

AS THE WIND BLEW

AMELIE RIVES

(Princess Troubetzkoy)

Margie R. Mac Intyre



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AS THE WIND BLEW

POEMS

BY

AMÉLIE RIVES

(PRINCESS TROUBETZKOY)

*Author of "The Ghost Garden," "Shadows of Flames,"
"World's End," "The Quick or the Dead,"
"Augustine the Man," etc.*



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SRLB
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THIS BOOK IS
DEDICATED
WITH ABIDING LOVE
TO
ADAIR ARCHER

"Whom the gods love die young"

2227823

ADAIR

SO many things you were, Adair,
Framed in a spirit golden fair,
That through your body's wilful grace
And your enchanting, strange young face,
Half angel's and half sylvan god's
And sweet as flowering almond rods,—
Shone in a myriad changeful hues,
As when the dayspring doth diffuse
Its whiteness through the mystic heart
Of the one jewel set apart
Within my thought to picture you,—
The opal wrought of fire and dew;
So many things you were, my dear,
When you were here,—when you were here,—
That it is hard to see you clear
As wholly this, or wholly that,
Or with an epithet smug and pat
To fix you in eternity
As some one thing you'll ever be,—
You that within your earthly span
Seemed Ariel sad for Caliban,
A seraph interested in devils,
A Galahad who on the revels

ADAIR

*Of Harlequin and Magdalen
Looked with a brother's pitying ken;
An imp, a saint, a puck, a poet,—
Aye,— all that knew you well must know it,
Even a pagan out and out
In many ways, yet so devout
In worship of the Christians' Lord,
So faithful to His Cross adored,
That of His grace he let you die
For others, as on Calvary
Himself gave up His Ghost for men;
But though again and still again
I've pondered o'er this mystery
That comforts those unlike to me,
I cannot see you dear, indeed,
Forever harnessed in one Creed,
When all infinity's to explore!
I cannot deem that heaven's door
Like some vast, churchly portal meet
For none but Christians' guileless feet
To pass, doth guard as its elect
Only one multitudinous sect.
Ah, dearest wild-fire, many-sided!
Your heavenly way will be divided
If you those Mighty Ones would seek
That through their written words did speak
Full wisely to you when on earth
You fared, so curious of re-birth*

ADAIR

*And Alchemy's thrice hidden lore,
And darkling Magic's lurid store,—
For not within the Christian heaven
Abide the great, all-glorious Seven
That your terrestrial hours made bright
So often: you must journey quite,
Quite, quite away to distant Stars
If you would find those Avatars!*

*No, it is useless, quick gold boy,
For me to seek a mournful joy
In dreaming you as evermore
A being different from of yore,
A creature all demure and holy,
Crowned with amaranth and moly
And lofty, archangelic air,
You that were here so debonair!
I take no joyance in the thought
That you, whose words came aye unsought,
In tricky fountains flashing free
As from a source of glamourie,
Should now in fixed Hebraic phrase
Forever utter words of praise,
Or when your thought on us is bent,
Whisper some staid admonishment.
Rather I'll think of you as loosed
Like lightning on a wind unnoosed,*

ADAIR

*And jubilant for sheer delight
Storming the spirit's utmost height:
I'll see you with some merry star
Dancing beyond the crystal bar
Of morning, and then back again
All wistful for the woes of men.
I'll dream that in those regions free
Where now you fare in ecstasy
Beings there are who love a soul
Because it is itself and whole,
Who do not take a pious offense
Even at your vivid impudence —
Who call to you: "Heaven is more fair
Since you have come to it, Adair!"
For He who made the grasshopper
As well as mighty Lucifer,
Who flecked the deep with useless foam
Apportioning loveliness no home
Nor any duties dull and sad,—
Who flung the comets forth and bade
Those bright-haired vagrants of the sky
To joy in fruitless errantry;
Who did ordain the ecstasy
Of all unchrisomed beasts and birds,
And all the darling, foolish words
That little children love to say
As we to hear,—be sure that play
He doth delight in as in work*

