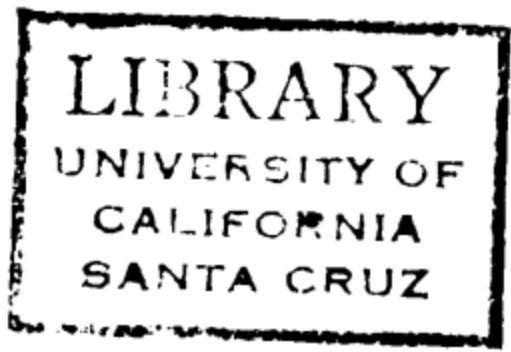


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WORDS FOR THE CHISEL

Books by
GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

**HAWAIIAN HILLTOP
FOR EAGER LOVERS**

**MAY DAYS: an Anthol-
ogy of Masses Liberator
Verse. Edited by Gene-
vieve Taggard**

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD
WORDS FOR THE CHISEL



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TO
R. W.

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CONTENTS

Words for the Chisel	11
I POPPY JUICE	
Poppy Juice	15
II SWARM	
Swarm	31
Merely	32
To One Loved Wholly Within Wisdom	33
Two Captives	34
Time Out	35
Dissonance Then Silence	36
Imminent Doom	37
Memoir	38
Galatea Again	39
Final	40
Picture	41
III MOODS OF WOMEN	
Doomsday Morning	45
The Desert Remembers Her Reasons	46
Tiger Moth	48
Song for Unbound Hair	49
Man in the Wind	50
Mr. Happiness Takes a Train	51

Autumn Episode	52
Chanson	53
Dead Grecians	54
The Unfaithful	55
Once	56
Just Daylight	57
Take the Summer	58
Only the Frost	59
Woodsman	60
Mirror	61
Runner	63
Elegy in Dialogue	64
To Several	66
Gipsy Confession	67
Quarrel	68
Truce	69
Ballad of Typical Lovers	70
Tale of the Wife and the Welder	71
A Story	72
Long Dialogue One Voice	73
Fall of Dew	75
Storm Centre	76
 IV VOICE IN THE CLOUD	
Threnody in Thin Air	79
Green Parable	82
Eruption in Utopia	84

WORDS FOR THE CHISEL

*The moss will creep upon your name
And fill the cleft of mine
And scraggley grasses grow and frame
The granite's oblong line.*

*This unsubstantial air we cleave
To rear us massive form
Will aid the moss, the viney weave,
The little clumsy worm*

*Within whose body all the crust
Of earth is powdered so
Often, with such patient lust
Against such granite woe.*

POPPY JUICE

POPPY JUICE

THERE is an island in an alien slant
Of water running endlessly on its edge
Whose mountains shut at sunset like a plant
Against a sea of darkness. When the wedge—
The peak of shadow skims the valley ledge
The island locks its color up, leaves bare
Its beaches to the sea, the colorless air.

And people in the cup of sea and sky
Among the painted island's blues and reds
See every night the wedge of shadow fly
Across their valleys, over all their heads
And shut their eyes, and hide themselves in beds;—
Meanwhile the sea spread level on the tide
Prowls in its surf. Lehua lived and died

Under this quarrel, this twofold daily change . . .
Her men found graves along the China coast:
Eric the elder;—then the other strange
Eric, her son, who wanted to be lost.
Lehua knew too well which she loved most.
She ended like a barnacle fastened where
The harbor waters see-saw. It is there.—

The little shack the schooners anchored by . . .
They tried, the other day to raid the den,
They found a passive Buddha hung up high,
Eight grams of opium and some Chinamen
With one kanaka hag. They asked her when
She took to living there. She gave no answer.
—There was a woman once, a hula dancer

Who kept this place, said someone half aloud.
She turned her back and muttered with a frown.
They took her with her pipe away. The crowd
Moved off behind. Enormous night came down
And made a ruby of the tropic town
And heaped the sea upon the open shore—
And no one saw the woman any more.

The hollow lantern hung like a fat spider
With four words in Chinese, lettered dull red.
The door was creaking in, opening wider,
You saw a crooked stool, an iron bed,
Old canisters of tea and chunks of bread . . .
The moon slipped past the window like a ghost
And touched the pink-nosed Buddha on the post.

Eric had brought the Buddha from Japan.
He laid it on the table, near, for her.
She took it shyly up. The color ran
Into her lips. He saw how red they were.
The carving smelt of sandal-wood and myrrh;
She laughed and kissed it. Eric waiting, grim,
Was thinking how her body suited him.

She was the eeriest woman anywhere
On the Pacific, or Pacific shores;—
So fragile and so savage, with the stare
Of delicate deer halted on all fours . . .
Lehua ran with laughter from the snores
Of all the heavy white-men who had found
Smoke more substantial than her singing sound.

She had come down from the valleys very young
Just sixteen—lodged with friends who kept a house

For haole sailors. When her song was sung
And danced her dance, Eric would seem to rouse
From lethargy, until a long carouse
Ended in silence, while she smiled and darted
Beyond his grasp. And he grew sullen hearted.

She knew he was a smuggler and a cold
White-angered Swede, and not the man for her;
But still she wore her flowers white and gold,
And shrugged at him, but shunned him oftener
With feints to snare him till she saw him stir
Like a lean tiger roused from wary sleeping,
So Eric rose and came, stalking and creeping.

