

BUTTERFLIES OF UGANDA

Butterflies of Africa: drifting clouds of blue:

Clouds of white and yellow drift: carnival of reds:

Sunset flashes at the noon: shining fields of dew:

Snowflakes stung to ecstasy: floating tulip beds!

Mardi Gras of loveliness: brilliant masquerade:

Wheeling, reeling companies of Lilliput hussars;

Blue and white the canopy, green the velvet shade...

In the night of wonderment, are you silver stars?

## DREAMER

He was dismayed by life's harsh waking view;  
Only in dreams he found escape from dread;  
And so he laid him down to sleep, and drew  
The coverlet of water o'er his head.

Then, as he slept, a murmur fled away:  
"Genius!" they whispered, wishing he might rise  
And place upon his brow the wreath of bay...  
Poor dreamer, with the dead, clairvoyant eyes!



### GOD'S RIDING

By night, with flogging whip He rides the breeze,  
And dreadful hoofs make thunder in the hills.  
The servile grasses and the tortured trees  
Bow down and tremble where His trumpet shrills.

Again He rides, and where His banners run  
Gay flowers quicken in the trampled sod.  
Earth leaps to beauty neath the goading sun,  
The pricking rowel on the heel of God.

## PICTURE

Brown for the autumn leaves,  
Green for the tree;  
White for the flying sail,  
Blue for the sea.

Gray for the solemn priest,  
Red for the lass;  
Black for the silent boy  
Dead in the grass.

## HOUSE

The little house across the way  
    Conceals some dreadful mystery.  
Its green-fringed eyes, day after day,  
    Stare at my windows fearfully.  
The door that is its mouth, it seems,  
    Shrieks mutely of an evil deed.  
I cannot still the voiceless screams...  
    Why do the drooping willows bleed?

## RETURN

In rooms long stranger to my tread  
My soul knelt down and wept;  
The gray walls whispered of the dead,  
The sad-eyed windows slept;  
And memories of perished years  
Were all that bade me stay...  
And those I kissed, with sudden tears,  
And those I bore away.

POET AS PEASANT

Miriam is Mary now,  
Muriel is Jane,  
And I make my lyric bow  
In another vein.

I have hired a little place  
Out beyond the town;  
I am done with any face  
Not of country brown.

I have leased a Thomas cat  
And a mottled cow;  
I shall wear a ragged hat  
And be happy now.

I shall write a little verse  
Every summer day;  
Listen to the birds rehearse,  
Merrier than they.

Anthea shall Alice be;  
Beatrice is Sue—  
Oh, remember, Lalage,  
All of these are you!

## POSSESSION

You who belong to another,  
And are mine;  
You who will wear another's name  
Where all may see,  
And mine, like a scarlet letter,  
Beneath your bodice—  
After the blasphemy of words is over,  
And sudden laughter shrills,  
Many will think to read your happiness  
On your gay lips—  
Poor, gay, sad, lying lips!—  
And he who will possess your fragrant husk  
Will marvel at the strangeness of your eyes...  
But you—  
You who belong to another, and are mine—  
You will read loathing in your mirror;  
Scorn  
In the gray eyes that give you stare for stare;  
Hate  
In the quick heart that, spite of you, was true.  
You will recall a day of scarlet splendor,  
And a cold flame will burn with icy breath,  
And you will come to me,  
Dry-eyed,  
Through the sobbing night.

## FLOTSAM

Who cares for these slight songs I sing?—this rhyme  
That hides a soul's unuttered ecstasy?  
And will my little raptures for a time  
Outlive their parent? Once upon the sea  
I saw a chip, wave-driven, breast the flood  
That greenly strove its insolence to submerge,  
And laughed to see the valiant fragment scud  
Before the fury of the water's urge.

Its curious malformation made it seem  
A relic of some child's abandoned play,  
Far journied from the quaint, quiescent stream  
Where it was launched and sent upon its way.  
So it may be some song that I have sung  
Will voyage for a space, impenitent:  
If it but echo that I once was young,  
That once I lived and loved, I am content.