ADAIR

*Nor looks on heaven as a kirk
Where laughter is a thing of blame.*

*Thrice greatest Seer, blest be thy name!
Thou who did'st speak that wondrous phrase:
The Ancient of immemorial Days
Is everlastingly a Lad!
Therefore my heart is great and glad
For you Adair, my various boy,
Speeding the starry way of joy,—
Youth unto youth eternal springing,
Light unto boundless Light up-winging!*

*Dear Star, at morning of your day
You sang upon an earthly way,
But now at evening, heaven doth hear
Your song triumphant mounting clear
Beyond the ultimate chanting sphere,
Alone unto the Great Alone;
Yet also to that mighty throne
Even songs as weak and faint as these
I give you dear for memories,
Do mount, returning in their course
Unto their all mysterious source,
Unto that Poet which is God,
Without whose guidance none hath trod
The hidden path of poesy,
For even the humblest songs there be
By Him were given that men might feel*

ADAIR

*What intellect could ne'er reveal,
His quickening essence in the heart —
And thus, though I may see in part
But darkly, while to you the Whole
Shineth ineffable Soul to soul,
The greater still includes the less,
And not to you as foolishness
Do these my words of love appear
Which now your spirit sweet doth hear
Or yet my pen hath written them,
Since love doth never love condemn.
And though I am blinded by my eyes,
And deafened by my ears, there lies
No power in these to dim or close
The all-perceiving heart that knows
Beyond the wit, and wisdom pure
And faultless hath, as maketh sure
The clay-wrapped seed when toward the light
It springs unhesitatingly right.
Yes, what my heart to me doth show
Not eyes, nor ears, nor wit may know,—
You, you yourself, more you, more whole
Than when your body veiled your soul,
Yet in a form even lovelier
Than seemed your soul when you were here,
And my heart knoweth well, my dear,
Heaven is more gay, heaven is more fair
Since you have won to it, Adair!*

NOTE

The author wishes to thank the Editor of the *Fortnightly Review* for permission to reprint "Isolation," and Messrs. Harper Brothers for permission to reprint "Love's Comings," also the "Balkan Songs" which appeared first in "Pan's Mountain." These "Balkan Songs" are original and not translations as many reviewers thought them to be when they appeared. The rest of the poems in this volume have never before been published, with the further exception of "Whom the Gods Love," which was given away to a war cause and is reprinted here with the kind consent of Mr. Maxfield Parrish.

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RHYMES AND RHYTHMS

THE WIND

THE wind bloweth as it listeth,
Joy long, tear long,
As it listeth the wind bloweth
All the year long.
If whence it cometh and whither it goeth
No man knoweth,
How may I, a changeling woman,
Tell why it bloweth?

The wind scattereth as it willeth,
Foul flowers, fair flowers,
As it willeth the wind scattereth
All the rare hours:
If whence man cometh and whither he goeth
The wind knoweth,
How may it tell and be comprehended
Of the seed it soweth?

The wind bloweth as it listeth,
And ceaseth never;
As it listeth the wind bloweth
Forever and ever.

THE STRANGER

THERE came a stranger to my door
When dusk was falling,
He spoke no word that I could hear,
Yet a voice seemed calling.

His eyes were green as leaves on a tree,
And his smile came slowly,
There was that about him rare and chill
And lovely and unholy.

He did not enter in my house,
Though he seemed full weary,
Only looked at me with a long, long look
Careless and eerie.

As he came he went, I know not how,
But my house is haunted,
By the words he said not, and the wondering
O'er what he wanted.

I'm a wedded woman with children three
And my man is forbearing,
Yet I'd rather that stranger gave me a leaf
Than my man a faring.

THE STRANGER

I'd rather that stranger give me one smile
Of glamourie and peril,
Than my man should give me a golden gown
And shoon of beryl.

And I'm ever away, away in my soul,
When night is nearing,
For I love the thing I never had,
And the thing I'm fearing.

THE SONG OF IOR

THIS the old, ever-new song of songs,
Chanted first in this land by two alone,
To one tune only could even an angel be singing it.
By threes it may not be sung even by angels.