What Eric wanted more than simply some
Woman or other, neither he nor she
Knew. He waited, eyed her, narrow and dumb;
Another white man took her on his knee.
And there they sat,—furtive and treacherous three,
Till she, Lehua, rose and fled far out
On the long pier, and paused. And faced about.

She married him and hated him. He strode
Like some rude giant in their narrow den;
His head would sway the lamps that gloomed and
glowed
Faint in the hazy cloud. The prostrate men
Stirred at his proddings, drowsed to sleep again;
Eric would bang the door, forgetting her
Go out to wharves where ships and seamen were.

And she would sit aside and sigh and dream,
Dream as she lingered at the window-pane;

She loved the mountains and the mountain stream:
She longed to smell the maile vine again
Spreading its odor with the drowsy rain.
—I hate the sea, she said—the smell of tar,
I want to go where pools and palm-trees are.

Men were afraid to speak to her. She dreamed
Like a young virgin tenderly, and more
Indifferent than aged women,—seemed
To be again as she had been before
She came to town a hula-girl and whore;
Only great Eric strode across her trance,
Laughed loud to see her shudder at his glance.

Late in the evenings came the sound of whips,
Hoof-beats and cries; the long banana-train
Came from the valleys to the riding ships;
Donkeys were loaded with ripe sugar-cane,
And wet banana-leaves gleaming with rain.
The mountain fastnesses she saw, the tall
Still palms, and heard the mountain water-fall.

The water-fall that poured, rushing in quiet,—
That seemed to fall and then to wane and hang;
And the pale tree that rose so lightly by it—
The maile vine that wound on the lang-lang.
This place was fixed: this picture was a pang.
She saw it with the shutting of an eye
White on the darkness of another sky.

Waves mocked her then, and the whispering hush
Spreading with sunset gave her heart small ease;
At night along the reefs, the unending rush—

Not like the noise that falters in the trees
Above the lesser ripples of the breeze;
Lying awake she listened tense and wept;
Or she would wail and murmur if she slept.

He said he'd take her with him once. She clung
To the sharp bedstead like a frantic child
Who fears the attic darkness. When he wrung
Her fingers from the bed-post, Eric smiled
And carried her as far as where the piled
Barrels of saki made a tunnel,—there
She screamed till Eric hushed her with her hair.

He left his wife ashore to sell the rice.
She kept the gambling house and kept it loose;
What stakes were won with throwing of the dice
They shoved into her lap for poppy juice.
She knew the trade now. Eric knew her use.
In all the foreign ports he boasted how
His fair kanaka kept her marriage vow.

—Just a kanaka, but not like the kind
That changes into niggers, Eric said
Coming to port, not knowing what to find,
But she was there, and sullen, being wed.
—You are a sailor's woman. When I'm dead
You can go off with someone on a spree,
But now, no matter what, you stick to me.

—And here I am, she said—Big with a child,
And Eric's child. Why Eric's? Tell me why
I married him? I never wanted wild
Acres of sea or sailors. She would cry,

Beat on the window. Eric going by
Was beautiful and terrible to her
As her own brother dark men never were.

So Eric ran the gales for years between
This harbor and the Orient. She grew
More slender with the years and more serene;
Sight of her son gave pride to her anew;
There was a whispered pact between these two.
She called him Eric. In her heart she said,
—A few years and his father will be dead.

—A few years and we two will leave this place,
Find some far valley shut to sea and ships.
Perhaps its narrow beauty will erase
These haole smiles and sorrows from my face.
Now I am weary and my throat and lips
Parched with the rank black smoke . . . I am not
fair
As once I was. We will be happy there.

—We will be happy where we both belong
Growing our taro. Kanakas are not made
For struggle, little Eric. We are strong
Only in endless rustles of green shade.
And you will bring me bread-fruit. I will braid
Mats for our hut and keep a little pig,
And we will have a feast when he is big.

Kanaka blood in him, blood of a dancer
Took him away and made him wary at
Her happy valley plan. He didn't answer
All her sharp questions when he came but sat

Tight in the corner like a cougar-cat.
She had forgotten how she used to be
Before she was rebuked by the blind sea.

And Eric's blood was like a thing at feud
With all her languid color and her fair
Clusters of flowers;—so he fled her mood,
Followed his father, always, everywhere,
A dark man at his heels,—a funny pair
To everyone who saw Lehua frown
And watch them as they wandered up and down.

The men around would offer her a smoke.
—A smuggler takes no opium, she said.
Suppose old Eric came before I woke?
She was shrewd now and always kept her head.
She wore an amber flower and a red
Silk *holuku*.—The smoke is made for men;
When one pipe's taken, there's no stopping then.

Some few knew why she left the smoke alone,
And burned a lantern nightly at the door.
Her boy was strong as steel and fully grown
And Eric nursed a leper's snowy sore.
They would outlive him long, and what was more
Live as they chose to live on Eric's gold—
And Eric knew they watched him growing old.

Eric the elder a leper! And she
Who shared the labor of the opium trade
In love with nothing brutal like the sea,
A fragile woman, only half afraid,
Something between a mother and a maid.

Eric was dying now, warping and grim:
He always took the boy to sea with him.

She never dreaded sickness,—only feared
This Swedish love of water. She would be
On the old wharf-end always when he neared
Drawing him back to make him anchor. He
Climbed like a sailor, agile, prancingly,
But he was polished bronze, and walked as one
Whose race had been emboldened by the sun.