## AIR DE GRIEF

As a youth I longed to be  
    Kindly, bearded, white,  
Spectacled and scholarly,  
    Underneath a light  
Falling on a printed page  
    Spread across my knee;  
In that placid picture, age  
    Seemed quite fine to me.

How the years have flickered by!  
    Here is book and light;  
Here are spectacles, and my  
    Hair is turning white.  
Beard alone has failed the scheme—  
    May it never start!  
In this triumph of my dream  
    Age appals my heart!

VERMILLION SQUARE

On summer nights Vermillion Square  
Is very brave and proud.  
A band performs, and everywhere  
The people push and crowd.

In couples and in droves they pass,  
Or lie upon the ground.  
They trample down the Sunday grass  
And scatter peanuts 'round.

But in this curious parade  
I never join—not I!  
I pick a cool place in the shade  
And watch myself go by.

## IN A FAIR GARDEN

In a fair garden, low beneath the moon,  
White Pierrot dreams of Pierrette's dainty shoon,  
    No bigger than a roseleaf, and as fair,  
    Nimble as poets' fancies, light as air,  
Dancing around the world to Pierrot's tune.

How worn they seem! O negligent buffoon,  
That, spendthrift, spends a golden afternoon  
    In folly dreaming! Wake, for *she* is there  
    In a fair garden.

Ah, 'tis a sight to make a Bishop swoon!  
Bowered in roses drunk with fragrant June...  
    See, she has crept into your blossom'd lair.  
    Waken indeed, Friend, 'an you would not share  
Her kisses, or 'tis I that shall be soon  
    In a fair garden!

## PAN

In a dim grotto of the wood, they said,  
Great Pan lies dead...  
And then they flew  
Laughing across the sand, but paused anew,  
Clad in white chastity, upon the brink—  
Shy fawns at drink,  
Half frightened by  
The murmuring treetops and the water's sigh—  
Viewing the wood with half-alarmed grimace  
For a strange face.  
The goat-eared Pan,  
They said, bravado-wise, is not a man,  
But a dead god, an antique legend sung  
To charm the young...  
And then the sea  
Robed them in living jewels, lavishly;  
Clasped his wet arms about them—young and slim—  
Drew them to him.

Beware, Old Sea!  
Do you not fear Pan's maddened jealousy?  
Do you think, too, that Pan is dead and cold,  
Deep in the gold  
Dead leaves of fall,  
Leaving all this to you as seneschal?  
Long since you heard the cloven hoof resound  
Upon the ground,  
Since your pale glass  
Gave back his image. Ah, the years may pass  
But Pan lives yet, for love is more than death!  
Heard you a breath  
Hot in the wood  
Where in your youth a shaggy lover stood?  
Then not too far, old graybeard charlatan,  
For I am Pan!

## A RONDEAU OF SONNETS

*(In Memory of Andrew Lang)*

What sonnet do you fancy?—if indeed  
You fancy any, now that verse is freed!  
Shall it be Swinburne, Aldrich, or divine  
Rossetti that I read you, Friend of Mine?—  
Or for what other shall you intercede?

So be it! Let us sate our sonnet greed  
With him who satisfies that special need—  
With Andrew, eh?—And so, for auld Lang syne,  
What sonnet?

Let us begin—and you, my friend, shall lead,  
And I shall follow on a second steed  
Borrowed from Villon or some other fine  
Old rascal. *Voila!* First a stoup of wine,  
Then plunge to any page you will, and read  
What's on it!

APOLOGY TO BROWNING

For that my wisdom was small,  
 For that my ego was big,  
 Once I sneered bravely withal;  
 Cried, for your verses—a fig!  
 Thought that *your* thought was involved  
 (Maybe it is—never mind;  
 When it is puzzled and solved  
 There is some substance behind);  
 Thought that your muse was a clod,  
 Heavy, and awkward, and dull;  
 Thought that your prating of God  
 Made *me* some kind of a gull.  
 Well, I was young—very young;  
 Fond of a dulcimer meter;  
 Long as to hair and to tongue—  
 Yes, I thought Tennyson sweeter.  
 Not that you care in the least  
 That I spoke of your rhyming as clowning!—  
 But I, who came late to your feast,  
 Am humbly a penitent, Browning.