Grief that is past will tighten the heart-strings fitly,
Then sweetness of sweetness when it is played upon
them;

Grief that is present will only rust and slacken them:
None may draw this song from a grieving heart.

Not grief for himself, not grief for any other,
Must be in the heart of him who would sing it meetly,
Nor in her heart who listens must there be sorrow
Nor any thought at all save of him singing.

Long and long ago I chose you to be my heaven,
Long and long since then and I never regretting it.
God and His angels all are less indeed by far to me,
Than one of the little flowers were kind to us in
our loving.

THE SONG OF IOR

More to me by far than the circle of Mary's halo
The soft, red ring of your mouth in the kiss of kisses.
This is the song that I sang and you singing it back
to me,
Long and long ago, when I chose you to be my
heaven.

THE DEAR LAND

I WAS homesick once for a far land, a fair land,
All the day long my wish turned there;
The rose seemed a shadow, the bird call an echo
Of the fulness of beauty in that far land, that
fair land.

All the morning the sun shone terribly,
Lighting my eyes that they could not see,
Flame was the noontide, flame the twilight;
I but a spark in the furious splendour
Waxed or waned as the hot winds blew.

Now at nightfall, beloved darkness,
Tenderest, most passionate of all things holy,
Breathes on my heart and its secret flower.

Ah, how wild is the pang of blossoming!
Soul, my soul, are you fragrance only?

Darkness answers me, darkness comforts:
“It is not a far but a near land, a dear land.

*Closer than thought, more intimate than agony,—
Your home land, your own land, the isle of lovely
loneliness.”*

TO A WOOD-THRUSH

For Landon

IF drops of rain within the lily bells
When shaken forth in shimmerings crystalline,
Could sound as sweetly as the lily smells,
I'd liken unto them your notes divine.

If golden, quivering sunlit skeins that glance
Reflected upward o'er the swan's white breast,
Could chime as silverly as light they dance,
I'd say: "So calls the Wood-thrush near his
nest."

If each fair, lovely, lonely little star,
As delicate and fine a song could sing
As its own beauty looked on from afar,
I'd think 'twas you that made the heavens to ring.

And if some wistful sprite from elfland fled
While watching at the gate of heaven in vain,
Should from the quill an angel's wing had shed,
Fashion a little pipe to flute his pain,
I'd think 'twas you that from the evening's height,
Rilled forth your spirit's longing and delight.

THE SCREECH-OWL

WHY with so piteous a melancholy
And with so inconsolable a plaint,
As though your wistful heart were broken wholly,
 Within your bosom quaint,
Do you, my little gossip of the air,
 Make all the night to ring,
 With your lorn quavering
As for some ancient, irremediable despair?

O-o-o! O-o-o-o!
 Do you not know?
 I, I alone did hear the cry,
 Of Lilith in her agony
 When Adam turned from her to Eve
 And so for her forevermore I grieve and grieve!

O-o-o! *Lilith! Poor, poor Lilith!*
That is what the screech-owl trilleth.

TO A TREE-FROG

LITTLE enchanted leaf,
Apart from the tree yet of it,
The magic of water made you
That so you love it;
The brook gave you a voice,
Dew drops your eyes,
Your little watery soul
From a mist did rise;
And so you're ever trilling,
While rain is rilling,
For sheer delight
In its wetness bright,—
And so you're ever crooning
With muted glee
While the wind his harp is tuning
To a higher key,
For well you know
When he doth so,
Full soon he'll strike the chord of power
That brings a shower,
And while the rain is rilling
Again you will be trilling:—

TO A TREE-FROG

*“Tree! Tree! Tree!
Dr-rink Dr-rink!
Creek! Creek! Creek!
Br-rim a-br-rink!
Dr-r-r-ops in millions,
Billions, tr-r-r-illions!”*

It is ecstasy to be
A little green frog on a tree
When rain is rilling,
When summer showers are shrilling.

TO A MAGNOLIA FLOWER

WHITE flower, holy with beauty,
Grail that the blossoming spirit has filled
and riven,
It was twilight with showers, and one star shining
When you were given.

Now morning is here
And rain still falling,—
You will fade, immaculate as at first unfolden
While the last birds are calling.