She spread a net to keep him in the brief
Time of his staying,—wore a sheer dress,
Yellow and red, a spotted mango-leaf
That eddied on her body. Happiness
Ran in her voice. Minnows and water-cress,
All little treasures she had gleaned she poured
Out on the pier before him. Ocean roared.

It was a day as light and sunny sweet
As any in a valley. Flashing brown,
The boy was diving, circling at her feet,
And she would lean and almost wish to drown.
Then up he climbed. And suddenly plunged down
Dragging her with him under and under. They
Always were terrified, after that day.

So, like a landsman, this young Eric stood
In the low door-way of the little den
Unable to go back to ship. One mood
Hung over both. The night was full of men
Putting to sea and sea was loud again

With the long wooing of a plangent woe . . .
She cut the web at last and let him go.

Across the harbor stood the Wainae,
Vast opal mountains open to the sun
Save for the middle, where the deep shades lie
Purple and blue. She watched the shadows run
Into the fastness of the cleft, where none
But shadow people go, and none return
Out of old depths of sandal-wood and fern.

And then old Eric died. She heard the news
As one who waits too long to alter much
The heavy groove of living. Smuggler crews
Stole in at night to bring her smoke and touch
Women and drink her saki. She was such
A witch for all kanaka boys that they
Didn't dare tell her all they came to say.

Didn't dare tell her how her son had dropped
His father into green, under the bow;
Didn't dare tell her how he furlled, and stopped,
Then tacked for days above him. Chiefly how
This huge Hawaiian skipper picked a row
With every Swede who said she was a whore
Or told old Eric's trouble. So ashore

He dumped his Chinese cargo, left it all
For any muddy pirate, hidden in weeds,
And ran without a ballast into a squall
Like a pure madman, having left his Swedes
Who knew some navigation mere half-breeds

Never quite master . . . Docked at last and slid
Into the Hong Kong crowds. There, what he did

Those winter months—smoked or followed women,
Or looked for secret cures, or simply loafed,
Nobody knew . . . But he got his men
One day in April when the skies were soft
And set them first to scrubbing deck. Aloft
The canvas thundered gently. Eric wore
A turban like an Arab. Words he swore

Were taken from his father, and the crew
Declared his father left him other things,
The white man's gift among them. Eric knew
They called him *hap' a haole*, and the stings
Of many ancient jests and mutterings
Drove him to sea, where he was master, where
He strode the deck and drank the tropic air.

Out of the west, out of a wordless year
His schooner came one day, riding the reef;
With sunset on her topsails she came near;
This coming rode on old Lehua's grief
Bringing her eyes unreasonable relief;
She sang that day, put on her spotted gown
And watched them anchor, haul her canvas down.

At last night came, so breathless and so black—
The old rats left off gnawing, and the tide
Mouthed with its toothless gums, the timber-stack.
A single star was open, crystal-eyed
When she let down a lantern over-side.
She swung it twice above the water-mark
Then drew it up, and blew the lantern dark.

An oar dipped from the bay. Came the faint creak
Of locks and running ripples at the bow.
She brushed her hair impatient from her cheek.
Eric was coming. Eric was coming now.
—Mother, he said—I can't land. Anyhow
I didn't come for long. Don't miss me—I—
Mother, he said—I've come to say goodbye.

Why did he come so stealthily as if
He were a seaman still, a criminal
On shore. He sat there hidden, talking, stiff . . .
His voice in darkness sounded beautiful.
Beating on shore resounded the loud, dull
Chant of the sea that followed when he fled;
She wished he were with her, safe in his bed.

—I've got to go away and leave this place.
The smuggling time is over here. And you . . .
You've never seen me much, to miss my face.
I've got a fine old ship. I've signed a crew.
I want to see the world. Her black hair blew
Black as the night and covered up her eyes.
She knew that she was listening to lies.

The shadows of the ships all loomed up vast;
Felt but not seen they stood, tangled in air.
There was no light in heaven or earth to cast
Light on the stealthy tide, nor anywhere
Sound but of his voice below her there.
—Darkness and sea, she said,—darkness and sea,
And my own son has turned away from me.

—Here is some gold, he said.—Mother believe
I go away from you because I must.
Don't touch me, Mother. Mother, don't you grieve.
I'll come again. I promise you. I just . . .
She lit her lantern, shaking then. He thrust
An oar against the wharf-end as she swung
Her light sharp on the water. Cold she hung

Peering. He sat there dazzled in the glare
Of her sick lantern . . . saw his forehead so
Horrible white (his eyes threatened her stare . . .),
A scar like a half moon. Softly—Now you know,
Mother, damn you, now will you let me go?
The sea between them lifted, fell and spoke,
And after that she slept and never woke.

She took to smoke that night, deafened her ears
To sea, to sound of the sea, and prowling ships;
Smoke veiled her eyes and with the hurrying years
Set its dry seal upon her withering lips,
Darkening her face from men in dull eclipse.
—He took his father's name, she'd vacantly say,
A father, a father took a son away.

So with the years she sat and saw his ghost
Rise in the phantom vapors of the air;
The passive little Buddha on the post
Changed countenance to see the spectre there . . .
Deep in the drowsy perfume of her hair
Beside the spectre presence of her son
She found the valley of oblivion.

But not the other valley. No one comes
Near its serene reality. The tall
Bow of the water bends itself and drums
On the bare rocks. No voice will ever call
Or ever answer from the valley wall.
Untouched by dream it hangs in emptiness,
And the pure stream pours on and is no less.