## LITERARY NOTE

Books and cooks are closely wed  
In my fond and foolish head.  
Brain and belly are befriended  
By those dispensations splendid—  
Yea, my heart and soul are joyed  
When I hear such words employed.

I should like a restaurant  
Up against some bookish haunt,  
That in either I might find  
Food to satisfy the mind—  
Solid fowl and flesh, or airy  
Salad for the solitary.



## RAIN

It wonders me that I should love the rain,  
The long swift rain that rivers in the street;  
That whispers stories sinister and sweet  
In the dull rhythms of its endless strain.

Fiercely I breathe its ancient mystery,  
Now as it dirks the night with lambent gleams...  
And ever when the yellow sunlight streams  
Its antiphon mourns in the heart of me.

## PALIMPSEST

The canopy of blue and gold  
That roofed my morning years  
Is clouded with a mottled mould,  
And big with iron tears.

There once upon a vellum sky  
Youth's eager hopes were spread.  
What critic hand has written high  
These symbols bleak and dread?

## AT THE BIRTHPLACE OF A DEAD POET

Still greens the grass upon the sod  
As when he tramped these country lanes,  
And where the orchards lift to God  
Their heavy fragrance after rains,  
Stand still the trees he loved and knew,  
The awkward fences that he climbed...  
The sky above is still as blue  
As when he learned it could be rhymed.

I do not see him in the trees  
Nor by the runing river's brim;  
Such breathless humors, while they please,  
And would have been no trick for *him*,  
Are shut from me by many veils.  
I walk the ways he must have known,  
And try to fancy in the trails  
His footprints pressed beneath my own.

## TWO HORSEMEN

Life came riding up the vale  
On a yellow steed,  
Helmet off; his coat of mail  
Shining like a polished pail—  
Thus it was decreed.  
“Here’s a penny for you, Lad.  
We are brothers! Are you glad?”  
This was Life, indeed!

Death came riding up the lane  
On a sable steed,  
Visor down; his coat of chain  
Black as was his horse’s mane—  
Thus it was decreed.  
“Here’s your penny, Sir Disguise:  
You can not conceal your eyes!”  
This was Death, indeed—  
This was Life, indeed!

MICHAEL

My lover's ship did not go down:  
It sailed into the setting sun.  
I watched across the sands from town  
Until the golden goal was won.

Upon a sea of molten glass  
It sailed across the world's red rim;  
With spreading sails I saw it pass  
Into a glory none shall dim.

Yet there are some that wring their hands  
And will not cease their doleful cries...  
I look across the blazing sands  
And smile into my lover's eyes.

## SELF-SLAIN

He was come to the edge of the wood,  
And he paused on the quiet frontier.  
The darkness clung close like a hood,  
And there splashed in the silence a tear...  
Down, down to the place where he stood  
Echoed starkly the footsteps of fear.

He knelt in the dew, as to pray...  
And his riven frame pitched to the knoll;  
And a wisp of smoke floated away  
To what mystical, ultimate goal!  
There was no one to wonder or say  
If the darkness went out of his soul.

## HIC JACET

*Here lies John Lorengood*—a simple name,  
Unknown to history and to acclaim.  
The willows droop across his bed of earth  
In this quaint village where he had his birth.  
No clash of voices breaks upon his rest  
With futile praise. A bird has made its nest,  
And feeds its young, and sings, above his head,  
While he sleeps late—blest privilege of the dead.

John Lorengood, perhaps your life was spent  
In this obscurity and this content.  
No bloody charge your awful glory weighs,  
No book the tumult of your soul betrays;  
Deserving much, you have deserved repose,  
And the recurrent tribute of a rose...  
I who with fatuous trust pursue the flame  
Falter before the grandeur of your fame.