One made you for his delight
And set you apart;
Only a god and a star
Have looked on your heart.

FIREFLIES

STILL in the dark I lay,
Still in the spangled darkness, very still,
And let my spirit have her way.
On questing she was bent, my little soul;
I held her not from any goal,
Paying the fine thread out and out until
She seemed an elfin lantern on a kite,
Giddily soaring,
Ardently exploring,
Up, up, about, about . . .
I feared her tender flame would quite go out,
And leave me to unglimmered night.
"Return!" I cried, "Return, O curious mite!
Shine on familiar things,
And like the mud-wasp, wingéd too but wise,
Content you with your house of clay.
Forego your wings,
They will but carry you to sunless skies,
And spatial silences more dread
Than any heaven-quake hurling down the stars.
Seek not to illumine Death,
Who like a negro Titan darkly dwells
In darkness. Come away!

FIREFLIES

Ask not whence blows this breath
Nor whither it is sped
When you and I dissever.
Dream you of soothing chat
With gods and avatars?
O glittering gnat!
We are sealed within the womb
Of That which answers not, now, nor perchance for-
ever!
Return unto my breast
And let us rest.”

Sleep quenched us both, but suddenly I was woken,
As though a stinging insect voice had spoken.
“ See! See! ” it sang. “ Your sleep is vain!
There is your tricky soul soaring again! ”

Firefly! darling of the night,
Little, lovely wandering light,
Why from freedom have you come
To the prison of my room?
By what tiny destiny,
Cruel as a larger fate,
Were you driven from your mate
In a sparkling ecstasy?
Now your fitful lamp goes reeling
All along my starless ceiling,
You must wonder where you've flown,
That your heaven has turned to stone!

MOON MADNESS

THE moon came down to my bed,
“ I am Lady Seléné,” she said.
“ If I lie by your side
And be your bride,
The dawn will find you dead.”

But I kissed her sweet, cold breast,
And answered: “ I'd rather rest
In your arms one night
Than take delight
For æons with the blest ! ”

And now forever alone,
On the wandering winds I moan,
While clear of stain,
In chill disdain,
Seléné keeps her throne.

TO A WIDOW

WITH hands discreet and slow
Richly dress your little woe
While day is nigh;
Veil your burning hair with black,
Weight all your pretty back
With weeds that cry "alack!"
To every passer by.
Make of it day long a becoming show,
Yet he who caused it well doth know
How in dreaming every night,
Your spirit, like a rainbow dight,
Doth dance down sorrow,
With the lewd Harlequin To-morrow.

THE CITY BLACKSMITH

MACHINES! Machines! Machines! Ma-
chines!

Of every metal,—by every means,—
Bigger than Behemoth, smaller than birds,
In winging swarms, in bellowing herds,
Some for labour and some for play,
Man is making machines alway.
Yet here in the steel-ribbed heart of the city
Iron is singing its ancient ditty,
With naught but the blacksmith's mighty arm
And anvil stout to work the charm.

“*Ha! ha! ha!*” it sings to me,
“*No machine will there ever be
Can nail a shoe to a horse's hoof!
Ho! ho! ho! And here's the proof;
No machine that ever ran
Can shoe a horse but the hands of man!
And this one thing all men shall see
Till men and horses cease to be.
You may tell it out where'er you wander,
For thus were Pharaoh's horses shod,
And thus the horses of Alexander;
And gruff Hephæstos, blacksmith god,
In the various, delirious days of old,
Thus shod Apollo's steeds with gold!*”

THE BURNING BUSH

WINTER has strewn its every twig
With frozen ashes,
Yet the bush is afire with scarlet wings,
It glows, it flashes:
Take off your shoes! Take off your shoes!
This ground is holy,
For the great I AM in the red-birds' breasts
Is burning lowly.

THE BIRD OF EILREY

LONG and long ago,
On a night of fear,
When something went to and fro,
That I felt but could not hear,—
 When the nursery fire had dwyned,
 My old nurse whispered it
 To her gossip the chimney wind;
 “Of doubt I’ve no’ a bit,—
 (’Tis the weird of Eilrey,—)
 That he ha’ surely heard,
 The fearsome eldritch bird;
That he ha’ heard the call
 Of the Bird of Eilrey . . .
 God save us all! God save us all!”

