



**FIRES**

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON



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# FIRES

By the same writer

DAILY BREAD (1910)

WOMENKIND (1912)



# FIRES

By  
Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

New York  
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TO  
GEORGE CLAUSEN  
A TRIBUTE



*Snug in my easy chair,  
I stirred the fire to flame.  
Fantastically fair,  
The flickering fancies came,  
Born of heart's desire:  
Amber woodland streaming;  
Topaz islands dreaming,  
Sunset-cities gleaming,  
Spire on burning spire;  
Ruddy-windowed taverns;  
Sunshine-spilling wines;  
Crystal-lighted caverns  
Of Golconda's mines;  
Summers, unreturning;  
Passion's crater yearning;  
Troy, the ever-burning;  
Shelley's lustral pyre;  
Dragon-eyes, unsleeping;  
Witches' cauldrons leaping;  
Golden galleys sweeping  
Out from sea-walled Tyre:  
Fancies, fugitive and fair,  
Flashed with singing through the air;  
Till, dazzled by the drowsy glare,  
I shut my eyes to heat and light;  
And saw, in sudden night,  
Crouched in the dripping dark,  
With steaming shoulders stark,  
The man who hews the coal to feed my fire.*



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# FIRES

## THE STONE

“AND will you cut a stone for him,  
To set above his head?  
And will you cut a stone for him—  
A stone for him?” she said.

Three days before, a splintered rock  
Had struck her lover dead—  
Had struck him in the quarry dead,  
Where, careless of the warning call,  
He loitered, while the shot was fired—  
A lively stripling, brave and tall,  
And sure of all his heart desired . . .  
A flash, a shock,  
A rumbling fall . . .  
And, broken 'neath the broken rock,  
A lifeless heap, with face of clay,  
And still as any stone he lay,  
With eyes that saw the end of all.

I went to break the news to her:  
And I could hear my own heart beat  
With dread of what my lips might say  
But, some poor fool had sped before;  
And, flinging wide her father's door,  
Had blurted out the news to her,  
Had struck her lover dead for her,  
Had struck the girl's heart dead in her,  
Had struck life, lifeless, at a word,  
And dropped it at her feet:  
Then hurried on his witless way,  
Scarce knowing she had heard.

And when I came, she stood, alone  
A woman, turned to stone:  
And, though no word at all she said,  
I knew that all was known.

Because her heart was dead,  
She did not sigh nor moan,  
His mother wept:  
She could not weep.  
Her lover slept:  
She could not sleep.  
Three days, three nights,

She did not stir:  
Three days, three nights,  
Were one to her,  
Who never closed her eyes  
From sunset to sunrise,  
From dawn to evenfall:  
Her tearless, staring eyes,  
That, seeing naught, saw all.

The fourth night when I came from work,  
I found her at my door.  
“And will you cut a stone for him?”  
She said: and spoke no more:  
But followed me, as I went in,  
And sank upon a chair;  
And fixed her grey eyes on my face,  
With still, unseeing stare.  
And, as she waited patiently,  
I could not bear to feel  
Those still, grey eyes that followed me,  
Those eyes that plucked the heart from me,  
Those eyes that sucked the breath from me  
And curdled the warm blood in me,  
Those eyes that cut me to the bone,  
And pierced my marrow like cold steel.

And so I rose, and sought a stone;  
And cut it, smooth and square:  
And, as I worked, she sat and watched,  
Beside me, in her chair.  
Night after night, by candlelight,  
I cut her lover's name:  
Night after night, so still and white,  
And like a ghost she came;  
And sat beside me, in her chair;  
And watched with eyes aflame.

She eyed each stroke;  
And hardly stirred:  
She never spoke  
A single word:  
And not a sound or murmur broke  
The quiet, save the mallet-stroke.

With still eyes ever on my hands,  
With eyes that seemed to burn my hands,  
My wincing, overwearied hands,  
She watched, with bloodless lips apart,  
And silent, indrawn breath:  
And every stroke my chisel cut,

---

---

Death cut still deeper in her heart:  
The two of us were chiselling,  
Together, I and death.

And when at length the job was done,  
And I had laid the mallet by,  
As if, at last, her peace were won,  
She breathed his name; and, with a sigh,  
Passed slowly through the open door:  
And never crossed my threshold more.

Next night I laboured late, alone,  
To cut her name upon the stone.

## THE WIFE

THAT night, she dreamt that he had died,  
As they were sleeping, side by side:  
And she awakened in affright,  
To think of him, so cold and white:  
And, when she turned her eyes to him,  
The tears of dream had made them dim;  
And, for a while, she could not see  
That he was sleeping quietly.  
But, as she saw him lying there,  
The moonlight on his curly hair,  
With happy face and even breath,  
Although she thought no more of death;  
And it was very good to rest  
Her trembling hand on his calm breast,  
And feel the warm and breathing life;  
And know that she was still his wife;  
Yet, in his bosom's easy stir,  
She felt a something trouble her;  
And wept again, she knew not why;  
And thought it would be good to die—  
To sink into the deep, sweet rest,  
Her hand upon his quiet breast.

---

She slept: and when she woke again,  
A bird was at the window-pane,  
A wild-eyed bird, with wings of white  
That fluttered in the cold moonlight,  
As though for very fear of night;  
And flapped the pane, as if afraid:  
Yet, not a sound the white wings made.  
Her eyes met those beseeching eyes;  
And then she felt she needs must rise,  
To let the poor, wild creature in  
To find the rest it sought to win.  
She rose; and set the casement wide;  
And caught the murmur of the tide;  
And saw, afar, the mounded graves  
About the church beside the waves:  
The huddled headstones gleaming white  
And ghostly in the cold moonlight.

The bird flew straightway to the bed;  
And hovered o'er the husband's head,  
And circled thrice above his head,  
Three times above his dreaming head:  
And, as she watched it, flying round  
She wondered that it made no sound;

And, while she wondered, it was gone:  
And cold and white, the moonlight shone  
Upon her husband, sleeping there;  
And turned to silver his gold hair;  
And paled like death his ruddy face.  
Then, creeping back into her place,  
She lay beside him in the bed:  
But, if she closed her eyes, with dread  
She saw that wild bird's eyes that burned  
Through her shut eyelids, though she turned  
Her blessings over in her heart,  
That peace might come: and with a start,  
If she but drowsed, or dreamt of rest,  
She felt that wild beak in her breast.  
So, wearying for the time to rise,  
She watched, till dawn was in the skies.

Her husband woke: but not a word  
She told him of the strange, white bird:  
But, as at breakfast-time, she took  
The pan of porridge from the crook;  
And all was ready to begin;  
A neighbour gossip hurried in;  
And told the news, that Phoebe Wright  
Had died in childbirth in the night.



---

The husband neither spoke, nor stirred,  
But sat as one who, having heard,  
May never hearken to a word  
From any living lips again;  
And, heedless of the tongues of men,  
Hears, in a silence, dread and deep,  
The dead folk talking in their sleep.  
His porridge stood till it was cold:  
And as he sat, his face grew old;  
And all his yellow hair turned white,  
As it had looked to her last night,  
When it was drenched with cold moonlight.  
And she knew all: yet never said  
A word to him about the dead;  
Or pestered him to take his meat:  
But, sitting silent in her seat,  
She left him quiet with his heart  
To thoughts in which she had no part;  
Until he rose to go about  
His daily work; and staggered out.  
And all that day, her eyes were dim  
That she had borne no child to him.

Days passed: and then, one evening late,  
As she came by the churchyard-gate,

She saw him, near the new-made grave:  
And, with a lifted head and brave,  
She hurried home, lest he should know  
That she had looked upon his woe.  
And when they sat beside the fire,  
Although it seemed he could not tire  
Of gazing on the glowing coal,  
And though a fire was in her soul;  
She sat beside him with a smile,  
Lest he should look on her, the while,  
And wonder what could make her sad  
When all the world but him was glad.  
But, not a word to her he said:  
And silently they went to bed.

She never closed her eyes that night:  
And she was stirring, ere the light;  
And while her husband lay at rest,  
She left his side, and quickly dressed;  
And stole downstairs, as though in fear  
That he should chance to wake, and hear.  
And still the stars were burning bright,  
As she passed out into the night;  
And all the dewy air was sweet  
With flowers that grew about her feet,

---

Where he, for her, when they were wed,  
Had digged and sown a wallflower-bed:  
And on the rich, deep, mellow scent  
A gust of memories came and went,  
As, dreaming of those old glad hours,  
She stooped to pluck a bunch of flowers,  
To lay upon the flowerless grave  
That held his heart beside the wave.  
Though, like a troop of ghosts in white,  
The headstones watched in cold starlight,  
As, by the dead girl's grave she knelt,  
No fear in her full heart she felt:  
But hurried home, when she had laid  
Her offering on the turf, afraid  
That he should wake, and find her gone:  
And still the stars in heaven shone,  
When into bed again she crept,  
And lay beside him, while he slept.  
And when day came, upon his hair,  
The warm light fell: and young and fair,  
He looked again to her kind eyes  
That watched him till 't was time to rise.

And, every day, as he went by  
The churchyard-gate with downcast eye

He saw fresh blooms upon the grave  
That held his heart beside the wave:  
And, wondering, he was glad to find  
That any living soul was kind  
To that dead girl who died the death  
Of shame for his sake: and the breath  
Of those fresh flowers to him was sweet,  
As he trudged home with laggard feet,  
Still wondering who could be her friend.

He never knew, until the end,  
When, in the churchyard by the wave,  
He stood beside another grave:  
And, as the priest's last words were said,  
He turned, and lifting up his head,  
He saw the bunch of flowers was dead  
Upon the dead girl's grave; and felt  
The truth shoot through his heart, and melt  
The frost of icy bitterness,  
And flood his heart with warm distress:  
And, kneeling by his dead wife's grave,  
To her, at last, her hour he gave.

That night, she dreamt he, too, had died,  
And they were sleeping, side by side.

## THE MACHINE

SINCE Thursday he'd been working overtime,  
With only three short hours for food and sleep,  
When no sleep came, because of the dull beat  
Of his fagged brain; and he could scarcely eat.  
And now, on Saturday, when he was free,  
And all his fellows hurried home to tea,  
He was so dazed that he could hardly keep  
His hands from going through the pantomime  
Of keeping-even sheets in his machine—  
The sleek machine that, day and night,  
Fed with paper, virgin white,  
Through those glaring, flaring hours  
In the incandescent light,  
Printed children's picture-books—  
Red and yellow, blue and green,  
With sunny fields and running brooks,  
Ships at sea, and golden sands,  
Queer white towns in Eastern lands,  
Tossing palms on coral strands—  
Until at times the clank and whirr and click,  
And shimmer of white paper turned him sick;

And though at first the colours made him glad,  
They soon were dancing in his brain like mad;  
And kept on flaring through his burning  
head:

Now, in a flash, the workshop, flaming red;  
Now blazing green; now staring blue;  
And then the yellow glow too well he knew:  
Until the sleek machine, with roar and glare,  
Began to take him in a dazzling snare;  
When, fascinated, with a senseless stare,  
It drew him slowly towards it, till his hair  
Was caught betwixt the rollers; but his hand,  
Almost before his brain could understand,  
Had clutched the lever; and the wheels were  
stopped

Just in the nick of time; though now he  
dropped,

Half-senseless on the littered workshop floor:  
And he'd lain dazed a minute there or more,  
When his machine-girl helped him to a seat.  
But soon again he was upon his feet,  
And tending that unsatisfied machine;  
And printing pictures, red and blue and green,  
Until again the green and blue and red  
Went jigging in a riot through his head;

---

And, wildest of the raging rout,  
The blinding, screeching, racking yellow—  
A crazy devil of a fellow—  
O'er all the others seemed to shout.  
For hands must not be idle when the year  
Is getting through, and Christmas drawing  
    near,  
With piles on piles of picture-books to print  
For people who spend money without stint  
And, while they're paying down their liberal  
    gold,  
Guess little what is bought, and what is sold.

But he, at last, was free till Monday, free  
To sleep, to eat, to dream, to sulk, to walk,  
To laugh, to sing, to whistle, or to talk . . .  
If only, through his brain, unceasingly  
The wheels would not keep whirring, while the  
    smell—  
The oily smell of thick and sticky glaze  
Clung to his nostrils, till 't was hard to tell  
If he were really out in the fresh air;  
And still before his eyes, the blind, white glare,  
And then the colours dancing in his head,  
A maddening maze of yellow, blue and red.

So, on he wandered in a kind of daze,  
Too racked with sleeplessness to think of bed  
Save as a hell, where you must toss and toss,  
With colours shooting in insane criss-cross  
Before wide, prickling, gritty, sleepless eyes.

But, as he walked along the darkening street,  
Too tired to rest, and far too spent to eat,  
The swish and patter of the passing feet,  
The living, human murmur, and keen cries,  
The deep, cool shadows of the coming night,  
About quick-kindling jets of clustered light;  
And the fresh breathing of the rain-washed air,  
Brought something of sweet healing to his  
mind;

And, though he trailed along as if half-blind,  
Yet often on the pavement he would stop  
To gaze at goods displayed within a shop;  
And wonder, in a dull and lifeless way,  
What they had cost, and who 'd the price to  
pay.

But those two kinds of shop which, as a boy,  
Had been to him a never-failing joy,  
The bookshop and the fruitshop, he passed by,  
As if their colours seared his wincing eye;



---

For still he feared the yellow, blue and red  
Would start that devils' dancing in his head.  
And soon, through throngs of people, almost  
gay

To be let loose from work, he pushed his way;  
And ripples of their careless laughter stole  
Like waves of cooling waters through his soul,  
While sometimes he would lift his aching eyes,  
And see a child's face, flushed with proud sur-  
prise,

As, gripping both its parents' hands quite tight,  
It found itself in fairylands of light,  
Walking with grown-up people through the  
night:

Then, turning, with a shudder he would see  
Poor painted faces, leering frightfully,  
And so drop back from heaven again to hell.

And then, somehow, though how he scarce  
could tell,

He found that he was walking through the  
throng,

Quite happy, with a young girl at his side—  
A young girl apple-cheeked and eager-eyed;  
And her frank, friendly chatter seemed a song

To him, who ne'er till now had heard life sing.  
And youth within him kindled quick and  
strong,

As he drank in that careless chattering.  
And now she told to him how she had come  
From some far Northern Isle to earn her bread;  
And in a stuffy office all day long,  
In shiny ledgers, with a splitting head,  
She added dazzling figures till they danced,  
And tied themselves in wriggling knots, and  
pranced,

And scrambled helter-skelter o'er the page:  
And, though it seemed already quite an age  
Since she had left her home, from end to end  
Of this big town she had not any friend:  
At times she almost dreaded she 'd go dumb,  
With not a soul to speak to; for, at home  
In her own Island, she knew everyone . . .  
No strangers there! save when the tinkers  
came,

With pots and pans aglinting in the sun—  
You saw the tin far off, like glancing flame,  
As all about the Island they would roam. . . .  
Then, of themselves at home, there were six  
brothers,

---

---

Five sisters, with herself, besides the others—  
Two homeless babes, whom, having lost their  
mothers,

Her mother'd taken in among her own . . .  
And she in all her life had hardly known  
Her mother with no baby at her breast . . .  
She'd always sing to hush them all to sleep;  
And sang, too, for the dancing, sang to keep  
The feet in time and tune; and still sang best,  
Clean best of all the singers of the Isle.

And as she talked of home, he saw her smile,  
With happy, far-off gaze; and then as though  
In wonder how she'd come to chatter so  
To this pale, grave-eyed boy, she paused, half  
shy;

And then she laughed, with laughter clear and  
true;

And looked into his eyes; and he laughed  
too,

And they were happy, hardly knowing why.

And now he told her of his life, and how  
He too had been nigh friendless, until now.  
And soon he talked to her about his work;  
But, when he spoke of it, as with a jerk,

The light dropped from his eyes. He seemed  
to slip

Once more in the machine's relentless grip;  
And hear again the clank and whirr and click;  
And see the dancing colours and the glare;  
Until his dizzy brain again turned sick:  
And seeing him look round with vacant air,  
Fierce pity cut her to the very quick;  
And as her eyes with keen distress were filled,  
She touched his hand; and soon her kind touch  
stilled

The agony: and so, to bring him ease,  
She told more of that Isle in Northern seas,  
Where she was born, and of the folks at  
home:

And how, all night you heard the wash of  
foam . . .

Sometimes, on stormy nights, against the pane  
The sousing spray would rattle just like rain;  
And oft the high-tides scoured the threshold  
clean . . .

And, as she talked, he saw the sea-light  
glint

In her dark eyes: and then the sleek machine

Lost hold on him at last; and ceased to  
print:

And in his eyes there sprang a kindred light,  
As, hand in hand, they wandered through the  
night.