SWARM

SWARM

ETHEREAL energy, airy lust,
Intangible madness,—these have made
A bee-like cloud about her head.

The coward, the coward is running home,
To hide herself in a bed of dust—
To huddle into an ugly bed.
Underground they can never come.

She broke and ate their honeycomb.
Over her belly the bees will hum.

MERELY

MERELY the thought of you
Makes me alive and new;

And your touch, merely,
Turns me mad—nearly.

If merely touch and thought
Make me so splendid

How marvelously am I caught
Doomed and ended . . .

Knowing which I merely
Smile and tarry,

Even now so nearly
Mad though wary.

TO ONE LOVED WHOLLY
WITHIN WISDOM

SOMEONE will reap you like a field,
Pile your gathered plunder,

Garner what you bring to yield,
Turn your beauty under;

In cruel usages, in such
Sickle-cutting, heaping,

Certain women toil too much,
Weary of their reaping;

Someone else may winnow you;
Someone else may plunder;

I have cut too many new
Swathes, and broken under

Soil that should have fallow lain
To be greedy either

For the shattered stalk, the stain
Where the clusters wither.

TWO CAPTIVES

I CANNOT keep the pompous years
From their poor task of taking you
Down the next alley-way of spears—
A gauntlet to be hurried through;

But now I watch them with a frown
Impassive as I try to be
And break a twig and throw it down
And look for them to come for me.

TIME OUT

WE will put Time to sleep on that warm hill.
Lie naked in the tawny grass and fill
Our veins with golden bubbles.

Grass will grow
Beneath your arm-pits and between your feet
Before we take our bodies up, and go
Like dazzled aliens through the dusty street.

DISSONANCE THEN SILENCE

BOTH being cowards, and pulses ice,
Knowing each the other's paradise;

Wanton with anguish and wry bliss—
Bruised the too great love with a death's kiss;

As eyes closed cruel-blind, and ecstasy
Weeping and ceasing to weep, went free

To come again in circles, lessening
But widening the span of ancient pain:

There being pain for tasting paradise,
And pain for lack of it; pain twice;

And the last pain: to see the flying moon,
To be immobile and to make no moan.

IMMINENT DOOM

THIS frail and fragrant morning
Is streaming on toward noon;
Listen to my warning!
There will be buzzing soon.
Soon we shall be shaken
Like flowers and gold grass
And all our pollen taken
By a bee with bowels of brass.

MEMOIR

SUCH bliss he had, such agony,
And what he had he gave to me.

I shut the door of our small house,
And lived with agony's carouse:

I opened the door and let in
Others to live down the din;

And all the time his bliss was there
Eluding me like silver air,

And when I caught his silver glee
It was too magical for me.

I broke his bliss, I hushed his woe,
We stood in our empty house to go

Packed and coated on our quest;
He went east, I went west,

Until at length we met before
The narrow panel of our door;

We stood and faced each other as
Long as life-times take to pass;

Into the house I led him then,
I shut the door on living men;

And now we watch grope to and fro
The ghost of bliss, the ghost of woe.

GALATEA AGAIN

LET me be marble, marble once again:
Go from me slowly, like an ebbing pain,
Great mortal feuds of moving flesh and blood:
This mouth so bruised, serene again,—and set
In its old passive changelessness, the rude
Wild crying face, the frantic eyes—forget
The little human shuddering interlude.

And if you follow and confront me there,
O Sons of Men, though you cry out and groan
And plead with me to take you for my own
And clutch my dress as a child, I shall not care,

But only turn on you a marble stare
And stun you with the quiet gaze of stone.

FINAL

A FAR barbaric sadness haunts these hills
In mist of autumn and magnificence
Of clear unearthly color—

I have crossed the wall
Past mortal sorrow and its single sense;
I am a human dying of my ills
Who comes upon a cosmic funeral
And the still splendor of indifference.

PICTURE

THESE triumphant hills have stood
Waiting for human magnitude;
They have seen
Only the humble and the mean:
The hurried farmer, haying, heaping
Acres of grass before the storm;
Smoke from houses, winter reaping,
And the heavy uniform
Furrow . . . These hills have seen
Only the meagre and the mean;
Awkward women weeding rows;
Children brandishing at crows;
Men building barns and cutting wood
In an eternal solitude.

MOODS OF WOMEN

DOOMSDAY MORNING

DEAF to God who calls and walks
Until the earth aches with his tread,
Summoning the sulky dead,
We'll wedge and stiffen under rocks,
Or be mistaken for a stone,
And signal as children do, "Lie low,"
Wait and wait for God to go.

The risen will think we slumber on
Like slug-a-beds. When they have gone
Trooped up before the Judgment Throne,—
We in the vacant earth alone—
Abandoned by ambitious souls,
And deaf to God who calls and walks
Like an engine overhead
Driving the disheveled dead,—
We will rise and crack the ground
Tear the roots and heave the rocks,
And billow the surface where God walks,
And God will listen to the sound
And know that lovers are below
Working havoc till they creep
Together from their sundered sleep.

Then end, world! Let your final darkness fall!
And God may call and call and call.

THE DESERT REMEMBERS
HER REASONS

How many rivers swerved aside
Rather than take a stony bride!
Rather than take a stony bride
Rivers and rivers swerved aside
And I grew desolate, and died.

At my hot breath they checked their rush
And reared a wave, a head, and hush. . . .
Then fell and fled and would not come
To kiss the color of my loam.