My father died that night,
 But ’twas many a day,
And the garden brimming with light,
 Ere I found the heart to say:
“Mother, what manner of thing
 Is the bird they name our weird;—
That fares on ghostly wing:
 Is it truly to be feared,—

THE BIRD OF EILREY

The Bird of Eilrey? ”
Not again until she dies,
Will she stare with such sad eyes:
“ May you never hear it call,
Donald of Eilrey!
For it withers all! It withers all! ”

“ But tell me, mother dear,
If I hear it cry,
Will it mean that death is near,
Or only some witchery? ”
Then she caught me to her heart,
And her gaze groped for my soul:
“ If we should be apart
When you hear that thing of dole
Little son of Eilrey,
Pray as none ever prayed,
That you may be undismayed,
That you may not heed the call
Of the Bird of Eilrey.
For it poisons all! It poisons all! ”

My mother went the way
My father had taken,
And I had no heart for play
In that lovely place and forsaken.
But after long years, to me
Came love with a cup of glass,

THE BIRD OF EILREY

'And his smile of ecstasy,
 " Drink! And your sorrow will pass,
 My Lord of Eilrey! "

I drained that cup to the lees:

 Then! From the darkling trees
On a sudden I heard the call
 Of the Bird of Eilrey:

" *Ah! Is that all? . . . Is that all?* "

A full life and a long,

 I have lived since then,
And good I have wrought and wrong,
 Like a hantle of other men;
And gotten me glory and gold
 And a lusty son to come after,—

Yet ever as I did hold

 The cup of sorrow or laughter
 The Weird of Eilrey
Like a chill mist stealing near
Would quench me, and I would hear
 The soft, derisive call
 Of the Bird of Eilrey:

" *Ah! . . . Is that all? Is that all?* "

And now my day is run,

 And at last I'll know,
Why men, like shades in the sun,
 Creep warily to and fro.

.

THE BIRD OF EILREY

Whence is this bird all golden
That perches near my head?
And this other of iron moulden
That stalks along my bed?
Is the Lord of Eilrey
To die all, all alone
While two weird fowl make moan? — ”
— Tolls the long, dirling call
Of the Bird of Eilrey,
The golden Bird of Eilrey:
“ *Ah-h! Is this all? Is this all?* ”
And in a voice of fate,
Replies its iron mate:
“ *Aye! This is all! This is all!* ”

THE GLEAMING ROSE

MY Clelia hath a lovely way,
Cool as vine leaves after showers,
From her clear eyes a tranquil ray,
Doth temper my too fervid hours;
Yet such a wanton moth am I,
'Twere sweeter far in flame to die!

Late yestereve I saw a rose
All gleaming as with Eros' fire:
"O marvel that so dearly glows,
O parable of pure desire!
You to my Clelia shall reveal
The eternal longing I conceal."

But oh, poor me! When for delight
Its darling petals I caressed,
I found the tricky flame so bright
Was but a firefly in its breast!
Aye, Eros' flower, the sacrosanct,
Irreverent Comus thus had pranked.

THE GLEAMING ROSE

Dear Lady Clelia, of your grace,
Accept from me before we part
This rose, the painting of your face,
The pretty symbol of your heart,
For light it hath to marvel at,
But not of fire to warm a gnat!

LOVE'S COMINGS

I

WHEN I was young, and wanton, wide-eyed
Life

Teased me from sleeping, Love himself did come
Me to console and learn to dream awake.
With heavenly toys my pillow he bestrewed,
Gifts of Dame Venus in his babyhood —
The little mirror that had held her face;
A golden shoe that Pegasus had cast,
One of her dove's bright plumes, an irised edge
Broke from the shell she lay in at her birth;
A rose kissed open by immortal lips.
All night I with the pretty baubles played,
Then asked his name, not knowing him who he was.
"I am First Love," quoth he, and straightway fled.