## THE LODESTAR

FROM hag to hag, o'er miles of quaking moss,  
Benighted, in an unknown countryside,  
Among gaunt hills, the stars my only guide;  
Bewildered by peat-waters, black and deep,  
Wherein the mocking stars swam; spent for  
sleep;

O'er-wearied by long trudging; at a loss  
Which way to turn for shelter from the night;  
I struggled on, until, my head grown light  
From utter weariness, I almost sank  
To rest among the tussocks, soft and dank,  
Drowsing, half-dazed, and murmuring: it were  
best

To stray no further: but, to lie at rest,  
Beneath the cold, white stars, for evermore:  
When, suddenly, I came across  
A runnel oozing from the moss;  
And knew that, if I followed where it led,  
'T would bring me to a valley, in the end,  
Where there 'd be houses, and, perhaps, a bed.

---

And so, the little runnel was my friend;  
And as I walked beside its path, at first  
It kept a friendly silence: then it burst  
Into a friendly singing, as it rambled,  
Among big boulders, down a craggy steep,  
'Mid bracken, nigh breast-deep,  
Through which I scrambled,  
Half-blind and numb for sleep,  
Until it seemed that I could strive no more:  
When, startled by a startled sheep,  
Looking down, I saw a track—  
A stony trackway, dimly white,  
Disappearing in the night,  
Across a waste of heather, burnt and black.  
And so, I took it, mumbling o'er and o'er,  
In witlessness of weariness,  
And featherheaded foolishness:  
A track must lead, at sometime, to a door.

And, trudging to this senseless tune,  
That kept on drumming in my head,  
I followed where the pathway led;  
But, all too soon,  
It left the ling, and nigh was lost  
Among the bent that glimmered grey

About my sore-bewildered way:  
But when, at length, it crossed  
A brawling burn, I saw, afar,  
A cottage window light—  
A star, but no cold, heavenly star—  
A warm red star of welcome in the night.

Far off, it burned upon the black hillside,  
Sole star of earth in all that waste so wide:  
A little human lantern in the night,  
Yet, more to me than all the bright  
Unfriendly stars of heaven, so cold and white.

And, as it dimly shone,  
Though towards it I could only go  
With stumbling step and slow,  
It quickened in my heart a kindred glow;  
And seemed to draw me on  
That last rough mile or so,  
Now seen, now hidden, when the track  
Dipped down into a slack,  
And all the earth again was black:  
And from the unseen fern,  
Grey ghost of all bewildered things,  
An owl brushed by me on unrustling wings,



---

And gave me quite a turn,  
And sent a shiver through my hair.

Then, again, more fair  
Flashed the friendly light,  
Beckoning through the night,  
A golden, glowing square,  
Growing big and clearer,  
As I drew slowly nearer,  
With eager, stumbling feet;  
And snuffed the homely reek of peat:  
And saw, above me, lone and high,  
A cottage, dark against the sky—  
A candle shining on the window-sill.

With thankful heart, I climbed the hill;  
And stood, at last, before  
The dark and unknown door,  
Wondering if food and shelter lay behind,  
And what the welcome I should find,  
Whether kindly, or unkind:  
But I had scarcely knocked, to learn my fate,  
When the latch lifted, and the door swung  
    wide  
On creaking hinges; and I saw, inside,

A frail old woman, very worn and white,  
Her body all atremble in the light,  
Who gazed with strange, still eyes into the  
    night,  
As though she did not see me, but looked  
    straight  
Beyond me, to some unforgotten past:  
And I was startled when she said at last,  
With strange, still voice: "You're welcome,  
    though you're late."

And then, an old man, nodding in a chair,  
Beside the fire, awoke with sleepy stare;  
And rose in haste; and led her to a seat,  
Beside the cosy hearth of glowing peat;  
And muttered to me, as he took her hand:  
"It's queer, it's queer, that she, to-night,  
    should stand,  
Who has not stood alone for fifteen year.  
Though I heard nothing, she was quick to hear.  
I must have dozed; but she has been awake,  
And listening for your footstep since day-  
    break:  
For she was certain you would come to-day;  
Aye, she was sure, for all that I could say:

---

Talk as I might, she would not go to bed,  
Till you should come. Your supper has been  
spread

This long while: you'll be ready for your  
meat."

With that he beckoned me to take a seat  
Before the table, lifting from the crook  
The singing kettle; while, with far-off look,  
As though she neither saw nor heard,  
His wife sat gazing at the glowing peat.

So, wondering sorely, I sat down to eat;  
And yet she neither spoke, nor stirred;  
But in her high-backed chair sat bolt-upright,  
With still grey eyes; and tumbled hair, as white  
As fairy-cotton, straggling o'er her brow,  
And hung in wisps about her wasted cheek.  
But, when I'd finished, and drew near the fire,  
She suddenly turned round to speak,  
Her old eyes kindling with a tense desire.  
Her words came tremblingly: "You'll tell me  
now

What news you bring of him, my son?"

Amazed,

I met that searching and love-famished look:

And then the old man, seeing I was dazed,  
Made shift to swing aside the kettle crook;  
And muttered in my ear:  
“John Netherton, his name:” and as I gazed  
Into the peat that broke in clear blue flame,  
Remembrance flashed upon me with the name;  
And I slipped back in memory twenty year—  
Back to the fo’c’sle of a villainous boat;  
And once again in that hot hell I lay,  
Watching the smoky lantern duck and sway,  
As though in steamy stench it kept afloat . . .  
The fiery fangs of fever at my throat;  
And my poor broken arm, ill-set,  
A bar of white-hot iron at my side:  
And, as I lay, with staring eyes pricked wide,  
Throughout eternities of agony,  
I saw a big, black shadow stoop o’er me;  
And felt a cool hand touch my brow, and wet  
My crackling lips: and sank in healing sleep:  
And when I rose from that unfathomed deep,  
I saw the youngest of that rascal crew  
Beside my bunk; and heard his name; and knew  
’Twas he who’d brought me ease: but, soon,  
ashore,  
We parted; and I never saw him more;

---

---

Though, some while after, in another place,  
I heard he'd perished in a drunken brawl . . .

And now the old man touched me, to re-  
call

My wandering thoughts; and breathed again  
the name:

And I looked up into the mother's face  
That burned before me with grey eyes aflame.

And so I told her how I'd met her son;

And of the kindly things that he had done.

And as I spoke her quivering spirit drank

The news that it had thirsted for so long;

And for a flashing moment gay and strong

Life flamed in her old eyes, then slowly sank.

"And he was happy when you saw him  
last?"

She asked: and I was glad to answer, "Yes."

Then all sat dreaming without stir or sound,

As gradually she sank into the past,

With eyes that looked beyond all happiness,

Beyond all earthly trouble and distress,

Into some other world than ours. The thread

That long had held the straining life earth-  
bound

Was loosed at last: her eyes grew dark: her  
head  
Drooped slowly on her breast; and she was  
dead.

The old man at her side spoke not a word,  
As we arose, and bore her to the bed;  
And laid her on the clean, white quilt at rest  
With calm hands folded on her quiet breast.  
And, hour by hour, he hardly even stirred,  
Crouching beside me in the ingle-seat;  
And staring, staring at the still red glow:  
But, only when the fire was burning low,  
He rose to bring fresh peat;  
And muttered with dull voice and slow:  
“This fire has ne’er burned out through all  
these years—  
Not since the hearthstone first was set—  
And that is nigh two hundred year ago.  
My father’s father built this house; and I . . .  
I thought my son . . .” and then he gave a  
sigh;  
And as he stooped, his wizened cheek was  
wet  
With slowly-trickling tears.

---

And now he hearkened, while an owl's keen  
cry  
Sang through the silence, as it fluttered nigh  
The cottage-window, dazzled by the light,  
Then back, with fainter hootings, into night.

But, when the fresh peats broke into a blaze,  
He watched it with a steady, dry-eyed gaze;  
And spoke once more: "And he, dead, too!  
You did not tell her; but I knew . . . I  
knew!"

And now came all the tale of their distress:  
Their only son, in wanton waywardness,  
Had left them, nearly thirty years ago;  
And they had never had a word from him  
In all that time . . . the reckless blow  
Of his unkindness struck his mother low . . .  
Her hair, as ruddy as the fern  
In late September by a moorland burn,  
Had shrivelled rimy-white  
In one short summer's night:  
And they had looked, and looked for his re-  
turn . . .  
His mother set for him at every meal,

And kept his bed well-aired . . . the knife and  
fork

I'd used were John's . . . but, as all hope  
grew dim,

She sickened, dwindling feebler every day:

Though, when it seemed that she must pass  
away,

She grew more confident that, ere she passed,

A stranger would bring news to her, at last,

Of her lost son. "And when I woke in bed

Beside her, as the dawn was burning red,

She turned to me, with sleepless eyes, and  
said:

'The news will come, to-day.' "

He spoke no more: and silent in my seat,

With burning eyes upon the burning peat,

I pondered on this strangest of strange things

That had befallen in my vagrant life:

And how, at last, my idle wanderings

Had brought me to this old man and his  
wife.

And as I brooded o'er the blaze,

I thought with awe of that steadfast desire

Which, unto me unknown,



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---

Had drawn me through long years, by such  
strange ways,  
From that dark fo'c'sle to this cottage-fire.

And now, at last, quite spent, I dropped asleep;  
And slumbered long and deep:  
And when I waked, the peats were smouldering  
white

Upon the white hearthstone:  
And over heath and bent dawn kindled bright  
Beyond dark ridges in a rosy fleece:  
While from the little window morning light  
Fell on her face, made holy with the peace  
That passeth understanding; and was shed  
In tender beams upon the low-bowed head  
Of that old man, forlorn beside the bed.

## THE SHOP

TIN-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle, went the bell,  
As I pushed in; and, once again, the smell  
Of groceries, and news-sheets freshly-printed,  
That always greeted me when I looked in  
To buy my evening-paper: but, to-night,  
I wondered not to see the well-known face,  
With kind, brown eyes, and ever-friendly smile,  
Behind the counter; and to find the place  
Deserted at this hour, and not a light  
In either window. Waiting there, a while,  
Though wondering at what change these  
changes hinted,  
I yet was grateful for the quiet gloom—  
Lit only by a gleam from the back-room,  
And, here and there, a glint of glass and tin—  
So pleasant, after all the flare and din  
And hubbub of the foundry: and my eyes,  
Still tingling from the smoke, were glad to rest  
Upon the ordered shelves, so neatly dressed  
That, even in the dusk, they seemed to tell  
No little of the hand that kept them clean,  
And of the head that sorted things so well

---

---

That naught of waste or worry could be seen,  
And kept all sweet with ever-fresh supplies.

And, as I thought upon her quiet way,  
Wondering what could have got her, that she'd  
left

The shop, unlit, untended, and bereft  
Of her kind presence, overhead I heard  
A tiptoe creak, as though somebody stirred,  
With careful step, across the upper floor:  
Then all was silent, till the back-room door  
Swung open; and her husband hurried in.  
He feared he'd kept me, waiting in the dark;  
And he was sorry: but his wife who served  
The customers at night-time usually—  
While he made up the ledger after tea,  
Was busy, when I . . . Well, to tell the truth,  
They were in trouble, for their little son  
Had come in ill from school . . . the doctor  
said

Pneumonia . . . they'd been putting him to  
bed:

Perhaps, I'd heard them, moving overhead,  
For boards would creak, and creak, for all your  
care.

They hoped the best; for he was young; and  
youth  
Could come through much; and all that could  
be done  
Would be . . . then he stood, listening, quite  
unnerved,  
As though he heard a footstep on the stair,  
Though I heard nothing: but at my remark  
About the fog and sleet, he turned,  
And answered quickly, as there burned  
In his brown eyes an eager flame:  
The raw and damp were much to blame:  
If but his son might breathe West-country air!  
A certain Cornish village he could name  
Was just the place; if they could send him  
there,  
And only for a week, he'd come back strong-  
er . . .  
And then, again, he listened: and I took  
My paper, and went, afraid to keep him longer;  
And left him standing with that haggard look.

Next night, as I pushed in, there was no tinkle:  
And, glancing up, I saw the bell was gone;  
Although, in either window, the gas shone;

---

And I was greeted by a cheery twinkle  
Of burnished tins and bottles from the shelves:  
And now, I saw the father busy there  
Behind the counter, cutting with a string  
A bar of soap up for a customer,  
With weary eyes, and jerky, harassed air,  
As if his mind were hardly on the task:  
And when 't was done, and parcelled up for her,  
And she had gone; he turned to me, and said:  
He thought that folks might cut their soap  
themselves . . .

'T was nothing much . . . but any little thing,  
At such a time . . . And, having little doubt  
The boy was worse, I did not like to ask;  
So picked my paper up, and hurried out.

And, all next day, amid the glare and clang  
And clatter of the workshop, his words rang;  
And kept on ringing, in my head a-ring;  
But any little thing . . . at such a time . . .  
And kept on chiming to the anvils' chime:  
But any little thing . . . at such a time . . .  
And they were hissed and sputtered in the  
sizzle  
Of water on hot iron: little thing . . .

At such a time: and, when I left, at last,  
The smoke and steam; and walked through  
    the cold drizzle,  
The lumbering of the 'buses as they passed  
Seemed full of it; and to the passing feet,  
The words kept patter, patter, with dull beat.

I almost feared to turn into their street,  
Lest I should find the blinds down in the shop:  
And, more than once, I'd half-a-mind to stop,  
And buy my paper from the yelling boys,  
Who darted all about with such a noise  
That I half-wondered, in a foolish way,  
How they could shriek so, knowing that the  
    sound  
Must worry children, lying ill in bed . . .  
Then, thinking even they must earn their  
    bread,  
As I earned mine, and scarce as noisily!  
I wandered on; and very soon I found  
I'd followed where my thoughts had been all  
    day,  
And stood before the shop, relieved to see  
The gases burning, and no window-blind  
Of blank foreboding. With an easier mind,

I entered slowly; and was glad to find  
The father by the counter, 'waiting me,  
With paper ready and a cheery face.  
Yes! yes! the boy was better . . . took the  
turn,

Last night, just after I had left the place.  
He feared that he'd been short and cross last  
night . . .

But, when a little child was suffering,  
It worried you . . . and any little thing,  
At such a moment, made you cut up rough:  
Though, now that he was going on all right . . .  
Well, he'd have patience, now, to be polite!  
And, soon as ever he was well enough,  
The boy should go to Cornwall for a change—  
Should go to his own home; for he, himself,  
Was Cornish, born and bred, his wife as well:  
And still his parents lived in the old place—  
A little place, as snug as snug could be . . .  
Where apple-blossom dipped into the sea . . .  
Perhaps, to strangers' ears, that sounded  
strange—

But not to any Cornishman who knew  
How sea and land ran up into each other;  
And how, all round each wide, blue estuary,

The flowers were blooming to the waters' edge:  
You'd come on blue-bells like a sea of blue . . .  
But they would not be out for some while  
yet . . .

'T would be primroses, blowing everywhere,  
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses . . .  
You'd never half-know what primroses were,  
Unless you'd seen them growing in the West;  
But, having seen, would never more forget.  
Why, every bank, and every lane and hedge  
Was just one blaze of yellow; and the smell,  
When the sun shone upon them, after wet . . .  
And his eyes sparkled, as he turned to sell  
A penny loaf and half-an-ounce of tea  
To a poor child, who waited patiently,  
With hacking cough that tore her hollow chest:  
And, as she went out, clutching tight the  
change,  
He muttered to himself. It's strange, it's  
strange  
That little ones should suffer so. . . . The  
light

Had left his eyes: but, when he turned to me,  
I saw a flame leap in them, hot and bright.  
I'd like to take them all, he said, to-night!



And, in the workshop, all through the next day,  
The anvils had another tune to play . . .  
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses:  
The bellows puffing out: It's strange, it's  
    strange  
That little ones should suffer so . . .  
And now, my hammer, at a blow:  
I'd like to take them all, to-night!  
And, in the clouds of steam, and white-hot  
    glow,  
I seemed to see primroses everywhere,  
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses.

And, each night after that, I heard the boy  
Was mending quickly; and would soon be well:  
Till one night I was startled by the bell:  
Tin-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle, loud and clear;  
And tried to hush it, lest the lad should hear.  
But, when the father saw me clutch the thing,  
He said, the boy had missed it yesterday;  
And wondered why he could not hear it ring;  
And wanted it; and had to have his way.  
And then, with brown eyes burning with deep  
    joy,  
He told me, that his son was going West—

Was going home . . . the doctor thought, next  
week,

He'd be quite well enough: the way was long;  
But trains were quick; and he would soon be  
there:

And on the journey he'd have every care,  
His mother being with him . . . it was best,  
That she should go: for he would find it  
strange,

The little chap, at first . . . she needed  
change . . .