The young bright rivers backed and fought—
And I lay thirsty and unsought.

They married valleys. If I caught
Water in my hand, it seeped. . . .
Rivers around—rain over me—leaped;
I was unwatered and unreaped.
Rather than take me for their bride
Rivers and rivers swerved aside
And I grew desolate, and died.

—(They shook their silver manes and curved
Aside. Aside they swept and swerved
Past my dull grandeur. River droves
Dared do no more than pound their hooves
And skirt my sombre purple. . . . White
Gallopings cataracts took to flight.)

Why have I the lustre of stone?
Color of scorn, and scorn's tone
Brood over me. I move beneath
Pale dust with an edged breath.

Sliding under cover of sand
I throttle young rivers with a bold hand.

TIGER MOTH

BLACK and Savage, here I lie
Taken by thy symmetry,

Quiet as the little beast
Taken in the jungle midst;

Breathing lightly, lest I stir
Some of thy bold gossamer,

Wanting sleep, where all forget
Dew of terror made them wet,

With mortality come on
And the crying glory gone;

So to wake as we began
Just a woman and a man.

SONG FOR UNBOUND HAIR

Oh, never marry Ishmael!
Marry another and prosper well;
But not, but never Ishmael . . .

What has he ever to buy or sell?
He only owns what his strength can keep,
Only a vanishing knot of sheep,
A goat or two. Does he sow or reap?
In the hanging rocks rings his old ram's bell—
Who would marry Ishmael!

What has he to give to a bride?
Only trouble, little beside,
Only his arm like a little cave
To cover a woman and keep her safe;
A rough fierce kiss, and the wind and the rain,
A child, perhaps, and another again—
Who would marry Ishmael?

The arrogant Lucifer when he fell
Bequeathed his wrath to Ishmael;
The hand of every man is set
Against this lad, and this lad's hand
Is cruel and quick,—forget, forget
The nomad boy on his leagues of sand. . . .

Marry another and prosper well,
But not, but never Ishmael.

MAN IN THE WIND

IN the end I'll open, find
Nothing knocking but the wind.

When you come you come so lightly,
I can never know you rightly;
Vines it might be from the eaves;
You have fingers like the leaves;
You can veer upon my door
Batter there, be off, before
I can even turn the lock.
It is hard to tell your knock
From the elements I love
From the tap, the knuckle of
Autumn gale or winter storm;
Always when you come, your form
Speeds upon the spinning air
And I stand and stare.

So tonight I open, find
Nothing knocking but the wind.

MR. HAPPINESS TAKES A TRAIN

ON that day there were milkweed plants;
I saw a running net of ants
And at the river I said goodbye
To all my happiness.

(Goodbye, Mr. Happiness, O, goodbye)

Up the hill

The maples hurried, and were still.
I was content. I walked until
I put my hand on the kitchen door.
Mr. Happiness won't come here any more.

AUTUMN EPISODE

BE sure of this: the chorus in the grass
Shrilling ahead of winter in one voice
Will be the warning you are come to pass
Against my will, regardless of my choice.

And autumn's self will ravish me again
And winnow me and find me lavish as
I found myself when fruit was scarlet, when
There was a voice insistent in the grass.

CHANSON

HE is much too lovely for
Kissing any longer;
Women, bar the little door,
Bring the iron-monger,
Make the latchet stronger.

Only iron-welders have
Tools that can deny us;
And a little latch may save
Much that might defy us,
—Or go gaily by us!

DEAD GRECIANS

HE worshipped her in quaint and quiet ways,
Linked her with loveliness, and taught her to be proud;
But once she ran, and crying in a cloud
Dark as her torment, intruded on his gaze,
Like a lost child, crying its soul aloud.

She robbed him of herself, for his cool praise,
And took sweet adoration from his days,
And now he loves dead Grecians, marble-browed.

THE UNFAITHFUL

BREAK me a bread not made with hands,
And I will eat and never more
Go wandering forth in foreign lands
Looking—what am I looking for?

Or teach me how to brew my own
Drink, and how to make such bread;
Others, asked, have offered a stone—
You must give me myself, instead.

And I will thus reward your love:
Never to eat of you again,
And stand alone, and never move,
And look like rock—to other men.

(Too hollow for you to ask much of,
But a rock to anchor other men.)

ONCE

THERE was Magdalen, the maid
Who heard a holy name
And brought an alabaster
Box of ointment,—laid
All at the wrong messiah's feet;

And when the Bridegroom came
Had only empty husks for him
And heavy tears and shame.

JUST DAYLIGHT

MEN follow women whom they would not follow;
And women yield who do not want to yield;
Wounds here are given, hardly to be healed;

(Oh, better, better, better to be dead
Than so to lie in such an alien bed.)

TAKE THE SUMMER

TAKE the Summer—when it's done
What's remembered but the Sun?
Now with winter, when *it's* in
Inclination after Sin
Withers with the bitter eaves,
Goes the way of gutter leaves.

Man's a creature of his Seasons.
When he loves, a hundred reasons
Will not tell him *why* he does.
When he doesn't, why he was
Mad to do so, but for this:
Summer kisses, he must kiss.

ONLY THE FROST

Good night, good night. And this warning:
I'll be kind and cold-hearted with you—
I will take you with me any morning
Up the path where this evening we flew
To the lap where we lay in the hills.