## AMANUENSIS

What eager urge directs my thought  
And drives this stubborn pen?—  
Fills me with memories, wonder-fraught,  
Of clouds and trees and men;  
Torments me with a dream of fame  
Immortal and benign...?  
O wondrous and consuming flame  
That marvels to be mine!

Is it perhaps some deathless shade  
That whispers secret words  
Wherewith the world I might persuade  
And sing beyond the birds?  
O that, when I have grasped his theme  
With sudden passioned cry,  
He should forsake that valiant dream  
And leave me—only I!



## SILVER POPLAR

Nothing more lorn, more lone, more lovely is,  
I think, than this...

A silver poplar lonely on a hill,  
The sun behind. The air at first is still,  
But a light whisper quickens, and a breeze  
Pushing through other and more distant trees,  
With faintly pattering, far off tapping drums  
And whipping banners comes;  
Rushes across the void... The crispéd leaves  
Bend double as the foliate spendor heaves.  
An argent glory shimmers, quivers, dances,  
Till in the sunny flame of darting lances  
The foam of seas  
Sparkles in sunshine, and the mounting breeze  
Stirs the quick leaves to keening melody;  
A curious sorcery  
That whispers at the heart like distant play  
Of rippling water in a little bay...  
And then the swelling wind becomes a roar,  
And gaunt waves dash upon a rocky shore  
In a white smother, and at length subside  
Into the garrulous murmur of the tide...

In the cool shadow of the hill I lie  
While the breeze patters by.

## RETROSPECT

An hour ago the lights were fey,  
And women moved with silken grace,  
And music made the maskers gay,  
And laughter eddied through the place.  
An hour ago! but all is gone:  
One figure only I recall—  
A girl with hair of ruddy dawn  
Who checked my garments in the hall.

A lot of famous folk were there  
Who in my vision dim and fade.  
It was, I think, a brave affair—  
Perfume and powder, gold and braid!  
But now 'tis all a vague surmise:  
One presence only I recall—  
A girl with lovely, scornful eyes  
Who checked my garments in the hall.

## DOXOLOGY TO A GOOD CITIZEN

What shall we say of Avondale,  
But lately of our planet?—  
Save that he carried on a tale  
When someone else began it;  
Save that he voted nearly right  
On every proposition;  
Save that he stayed at home at night  
And held a fair position;  
Save that his fervor was derived  
From other people's thinking;  
Save that his seven children thrived  
And none inclined to drinking;  
Save that he played a steady hand  
At whist, and bowled not badly;  
Save that he loved his native land,  
His wife and babies madly;  
Save—'Tis a simple, poignant tale,  
This slight suburban story:  
But, O, from such as Avondale  
Deliverance, Saints in Glory!

## SIRENICA

Your eyes are pools of purple moonlit wine  
Across whose sweep gleam fiery flecks of gold:  
False beacons crying harbor unto mine...  
I drown within the madness that they hold.

Your eyes are braziers of caressing fire,  
Consuming tongues of flagrant yellow flame.  
Pile high the fagots on my funeral pyre!  
The smoke of torment shall inscribe your name.

Your eyes are daedal wishes. O they gleam  
Now wistful-sweet, now passionately wise!  
Danger and death are in their burning dream:  
And yet...and yet...Heart of my Heart, your eyes...!

## NASTURTIUM

Amber-maiden, sun-caressed,  
Dewy, nectar-brimmed,  
In such splendor are you dressed,  
In such glory limned...  
Are you something more than flower  
Nodding in your orient bower?

What do you become at eve—  
In the langorous night?  
May a lover then achieve  
Favor in your sight?  
All life's rapture I would risk  
For your smile, dear odalisque!

I shall leave the tear-faced rose  
To her buccaneers,  
Jilt the red-cheeked Jacqueminots  
Spite of all their tears.  
Amber-maiden, lovely flower,  
Pray you name the blissful hour!