And, when they'd had a whiff of Western air!  
'T would cost a deal; and there was naught to  
spare:

But, what was money, if you had n't health:  
And, what more could you buy, if you'd the  
wealth . . .

Yes! 't would be lonely for himself, and rough;  
Though, on the whole, he'd manage well  
enough:

He'd have a lot to do: and there was naught  
Like work to keep folk cheerful: when the hand  
Was busy, you had little time for thought;  
And thinking was the mischief . . . and 't was  
grand

---

To know that they'd be happy. Then the bell  
Went tinkle-tinkle; and he turned to sell.

One night he greeted me with face that shone,  
Although the eyes were wistful; they were  
gone—

Had gone this morning, he was glad to say:  
And, though 'twas sore work, setting them  
away,

Still, 't was the best for them . . . and they  
would be

Already in the cottage by the sea . . .

He spoke no more of them; but turned his head;

And said he wondered if the price of bread . . .

And, as I went again into the night,

I saw his eyes were glistening in the light.

And, two nights after that, he'd got a letter:

And all was well: the boy was keeping better;

And was as happy as a child could be,

All day with the primroses and the sea,

And pigs! Of all the wonders of the West,

His mother wrote, he liked the pigs the best.

And now the father laughed until the tears

Were in his eyes, and chuckled: Aye! he knew!

Had he not been a boy there once, himself?  
He'd liked pigs, too, when he was his son's  
years.

And then, he reached a half-loaf from the  
shelf;

And twisted up a farthing's worth of tea,  
And farthing's worth of sugar, for the child,  
The same poor child who waited patiently,  
Still shaken by a hacking, racking cough.

And, all next day, the anvils rang with jigs:  
The bellows roared and rumbled with loud  
laughter,

Until it seemed the workshop had gone wild,  
And it would echo, echo, ever after  
The tune the hammers tinkled on and off,  
A silly tune of primroses and pigs . . .  
Of all the wonders of the West  
He liked the pigs, he liked the pigs the best!

Next night, as I went in, I caught  
A strange, fresh smell. The postman had just  
brought

A precious box from Cornwall, and the shop  
Was lit with primroses, that lay atop

A Cornish pasty, and a pot of cream:  
And, as, with gentle hands, the father lifted  
The flowers his little son had plucked for him,  
He stood a moment in a far-off dream,  
As though in glad remembrances he drifted  
On Western seas: and, as his eyes grew dim,  
He stooped, and buried them in deep, sweet  
bloom:

Till, hearing, once again, the poor child's  
cough,  
He served her hurriedly, and sent her off,  
Quite happily, with thin hands filled with  
flowers.

And, as I followed to the street, the gloom  
Was starred with primroses; and many hours  
The strange, shy flickering surprise  
Of that child's keen, enchanted eyes  
Lit up my heart, and brightened my dull room.

Then, many nights the foundry kept me late  
With overtime; and I was much too tired  
To go round by the shop; but made for bed  
As straight as I could go: until one night  
We'd left off earlier, though 't was after eight,  
I thought I'd like some news about the boy.

I found the shop untended; and the bell  
Tin-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle all in vain.  
And then I saw, through the half-curtained  
pane,  
The back-room was a very blaze of joy:  
And knew the mother and son had come safe  
back.  
And, as I slipped away, now all was well,  
I heard the boy shriek out, in shrill delight:  
“And, father, all the little pigs were black!”

## FLANNAN ISLE

“THOUGH three men dwell on Flannan Isle  
To keep the lamp alight,  
As we steered under the lee, we caught  
No glimmer through the night.”

A passing ship at dawn had brought  
The news; and quickly we set sail,  
To find out what strange thing might ail  
The keepers of the deep-sea light.

The Winter day broke blue and bright,  
With glancing sun and glancing spray,  
As o'er the swell our boat made way,  
As gallant as a gull in flight.

But, as we neared the lonely Isle;  
And looked up at the naked height;  
And saw the lighthouse towering white,  
With blinded lantern, that all night  
Had never shot a spark  
Of comfort through the dark,

So ghostly in the cold sunlight  
It seemed, that we were struck the while  
With wonder all too dread for words.  
And, as into the tiny creek  
We stole beneath the hanging crag,  
We saw three queer, black, ugly birds—  
Too big, by far, in my belief,  
For guillemot or shag—  
Like seamen sitting bolt-upright  
Upon a half-tide reef:  
But, as we neared, they plunged from sight,  
Without a sound, or spurt of white.

And still too mazed to speak,  
We landed; and made fast the boat;  
And climbed the track in single file,  
Each wishing he was safe afloat,  
On any sea, however far,  
So it be far from Flannan Isle:  
And still we seemed to climb, and climb,  
As though we'd lost all count of time,  
And so must climb for evermore.  
Yet, all too soon, we reached the door—  
The black, sun-blistered lighthouse-door,  
That gaped for us ajar.



---

As, on the threshold, for a spell,  
We paused, we seemed to breathe the smell  
Of limewash and of tar,  
Familiar as our daily breath,  
As though 'twere some strange scent of  
    death:

And so, yet wondering, side by side,  
We stood a moment, still tongue-tied:  
And each with black foreboding eyed  
The door, ere we should fling it wide,  
To leave the sunlight for the gloom:  
Till, plucking courage up, at last,  
Hard on each other's heels we passed,  
Into the living-room.

Yet, as we crowded through the door,  
We only saw a table, spread  
For dinner, meat and cheese and bread;  
But, all untouched; and no one there:  
As though, when they sat down to eat,  
Ere they could even taste,  
Alarm had come; and they in haste  
Had risen and left the bread and meat:  
For at the table-head a chair  
Lay tumbled on the floor.

We listened; but we only heard  
The feeble cheeping of a bird  
That starved upon its perch:  
And, listening still, without a word,  
We set about our hopeless search.

We hunted high, we hunted low;  
And soon ransacked the empty house;  
Then o'er the Island, to and fro,  
We ranged, to listen and to look  
In every cranny, cleft or nook  
That might have hid a bird or mouse:  
But, though we searched from shore to shore,  
We found no sign in any place:  
And soon again stood face to face  
Before the gaping door:  
And stole into the room once more  
As frightened children steal.

Aye: though we hunted high and low,  
And hunted everywhere,  
Of the three men's fate we found no trace  
Of any kind in any place,  
But a door ajar, and an untouched meal,  
And an overtoppled chair.

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And, as we listened in the gloom  
Of that forsaken living-room—  
A chill clutch on our breath—  
We thought how ill-chance came to all  
Who kept the Flannan Light:  
And how the rock had been the death  
Of many a likely lad:  
How six had come to a sudden end,  
And three had gone stark mad:  
And one whom we'd all known as friend  
Had leapt from the lantern one still night,  
And fallen dead by the lighthouse wall:  
And long we thought  
On the three we sought,  
And of what might yet befall.

Like curs, a glance has brought to heel,  
We listened, flinching there:  
And looked, and looked, on the untouched  
meal,  
And the overtoppled chair.

We seemed to stand for an endless while,  
Though still no word was said,  
Three men alive on Flannan Isle,  
Who thought, on three men dead.

## THE BROTHERS

ALL morning they had quarrelled, as they  
worked,  
A little off their fellows, in the pit:  
Dick growled at Robert; Robert said Dick  
shirked:  
And when the roof, dropt more than they had  
reckoned,  
Began to crack and split,  
Though both rushed like a shot to set  
The pit-props in their places,  
Each said the other was to blame,  
When, all secure, with flushed and grimy faces,  
They faced each other for a second.  
All morning they had quarrelled: yet,  
Neither had breathed her name.

Again they turned to work:  
And in the dusty murk  
Of that black gallery  
Which ran out three miles underneath the sea,  
There was no sound at all,  
Save whispering creak of roof and wall.

---

And crack of coal, and tap of pick,  
And now and then a rattling fall:  
While Robert worked on steadily, but Dick  
In fits and starts, with teeth clenched tight,  
And dark eyes flashing in his lamp's dull  
light.

And when he paused, nigh spent, to wipe the  
sweat

From off his dripping brow: and Robert turned  
To fling some idle jibe at him, the spark  
Of anger, smouldering in him, flared and  
burned—

Though all his body quivered, wringing-wet—  
Till that black hole

To him blazed red,

As if the very coal

Had kindled underfoot and overhead:

Then, gripping tight his pick,

He rushed upon his brother:

But Robert, turning quick,

Leapt up, and now they faced each other.

They faced each other: Dick with arm up-  
raised,

In act to strike, and murder in his eyes. . . .

When, suddenly, with noise of thunder,  
The earth shook round them, rumbling o'er  
and under;

And Dick saw Robert, lying at his feet:  
As, close behind, the gallery crashed in:  
And almost at his heel, earth gaped asunder.

By black disaster dazed,  
His wrath died; and he dropped the pick;  
And staggered, dizzily and terror-sick.  
But, when the dust and din  
Had settled to a stillness, dread as death:  
And he once more could draw his breath;  
He gave a little joyful shout  
To find the lamps had not gone out.

And on his knees he fell  
Beside his brother, buried in black dust:  
And, full of tense misgiving,  
He lifted him, and thrust  
A knee beneath his head; and cleared  
The dust from mouth and nose: but could not  
tell  
Awhile if he were dead or living.  
Too fearful to know what he feared,

---

He fumbled at the open shirt,  
And felt till he could feel the heart,  
Still beating with a feeble beat:  
And then he saw the closed lids part,  
And saw the nostrils quiver;  
And knew his brother lived, though sorely hurt.

Again he staggered to his feet,  
And fetched his water-can, and wet  
The ashy lips, and bathed the brow,  
Until his brother sat up with a shiver,  
And gazed before him with a senseless stare  
And dull eyes strangely set.  
Too well Dick knew that now  
They must not linger there,  
Cut off from all their mates, to be o'ertaken  
In less than no time by the deadly damp,  
So, picking up his lamp,  
He made his brother rise;  
Then took him by the arm,  
And shook him, till he'd shaken  
An inkling of the danger and alarm  
Into those dull, still eyes:  
Then dragged him, and half-carried him, in  
haste,

To reach the airway, where 't would still be  
sweet

When all the gallery was foul with gas:  
But, soon as they had reached it, they were  
faced

By a big fall of roof they could not pass;  
And found themselves cut off from all re-  
treat,

On every hand, by that black shining wall;  
With naught to do but sit and wait  
Till rescue came, if rescue came at all,  
And did not come too late.

And, in the fresher airway, light came back  
To Robert's eyes, although he never spoke:  
And not a sound the deathly quiet broke,  
As they sat staring at that wall of black—  
As, in the glimmer of the dusky lamp,  
They sat and wondered, wondered if the  
damp—

The stealthy after-damp that creeping, creep-  
ing,

Takes strong lads by the throat, and drops  
them sleeping,

To wake no more for any woman's weeping—



---

---

Would steal upon them, ere the rescue  
came. . . .

And if the rescuers would find them sitting,  
Would find them sitting cold. . . .

Then, as they sat and wondered, like a  
flame

One thought burned up both hearts:  
Still, neither breathed her name.

And now their thoughts dropped back into the  
pit,

And through the league-long gallery went  
flitting

With speed no fall could hold:

They wondered how their mates had fared:

If they'd been struck stone-dead,

Or if they shared

Like fate with them, or reached the shaft,

Unhurt, and only scared,

Before disaster overtook them:

And then, although their courage ne'er forsook  
them,

They wondered once again if they must sit

Awaiting death . . . but knowing well

That even for a while to dwell

On such like thoughts will drive a strong man  
daft:

They shook themselves until their thoughts ran  
free

Along the drift, and clambered in the cage,

And in a trice were shooting up the shaft:

But when their thoughts had come to the pit-  
head,

And found the fearful people gathered there,

Beneath the noonday sun,

Bright-eyed with terror, blinded by despair,

Dick rose, and with his chalk wrote on the wall,

This message for their folk:

“We can’t get any further, 12, noonday”—

And signed both names; and, when he’d done,

Though neither of them spoke,

They both seemed easier in a way,

Now that they’d left a word,

Though nothing but a scrawl.

And silent still they sat,

And never stirred:

And Dick’s thoughts dwelt on this and that:

How, far above their heads, upon the sea

The sun was shining merrily,

And in its golden glancing  
The windy waves were dancing:  
And how he'd slipt that morning on his way:  
And how on Friday, when he drew his pay,  
He'd buy a blanket for his whippet, Nell;  
He felt dead certain she would win the race,  
On Saturday . . . though you could never tell,  
There were such odds against her . . . but his  
face

Lit up as though, even now, he saw her run,  
A little slip of lightning, in the sun:  
While Robert's thoughts were ever on the  
match

His team was booked to play on Saturday;  
He placed the field, and settled who should play  
The centre-forward; for he had a doubt  
Will Burn was scarcely up to form, al-  
though . . .

Just then, the lamp went slowly out.

Still, neither stirred,  
Nor spoke a word;  
Though either's breath came quickly, with a  
catch.

And now again one thought  
Set both their hearts afire  
In one fierce flame  
Of quick desire:  
Though neither breathed her name.

Then Dick stretched out his hand; and caught  
His brother's arm; and whispered in his ear:  
"Bob, lad, there's naught to fear . . .  
And, when we're out, lad, you and she shall  
wed."

Bob gripped Dick's hand; and then no more  
was said,  
As, slowly, all about them rose  
The deadly after-damp; but close  
They sat together, hand in hand.  
Then their minds wandered; and Dick seemed  
to stand  
And shout till he was hoarse  
To speed his winning whippet down the  
course . . .

And Robert, with the ball  
Secure within his oxters charged ahead  
Straight for the goal, and none could hold,  
Though many tried a fall.

Then dreaming they were lucky boys in bed,  
Once more, and lying snugly by each other:  
Dick, with his arms clasped tight about his  
    brother,  
Whispered with failing breath  
Into the ear of death:  
“Come, Robert, cuddle closer, lad, it’s cold.”

## THE BLIND ROWER

AND since he rowed his father home,  
His hand has never touched an oar.  
All day, he wanders on the shore,  
And hearkens to the swishing foam.  
Though blind from birth, he still could row  
As well as any lad with sight;  
And knew strange things that none may know  
Save those who live without the light.

When they put out that Summer eve  
To sink the lobster-pots at sea,  
The sun was crimson in the sky;  
And not a breath was in the sky,  
The brooding, thunder-laden sky,  
That, heavily and wearily,  
Weighed down upon the waveless sea  
That scarcely seemed to heave.

The pots were safely sunk; and then  
The father gave the word for home:  
He took the tiller in his hand,  
And, in his heart already home,

---

He brought her nose round towards the land,  
To steer her straight for home.  
He never spoke,  
Nor stirred again:  
A sudden stroke,  
And he lay dead,  
With staring eyes, and lips of lead.

The son rowed on, and nothing feared:  
And sometimes, merrily,  
He lifted up his voice, and sang,  
Both high and low,  
And loud and sweet:  
For he was ever gay at sea,  
And ever glad to row,  
And rowed as only blind men row:  
And little did the blind lad know  
That death was at his feet:  
For still he thought his father steered;  
Nor knew that he was all alone  
With death upon the open sea.  
So merrily, he rowed, and sang;  
And, strangely on the silence rang  
That lonely melody,  
As, through the livid, brooding gloom,

By rock and reef, he rowed for home—  
The blind man rowed the dead man home.

But, as they neared the shore,  
He rested on his oar:  
And, wondering that his father kept  
So very quiet in the stern;  
He laughed, and asked him if he slept;  
And vowed he heard him snore just now.  
Though, when his father spoke no word,  
A sudden fear upon him came:  
And, crying on his father's name,  
With flinching heart, he heard  
The water lapping on the shore;  
And all his blood ran cold, to feel  
The shingle grate beneath the keel:  
And stretching over towards the stern,  
His knuckle touched the dead man's brow.

But, help was near at hand;  
And safe he came to land:  
Though none has ever known  
How he rowed in, alone,  
And never touched a reef.  
Some say they saw the dead man steer—  
The dead man steer the blind man home—



Though, when they found him dead,  
His hand was cold as lead.

So, ever restless, to and fro,  
In every sort of weather,  
The blind lad wanders on the shore,  
And hearkens to the foam.  
His hand has never touched an oar,  
Since they came home together—  
The blind, who rowed his father home—  
The dead, who steered his blind son home.

## THE FLUTE

“GOOD-NIGHT!” he sang out cheerily:  
“Good-night!” and yet again: “Good-night!”