There, where the lavish sun spills
To the level of the hollow,
Where the sun-motes flicker and fall
And the flakes of the sparse leaves follow,
When you see the sure sun crawl
Where you saw the huge moon hover
And the swallows go southward, over—
You will wonder you loved me at all!

You will know you wanted, and made
A girl-lover of moon-shade.

Morning, and the sane light chills
The love, the loved, and the lover;
Why search for the little thing lost
On scarlet leaves, under frost?
There is only the frost in the hills.

WOODSMAN

I THINK you draw out roses on the stem
Just by your love, because you look for them;

So a drab woman, when you look at her,
Puts on new leaves where never any were.

No matter how much winter she has seen
Or how much sorrow, you will make her green.

If she should stand a skeleton-tree for years
You would not give her up for all your fears,

But look at her as if she rustled soft
Multitudes of leaves held lightly up aloft,

Until her branches were an airy flush,
Color of second life, green burning bush.

And if the woman wrings her hands and shakes
Her thin leaves from her—bows her head and takes

The steep path down her root, to lie as seed
Under the ragged triumph of a weed,

And though her shell grows crooked, cold and brown
You let her go, and do not cut her down;

You let her go, content that she will come
Up from the earth in hymeneal bloom;

You do not cut her down—though all her sisters wear
Glittering leaves. You are as wise as air.

M I R R O R

A YOUNG girl saw in a mirror-glass
The sun like a spot of smitten brass;
She saw three lines of black birds pass;
A crooked tree, a curly cloud;
A new-mown field and a country road,—
These the silver mirror showed.

And when the novice gazed again
She saw Orion pure and plain;
The moon rode in and ploughed a lane
Of noiseless silver in the glass;
A black hour—then the spot of brass,—
Back whence they flew, the beaked birds pass. . . .

And this is all she saw for years
Unless you add her silly tears,
Her own peaked face where her own face peers;

Unless you want to count her own
Blue eyes she neared and pondered on
And closed and opened all alone.

Until one day it seemed that down
The vacant road of ribbon-brown
She saw a mortal figure blown.
It shaped and strode and was a man
Naked and negligent and tan,
With animal loveliness it ran. . . .

Running too large, too light and tall—
The torso flashed, a living wall,

Slim hips, belly panting,—all
Blurred in a loop of silver smoke,
Cleared, then with a quiet stroke
Crash!—the crystal mirror broke!

RUNNER

You are not for valleys. Or for any maiden.
You are a runner. I have seen. I know.
You were never made to move, laden, heavy-laden;
You were born to nimble air. I have seen you go.

One wind is your wind. I have seen you finger
Forms in the air, sightless, hard to hold;
Nothing ever held you, ever made you linger;
Ever even ran with you; no one, young or old.

She is like a sickle, cutting swathes with rasping,
Swishing as she comes, and the trees lie down like
wheat;
Go to find your phantom now, clasping and unclasping
A wind eluding open hands, eluding lightest feet.

ELEGY IN DIALOGUE

SEE . . . we find pathways
All overgrown,
Prod on old spider,
Turn a damp stone,
Until in a loop a spider spun
We start at a silver skeleton.

This is death—this exquisite
Quiver of hollow coral. Try—
The delicate thing is all awry—
Put it in order, gently, knit
These dangling stems together tight;
Put on the flesh, put in the light,
Peer at the wee imagined face,
Pretend—you cannot—pretend you can
Start a little thud in the skeleton man.

So we shall struggle—you or I!

One of us will shortly die
And leave the other alone in the end
Stunned, too weary to pretend.

—Is this death? This delicate tangle,
Caprice of bones at an uneasy angle?

This is the trellis-frame beneath
The bruised and crumbling spray of death.

Death is a reckless lunge—a sprawl
Of naked limbs on a narrow wall.

So shall we struggle, you or I.
One of us will shortly die
And leave the other a callow mask
Or an idiot smile to remember by,
And a granite body to conjure and turn.

Against such massive unconcern
One will labor. The other lie
Tall and quiet. Tell me why. . . .

TO ALMOST ANYONE

You are too wise, too wise, I want
A lover not so chill, so sure.
I might make verses for a taunt
To turn you bold and burn you pure—
So sane you are, so faintly brave. . . .

Go get yourself a cosy grave!

GIPSY CONFESSION

THERE was a lad as cold as ice;
He was my lover,—twice.

(Don't ask me more; it isn't nice,—
Cruel cold, or I shouldn't be
Counting them up now. Listen to me.)

There was a fellow, once,—I hoped . . .
He and another girl eloped;

A certain lad had let me think—
He went away and took a drink;

Then came a poet suave as oil—
But I was much too giddy to spoil;

There was a man with a bold black beard,
But he was nothing to be feared. . . .

Yet there have been and there will be
One or two or even three
Could make a wanton girl of me:

(A wanton girl is hard to find
When so many men are dull or blind,
Or take a drink, or change their mind. . . .)

QUARREL

STOP fighting! It's the armour that I hate
And not the boy beneath it. Will you run
Out from your anger, put the quarrel straight—
(I will not always be the vanquished one!)

Or shall we go on raging, while we wait
Each for the other to come crying out
Like demons in the bible, so too late,
With frantic tears, bewildered by a doubt:

If I must anger and possess you so
And make you turn on me so black an eye
Your anger may not let you out but grow
To be your only being, by and by;

And we will go down clattering at last,
Two empty people, murderously fast.