## REVELATION

As out beyond the heedless, roaring town,  
In Crusoe wonder, threading forest ways,  
I walked, the lanes in ribald beauty swam,  
Drunk with desire, beneath an opal haze.  
The mysteries of pulsing root and branch,  
Of joyous hoof and wing, and odorous breeze,  
Charged with a tacit import seemed, and—mute—  
I listened to the trees.

Then down a strange and yet familiar path,  
Borne upon heaving turf, in breathless thought  
I passed, where burning beauty shone about  
The things no hands for other hands had wrought.  
A secret whisper thrilled upon the air;  
Startled, I heard a flattered woodbird call. . .  
And suddenly I fled away before  
The terror of it all!

A MOOD

Outside the rain falls sullenly. The day  
Was never dreary as this day, it seems.  
Gay voices near me laugh the hours away;  
They find no time for melancholy dreams.

What is it on my spirit seems to pall?—  
Grim something that I cannot put away!  
I have no hurt, no sorrow to recall—  
And yet—and yet how sorrowful the day!

## LONELINESS

The whistle of a train at night  
Sometimes seems more than heart can bear.  
I do not see the rushing light  
Nor feel the hot exhaust of air;  
I only hear the distant tread  
Of wheels, and then that keening cry—  
But all the loneliness and dread  
Of life is in that long "Good bye!"



LAUGHTER

Your laughter is a careless brook  
In sunshine speeding.  
Your laughter is a yellow book  
For furtive reading.

Your laughter is an icy stream  
In which none dives.  
Your laughter is the slim bright gleam  
Of cruel knives.

Your laughter is a child that runs  
With guileless prattle.  
Your laughter is the crash of guns  
In sudden battle.

Your laughter is a spray of bells  
On Christmas morning.  
Your laughter is a gust of Hell's  
Unbridled scorning.

## AN EVENING IN NOVEMBER

Outside, the lashing, swirling rain,  
And a cold wind that cut the heart:  
But, O, within, soft candles in the dusk,  
And a queer Oriental lantern, hung apart  
In a far corner, near the firelight glow,  
Over heaped pillows of a quaint design...  
And one beside me in the shouting silence,  
Looking with eyes of startled understanding into mine.

## NOCTURNE (Op. 1)

We called him something loud and free  
And tossed him through the door.  
The night received him patiently,  
As somewhat of a bore—  
He'd gone that way before.

He left behind him on the bar  
And scattered 'round the place,  
A hat, a cuff, a chewed cigar,  
Some pieces of his face—  
And the disputed ace.

He didn't mind our coltish play;  
He took it with a leer;  
But it was pitiful the way  
He whimpered for his ear—  
We'd dropped it in the beer!

## BOOBY PRIZE

It seems I trumped an ace—my partner's ace—  
And bid too high, and paid too great attention  
To airs and fingers in the fourth dimension.  
I should, it seems, have watched my partner's face.

Her face—Ye Gods! Ah, well I won a prize:  
That painted kewpie on the mantel there!  
In it I see again the vapid stare  
Of that depraved old dromedary's eyes.

## MY LORD'S MOTORING

He was an arrogant cat, *My Lord*,  
Or ever he heard of Henry Ford.  
He sat in the windows, east and west,  
Amber eyes and a snow-white vest,  
Watching the silly children run,  
Staring haughtily at the sun:  
Nothing disturbed him in the least,  
Nor touched the pride of that stately beast.

Then, on a day, we went to ride  
I in the wheel-seat, he beside.  
Never a move that advertised  
He was the slightest bit surprised;  
He sat up straight as a millionaire,  
A snob of snobs in a parlor chair—  
But once, when I missed a boy at play,  
I thought he winked in a knowing way.

## FOOTSTEPS OF FEAR

Who travels this cold road alone by night?

Footsteps! They follow, follow, follow after!

There is no human thing in mortal sight...