And I was gay that night to be  
Once more in my clean countryside,  
Among the windy hills and wide.  
Six days of city slush and mud,  
Of hooting horn, and spattering wheel,  
Made me rejoice again to feel  
The tingling frost that fires the blood,  
And sets life burning keen and bright;  
And down the ringing road to stride  
The eager swinging stride that braces  
The straining thews from hip to heel:  
To breathe again the wind that sweeps  
Across the grassy, Northern steeps,  
From crystal deeps and starry spaces.

And I was glad again to hear  
The old man's greeting of good cheer:  
For every night for many a year

---

At that same corner we had met,  
Summer and Winter, dry and wet:  
And though I never once had heard  
The old man speak another word,  
His cheery greeting at the bend  
Seemed like the welcome of a friend.

But, as we neared to-night, somehow,  
I felt that he would stop and speak:  
Though he went by: and when I turned,  
I saw him standing in the road,  
And looking back, with hand to brow,  
As if to shade old eyes, grown weak  
Awaiting the long sleep they'd earned:  
Though, as again towards him I strode,  
A friendly light within them burned.  
And then, as I drew nigh, he spoke  
With shaking head, and voice that broke:  
"I've missed you these last nights," he  
said:  
"And I have not so many now,  
That I can miss friends easily. . .  
Aye: friends grow scarce, as you grow old:  
And roads are rough: and winds are cold:  
And when you feel you're losing hold,

Life does not go too merrily.”  
And then he stood with nodding head,  
And spoke no more. And so I told  
How I had been, six days and nights,  
Exiled from pleasant sounds and sights.  
And now, as though my voice has stirred  
His heart to speech, he told right out,  
With quickening eye and quavering word,  
The things I care to hear about,  
The little things that make up life:  
How he'd been lonesome, since his wife  
Had died, some thirty year ago:  
And how he trudged three mile or so  
To reach the farmstead where he worked,  
And three mile back to his own door . . .  
For he dwelt outby on the moor:  
And every day the distance irked  
More sorely still his poor, old bones;  
And all the road seemed strewn with stones  
To trip you up, when you were old—  
When you were old, and friends were few:  
How, since the farmstead had been sold,  
The master and the men were new,  
All save himself; and they were young;  
And Mistress had a raspy tongue:

---

So, often, he would hardly speak  
A friendly word from week to week  
With any soul. Old friends had died,  
Or else had quit the countryside:  
And, since his wife was taken, he  
Had lived alone, this thirty year:  
And there were few who cared to hear  
An old man's jabber . . . and too long  
He'd kept me, standing in the cold,  
With his long tongue, and such a song  
About himself! And I would be . . .

I put my arm through his; and turned  
To go upon his way with him:  
And once again that warm light burned  
In those old eyes, so weak and dim:  
While, with thin, piping voice, he told  
How much it meant to him each night  
To change a kindly word with me:  
To think that he'd at least one friend  
Who'd maybe miss him, in the end.

Then, as we walked, he said no more:  
And, silent, in the starry light,  
Across the wide, sweet-smelling bent,  
Between the grass and stars we went

In quiet, friendly company:  
And, all the way, we only heard  
A chirrup where some partridge stirred,  
And ran before us through the grass,  
To hide his head till we should pass.

At length, we reached the cottage-door:  
But, when I stopped, and turned to go,  
His words came falteringly and slow:  
If I would step inside, and rest,  
I'd be right welcome: not a guest  
Had crossed his threshold, thirty year . . .  
He'd naught but bread and cheese and beer  
To offer me . . . but, I'd know best . . .

He spoke with hand upon the latch;  
And, when I answered, opened wide  
The cottage-door; and stepped inside;  
And, as I followed, struck a match,  
And lit a tallow-dip: and stirred  
The banked-up peats into a glow:  
And then with shuffling step and slow  
He moved about: and soon had set  
Two mugs of beer, and bread and cheese:  
And while we made a meal off these,

---

The old man never spoke a word;  
But, brooding in the ingle-seat,  
With eyes upon the kindling peat,  
He seemed awhile to quite forget  
He was not sitting by himself  
To-night, like any other night;  
When, as, in the dim candle-light,  
I glanced around me, with surprise  
I saw, upon the rafter-shelf,  
A flute, nigh hidden in the shade.

And when I asked him if he played,  
The light came back into his eyes:  
Aye, aye, he sometimes piped a bit,  
But not so often since she died.  
And then, as though old memories lit  
His poor, old heart, and made it glad,  
He told how he, when quite a lad,  
Had taught himself: and they would play  
On penny whistles all the day—  
He and the miller's son, beside  
The millpool, chirping all they knew,  
Till they could whistle clean and true:  
And how, when old enough to earn,  
They both saved up to buy a flute;

And they had played it, turn for turn:  
But, Jake was dead, this long while back . . .  
Ah! if I'd only heard him toot,  
I'd know what music meant. Aye, aye . . .  
He'd play me something, by-and-bye;  
Though he was naught to Jake . . . and  
now

His breath was scant, and fingering slack . . .  
He used to play to her at night  
The melodies that she liked best,  
While she worked on: she'd never rest  
By daylight, or by candle-light . . .  
And then, with hand upon his brow,  
He brooded, quiet in his chair,  
With eyes upon the red peat-glare;  
Until, at length, he roused himself,  
And reached the flute down from the shelf;  
And, carrying it outside the door,  
I saw him take a can, and pour  
Fresh water through the instrument,  
To make it sweet of tone, he said.  
Then, in his seat, so old and bent,  
With kindling eyes, and swaying head,  
He played the airs he used to play  
To please his wife, before she died:



---

And as I watched his body sway  
In time and tune, from side to side,  
So happy, playing, and to please  
With old familiar melodies,  
His eyes grew brighter and more bright,  
As though they saw some well-loved sight:  
And, following his happy gaze,  
I turned, and saw, without amaze,  
A woman standing, young and fair,  
With hazel eyes, and thick brown hair  
Brushed smoothly backward from the brow,  
Beside the table that but now,  
Save for the empty mugs, was bare.  
Upon it she had spread a sheet:  
And stood there, ironing a shirt,  
Her husband's, as he played to her  
Her favourite tunes, so old and sweet.  
I watched her move with soundless stir,  
Then stand with listening eyes, and hold  
The iron near her glowing cheek,  
Lest it, too hot, should do some hurt,  
And she, so careful not to burn  
The well-darned shirt, so worn and old.  
Then, something seemed to make me turn  
To look on the old man again:

And, as I looked, the playing stopped;  
And now I saw that he had dropped  
Into his brooding mood once more,  
With eyes again grown dull and weak.  
He seemed the oldest of old men  
Who grope through life with sight worn  
dim:

And, even as I looked at him,  
Too full of tender awe to speak,  
I knew once more the board was bare,  
With no young woman standing there  
With hazel eyes and thick, brown hair;  
And I, in vain, for her should seek,  
If I but sought this side death's door.

And so, at last, I rose, and took  
His hand: and as he clasped mine tight,  
I saw again that friendly look  
Fill his old weary eyes with light,  
And wish me, without words, good-night  
And in my heart, that look glowed bright  
Till I reached home across the moor.

And, at the corner of the lane,  
Next night, I heard the old voice cry

---

In greeting, as I struggled by,  
Head-down against the wind and rain.  
And so each night, until one day,  
His master chanced across my way:  
But, when I spoke of him, he said:  
Did I not know the man was dead,  
And had been dead a week or so?  
One morn he'd not turned up to work;  
And never having known him shirk;  
And hearing that he lived alone;  
He thought it best himself to go  
And see what ailed: and coming there,  
He found the old man in his chair,  
Stone-dead beside the cold hearthstone.  
It must be full a week, or more . . .  
Aye, just two weeks, come Saturday,  
He'd found him; but he must have died  
O'ernight—(the night I heard him play!)  
And they had found, dropt by his side,  
A broken flute upon the floor.

Yet, every night, his greeting still  
At that same corner of the hill,  
Summer and Winter, wet or dry,  
'Neath cloud, or moon, or cold starlight,

Is waiting there to welcome me:  
And ever as I hurry by,  
The old voice sings out cheerily:  
“Good-night!” and yet again, “Good-night!”

## THE CRANE

THE biggest crane on earth, it lifts  
Two hundred ton more easily  
Than I can lift my heavy head:  
And, when it swings, the whole world shifts,  
Or so, at least, it seems to me,  
As, day and night, adream I lie  
Upon my crippled back in bed,  
And watch it, up against the sky.

My mother, hunching in her chair,  
Day-long, and stitching trousers there—  
Day-long, at fifteen-pence the pair . . .  
She'd sit all night, and stitch for me,  
Her son, if I could only wear . . .  
She never lifts her eyes to see  
The big crane swinging through the air.

But, though she has no time to talk,  
She always cleans the window-pane,  
That I may see it, clear and plain:  
And, as I watch it move, I walk

Who never walked in all my days . . .  
And often, as I dream agaze,  
I'm up and out; and it is I  
Who swings the crane across the sky.  
Right up above the wharf I stand,  
And touch a lever with my hand,  
To lift a bunch of girders high,  
A truck of coal, a field of grain  
In sacks, a bundle of big trees,  
Or beasts, too frightened in my grip  
To wonder at their skiey trip:  
And then I let the long arm dip  
Without a hitch, without a slip,  
To set them safely in the ship  
That waits to take them overseas.

My mother little dreams it's I,  
Up there, as tiny as a fly,  
Who stand above the biggest crane,  
And swing the ship-loads through the sky;  
While she sits, hunching in her chair,  
Day-long, and stitching trousers there—  
Day-long, at fifteen-pence the pair.

And sometimes, when it turns me dizzy,  
I lie and watch her, ever busy;

---

---

And wonder at a lot of things  
I never speak to her about:  
I wonder why she never sings  
Like other people on the stair . . .  
And why, whenever she goes out  
Upon a windy day, the air  
Makes her sad eyes so strangely bright . . .  
And if the colour of her hair  
Was brown like mine, or always white . . .  
And why, when through the noise of feet  
Of people passing in the street,  
She hears a dog yelp or sheep bleat,  
She always starts up in her chair,  
And looks before her with strange stare,  
Yet seeing nothing anywhere:  
Though, right before her, through the sky  
The biggest crane goes swinging by.

But, it's a lucky day and rare  
When she's the time to talk to me . . .  
Though, only yesterday, when night  
Shut out, at last, the crane from sight . . .  
She, in her bed; and thinking I  
Was sleeping—though I watch the sky,  
At times, till it is morning-light,

And ships are waiting to unload—  
I heard her murmur drowsily:  
“The pit-pat-pattering of feet,  
All night, along the moonlit road . . .  
A yelp, a whistle, and a bleat . . .  
The bracken’s deep and soft and dry,  
And safe and snug, and no one near . . .  
The little burn sings low and sweet,  
The little burn sings shrill and clear . . .  
And loud all night the cock-grouse talks . . .  
There’s naught in heaven or earth to  
fear . . .  
The pit-pat-pattering of feet . . .  
A yelp, a whistle, and a bleat . . .”  
And then, she started up in bed:  
I felt her staring, as she said:  
“I wonder if he ever hears  
The pit-pat-pattering of sheep,  
Or smells the broken bracken-stalks . . .  
While she is lying sound asleep  
Beside him . . . after all these years—  
Just nineteen years, this very night—  
Remembering? . . . and now, his son,  
A man . . . and never stood upright!”  
And then, I heard a sound of tears:



---

But dared not speak, or let her know  
I'd caught a single whisper, though  
I wondered long what she had done  
That she should fear the pattering feet:  
And when those queer words in the night  
Had fretted me half-dead with fright,  
And set my throbbing head a-beat . . .  
Out of the darkness, suddenly,  
The crane's long arm swung over me,  
Among the stars, high overhead . . .  
And then it dipped, and clutched my bed:  
And I had not a breath to cry,  
Before it swung me through the sky,  
Above the sleeping city high,  
Where blinding stars went blazing by . . .

My mother, hunching in her chair,  
Day-long, and stitching trousers there—  
Day-long, at fifteen-pence the pair—  
With quiet eyes and smooth white hair . . .  
You'd little think a yelp or bleat  
Could start her; or that she was weeping  
So sorely, when she thought me sleeping.  
She never tells me why she fears  
The pit-pat-pattering of feet

All night along the moonlit road . . .  
Or what's the wrong that she has done . . .  
I wonder if 't would bring her tears,  
If she could know that I, her son—  
A man, who never stood upright,  
But all the livelong day must lie,  
And watch, beyond the window-pane,  
The swaying of the biggest crane—  
That I, within its clutch, last night,  
Went whirling through the starry sky.

## THE LIGHTHOUSE

Just as my watch was done, the fog had lifted;  
And we could see the flashing of our light;  
And see, once more, the reef beyond the Head,  
O'er which, six days and nights, the mist had  
drifted—

Six days and nights in thick, white mist had  
drifted,

Until it seemed all time to mist had drifted,  
And day and night were but one blind, white  
night.

But on the seventh midnight the wind shifted:  
And I was glad to tumble into bed:  
Thankful to hear no more the blaring horn,  
That ceaselessly had sounded, night and morn,  
With moaning echoes through the mist, to  
warn

The blind, bewildered ships at sea:  
Yet, though as tired as any dog,  
I lay awhile and seemed to feel  
Fog lying on my eyes still heavily;  
And still the horn unceasingly

Sang through my head, till gradually  
Through night's strange stillness, over me  
Sweet sleep began to steal,  
Sleep, blind and thick and fleecy as the fog.

For all I knew, I might have slept  
A moment, or eternity;  
When, startled by a crash,  
I waked to find I'd leapt  
Upright on the floor:  
And stood there, listening to the smash  
Of falling glass . . . and then a thud  
Of something heavy tumbling  
Into the next room . . .  
A pad of naked feet . . .  
A moan . . . a sound of stumbling . . .  
A heavier thud . . . and then no more.  
And I stood shivering in the gloom,  
With creeping flesh, and tingling blood,  
Until I gave myself a shake  
To bring my wits more wide awake;  
And lit a lantern, and flung wide the door.

Half-dazed and dazzled by the light,  
At first it seemed I'd only find

---

A broken pane, a flapping blind:  
But, when I'd raised the lantern o'er my head,  
I saw a naked boy upon the bed,  
Who crouched and shuddered on the folded  
sheet;  
And, on his face, before my feet,  
A naked man, who lay as if quite dead,  
Though on his broken knuckles blood was red:  
And all wits awakened at the sight.

I set the lantern down; and took the child,  
Who looked at me with piteous eyes and wild;  
And chafed his chill, wet body till it glowed;  
And forcing spirit 'twixt his chattering teeth,  
I tucked him snugly in beneath  
The blankets, and soon left him warmly  
stowed;  
And stooped to tend the man who lay  
Still senseless on the floor.

I turned him off his face;  
And laid him on the other bed;  
And washed and staunched his wound.  
And yet, for all that I could do,  
I could not bring him to,

Or see a trace  
Of life returning to that heavy head.

It seemed he'd swooned,  
When through the window he'd made way,  
Just having strength to lay  
The boy in safety. Still as death,  
He lay, without a breath:  
And seeing I could do no more  
To help him in the fight for life;  
I turned to tend the lad;  
And, as I looked on him, was glad  
To find him sleeping quietly.

So, fetching fuel, I lit a fire;  
And quickly had as big a blaze  
As any housewife could desire:  
Then, 'twixt the beds, I set a chair,  
That I might watch until they stirred;  
And as I saw them lying there—  
The sleeping boy, and him who lay  
In that strange, stiller sleep, 'twas plain  
That they were son and father, now  
I'd time to look, and wonder how,  
In such a desperate plight,  
Without a stitch or rag,

They'd taken refuge from the night  
And, as I wondered drowsily,  
It seemed yet queerer and more queer,  
For round the Head the rocks are sheer,  
And it seemed quite beyond belief  
That any wrecked upon the reef,  
Could swim ashore, and climb the crag,  
By daylight, let alone by night.  
But they who live beside the sea  
Know naught's too wonderful to be:  
And, as I sat, and heard  
The quiet breathing of the child,  
Great weariness came over me;  
And, in a kind of daze,  
I watched the blaze,  
With nodding head:  
And must have slept, for, presently,  
I found the man was sitting up in bed:  
And talking to himself with wide, unseeing  
eyes.  
At first, I hardly made out what he said:  
But soon his voice, so hoarse and wild,  
Grew calm: and straining, I could hear  
The broken words, that came with many  
sighs.

“Yes, lad: she’s going: but, there’s naught to  
fear:

For I can swim; and tow you in the belt.

Come, let’s join hands together, and leap  
clear . . .

Aye, son: it’s dark and cold . . . but you  
have felt

The cold and dark before . . .

And you should scorn . . .

And we must be near shore . . .

For, hark, the horn!

Think of your mother and your home, and  
leap . . .

She thinks of us, lad, waking or asleep . . .

You would not leave her lonely?