TRUCE

FLING down your weapons, weary enemy,
And I will bind the wounds I just now gave;
Ah, keep your strength and all your poise and save
Your passion for tomorrow, when with me
You meet in naked grapple. Who but we
Should heal each other, wounded, who but we,
My tall antagonist, terrible and brave?

Some day beside each other we shall lie
And bleed, and ebb, and separately die:
Beyond this shock of battle, there will be
No warrior for our valor, in the grave.
Forbear to wound me utterly, unless
The time has come for that long loneliness.

BALLAD OF TYPICAL LOVERS

THEY are untrue by fits and starts,
And each goes gray with grief;
They both break ardent beauty and their hearts
Believing love is brief;

She wantons with a new man
Against the day love fails;
In hell, on a wooden woman,
He hangs with kisses for nails.

And love is always under
Their feet, wherever they move;
Too late to mend their blunder
How sick they are now, of Love!

They loathe each other and wonder
What strange thing has them bound:

Too late, they grope and falter
Together, when they have found
The bond they aged to alter
Was solid as the ground.

Too late, too late;—for never
Will love be anything
But acrid flesh, forever,
And restlessness, in spring.

TALE OF THE WIFE AND THE WELDER

ONCE a great welder gave a woman his lonely
Cold iron dreams to hang upon her only
And decked the fragile woman with a great chain.

She wears his madness mingled with his pain
Arches and preens,—O she is very vain!

Dreams are too much for sober women to carry,
But she,—she wears his passion with a pride
Like a little slender jewel-laden bride. . . .

Of all rare women, what a woman to marry!
She likes her rôle. . . . He's part satisfied.
She's a good peg to hang his anguish on,
So suave she sits, so dutiful, so very
Nice, with no notion where his wits have gone.

She looks so winsome, he so gaunt and weary;
So arch and flighty,—he so worn and wan,
She's all alert, and he, how heavy-eyed!
But still together, still they struggle on,
And so she journeys, jangling at his side!

Tons settle on her, being welded from
Metal that clanks and snow that tightens numb,
Both shaped and beaten down to look the same
Out of fierce elements no other man could tame. . . .

Around her tiny throat in captured form
The tempest writhes and on her back, the storm.

A STORY

Love came a little too late,
Bringing hunger and danger and hate;

With these she made up her bed;
With these devoured sparse bread;

These, the gifts of her fate,
Splendor and sorrow,—then late
Wave on wave, instead
Came hunger and danger and hate.

There was love, but frail with the weight
Of hunger and danger and hate.
—These I endured, she said.

These she endured. They are great.
She is greater than these. She is dead.

LONG DIALOGUE

ONE VOICE

ENDURE the dark.
I have turned
You out on chaos. . . .
My need is deep
To open to such comers on the earth.
What is it then you envy so?
You who are nothing
Who might suddenly start
Up from my torpor, up from sleep.

Enter not now, through me, into agony: the narrow
groove of birth.

Endure the dark.
I have turned
You out on chaos.
Enter not now, through me.
Endure where
You are in darkness howling with the wind.
And I with you, I limited, you blind.

Elemental, pure,
Endure
Darkness and the terrible lust of speed.
I move
On a firm planet, still, in me, the stream,
The precipice of space, the earth's groove. . . .

Endure the dark.
Strangely, I endure

The nothingness of you—your
Unbodied being. This insistent pain
Is mortal illness, being neither in
The glut of life or death, caught in meshes, given
Space still to turn
About a nothingness that in its time
Will have its atoms and its tiny suns.

FALL OF DEW

SWEET mortal boy who walks with me
Nearer and nearer the sleepy sea

Wherein we shall be separate
Drowning singly—it is late;

Now while my mind is clear and airy
I want to hurry, hurry, carry

All I may ever keep with me
Before it vanishes, to the sea;

Toward the salty sea I take
Dew from a little inland lake;

A lake that lay on a leaf, where
You wrung water from the air;

The sea has nothing to say to this;
I will dilute her salt with bliss;

However silent, it has been.
I am sleepy and serene.

STORM CENTRE

PAST noon, past the strong
Hour for full song,
—However late—
Mere silence holds me. Here are met
Furious winds and the great
Quiet is desperate.

Utterly still they stand locked.
Once only the earth rocked
With the weakening of one.

This is battle, forehead-on.
Barbarous singing follows when
One triumphs. Now the centre
Tightens again
Closes. None enter—

It is silent where
Wrestles the air.

VOICE IN THE CLOUD

THRENODY IN THIN AIR

HAVE you ever been lost?
Or gone like a ghost
From pillar to post
Afloat like a frost—
Lost, lost on the coast
Of the billowy air—
Have you ever been lost?

Or ever sailed by
Too shaken to cry,
Too quiet to care
For the slow cattle's stare,
Lost, lost in the air,
In the billowy air,
In the wide, wide colorless sky?

I was lost, care not why—
I was doomed, I was done.
And I floated and spun
As dizzily lie
The dots on the sun;
As hither and yon,
Zig-zag and awry
As light and alone
I was lifted and blown
In the wide, wide colorless sky.

You are lost? So am I.
This vague dreamy death,—
This exquisite trance,

Is the first little drift
In the long dreary dance
We shall dance by and by.

Are all lost? Will we lie
Effortless, prone
On the shapes of the sky?
Will we crumble with stone
Scatter with hail,
In the wind that goes on,
Past nothingness blown,
To column the pale
Pearl edges of cloud,—
Bellow aloud,
And shatter and batter and tear
The colorless air.