Footsteps!... and mocking laughter!

They echo in my brain, they slowly beat

Upon my heart with careful, strange insistence.

They whisper in the long deserted street...

Laughter, across the distance!

Why is the moon so cruel and so white?

White is her shadow in the black street canyon.

Footsteps that pace beside me... But the light

Reveals no dark companion.

Who travels thus beside me through the dark?

The road is endless, and the day comes never...

Footsteps of fear, and I shall hear them—Hark!—

For ever and for ever!

POETRY

It is a little room, a secret room,  
Within a palace falling to decay,  
Wherein I tryst with one that was myself...  
And, O! the world is more than life away!

It is a little ship upon the sea,  
Bravely adrift, I know not whither blown,  
Nor where the low reef of the harbor lies...  
But a far bell calls, and I sail alone.

It is a little gate beside a road,  
And strait the way to scornful eyes may seem,  
But who shall lift the latch and pass within  
May pluck the fruit of his unconquered dream.

## UNCAPTIVE

Whose eyes have looked on hidden things  
Nor hate nor walls have strength to bind;  
He journeys on an ageless quest,  
His voice is in the changing wind.

They fettered steel about his soul,  
They put his body in a cell,  
But while a single cloud looked in  
His covert chamber all was well.

Upon his wall the pontiff moon  
Shadowed the menace of his bars:  
Joyful, he breathed the strength of night,  
And walked among the laughing stars.

Then shall they hurt us as they will,  
So that the secret glory gleams.  
For the captivity of life  
There is the recompense of dreams.



## PIERROT THE URCHIN

*(Paul Verlaine)*

This is not Pierrot on the green—  
Vague Pierrot, sporting half unseen—  
'Tis Pierrot, Pierrot, Pierrot!  
Pierrot, the urchin, madcap he,  
Stripped of his mask and mimicry—  
Ah, Pierrot, Pierrot, Pierrot!

Although no bigger than a mite  
The rascal's eyes are all alight;  
With sparks of steel they're flaming.  
They dance with demon lights, it seems;  
They leap with sudden, scornful gleams  
For a gay poet's shaming.

Lips red as wounds, whose scarlet pout  
Is slumberous luxury's redoubt;  
Face fair as lily's lining,  
And splendid although somewhat wan—  
Such face as loves to gaze upon  
The golden things and shining.

Supple and lithe his girlish form,  
Voice soft and, like a woman's, warm;  
Mature his shape, though elfish.  
His thrilling tone, his raiment gay  
Proclaim a lover, seeking aye  
To sate each pleasure selfish.

Go, Brother—Comrade—where they teem,  
And play the devil, seek thy dream  
Where'er thou wilt—thy Pierrettes—  
And be the soul unscrupulous,  
High, noble, lively, infamous,  
Of these our simple spirits.

Grow, Scapegrace, others are not shy!  
Thy bitter riches multiply;  
Enhance thy reputation,  
Thy virtue, and thy people's love!  
Thy grimace is the symbol of  
Our simple congregation.

## MEMORIAL DAY

Drums in the city street  
Monotonously rolling,  
And marching feet  
In the measures of the beat,  
And flags,  
And far bells tolling...

Sabbath in the warm breeze;  
By the graves, weeping.  
Birds on the liliated air,  
Caroling, leaping,  
And sudden blossoms where  
Beneath the trees  
The dead are sleeping.

Bugles in the twilight  
Piercingly calling.  
Bugle echoes, clear and far,  
Falling... falling...  
(From what bright star?  
And Whose tears do they seem  
To them that dream?)

And then,  
Again  
The muffled drum, the tread of feet,  
And hearts that beat  
With long thoughts to the throbbing drum,  
The sobbing drum,  
The drum...  
Drum...  
Drum...

## SPRING SONG

Now crack with mirth your wintry lips,  
And loose your limbs to gladness,  
And hang a garland on your hips  
And leap with pleasant madness.

Now pitch away your book of dreams  
And hark the highway calling:  
Again the minnesinger streams  
Down pebbled trails are brawling.