Nay! . . . then . . . go! . . .

Well done, lad! . . . Nay! I’m here . . .

Aye, son, it’s cold: but you’re too big to  
fear.

Now then, you’re snug: I’ve got you safe in  
tow:

The worst is over: and we’ve only

To make for land . . . we’ve naught to do  
. . . but steer . . .

But steer . . . but steer . . .”



---

---

He paused; and sank down in the bed quite  
done:

And lay a moment silent, while his son

Still slumbered in the other bed,

And on his quiet face the firelight shone.

Then, once again, the father raised his head.

And rambled on . . .

“Say, lad, what cheer?

I thought you’d dropt asleep . . . but you’re  
all right.

We’ll rest a moment . . . I’m quite out of  
breath . . .

It’s further than . . . Nay, son! there’s  
naught to fear . . .

The land must be quite near . . .

The horn is loud enough!

Aye, lad, it’s cold:

But, you’re too old

To cry for cold:

Now . . . keep . . . tight hold:

And we’ll be off again.

I’ve got my breath . . .”

He sank, once more, as still as death,

With hands that clutched the counterpane.

But still the boy was sleeping quietly.  
And then the father sat up suddenly:  
And cried: "See! See!  
The land! the land!  
It's near . . . I touch it with my hand."  
And now, "O God!" he moaned.  
Small wonder, when he saw what lay before—  
The black, unbroken crags, so grim and high,  
That must have seemed to him to soar  
Sheer from the sea's edge to the sky.  
But, soon he plucked up heart, once more:  
"We're safe, lad—safe ashore!  
A narrow ledge, but land, firm land.  
We'll soon be high and dry.  
Nay, son: we can't stay here:  
The waves would have us back;  
Or we should perish of the cold.  
Come, lad: there's naught to fear . . .  
You must be brave and bold.  
Perhaps we'll strike a track.  
Aye, son, it's steep and black,  
And slimy to the hold:  
But, we must climb . . . and see! the mist is  
gone.  
The stars are shining clear . . .

---

Think, son, your mother's at the top,  
And you'll be up in no time. See that star,  
The brightest star that ever shone,  
Just think it's she who watches you;  
And knows that you'll be brave and true.  
Come, lad: we may not stop . . .  
Or else the cold . . .  
Give me your hand . . .  
Your foot there, now . . . just room to stand.  
It cannot be so far . . .  
We'll soon be up . . . this work should make  
    us warm.  
Thank God, it's not a storm,  
Or we should scarce . . . your foot, here,  
    firm . . .  
Nay, lad! you must not squirm.  
Come, be a man: you shall not fall:  
I'll hold you tight.  
There: now you are my own son, after all!  
Your mother, lad,  
Her star burns bright . . .  
And we're already half-way up the height . . .  
Your mother will be glad,  
Aye, she'll be glad to hear  
Of her brave boy who had no fear.

Your foot . . . your hand . . . 'twas but a  
bird

You startled out of bed:

'Twould think it queer

To wake up suddenly and see your head!

And when you stirred . . .

Nay! steady, lad!

Or you will send your dad . . .

Your hand . . . your foot . . . we'll rest  
upon this ledge . . .

Why, son, we're at the top . . . I feel the  
edge,

And grass, soft, dewy grass.

Let go, one moment; and I'll draw you up . . .

Now lad . . . Thank God! that's past . . .

And you are safe, at last:

You're safe, you're safe . . . and now, my  
precious lass

Will see her son, her little son, again.

I never thought to reach the top to-night.

God! what a height!

Nay! but you must not look: 'twould turn  
your head . . .

And we must not stand shivering here . . .

---

And see . . . a flashing light . . .  
It's sweeping towards us: and now you stand  
bright . . .  
Ah, your poor bleeding hands and feet . . .  
My little son, my sweet!  
There's nothing more to fear.  
A lighthouse, lad! and we must make for it.  
You're tired: I'll carry you a bit.  
Nay, son: 'twill warm me up . . .  
And there will be a fire and bed;  
And ev'n perhaps a cup  
Of something hot to drink,  
And something good to eat.  
And think, son, only think,  
Your home . . . and mother . . . once  
again."

Once more, the weary head  
Sank back upon the bed:  
And, for a while, he hardly stirred;  
But only muttered, now and then,  
A broken word,  
As though to cheer  
His son, who still slept quietly  
Upon the other side of me.

And then my blood ran cold to hear  
A sudden cry of fear:  
“My son! My son!  
Ah, God, he’s done!  
I thought I’d laid him on the bed . . .  
I’ve laid him on white mist, instead . . .  
He’s fallen sheer . . .”

Then I sprang up, and cried: “Your son is  
here!”  
And, taking up the sleeping boy,  
I bore him to his father’s arms:  
And, as he nestled to his breast,  
Kind life came back to those wild eyes;  
And filled them with deep joy:  
And, free of all alarms,  
The son and father lay,  
Together, in sweet rest,  
While through the window stole the strange,  
clear light of day.

## THE MONEY

THEY found her cold upon the bed.  
The cause of death, the doctor said,  
Was nothing save the lack of bread.

Her clothes were but a sorry rag  
That barely hid the nakedness  
Of her poor body's piteous wreck:  
Yet, when they stripped her of her dress,  
They found she was not penniless;  
For, in a little silken bag,  
Tied with red ribbon round her neck,  
Was four-pound-seventeen-and five.

“It seems a strange and shameful thing  
That she should starve herself to death,  
While she'd the means to keep alive.  
Why, such a sum would keep the breath  
Within her body till she'd found  
A livelihood: and it would bring . . .  
But, there is very little doubt  
She'd set her heart upon a grand

And foolish funeral—for the pride  
Of poor folk, who can understand!—  
And so, because she was too proud  
To meet death penniless, she died.”

And talking, talking, they trooped out:  
And, as they went, I turned about  
To look upon her in her shroud;  
And saw again the quiet face  
That filled with light the shameful place,  
Touched with the tender, youthful grace  
Death brings the broken and outworn  
To comfort kind hearts left to mourn.

And as I stood, the sum they'd found  
Rang with a queer, familiar ring  
Of some uncouth, uncanny sound  
Heard in dark ages underground;  
And “four-pound-seventeen-and five”  
Through all my body seemed to sing,  
Without recalling anything  
To help me, strive as I might strive.

But, as I stumbled down the stairs  
Into the alley's gloom and stench—  
A whiff of burning oil



That took me unawares—  
And I knew all there was to tell.  
And, though the rain in torrents fell,  
I walked on, heedless through the drench . . .  
And, all the while, I seemed to sit  
Upon a tub in Lansel pit:  
And in the candle-light to see  
John Askerton, a “deputy,”  
Who paused awhile to talk with me,  
His kind face glistening black with toil.

“’Twas here I found him dead, beside  
His engine. All the other men  
Were up—for things were slack just then—  
And I’d one foot upon the cage;  
When, all at once, I caught the smell  
Of burning. Even as I turned  
To see what it could be that burned,  
The drift behind was choked with strife.  
And so I dropped on hands and knees,  
And crawled along the gallery,  
Beneath the smoke, that I might see  
What ailed: and as I crept, half-blind,  
With smarting eyes, and breath awheeze,  
I scarcely knew what I should find.

At times, I thought I'd never know . . .  
And 't was already quite an age  
Since I set out . . . I felt as though  
I had been crawling all my life  
Beneath the stifling cloud of smoke  
That clung about me fit to choke:  
And when, at last, I'd struggled here,  
'T was long ere I could see things clear . . .  
That he was lying here . . . and he  
Was dead . . . and burning like a tree . . .  
A tree-trunk soaked in oil . . . No doubt,  
The engine had caught fire, somehow;  
And when he tried to put it out,  
His greasy clothes had caught . . . and now!  
As fine a lad as you could see . . .  
And such a lad for singing . . . I  
Had heard him when I worked hard by:  
And often quiet I would sit  
To hear him, singing in the pit,  
As though his heart knew naught of it,  
And life was nothing but a song.

“He'd not been working with us long:  
And little of his ways I knew:  
But, when I'd got him up, at last;

---

And he was lying in the shed,  
The sweet song silent in his breast;  
And there was nothing more to do:  
The notion came into my head  
That he had always been well-dressed;  
And seemed a neat and thrifty lad . . .  
And lived in lodgings . . . so, maybe,  
Would carry on him all he had.  
So, back into the cage I stepped:  
And, when it reached the bottom, crept  
Along the gallery again;  
And, in the dust where he had lain,  
I rummaged, until I found all  
That from his burning pockets fell.  
And when it seemed there was no more,  
I thought how, happy and alive,  
And recking naught what might befall,  
He, too, for all that I could tell,  
Just where I stood, had reckoned o'er  
That four-pound-seventeen-and five.

“Aye, like enough . . . for soon we heard  
That in a week he'd looked to wed.  
He'd meant to give the girl that night  
The money to buy furniture.

She came, and watched till morning-light  
Beside the body in the shed:  
Then rose; and took, without a word,  
The money he had left for her.”

. . . . .  
Then, as I wandered through the rain,  
I seemed to stand in awe again  
Beside that lonely garret-bed.  
And it was good to think the dead  
Had known the wealth she would not spend  
To keep a little while alive—  
His four-pound-seventeen-and five—  
Would buy her houseroom in the end.

## THE SNOW

JUST as the school came out,  
The first, white flakes were drifting round  
about;

And all the children shouted with delight  
To see such flakes, so big, so white,  
Tumbling from a cloud so black,  
And whirling, helter-skelter  
Across the windy moor:

And, as they saw the light flakes race,  
Started off in headlong chase,  
Swooping on them with a shout,  
When they seemed to drop for shelter  
Underneath the dry-stone wall.

And then the master, at the schoolhouse door,  
Called out to them to hurry home, before  
The storm should come on worse; and watched  
till all

Had started off by road or moorland-track:  
Then, turning to his wife, he said:  
It looked like dirty weather overhead;

He thought 't would be a heavy fall,  
And threatened for a roughish night;  
But they would all reach home in broad day-  
light.

'T was early, yet: he'd let the school out soon;  
As it had looked so lowering, since forenoon:  
And many had a goodish step to go;  
And it was but ill-travelling in the snow.  
Then by the fire he settled down to read;  
And to the tempest paid no further heed.

And, on their road home, full three miles away,  
John and his little sister, Janey, started:  
And, at the setting-out, were happy-hearted  
To be let loose into a world so gay,  
With jolly winds and frisking flakes at play  
That flicked your cheek, and whistled in your  
teeth:

And now hard on each other's heels they darted  
To catch a flake that floated like a feather,  
Then dropped to nestle in a clump of heather:  
And often tumbled both together  
Into a deep, delicious bed  
Of brown and springy heath.  
But, when the sky grew blacker overhead,

---

As if it were the coming on of night,  
And every little hill, well known to sight,  
Looked big and strange in its new fleece of  
white;  
And as, yet faster and more thickly  
The big flakes fell,  
To John the thought came that it might be well  
To hurry home: so, striding on before,  
He set a steady face across the moor;  
And called to Janey she must come more  
quickly.

The wind soon dropped: and fine and dry the  
snow  
Came whispering down about them, as they  
trudged:  
And, when they'd travelled for a mile or so,  
They found it ankle-deep; for here the storm  
Had started long before it reached the school:  
And, as he felt the dry flakes tingle warm  
Upon his cheek, and set him all aglow,  
John, in his manly pride, a little gruded  
That, now and then, he had to wait awhile  
For Janey, lagging like a little fool:  
But, when they'd covered near another mile

Through that bewildering white, without a  
    sound,  
Save rustling, rustling, rustling all around;  
And all his well-known world so queer and dim,  
He waited until she caught up to him;  
And felt quite glad that he was not alone.

And when they reached the low, half-buried  
    stone  
That marked where some old shepherd had  
    been found,  
Lost in the snow in seeking his lost sheep,  
One wild March night, full forty years ago,  
He wished, and wished, that they were safe  
    and sound  
In their own house: and as the snow got  
    deeper,  
And every little bank seemed strangely steeper,  
He thought, and thought of that lost sleeper,  
And saw him, lying in the snow,  
Till every fleecy clump of heath  
Seemed to shroud a man beneath:  
And now his blood went hot and cold  
Through very fear of that dread sight:  
And then he felt that, in sheer fright,



---

He must take to his heels in flight,  
He cared not whither, so that it might be  
Where there were no more bundles, cold and  
white,  
Like sheeted bodies, plain to see.  
And, all on edge, he turned to chide  
His sister, dragging at his side:  
But, when he found that she was crying,  
Because her hands and feet were cold,  
He quite forgot to scold;  
And spoke kind words of cheer to her:  
And saw no more dead shepherds lying  
In any snowy clump of heather.  
So, hand in hand, they trudged together,  
Through that strange world of drifting  
gloom,  
Sharp-set and longing sore for home.  
And John remembered how, that morning,  
When they set out, the sky was blue—  
Clean, cloudless blue, and gave no warning:  
And how, through air as clear as glass,  
The far-off hills he knew  
Looked strangely near, and glittered brightly;  
Each sprig of heath and blade of grass  
In the cold wind blowing lightly;

Each clump of green and crimson moss  
Sparkling in the Wintry sun.

But, now, as they trailed home, across  
These unfamiliar fells, nigh done,  
The wind again began to blow;  
And thicker, thicker fell the snow:  
Till Janey sank, too numb to stir:  
When John stooped down, and lifted her,  
To carry her upon his back.  
And then his head began to tire:  
And soon he seemed to lose the track . . .  
And now the world was all afire . . .  
Now dazzling white, now dazzling black . . .  
And then, through some strange land of light,  
Where clouds of butterflies all white  
Fluttered and flickered all about,  
Dancing ever in and out,  
He wandered, blinded by white wings,  
That rustled, rustled in his ears  
With cold, uncanny whisperings . . .  
And then it seemed his bones must crack  
With that dead weight upon his back . . .  
When, on his cheek, he felt warm tears,  
And a cold tangle of wet hair;

---

And knew 't was Janey, weeping there:  
And, taking heart, he stumbled on,  
While in his breast the hearthlight shone;  
And it was all of his desire  
To sit once more before the fire;  
And feel the friendly, glowing heat.  
But, as he strove, with fumbling feet,  
It seemed that he would never find  
Again that cheery hearth and kind;  
But wander ever, bent and blind,  
Beneath his burden through the night  
Of dreadful, rustling, whispering white.

The wind rose; and the dry snow drifted  
In little eddies round the track:  
And when, at last, the dark cloud rifted,  
He saw a strange lough, lying cold and black,  
'Mid unknown ghostly fells, and knew  
That they were lost: and once again,  
The snow closed in, and shut from view  
The dead black water and strange fells.  
But still, he struggled on: and then,  
When he seemed climbing up an endless steep,  
And ever slipping, sliding back,  
With ankles aching like to crack,

And only longed for sleep;  
He heard a tinkling sound of bells,  
That kept on ringing, ringing, ringing,  
Until his dizzy head was singing;  
And he could think of nothing else:  
And then it seemed the weight was lifted  
From off his back; and on the ground  
His sister stood, while, all around  
Were giants clad in coats of wool,  
With big, curled horns, and queer, black  
faces,  
Who bobbed and curtsied in their places,  
With blazing eyes and strange grimaces;  
But never made a sound;  
Then nearly shook themselves to pieces,  
Shedding round a smell of warm, wet fleeces:  
Then one it seemed as if he knew,  
Looking like the old, lame ewe,  
Began to bite his coat, and pull  
Till he could hardly stand: its eyes  
Glowing to a monstrous size,  
Till they were like a lantern light  
Burning brightly through the night . . .  
When someone stooped from out the sky  
To rescue him; and set him high . . .

---

And he was riding, snug and warm,  
In some king's chariot through the storm,  
Without a sound of wheel or hoof—  
In some king's chariot, filled with straw,  
And he would nevermore be cold . . .

And then with wondering eyes he saw  
Deep caverns of pure burning gold:  
And knew himself in fairyland:  
But when he stretched an eager hand  
To touch the glowing walls, he felt  
A queer, warm puff, as though of fire . . .  
And suddenly he smelt  
The reek of peat; and looking higher,  
He saw the old, black, porridge-kettle,  
Hanging from the cavern roof,  
Hanging on its own black crook:  
And he was lying on the settle,  
While by his side,  
With tender look,  
His mother knelt;  
And he had only one desire  
In all the world: and 't was to fling  
His arms about her neck, and hide  
His happy tears upon her breast

And as to her he closely pressed,  
He heard his merry father sing:  
"There was a silly sleepy-head,  
Who thought he'd like to go to bed:  
So, in a stell he went to sleep,  
And snored among the other sheep."