Past stars, the last sun,
I was witness of one
Pale universe, crossed
With little sparks, poured
Past sunlight's great sword,
On nothingness, lost. . . .
—Saw and was lost.

For this, for sheer sight,
For this I went far,
Went out with the light
Of an opening star,
And saw peering, where
Turned circles of air,
The billowy air,
The wide, wide colorless sky.

Peeped beyond dream;
Looked far beyond
These planets and found
The last zone of all
The level, the tall
Great colorless bourne. . . .

—So to return
With nothing,—to know
We are tiny moths . . . O,
We are lost, you and I,
We are doomed, we are done,
As anyone is
Who stares at the sun. . . .

We have stared at the sun,
We are doomed, we are done,
We have floated and spun
As dizzily lie
The dots on the sun,—

Spinning, we spun,
As hither and yon,
Zig-zag and awry,
As light and alone
We were lifted and blown
In the wide, wide colorless sky.

GREEN PARABLE

A CROWD of women, like a little wood
Of barefoot birches, running under oaks
Wait on the hillside, linger, old and young—
This being spring and trouble in their blood.

While in between them fall with little strokes
Their rotting twigs. They sigh. They have no mood
For falling bit by bit. They clutch the air
And press the stones their roots are struck among—
This being spring and trouble in their blood.

All seasons are alike to them. They bear
No fruit for seed. But this sly early spring
For once has come, for once has stolen upon them;
They wait arrested threshing, while they wring
Their hands and turn their heads bewildered,—all
The tips that merely budded they let fall;
They hold no bud with calyxes. They need
A thing they have no name for. How they push
Upon each other, bid each other hush
And hush the squirrels, turn upon the birds
With troubled rigid faces. Weighed with fear
And laden with the wind and withered seed
They stand and sigh and part their leaves and peer
Over each other's shoulders down a lane
Of aged nettles quivering for rain.

Now in a hasty ripple and a slow
Earth-slipping sigh, the blasted tips are stirred;
Something is coming, something is coming so
Close that it comes too quiet to be heard.

Toss! Down a lane a tall tree flashes.
Turrets of leaves from a pillar of ashes—
Fountains of leaves, a leafy water-fall
Pours down against the sky's high crystal wall.

The young earth wrinkles like a small mole's mound,—
An undulating river underground
Comes like the summer, comes without a sound.

The stranger strides with blazing face, the stranger
Invisible, intangible, and bold;
He brings green torches and he treads in anger,
Lifts up the fallen, shakes alive the old;
He blows a breath before him, blazing gold
And all around the gold-green rips its sheath
In emerald air, from an emerald earth beneath.

And one who cast herself imploring before him
Her long hair flung across his path, now turns
To lift rejoicing leaves on every limb;
Another rockets upward. Crisply burns
Earth's unpolluted green in fronds and ferns.

ERUPTION IN UTOPIA

THERE'LL be a glassy paradise
Where all will have their crowns of ice,
And all will wear their robes of snow;
And the trees will bow, and the winds will blow—
And men will falter to and fro.

Men will prowl like timid beasts
Hungry after a hundred feasts
And break the bracken down in the woods,
Crash and fret and gaze and spy—
And look for nothing, low and high.

Then they will shiver and go to sleep.

To sleep, to sleep, and toss and sigh—
Sprawled they will mutter where they lie,
And sit up rigid, and wonder why.

They seem to stretch and never wake:
There is a glaze they cannot break
To the world outside, or the inner eye;
Oh, how they cry and cannot ache,
Oh, how they try and cannot weep,—
And there's nothing to do but shiver and sleep.

This weight of nothingness is more
Than any planet stood before:
Shades and empty clouds will gather
Tons of fret in weight of weather,
Till under the burden of this lack
Obeisant earth will warp and crack
Open a wound to bleed them terror.

Lava, lava. Slow and thick
Earth oozes, shudders and is sick.

How they will gape at the molten stone,
Take earth's illness for their own,
And groan. . . .

There they will stand, stormed by pain,
The obscene flood, the lewd stain.

Across the glassy zones of ice
Comes the long writhe and the slow hiss,
Sluggish red, the fire's kiss—
Snaky mark in paradise.

And who is this delivers them?
The serpent, yea, the very same
Who was their doom and shame.

Cast down your haughty diadem,
Your paradisal diadem,
Into the lava flame.

Now all the pent-up rivers run
In headlong silence under sun;
And miracle, O, miracle,
The silver fluid in their veins
Is moving in a miracle:

In them their own volcanoes seethe,
And their bright bodies breathe. . . .

And fixedly as in a spell
They watch the serpent writhe and wreathe
Over the earth and on to smite
The glassy sea—and the marble, white
Stone sea uplifts a mist of light.

O, what marvels they behold:
The mountains settling fold on fold,
Cliffs that melt and rivers gold,
And mists like angels rising slowly,
Singing holy, holy, holy.

They are not souls, but flesh at last,
And the rent earth, under the ice,
Dearer than any paradise—
Into the sea their crowns they cast,
Into the air go up their cries,
With joy they rend their snowy guise;

And now they wait, transfixed with awe,
By the white sea—by the red flaw. . . .

Listen to the voice
In the cloud
Listen to the loud
And suddenly ended
Outcry
It is my
Voice in the high
Moon-running ruin of the sky

If you will not listen
If you are afraid
I will go higher
Where you will not hear

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