Now songbirds blossom on the haw—  
Shall not the poet sing  
When trees o'er naked fingers draw  
The glad green gloves of spring?

OMEN

Apes in scarlet petticoats  
Dance a rigadoon—  
Pennies for the broken notes  
Of a murdered tune.

Grind your organ, Angelo,  
For the tickled throng;  
Summer's skipping down the row—  
Hey! Another song!

## TWO A. M.

The clock hands creep around the clock...  
A milk cart rattles down the block...  
And once more silence flutters down  
Darkly upon the sleeping town.

My window faces to the breeze...  
The secret voices of the trees,  
Half-heard, half-felt, cry in my ears...  
My heart is strange with eager fears.

To-morrow, I shall grieve that I  
Sat up so late to watch the sky;  
But now... Who knows what hidden sight  
May be revealed to me this night!

## BRIDGE

The bridge is long and white and fine,  
And lined with rails of polished brass;  
At night its carbon clusters shine  
On laughing throngs that pass and pass.

Beneath, the singing water flows  
As smoothly as a pictured stream,  
Dappled with yellow gleams and glows  
Like sprites that vanish in a dream.

Only within my furtive nook  
Does shadow shield from kind alarms...  
Ay, chuckle, Water, while they look!  
I shall sleep soundly in your arms.

## HARLEQUIN

*(Theodore de Banville)*

From the cat he steals his grace,  
From the dog his whiskered face.  
He has taken from the king  
Of his purple robe a string;  
From the Jew a bit of yellow;  
From the Spring this lawless fellow  
Has purloined a bit of green,  
And the whole, with solemn mien,  
He has made a garment gay  
To wear upon a holiday.

Round his waist a scarlet belt  
Holds a slapstick, often felt.  
On his feet are scarlet shoon;  
With quicksilver— gay buffoon!—  
They are lined; and how they prance  
In some ancient, pagan dance!  
At his hat I laugh aloud:  
Did he carve it from a cloud?  
He's an organ grinder's ape—  
Yet how lithe his graceful shape!

Thus, attended like a king,  
Skillful as a Jew; like Spring  
Come with April's flowering bloom,  
Hums he like a busy loom  
Through the cities and the fields,  
Seeking all that Springtime yields:  
Followed by coy Columbine,



Amorous and half-divine,  
Who, the more the monster beats,  
More adores his knavish feats.

With what hideous flutterings,  
Like a moth with painted wings,  
Now he clasps her fluid charms  
In his careless, cruel arms—  
Courts, caresses, entertains  
In conquered and enchanted lanes,  
Where Nature sleeps the summer through  
And lesser gods make rendezvous—  
Till, tired of kissing, with a shrug  
He offers Toby's ugly mug.—  
*C'est Harlequin!*

## A HYMN OF HATE

Beside Francesca Brown, my wife's dear friend,  
Iago was a big, good-natured slob;  
And if some unofficial vengeance end  
Her vile career, 'twill be a splendid job.  
And I shall caper happily what time  
They tell me she has fled to occult shores,  
Who never let the sun to zenith climb  
Until her tongue had probed a dozen sores.

Beside Francesca Brown of fair repute,  
Who lives a blameless life, and has a class,  
"Yond Cassius" was a blundering recruit,  
And Ballantrae a simple, witless ass.  
O Muse of Malice, give me power to pen  
For decent ears and eyes the thoughts I hold  
Concerning one Francesca Brown, and then  
The nerve to tell her what she should be told!

NOCTURNE (Op. 2)

It is a very strange and curious thing  
To see a person hanging by his thumbs,  
While round about him, in a narrow ring,  
March little demons with exulting drums.  
It is an awe-inspiring sight to see  
One's oldest friend turn slowly inside out,  
Then hang his watch upon a friendly tree,  
And greet his organisms with a shout.