And then his mother gently said:  
"Nay, father: do not tease him now:  
He's quite worn out; and needs a deal  
Of quiet sleep: and, after all,  
He brought his sister safe from school."  
And now he felt her warm tears fall  
Upon his cheek: and thrilled to feel  
His father's hand on his hot brow,  
And hear him say: "The lad's no fool."

## RED FOX

I HATED him . . . his beard was red . . .  
Red fox . . . red thief . . . Ah, God, that  
she—

She with the proud and lifted head  
That never stooped to glance at me—  
So fair and fancy-free, should wed  
A slinking dog-fox such as he!

Was it last night I hated him?  
Last night? It seems an age ago . . .  
At whiles, my mind comes over dim  
As if God's breath . . . yet, ever slow  
And dull, too dull she . . . limb from limb  
Last night I could have torn him, so!

My lonely bed was fire and ice.  
I could not sleep. I could not lie.  
I shut my hot eyes once or twice . . .  
And saw a red fox slinking by . . .  
A red dog-fox that turned back thrice  
To mock me with a merry eye.

And so I rose to pace the floor . . .  
And, ere I knew, my clothes were on . . .  
And as I stood outside the door,  
Cold in the Summer moonlight shone  
The gleaming barrel . . . and no more  
I feared the fox, for fear was gone.

“The best of friends,” I said, “must part . . .”  
“The best of friends must part,” I said:  
And like the creaking of a cart  
The words went wheeling through my head.  
“The best of friends . . .” and, in my heart,  
Red fox, already lying dead!

I took the trackway through the wood.  
Red fox had sought a woodland den,  
When she . . . when she . . . but, 'twas not  
good  
To think too much on her just then . . .  
The woman must beware, who stood  
Between two stark and fearless men.

The pathway took a sudden turn . . .  
And in a trice my steps were stayed.



---

Before me, in the moonlit fern,  
A young dog-fox and vixen played  
With their red cubs beside the burn . . .  
And I stood trembling and afraid.

They frolicked in the warm moonlight—  
A scuffling heap of heads and heels . . .  
A rascal rush . . . a playful bite . . .  
A scuttling brush, and frightened squeals . . .  
A flash of teeth . . . a show of fight . . .  
Then lively as a bunch of eels.

Once more they gambolled in the brake,  
And tumbled headlong in the stream,  
Then scrambled gasping out, to shake  
Their sleek, wet furry coats agleam.  
I watched them, fearful and awake . . .  
I watched them, hateless and adream.

The dog-fox gave a bark, and then  
All ran to him: and, full of pride,  
He took the trackway up the glen,  
His family trotting by his side:  
The young cubs nosing for the den,  
With trailing brushes, sleepy-eyed.

And then it seems I must have slept—  
Dropt dead asleep . . . dropt dead outworn.  
I wakened, as the first gleam crept  
Among the fern, and it was morn . . .  
God's eye about their home had kept  
Good watch, the night her son was born.

## THE OVENS

HE trailed along the cinder-track,  
Beside the sleek canal, whose black  
Cold, slinking waters shivered back  
Each frosty spark of starry light:  
And each star pricked, an icy pin,  
Through his old jacket worn and thin;  
The raw wind rasped his shrinking skin  
As if stark-naked to its bite:  
Yet, cutting through him like a knife,  
It would not cut the thread of life;  
But only turned his feet to stones  
With red-hot soles, that weighed like lead  
In his old broken boots. His head  
Sunk low upon his sunken chest,  
Was but a burning, icy ache  
That strained a skull which would not break  
To let him tumble down to rest.  
He felt the cold stars in his bones:  
And only wished that he were dead,  
With no curst, searching wind to shred

The very flesh from off his bones—  
No wind to whistle through his bones,  
His naked, icy, burning bones:  
When, looking up, he saw, ahead,  
The far coke-ovens' glowing light  
That burnt a red hole in the night.  
And but to snooze beside that fire  
Was all the heaven of his desire . . .  
To tread no more this cursed track  
Of cranching cinders, through a black  
And blasted world of cinder-heaps,  
Beside a sleek canal that creeps  
Like crawling ice through every bone,  
Beneath the cruel stars, alone  
With this hell-raking wind that sets  
The cold teeth rattling castanets . . .  
Aye heaven, indeed! that core of red  
In night's black heart that seemed quite  
dead.

Though still far off, the crimson glow  
Through his chilled veins began to flow,  
And fill his shrivelled heart with heat:  
And, as he dragged his senseless feet,  
That lagged as though to hold him back  
In cold, eternal hell of black,

---

With heaven before him, blazing red,  
The set eyes staring in his head  
Were held by spell of fire quite blind  
To that black world that fell behind,  
A cindery wilderness of death:  
As he drew slowly near and nearer,  
And saw the ovens glowing clearer—  
Low-domed and humming hives of heat—  
And felt the blast of burning breath  
That quivered from each white-hot brick:  
Till, blinded by the blaze, and sick,  
He dropped into a welcome seat  
Of warm, white ashes, sinking low  
To soak his body in the glow  
That shot him through with prickling pain,  
An eager agony of fire,  
Delicious after the cold ache,  
And scorched his tingling, frosted skin,  
Then, gradually, the anguish passed;  
And blissfully he lay, at last,  
Without an unfulfilled desire,  
His grateful body drinking in  
Warm, blessed, snug forgetfulness.  
And yet, with staring eyes awake,  
As though no drench of heat could slake

His thirst for fire, he watched a red  
Hot eye that burned within a chink  
Between the bricks: while overhead  
The quivering stream of hot gold air  
Surged up to quench the cold starlight.  
His brain too numbed and dull to think  
Throughout the day, in that fierce glare  
Awoke, at last, with startled stare  
Of pitiless, insistent sight  
That stript the stark, mean, bitter strife  
Of his poor, broken, wasted life,  
Crippled from birth, and struggling on,  
The last, least shred of hope long gone,  
To some unknown, black, bitter end.  
But, even as he looked, his brain  
Sank back to sightless sloth again:  
Then, all at once, he seemed to choke;  
And knew it was the stealthy strife  
And deadly fume of burning coke  
That filled his lungs, and seemed to soak  
Through every pore, until the blood  
Grew thick and heavy in his veins,  
And he could scarcely draw a breath.  
He lay, and murmured, drowsily,  
With closing eyes: "If this be death,

It's snug and easy . . . let it come . . .  
For life is cold and hard . . . the flood  
Is rising with the heavy rains  
That pour and pour . . . that damned old  
drum,

Why ever can't they let it be . . .  
Beat-beating, beating, beating, beat . . .”  
Then, suddenly, he sat upright,  
For, close behind him in the night,  
He heard a breathing loud and deep,  
And caught a whiff of burning leather.  
He shook himself alive, and turned:  
And on a heap of ashes white,  
O'er-come by the full blast of heat,  
Where fieriest the dread blaze burned,  
He saw a young girl stretched in sleep.  
He sat awhile with heavy gaze  
Fized on her in a dull amaze,  
Until he saw her scorched boots smoking:  
Then whispering huskily: “She's dying,  
While I look on and watch her choking!”  
He roused, and pulled himself together;  
And rose, and went where she was lying:  
And, bending o'er the senseless lass,  
In his weak arms he lifted her;

And bore her out beyond the glare,  
Beyond the stealthy, stifling gas,  
Into the fresh and eager air:  
And laid her gently on the ground  
Beneath the cold and starry sky:  
And did his best to bring her round;  
Though still, for all that he could try,  
She seemed with each, deep, labouring breath  
Just brought up on the brink of death.  
He sought, and found an icy pool,  
Though he had but his cap to fill,  
And bathed her hands and face, until  
The troubled breath was quieter,  
And her flushed forehead felt quite cool:  
And then he saw an eyelid stir;  
And shivering she sat up, at last,  
And looked about her sullenly.  
“I’m cold . . . I’m mortal cold,” she said:  
“What call had you to waken me?  
I was so warm and happy, dead . . .  
And still those staring stars!” Her head  
Dropt in her hands: and thick and fast  
The tears came with a heavy sobbing.  
He stood quite helpless while she cried;  
And watched her shaken bosom throbbing



---

With passionate, wild, weak distress,  
Till it was spent. And then she dried  
Her eyes upon her singed black dress;  
Looked up, and saw him standing there,  
Wondering, and more than half-afraid.  
But now, the nipping, hungry air  
Took hold of her, and struck fear dead.  
She only felt the starving sting  
That must, at any price, be stayed;  
And cried out: "I am famishing!"  
Then from his pocket he took bread  
That he had been too weak and sick  
To eat o'ernight: and eager-eyed,  
She took it timidly; and said:  
"I have not tasted food two days."  
And, as he waited by her side,  
He watched her with a quiet gaze;  
And saw her munch the broken crust  
So gladly, seated in the dust  
Of that black desert's bitter night,  
Beneath the freezing stars, so white  
And hunger-pinched; and at the sight  
Keen pity touched him to the quick;  
Although he never said a word,  
Till she had finished every crumb.

And then he led her to a seat  
A little closer to the heat,  
But well beyond the deadly strife.  
And in the ashes, side by side,  
They sat together dazed and dumb,  
With eyes upon the ovens' glare,  
Each looking nakedly on life.  
And then, at length, she sighed, and stirred;  
Still staring deep and dreamy-eyed  
Into the whitening, steady glow.  
With jerky, broken words and slow,  
And biting at her finger ends,  
She talked at last: and spoke out all  
Quite open-heartedly, as though  
There were not any stranger there—  
The fire and he, both bosom-friends.  
She'd left her home three months ago—  
She, country-born and country-bred,  
Had got the notion in her head  
That she'd like city-service best . . .  
And so no country place could please . . .  
And she had worried without rest  
Until, at last, she got her ends;  
And, wiser than her folk and friends,  
She left her home among the trees . . .

The trees grew thick for miles about  
Her father's house . . . the forest spread  
As far as ever you could see . . .  
And it was green, in Summer, green . . .  
Since she had left her home, she'd seen  
No greenness could compare with it . . .  
And everything was fresh and clean,  
And not all smutched and smirched with  
smoke . . .

They burned no sooty coal and coke,  
But only wood-logs, ash and oak . . .  
And by the fire at night they'd sit . . .  
Ah! would n't it be rare and good  
To smell the sappy, sizzling wood,  
Once more; and listen to the stream  
That runs just by the garden gate . . .  
And often, in a Winter spate,  
She'd wakened from a troubled dream,  
And lain in bed, and heard it roar;  
And quaked to hear it, as a child . . .  
It seemed so angry and so wild—  
Just mad to sweep the house away!  
And now, it was three months or more  
Since she had heard it, on the day . . .  
The day she left . . . and Michael stood . . .

He was a woodman, too; and he  
Worked with her father in the wood . . .  
And wanted her, she knew . . . but she  
Was proud, and thought herself too good  
To marry any country-lad . . .  
'Twas queer to think she'd once been proud—  
And such a little while ago—  
A beggar, wolfing crusts! . . . The pride  
That made her quit her countryside  
Soon left her stranded in the crowd . . .  
And precious little pride she had  
To keep her warm these freezing days  
Since she had fled the city ways  
To walk back home . . . aye! home again:  
For, in the town she'd tried, in vain,  
For honest work to earn her bread . . .  
At one place, they'd nigh slaved her dead,  
And starved her, too; and when she left,  
Had cheated her of half her wage:  
But she'd no means to stop the theft . . .  
And she'd had no more work to do . . .  
Two months since, now . . . it seemed an  
age!  
How she had lived, she scarcely knew . . .  
And still, poor fool, too proud to write

To home for help, until, at length,  
She'd not a penny for a bite,  
Or pride enough to clothe her back . . .  
So, she was tramping home, too poor  
To pay the train-fare . . . she'd the  
strength,  
If she'd the food . . . but that hard track,  
And that cold, cruel, bitter night  
Had taken all the heart from her . . .  
If Michael knew, she felt quite sure . . .  
For she would rather drop stone-dead  
Than live as some . . . if she had cared  
To feed upon the devil's bread,  
She could have earned it easily . . .  
She'd pride enough to starve instead,  
Aye, starve, than fare as some girls fared . . .  
But, that was all behind . . . and she  
Was going home . . . and yet, maybe,  
If they'd a home like hers, they, too,  
Would be too proud . . . she only knew  
The thought of home had kept her straight,  
And saved her ere it was too late.  
She'd soon be home again . . . And now  
She sat with hand upon her brow;  
And did not speak again or stir.

And as he heard her words, his gaze  
Still set upon the steady glare,  
His thoughts turned back to city ways:  
And he remembered common sights  
That he had seen in city nights:  
And, once again, in early June,  
He wandered through the midnight street;  
And heard those ever-pacing feet  
Of young girls, children yet in years,  
With gaudy ribbons in their hair,  
And shameless, fevered eyes astare,  
And slack lips set in brazen leers,  
Who walked the pavements of despair,  
Beneath the fair, full Summer moon . . .  
Shadowed by wornout wizened hags,  
With claw-hands clutching filthy rags  
About old bosoms, shrunk and thin,  
And mouths aler without a tooth,  
Who dogged them, cursing their sleek youth  
That filched their custom and their bread . . .  
Then, in a reek of hot gas light,  
He stood where, through the Summer night,  
Half-dozing in the stifling air,  
The greasy landlord, fat with sin,  
Sat, lolling in his easy chair,

---

Just half-way up the brothel stair,  
To tax the earnings they brought in,  
And hearken for the policeman's tread . . .  
Then, shuddering back from that foul place;  
And turning from the ovens' glare,  
He looked into her dreaming face;  
And saw green sunlit woodlands there,  
With waters flashing in between  
Low-drooping boughs of Summer-green.  
And, as he looked, still in a dream  
She murmured: Michael would, she knew . . .  
Though she'd been foolish . . . he was true,  
As true as steel, and fond of her . . .  
And then she sat with eyes agleam  
In dreaming silence, till the stir  
Of cold dawn shivered through the air:  
When, twisting up her tumbled hair,  
She rose; and said she must be gone.  
Though she'd still far to go, the day  
Would see her well upon her way . . .  
And she had best be jogging on,  
While she'd the strength . . . and so, Good-bye.

And as, beneath the paling sky,  
He trudged again the cinder-track

That stretched before him, dead and black,  
He muttered: "It's a chance the light  
Has found me living still . . . and she . . .  
She, too . . . and Michael . . . and through  
me!

God knows whom I may wake to-night."



## THE DANCING SEAL

WHEN we were building Skua Light—  
The first men who had lived a night  
Upon that deep-sea Isle—  
As soon as chisel touched the stone,  
The friendly seals would come ashore;  
And sit and watch us all the while,  
As though they'd not seen men before;  
And so, poor beasts, had never known  
Men had the heart to do them harm.  
They'd little cause to feel alarm  
With us, for we were glad to find  
Some friendliness in that strange sea;  
Only too pleased to let them be  
And sit as long as they'd a mind  
To watch us: for their eyes were kind  
Like women's eyes, it seemed to me.

So, hour on hour, they sat: I think  
They liked to hear the chisels' clink:  
And when the boy sang loud and clear,  
They scrambled closer in to hear;

And if he whistled sweet and shrill,  
The queer beasts shuffled nearer still:  
But every sleek and sheeny skin  
Was mad to hear his violin.

When, work all over for the day,  
He'd take his fiddle down and play  
His merry tunes beside the sea,  
Their eyes grew brighter and more bright,  
And burned and twinkled merrily:  
And as I watched them one still night,  
And saw their eager, sparkling eyes,  
I felt those lively seals would rise  
Some shiny night ere he could know,  
And dance about him, heel and toe,  
Unto the fiddle's heady tune.

And at the rising of the moon,  
Half-daft, I took my stand before  
A young seal lying on the shore;  
And called on her to dance with me.  
And it seemed hardly strange when she  
Stood up before me suddenly,  
And shed her black and sheeny skin;  
And smiled, all eager to begin . . .

And I was dancing, heel and toe,  
With a young maiden white as snow,  
Unto a crazy violin.  
We danced beneath the dancing moon,  
All night beside the dancing sea,  
With tripping toes and skipping heels:  
And all about us friendly seals  
Like Christian folk were dancing reels  
Unto the fiddle's endless tune  
That kept on spinning merrily  
As though it never meant to stop.  
And never once the snow-white maid  
A moment stayed  
To take a breath,  
Though I was fit to drop:  
And while those wild eyes challenged me,  
I knew as well as well could be  
I must keep step with that young girl,  
Though we should dance to death.

Then with a skirl  
The fiddle broke:  
The moon went out:  
The sea stopped dead:  
And, in a twinkling, all the rout

Of dancing folk had fled . . .  
And in the chill, bleak dawn I woke  
Upon the naked rock, alone.

They've brought me far from Skua Isle . . .  
I laugh to think they do not know  
That, as all day I chip the stone,  
Among my fellows here inland,  
I smell the sea-wrack on the shore . . .  
And see her snowy-tossing hand,  
And meet again her merry smile . . .  
And dream I'm dancing all the while,  
I'm dancing ever, heel and toe,  
With a seal-maiden, white as snow,  
On that moonshiny Island-strand,  
For ever and for evermore.

## THE SLAG

AMONG bleak hills of mounded slag they  
walked,

'Neath sullen evening skies that seemed to sag  
O'er-burdened by the belching smoke, and lie  
Upon their aching foreheads, dense and dank  
Till both felt youth within them fail and flag—

Even as the flame that shot a fiery rag  
A fluttering moment through the murky sky  
Above the black blast-furnaces, then sank  
Again beneath the iron bell, close-bound—  
And it was all that they could do to drag  
Themselves along, 'neath that dead-weight of  
smoke,

Over the cinder-blasted, barren ground.

Though fitfully and fretfully she talked,

He never turned his eyes to her, or spoke:

And as he slouched with her along the track

That skirted a stupendous lowering mound,

With listless eyes, and o'er-strained sinews  
slack,

She bit a petted, puckered lip, and frowned

To think she ever should be walking out  
With this tongue-tied, slow-witted, hulking lout,  
As cold and dull and lifeless as the slag.

And, all on edge, o'erwrought by the cramped  
day

Of crouched, close stitching at her dull ma-  
chine,

It seemed to her a girl of seventeen

Should have, at least, an hour of careless talk-  
ing—

Should have, at least, an hour of life, out  
walking

Beside a lover, mettlesome and gay—

Not through her too-short freedom doomed to  
lag

Beside a sparkless giant, glum and grim,

Till all her eager youth should waste away.

Yet, even as she looked askance at him—

Well-knit, big-thewed, broad-chested, steady-  
eyed—

She dimly knew of depths she could not sound

In this strong lover, silent at her side:

And once again, her heart was touched with  
pride

---

To think that he was hers, this strapping lad—  
Black-haired, close-cropped, clean-skinned, and  
neatly clad . . .

His crimson neckerchief so smartly tied—  
And hers alone, and more than all she had  
In all the world to her . . . and yet, so grave!  
If he would only shew that he was glad  
To be with her—a gleam, a spark of fire,  
A spirit of flame to shoot into the night,  
A moment through the murky heavens to wave  
An eager beacon of enkindling light  
In answer to her young heart's quick desire!

Yet, though he walked with dreamy eyes agaze,  
As deep within a mound of slag, a core  
Of unseen fire may smoulder many days,  
Till suddenly the whole heap glow ablaze,  
That seemed but now, dead cinder, grey and  
cold,

Life smouldered in his heart. The fire he fed  
Day long in the tall furnace just ahead  
From that frail gallery slung against the sky  
Had burned through all his being, till the ore  
Glowed in him. Though no surface-stream of  
gold

Quick-molten slag of speech was his to spill  
Unceasingly, the burning metal still  
Seethed in him, from the broken furnace-side  
To burst at any moment in a tide  
Of white-hot, molten metal o'er the mould . . .

But still he spoke no word as they strolled on  
Into the early-gathering Winter-night:  
And, as she watched the leaping furnace light,  
She had no thought of smouldering fires un-  
seen . . .

The daylong clattering whirr of her machine  
Hummed in her ears again—the straining  
thread  
And stabbing needle starting through her  
head—  
Until the last dull gleam of day was gone . . .

When, all at once, upon the right,  
A crackling crash, a blinding flare . . .  
A shower of cinders through the air . . .  
A grind of blocks of slag aslide . . .  
And, far above them, in the night,  
The looming heap had opened wide  
About a fiery gaping pit . . .  
And, startled and aghast at it,



With clasping hands, they stood astare  
And gazed upon the awful glare:  
And, as she felt him clutch her hand,  
She seemed to know her heart's desire,  
For evermore with him to stand  
In that enkindling blaze of fire . . .  
When, suddenly, he left her side;  
And started scrambling up the heap:  
And looking up, with stifled cry,  
She saw, against the glowing sky,  
Almost upon the pit's red brink,  
A little lad, stock-still with fright  
Before the blazing pit of dread  
Agape before him in the night,  
Where, playing castles on the height  
Since noon, he 'd fallen, spent, asleep  
And dreaming he was home in bed . . .  
With brain afire, too strained to think,  
She watched her lover climb and leap  
From jag to jag  
Of broken slag . . .  
And still he only seemed to creep . . .  
She felt that he would never reach  
That little lad, though he should climb  
Until the very end of time . . .

And, as she looked, the burning breach  
Gaped suddenly more wide . . .  
The slag again began to slide,  
And crash into the pit,  
Until the dazed lad's feet  
Stood on the edge of it.  
She saw him reel and fall . . .  
And thought him done for . . . then  
Her lover, brave and tall,  
A very fire-bright god of men!  
He stooped . . . and now she knew the  
    lad  
Was safe with Robert, after all.

And, while she watched, a throng of folk  
Attracted by the crash and flare,  
Had gathered round, though no one spoke;  
But all stood terror-stricken there,  
With lifted eyes and indrawn breath,  
Until the lad was snatched from death  
Upon the very pit's edge, when,  
As Robert picked him up, and turned,  
A sigh ran through the crowd; and fear  
Gave place to joy, as cheer on cheer  
Sang through the kindled air . . .

---

But still she never uttered word,  
As though she neither saw nor heard;  
Till as, at last, her lad drew near,  
She saw him bend with tender care  
Over the sobbing child who lay  
Safe in his arms, and hug him tight  
Against his breast—his brow alight  
With eager loving eyes that burned  
In his transfigured face aflame . . .  
And even when the parents came,  
It almost seemed that he was loth  
To yield them up their little son;  
As though the lad were his by right  
Of rescue, from the pit's edge won.  
Then, as his eyes met hers, she felt  
An answering thrill of tenderness  
Run, quickening, through her breast; and both  
Stood quivering there, with envious eyes,  
And stricken with a strange distress,  
As quickly homeward through the night  
The happy parents bore their boy . . .

And then, about her reeling bright,  
The whole night seemed to her to melt  
In one fierce, fiery flood of joy.

## DEVIL'S EDGE

ALL night I lay on Devil's Edge,  
Along an overhanging ledge  
Between the sky and sea:  
And as I rested 'waiting sleep,  
The windless sky and soundless deep  
In one dim blue infinity  
Of starry peace encompassed me.

And I remembered, drowsily,  
How 'mid the hills last night I'd lain  
Beside a singing moorland burn;  
And waked at dawn, to feel the rain  
Fall on my face, as on the fern  
That drooped about my heather-bed:  
And how by noon the wind had blown  
The last grey shred from out the sky,  
And blew my homespun jacket dry,  
As I stood on the topmost stone  
That crowns the cairn on Hawkshaw Head,  
And caught a gleam of far-off sea;  
And heard the wind sing in the bent

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Like those far waters calling me:  
When, my heart answering to the call,  
I followed down the seaward stream,  
By silent pool and singing fall;  
Till with a quiet, keen content,  
I watched the sun, a crimson ball,  
Shoot through grey seas a fiery gleam,  
Then sink in opal deeps from sight.

And with the coming on of night,  
The wind had dropped: and as I lay,  
Retracing all the happy day,  
And gazing long and dreamily  
Across the dim, unsounding sea,  
Over the far horizon came  
A sudden sail of amber flame;  
And soon the new moon rode on high  
Through cloudless deeps of crystal sky.

Too holy seemed the night for sleep:  
And yet, I must have slept, it seems;  
For, suddenly, I woke to hear  
A strange voice singing, shrill and clear,  
Down in a gully black and deep  
That cleft the beetling crag in twain.

It seemed the very voice of dreams  
That drive hag-ridden souls in fear  
Through echoing, unearthly vales,  
To plunge in black, slow-crawling streams,  
And seek to drown that cry, in vain . . .  
Or some sea-creature's voice that wails  
Through blind, white banks of fog unlifting  
To God-forgotten sailors drifting  
Rudderless to death . . .  
And as I heard,  
Though no wind stirred,  
An icy breath  
Was in my hair . . .  
And clutched my heart with cold despair . . .  
But, as the wild song died away,  
There came a faltering break  
That shivered to a sobbing fall;  
And seemed half-human, after all . . .

And yet what foot could find a track  
In that deep gully, sheer and black . . .  
And singing wildly in the night!  
So, wondering, I lay awake,  
Until the coming of the light  
Brought day's familiar presence back.

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Down by the harbour-mouth that day,  
A fisher told the tale to me.  
Three months before, while out at sea,  
Young Philip Burn was lost, though how,  
None knew, and none would ever know.  
The boat becalmed at noonday lay . . .  
And not a ripple on the sea . . .  
And Philip standing in the bow,  
When his six comrades went below  
To sleep away an hour or so,  
Dog-tired with working day and night,  
While he kept watch . . . and not a sound  
They heard, until, at set of sun  
They woke; and coming up, they found  
The deck was empty, Philip gone . . .  
Yet not another boat in sight . . .  
And not a ripple on the sea.  
How he had vanished, none could tell.  
They only knew the lad was dead  
They'd left but now, alive and well . . .  
And he, poor fellow, newly wed . . .  
And when they broke the news to her,  
She spoke no word to anyone:  
But sat all day, and would not stir—  
Just staring, staring in the fire,

With eyes that never seemed to tire;  
Until, at last, the day was done,  
And darkness came; when she would rise,  
And seek the door with queer, wild eyes;  
And wander singing all the night  
Unearthly songs beside the sea:  
But always the first blink of light  
Would find her back at her own door . . .

'Twas winter, when I came once more  
To that old village by the shore:  
And as, at night, I climbed the street,  
I heard a singing, low and sweet,  
Within a cottage near at hand:  
And I was glad awhile to stand  
And listen by the glowing pane:  
And as I hearkened, that sweet strain  
Recalled the night when I had lain  
Awake on Devil's Edge . . .

And now I knew the voice again,  
So different, free of pain and fear—  
Its terror turned to tenderness—  
And yet the same voice none the less,



Though singing now so true and clear:  
And drawing nigh the window-ledge,  
I watched the mother sing to rest  
The baby snuggling to her breast.

## THE LILAC-TREE

“I PLANTED her the lilac-tree  
Upon our wedding-day:  
But, when the time of blossom came,  
With her dead babe she lay . . .  
And, as I stood beside the bed,  
The scent of lilac filled the room;  
And always when I smell the bloom  
I think upon the dead.”

He spoke; and, speaking, sauntered on,  
The young girl by his side:  
And then they talked no more of death,  
But only of the happy things  
That burst their buds, and spread their wings,  
And break in song at Whitsuntide,  
That burst to bloom at Whitsuntide,  
And bring the Summer in a breath.

And, as they talked, the young girl's life  
Broke into bloom and song;

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And one with all the happy things  
That burst their buds, and spread their  
wings,  
Her very blood was singing,  
And at her pulses ringing;  
Life tingled through her, sweet and strong,  
From secret sources springing:  
And, all at once, a quickening strife  
Of hopes and fears was in her heart,  
Where only wondering joy had been;  
And, kindling with a sudden light,  
Her eyes had sight  
Of things unseen:  
And, in a flash, a woman grown,  
With pangs of knowledge, fierce and keen,  
She knew strange things unknown.

A year went by: at Whitsuntide,  
He brought her home, a bride.

He planted her no lilac-tree  
Upon their wedding-day:  
And strange distress came over her,  
As on the bed she lay:

For as he stood beside the bed,  
The scent of lilac filled the room.  
Her heart knew well he smelt the bloom,  
And thought upon the dead.  
Yet, she was glad to be his wife:  
And, when the blossom-time was past,  
Her days no more were overcast;  
And deep she drank of life:  
And, thronged with happy, household cares,  
Her busy days went pleasantly;  
Her foot was light upon the stairs;  
And every room rang merrily,  
And merrily, and merrily,  
With song and mirth, for, unto her  
His heart seemed hers, and hers alone:  
Until new dreams began to stir  
Her wondering breast with bliss unknown  
Of some new miracle to be;  
And, though she moved more quietly,  
And seldom sang; yet, happily,  
From happy dawn to happy night  
The mother's eyes shone bright.

But, as her time drew near,  
Her heart was filled with fear:

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And, when the lilac burst to bloom,  
And brought the Summer in a breath,  
A presence seemed to fill the room,  
And fill her heart, with death:  
And, as her husband lay asleep,  
Beside her, on the bed,  
Into her breast the thought would creep  
That he was dreaming of the dead.  
And all the mother's heart in her  
Was mad with mother-jealousy  
Of that sweet-scented lilac-tree;  
And, blind with savage ecstasy,  
Night after night, she lay,  
Until the break of day,  
With staring eyes and wild,  
Half-crazy lest the lilac-tree  
Should come betwixt him and his child.  
By day, her mother-tenderness  
Was turned to brooding bitterness,  
Whene'er she looked upon the bloom;  
And, if she slept at all at night,  
Her heart would waken in affright  
To smell the lilac in the gloom;  
And, when it rained, it seemed to her,  
The fresh, keen scent was bitterer;

Though, when the blaze of morning came,  
And flooded all the room,  
The perfume burned her heart like flame.

As, in the dark,  
One night she lay,  
A dark thought shot  
Through her hot heart:  
And, from a spark  
Of smouldering wrong,  
Hate burst to fire.  
Now quaking cold,  
Now, quivering hot,  
With breath indrawn,  
Through time untold,  
She 'waited dawn,  
That lagged too long  
For her desire.

And when, at last, at break of day,  
Her husband rose, and went his way  
About his daily toil,  
She, too, arose, and dressed,  
With frenzy in her breast;  
And stole downstairs, and took a spade,

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And digged about the lilac-roots,  
And laid them bare of soil:  
Then, with a jagged blade,  
She hacked and slashed the naked roots—  
She hacked and slashed with frantic hand,  
Until the lilac scarce might stand;  
And then again she laid the soil  
About the bleeding roots—  
It seemed to her the sap ran red  
About the writhing roots! . . .  
But now her heart was eased of strife,  
Since she had sapped the lilac's life;  
And, frenzy-spent, she dropped the knife;  
Then, dizzily, she crept to bed;  
And lay all day as one nigh-dead.

That night, a sudden storm awoke;  
And struck the slumbering earth to life:  
And, as the heavens in thunder broke,  
She lay exulting in the strife  
Of flash and peal,  
And gust and rain;  
For, now, she thought: the lightning-stroke  
Will lay the lilac low;  
And he need never know

How I . . . and then, again,  
Her heart went cold with dread,  
As she remembered that the knife  
Still lay beneath the lilac-tree . . .  
A blinding flash,  
A lull, a crash,  
A rattling peal . . .  
And suddenly,  
She felt her senses reel:  
And, crying out: "The knife! the knife!"  
Her pangs were on her . . .  
Dawn was red,  
When she awoke upon the bed  
To life—and knew her babe was dead.  
She rose: and cried out fearfully:  
"The lilac-tree! The lilac-tree!"  
Then fell back in a swoon.

But, when she waked again at noon,  
And looked upon her sleeping child;  
And laid her hand upon its head;  
No more the mother's heart was wild,  
For hate and fear were dead;  
And all her brooding bitterness  
Broke into tears of tenderness.



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And, not a word the father said  
About the lilac, lying dead.

A week went by: and Whitsuntide  
Came round: and, as she lay,  
And looked upon the newborn day,  
Her husband, lying by her side,  
Spoke to her very tenderly:  
“Wife, ’t is again our wedding-day;  
And we will plant a lilac-tree,  
In memory of the babe that died.”

They planted a white lilac-tree  
Upon their wedding-day:  
And, when the time of blossom came,  
With kindly hearts they lay.  
The sunlight streamed upon the bed:  
The scent of lilac filled the room:  
And, as they smelt the breathing bloom,  
They thought upon the dead.

## THE OLD MAN

THE boat put in at dead of night;  
And, when I reached the house, 't was sleeping  
dark.

I knew my gentlest tap would be a spark  
To set my home alight:  
My mother, ever listening in her sleep  
For my returning step, would leap  
Awake with welcome; and my father's eyes  
Would twinkle merrily to greet me;  
And my young sister would run down to meet  
me  
With sleepy, sweet surprise.

And yet, awhile, I lingered  
Upon the threshold, listening;  
And watched the cold stars glistening;  
And seemed to hear the deep  
Calm breathing of the house asleep—  
In easy sleep so deep I almost feared to break  
it:  
And even as I fingered

---

The knocker, loth to wake it,  
Like some uncanny inkling  
Of news from otherwhere,  
I felt a cold breath in my hair,  
As though, with chin upon my shoulder,  
One waited, hard upon my heel,  
With pricking eyes of steel,  
Though well I knew that not a soul was there.