It is a shocking thing to watch a man  
Reduce himself to gravy, in a pot;  
Then pour himself into a cooling pan  
And weep because the mixture is too hot.  
It is a solemn thing to play with verse,  
And rhyme with shadows purple, green and white:  
The wonder is it isn't often worse,  
After such dreaming as I did last night.

## TO ONE UNKNOWN

Once as I passed you in the street  
You turned away your head,  
And looked into the windows of  
A barber shop instead.

I cannot think in such a place  
You found what you would seek...  
Oh, was it that you liked me, Girl,  
And feared that I would speak?

PANHANDLER

Buchanan talked in sums of large importance,  
His figures dazzled as his schemes amazed;  
The brilliant sense and flow of his exhortance  
Conquered, and left one feeling slightly dazed.

Millions for him were easy computations;  
From oil to ermine ranged his arguments—  
But always, at the end of his orations,  
One found Buchanan needed fifty cents.

## ON A LADY

Poets her conquering beauty tell in rhyme,  
And Princes polish lyrics to her grace;  
Bishops are writing ballads—even Time  
Himself has written lines upon her face.

BED

This is the very same bed;  
In it my grandfather died.  
Well I recall what he said:  
"This is the very same bed..."  
Just that—and next moment was dead.  
*Now I am here with my bride.*  
This is the very same bed;  
In it my grandfather died!

## LYRIC

Lady, if you speak the truth  
With your eyes of granite,  
Little love and less of ruth  
Holds you to our planet.

Yet the pressure of a knee  
Mutes the strings of reason.  
Soul, if this be treachery,  
Make the most of treason!



FOOTNOTE

Thus the prince in the fairy tale tarried:

There was singing of harps and bright laughter;  
And thus were the true lovers married,  
And happily lived... ever after?

Ever after! So endeth the pages

As writ by the great versifiers.

"There were giants," they said, "in those ages."

Ay, giants—and subsidized liars!

## AT THE STATE FAIR

Over the heads of the yokels,  
High on a swaying wire,  
Mademoiselle Lepelletier  
Dances and slithers and slides.  
Slim her ankles, and round her calves  
Under her foaming laces,  
And the rustics gaze with wild desire  
And feast their Puritan eyes.  
But one goes home to his light o' love  
And eyes her with disapproval,  
And tries to imagine that dreadful girth  
High on a swaying wire!

## LA VIE LITTÉRAIRE

Then,  
For the last time he dipped his pen  
Into his heart, and wrote  
"The End." It seemed a bugle note  
Cried as he moved his hand across the sheet,  
And something swelled and rattled in his throat.  
Ah, it was sweet!  
Yet in his heart the pain still lingered on,  
A dull gray memory of agony,  
Of turmoil and of tortured reverie  
Often from dark to dawn;  
The bittersweet of truth revealed, confessed...  
It was himself he wrote into the book;  
The wounds were his, they raged yet in his breast,  
He was the victim of the rack and cross,  
The torn, bruised thing he painted; his the loss,  
The gain, the doubt, the joy, the sorrowing.  
Let them but look  
Into his pages who had eyes to see  
And hearts to understand and sympathize,  
And they would know his secret agony,  
His fears, his courage, and his suffering.  
These were not lies,  
Decked out with tinsel trimmings and fine lace,  
To while away an hour of idleness,

But the dark record of a great disgrace,  
And victory born of a great distress...

And so the book went forth into the world,  
Hurled  
Into the maelstrom of contending wit  
And specious fancy, lone as any leaf  
Blown down the tides of commerce; and in time  
He read what they who criticized had writ. . .

One said it was a litany of grief,  
And gibbered of its melancholy splendor;  
One from the paper jacket stole a phrase,  
Agreeing that the love scenes were most tender,  
Whilst one who thought to praise,  
Although annoyed,  
Spoke learnedly about himself and Freud,  
And turned a clever rhyme. . .  
A charlatan of brilliant reputation  
Declared the fellow lacked imagination.











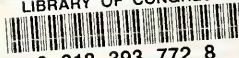








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