Until, at last, grown bolder,  
I rapped; and in a twinkling,  
The house was all afire  
With welcome in the night:  
First, in my mother's room, a light;  
And then, her foot upon the stair;  
A bolt shot back; a candle's flare;  
A happy cry; and to her breast  
She hugged her heart's desire;  
And hushed her fears to rest.

Then, shivering in the keen night air,  
My sleepy sister, laughing came;  
And drew us in; and stirred to flame  
The smouldering kitchen-fire; and set  
The kettle on the kindling red:

And, as I watched the homely blaze,  
And thought of wandering days  
With sharp regret;  
I missed my father: then I heard  
How he was still a-bed;  
And had been ailing for a day or so:  
But now was waking, if I'd go . . .  
My foot already on the stair,  
In answer to my mother's word  
I turned; and saw, in dull amaze,  
Behind her, standing unaware,  
An old man sitting in my father's chair.

A strange old man . . . yet, as I looked at  
    him,  
Before my eyes, a dim  
Remembrance seemed to swim  
Of some old man who'd lurked about the boat,  
While we were still at sea;  
And who had crouched beside me at the oar,  
As we had rowed ashore;  
Though, at the time, I'd taken little note,  
I felt I'd seen that strange old man before:  
But, how he'd come to follow me,  
Unknown . . .

And to be sitting there . . .  
Then I recalled the cold breath in my hair,  
When I had stood, alone,  
Before the bolted door.

And now, my mother, wondering sore  
To see me stare and stare,  
So strangely, at an empty chair,  
Turned, too; and saw the old man there.

And, as she turned, he slowly raised  
His drooping head;  
And looked upon her with her husband's eyes.  
She stood, a moment, dazed;  
And watched him slowly rise,  
As though to come to her:  
Then, with a cry, she sped  
Upstairs, ere I could stir.

Still dazed, I let her go, alone:  
I heard her footstep overhead:  
I heard her drop beside the bed,  
With low, forsaken moan.

Yet, I could only stare and stare  
Upon my father's empty chair.

## THE HARE

My hands were hot upon a hare,  
Half-strangled, struggling in the snare—  
My knuckles at her warm wind-pipe—  
When suddenly her eyes shot back,  
Big, fearful, staggering and black:  
And, ere I knew, my grip was slack;  
And I was clutching empty air,  
Half-mad, half-glad at my lost luck . . .  
When I awoke beside the stack.

'Twas just the minute when the snipe,  
As though clock-wakened, every jack,  
An hour ere dawn, dart in and out  
The mist wreathes filling syke and slack,  
And flutter wheeling round about,  
And drumming out the Summer night.  
I lay star-gazing yet a bit:  
Then, chilly-skinned, I sat upright,  
To shrug the shivers from my back:  
And, drawing out a straw to suck,  
My teeth nipped through it at a bite . . .

---

The liveliest lad is out of pluck  
An hour ere dawn—a tame cock-sparrow—  
When cold stars shiver through his mar-  
row,  
And wet mist soaks his mother-wit.

But, as the snipe dropped one by one;  
And one by one the stars blinked out;  
I knew 't would only need the sun  
To send the shudders right-about:  
And, as the clear East faded white,  
I watched and wearied for the sun—  
The jolly, welcome, friendly sun—  
The sleepy sluggard of a sun  
That still kept snoozing out of sight,  
Though well he knew the night was done . . .  
And, after all, he caught me dozing;  
And leapt up, laughing, in the sky  
Just as my lazy eyes were closing:  
And it was good as gold to lie  
Full length among the straw, and feel  
The day wax warmer every minute,  
As, glowing glad from head to heel,  
I soaked and rolled rejoicing in it . . .  
When from the corner of my eye,

Upon a heathery knowe hard-by,  
With long lugs cocked, and eyes astare,  
Yet all serene, I saw a hare.

Upon my belly in the straw,  
I lay, and watched her sleek her fur,  
As, daintily, with well-licked paw,  
She washed her face and neck and ears:  
Then clean and comely in the sun,  
She kicked her heels up, full of fun,  
As if she did not care a pin  
Though she should jump out of her skin;  
And leapt and lolloped free of fears,  
Until my heart frisked round with her.  
“And yet, if I but lift my head,  
You’ll scamper off, young Puss,” I said.  
“Still, I can’t lie, and watch you play  
Upon my belly half-the-day.  
The Lord alone knows where I’m going:  
But I had best be getting there.  
Last night I loosed you from a snare—  
Asleep, or waking, who’s for knowing!—  
So, I shall thank you now for shewing  
Which art to take to bring me where



---

My luck awaits me. When you're ready  
To start, I'll follow in your track.  
Though slow of foot, I'm sure and steady . . ."  
She pricked her ears, then set them back;  
And like a shot was out of sight:  
And with a happy heart and light  
As quickly I was on my feet;  
And following the way she went,  
Keen as a lurcher on the scent,  
Across the heather and the bent,  
Across the quaking moss and peat.  
Of course, I lost her soon enough;  
For moorland-tracks are steep and rough;  
And hares are made of nimbler stuff  
Than any lad of seventeen,  
However lanky-legged and tough,  
However kestrel-eyed and keen:  
And I'd at last to stop and eat  
The little bit of bread and meat  
Left in my pocket overnight.  
So, in a hollow, snug and green,  
I sat beside a burn, and dipped  
The dry bread in an icy pool;  
And munched a breakfast fresh and cool . . .  
And then sat gaping like a fool . . .

For, right before my very eyes,  
With lugs acock and eyes astare,  
I saw again the selfsame hare.

So, up I jumped, and off she slipped:  
And I kept sight of her until  
I stumbled in a hole, and tripped;  
And came a heavy, headlong spill:  
And she, ere I'd the wit to rise,  
Was o'er the hill, and out of sight:  
And sore and shaken with the tumbling,  
And sicker at my foot for stumbling,  
I cursed my luck, and went on, grumbling  
The way her flying heels had fled.

The sky was cloudless overhead;  
And just alive with larks a-singing:  
And, in a twinkling, I was swinging  
Across the windy hills, light-hearted.  
A kestrel at my footstep started,  
Just pouncing on a frightened mouse,  
And hung o'er-head with wings a-hover:  
Through rustling heath an adder darted:  
A hundred rabbits bobbed to cover:  
A weasel, sleek and rusty-red,

---

Popped out of sight as quick as winking:  
I saw a grizzled vixen slinking  
Behind a clucking brood of grouse  
That rose and cackled at my coming:  
And all about my way were flying  
The peewit, with their slow wings creaking:  
And little jack-snipe darted, drumming:  
And now and then the golden plover  
Or red-shank piped with reedy whistle.  
But never shaken bent or thistle  
Betrayed the quarry I was seeking:  
And not an instant, any where  
Did I clap eyes upon a hare.

So, travelling still, the twilight caught me:  
And as I stumbled on, I muttered:  
“A deal of luck the hare has brought me!  
The wind and I must spend together  
A hungry night among the heather.  
If I'd her here . . .” And as I uttered,  
I tripped, and heard a frightened squeal;  
And dropped my hands in time to feel  
The hare just bolting 'twixt my feet.  
She slipped my clutch: and I stood there,  
And cursed that devil-littered hare,

That left me stranded in the dark  
In that wide waste of quaggy peat,  
Beneath black night without a spark:  
When, looking up, I saw a flare  
Upon a far-off hill, and said:  
"By God, the heather is afire!  
It's mischief at this time of year . . ."  
And then as one bright flame shot higher,  
And booths and vans stood out quite clear,  
My wits came back into my head;  
And I remembered Brough Hill Fair.  
And, as I stumbled towards the glare,  
I knew the sudden kindling meant  
The Fair was over for the day;  
And all the cattle-folk away;  
And gipsy-folk and tinkers now  
Were lighting supper-fires without  
Each caravan and booth and tent.  
And, as I climbed the stiff hill-brow,  
I quite forgot my lucky hare.  
I'd something else to think about;  
For well I knew there's broken meat  
For empty bellies after Fair-time;  
And looked to have a royal rare time  
With something rich and prime to eat:

---

And then to lie and toast my feet  
All night beside the biggest fire.

But, even as I neared the first,  
A pleasant whiff of stewing burst  
From out a smoking pot a-bubble:  
And, as I stopped behind the folk  
Who sprawled around and watched it seething;  
A woman heard my eager breathing,  
And turning, caught my hungry eye:  
And called out to me: "Draw in nigher,  
Unless you find it too much trouble;  
Or you've a nose for better fare,  
And go to supper with the Squire . . .  
You've got the hungry parson's air!"  
And all looked up, and took the joke,  
As I dropped gladly to the ground  
Among them, where they all lay gazing  
Upon the bubbling and the blazing.  
My eyes were dazzled by the fire  
At first; and then I glanced around;  
And, in those swarthy, fire-lit faces—  
Though drowsing in the glare and heat  
And snuffing the warm savour in,  
Dead-certain of their fill of meat—

I felt the bit between the teeth,  
The flying heels, the broken traces,  
And heard the highroad ring beneath  
The trampling hoofs: and knew them kin.  
Then for the first time, standing there  
Behind the woman who had hailed me,  
I saw a girl with eyes astare  
That looked in terror o'er my head:  
And, all at once, my courage failed me . . .  
For now again, and sore-adread,  
My hands were hot upon a hare,  
That struggled strangling in the snare . . .  
Then once more as the girl stood clear,  
Before me, quaking cold with fear  
I saw the hare look from her eyes . . .

And when, at last, I turned to see  
What held her scared, I saw a man—  
A fat man with dull eyes aleer—  
Within the shadow of the van:  
And I was on the point to rise  
To send him spinning mid the wheels,  
And twist his neck between his heels,  
And stop his leering grin with mud . . .  
And would have done it in a tick . . .

---

When, suddenly, alive with fright,  
She started, with red, parted lips,  
As though she guessed we'd come to grips,  
And turned her black eyes full on me . . .  
And as I looked into their light,  
My heart forgot the lust of fight,  
And something shot me to the quick,  
And ran like wildfire through my blood,  
And tingled to my finger-tips . . .  
And in a dazzling flash I knew  
I'd never been alive before . . .  
And she was mine for evermore.

While all the others slept asnore  
In caravan and tent that night,  
I lay alone beside the fire;  
And stared into its blazing core,  
With eyes that would not shut or tire,  
Because the best of all was true,  
And they looked still into the light  
Of her eyes burning ever bright  
Within the brightest coal for me . . .  
Once more, I saw her, as she started,  
And glanced at me with red lips parted:  
And, as she looked, the frightened hare

Had fled her eyes; and merrily,  
She smiled, with fine teeth flashing white,  
As though she, too, were happy-hearted . . .  
Then she had trembled suddenly,  
And dropped her eyes, as that fat man  
Stepped from the shadow of the van,  
And joined the circle, as the pot  
Was lifted off, and piping-hot  
The supper steamed in wooden bowls.  
Yet she had hardly touched a bite:  
And never raised her eyes all night  
To mine again: but on the coals,  
As I sat staring, she had stared—  
The black curls shining round her head  
From under the red kerchief, tied  
So nattily beneath her chin—  
And she had stolen off to bed  
Quite early, looking dazed and scared.  
Then, all agape and sleepy-eyed,  
Ere long the others had turned in:  
And I was rid of that fat man,  
Who slouched away to his own van.

And now, before her van, I lay,  
With sleepless eyes, awaiting day:



---

And as I gazed upon the glare,  
I heard, behind, a gentle stir:  
And, turning round, I looked on her  
Where she stood on the little stair  
Outside the van, with listening air—  
And, in her eyes, the hunted hare . . .  
And then I saw her slip away,  
A bundle underneath her arm,  
Without a single glance at me.  
I lay a moment wondering,  
My heart a-thump like anything,  
Then, fearing she should come to harm,  
I rose, and followed speedily  
Where she had vanished in the night.  
And as she heard my step behind,  
She started, and stopt dead with fright:  
Then blundered on as if struck blind:  
And when I'd soon caught up with her,  
Just as she took the moorland track,  
I saw the hare's eyes, big and black . . .  
She made as though she'd double back . . .  
But, when she looked into my eyes,  
She stood quite still and did not stir . . .  
And, picking up her fallen pack,  
I tucked it 'neath my arm, and she

Just took her luck quite quietly,  
As she must take what chance might come,  
And would not have it otherwise,  
And walked into the night with me,  
Without a word, across the fells.

And all about us through the night,  
The mists were stealing, cold and white,  
Down every rushy syke and slack:  
But, soon the moon swung into sight;  
And, as we went, my heart was light,  
And singing like a burn in flood:  
And in my ears were tinkling bells:  
My body was a rattled drum:  
And fifes were shrilling through my blood  
That Summer night, to think that she  
Was walking through the world with me.

But when the air with dawn was chill,  
As we were travelling down a hill,  
She broke her silence with low sobbing:  
And told her tale, her bosom throbbing  
As though her very heart were shaken  
With fear she'd yet be overtaken . . .  
She'd always lived in caravans—

---

Her father's, gay as any man's,  
Grass-green, picked out with red and yellow,  
And glittering brave with burnished brass  
That sparkled in the sun like flame,  
And window-curtains, white as snow . . .  
But, they had died, ten years ago,  
Her parents both, when fever came . . .  
And they were buried side by side,  
Somewhere beneath the wayside grass . . .  
In times of sickness, they kept wide  
Of towns and busybodies, so  
No parson's or policeman's tricks  
Should bother them when in a fix . . .  
Her father never could abide  
A black coat or a blue, poor man . . .  
And so, Long Dick, a kindly fellow,  
When you could keep him from the can,  
And Meg, his easy-going wife,  
Had taken her into their van;  
And kept her since her parents died . . .  
And she had lived a happy life,  
Until Fat Pete's young wife was taken . . .  
But, ever since, he'd pestered her . . .  
And she dared scarcely breathe or stir,

Lest she should see his eyes aleeer . . .  
And many a night she'd lain and shaken,  
And very nearly died of fear—  
Though safe enough within the van  
With Mother Meg and her good-man—  
For, since Fat Pete was Long Dick's friend,  
And they were thick and sweet as honey;  
And Dick owed Pete a pot of money,  
She knew too well how it must end . . .  
And she would rather lie stone-dead  
Beneath the wayside grass than wed  
With leering Pete, and live the life,  
And die the death of his first wife . . .  
And so, last night, clean-daft with dread,  
She'd bundled up a pack and fled. . . .

When all the sobbing tale was out,  
She dried her eyes, and looked about,  
As though she'd left all fear behind,  
And out of sight were out of mind.  
Then, when the dawn was burning red,  
"I'm hungry as a hawk!" she said:  
And from the bundle took out bread.  
And, at the happy end of night,  
We sat together by a burn:

---

And eat a thick slice, turn by turn;  
And laughed and kissed between each bite.

Then up again, and on our way  
We went; and tramped the livelong day  
The moorland trackways, steep and rough,  
Though there was little fear enough  
That they would follow on our flight.

And then again a shiny night  
Among the honey-scented heather,  
We wandered in the moonblaze bright,  
Together through a land of light,  
A lad and lass alone with life.  
And merrily we laughed together,  
When, starting up from sleep, we heard  
The cock-grouse talking to his wife . . .  
And "Old Fat Pete" she called the bird.

Six months and more have cantered by:  
And, Winter past, we're out again—  
We've left the fat and weather-wise  
To keep their coops and reeking sties,  
And eat their fill of oven-pies,  
While we win free and out again

To take potluck beneath the sky  
With sun and moon and wind and rain.  
Six happy months . . . and yet, at night,  
I've often wakened in affright,  
And looked upon her, lying there  
Beside me, sleeping quietly,  
Adread that when she waked I'd see  
The hunted hare within her eyes.

And, only last night, as I slept  
Beneath the shelter of a stack . . .  
My hands were hot upon a hare,  
Half-strangled, struggling in the snare,  
When, suddenly, her eyes shot back,  
Big, fearful, staggering and black;  
And ere I knew, my grip was slack,  
And I was clutching empty air . . .  
Bolt-upright in my sleep I leapt . . .  
Her place was empty in the straw . . .  
And then, with quaking heart, I saw  
That she was standing in the night,  
A leveret cuddled to her breast . . .

I spoke no word: but, as the light  
Through banks of Eastern cloud was breaking,

---

She turned, and saw that I was waking:  
And told me how she could not rest;  
And, rising in the night, she'd found  
This baby-hare upon the ground;  
And she had nursed it quite a while:  
But now, she'd better let it go . . .  
Its mother would be fretting so . . .  
A mother's heart . . .

I saw her smile,  
And look at me with tender eyes:  
And as I looked into their light,  
My foolish fearful heart grew wise . . .  
And now, I knew that never there  
I'd see again the startled hare  
Or need to dread the dreams of night.











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