II

Youth with First Love was gone and Life asleep,
But I lay wakeful, lonely even for dreams,
When one came suddenly, like a serving King,
And smoothed my pillow. Wonderful his eyes
As winter waters that enfold a star.

LOVE'S COMINGS

No baubles did he bring nor any rose,
But for a scepter held a branch of thorns
Thick studded as with rubies — Trembling sore,
“ Kind Lord,” I questioned, “ who art thou in
truth? ”

Then did he bend his scepter to my breast:
“ I am Last Love,” he said, “ and I remain.”

SEEKER AND SOURCE

I LOOKED up to God and I said:
“ Art Thou there? I am here.”
I waited in dread.
God said: “ I am here.”

I answered Him: “ Thus spake the word:
Thou art I . . . I am Thou!
Is this true, then, O Lord? ”
God said: “ I am Thou.”

Then doubt shook my soul for a span,
And I cried, “ When all’s answered and done,
Art Thou God, but the echo of man? ”
God said: “ We are one.”

INNIRA

I THOUGHT I'd bear a pithy boy,
To make my man more proud of me
Or else, at least a sony lass,
To help me in my housewifery.
But oh! they laid upon my breast
A little star with flamy hair,
A little comet of a babe,
All fiery tressed and silver fair,
A thing so elfin bright and wanton,
As neither life nor death will daunton.

That night in dreams I heard a voice,
(No voice of day was ever clearer),
Full sweet and shrill it sang to me:
"Woman! You'll call her name Innira!"
My neighbors all, they thought me daft,
My man was tolerant but merry,
"Innira next to Shaw?" laughed he,
"A diamond strung beside a cherry!"
But still he let me have my way,
And she's "Innira" to this day.

INNIRA

Come closer, 'tis too hard to bear
A grievous secret all alone,—
Though twenty mothers could not love
Their twenty bairns as I this one,
Terribly sure I am of this,—
She is a thing of faërie.
And oh! my heart is filled with fire,
To think how she may flit from me,
Some evening all so silently
As flits a blossom from a tree.

For though she is an only child
And other bairnies dwell not near,
Playmates she hath for her delight,
Playmates I cannot see or hear:
And she will kiss the empty air,
Or gather it in loving arms,
Murmuring lowly or with laughter,
Lovely names like elfin charms,—
Illida, Ellora, Zelis,
Marivore and Chrysadelis.

Yet there is worse that I must tell.
— Would you have thought a lovely thing
A thing of horror e'er could be?
Well may you stare with marvelling!
'Twas yestereve,— we walked alone,
My little starry lass and I;

INNIRA

She plucked a white rose from the hedge,
Then turning with a joyous cry:
“ It is for you, Ellora, dear ! ”
Held it as though to some one near.

Oh, even now my heart is ice,
To see within the glass of thought
That sight so eerisome again ! —
— She loosed the rose, its stem was caught
By something in the vacant air,
And just a child’s height from the ground
That flower did float as though upheld
By little fingers clasped around,—
Did keep beside us for a space,
Then like a white moth fled apace !

And now you know why all my joy
Is dwyning in me hour by hour,
And why my love is all unease ;
Prayer without faith has little power.
Alas ! and I have little faith,
For what availeth it to pray,
When sure I am in flesh and soul,
That she from me will fade away,
Suddenly, all so fair and fey,
As fades the morning from the day ?

THE PART AND THE WHOLE

O LITTLE man, what joy is yours
When through a wave you fall,
What yearning stirs your lively flesh,
To hear the wild bird's call;
How glad and moved your heart-strings are,
When twilight quickens with a star!

Upon a rushing horse to flee,
Your dancing blood delights,
With borrowed wings to fan the clouds,
And swagger in the heights,
And somersault through nothingness,
Brings you delirium, no less.

Yet, were you not a man but God,
The wave itself you'd be,
The wild bird and the evening star,
The wild steed's ecstasy;
You, you yourself would be the heights,
You, the invisible delights.

THE PART AND THE WHOLE

Sin and repentance now you know,
But then you would have known,
Deific darkness' primal pang
When from the Great Alone,
The riving light tore through its breast,
And Godhead's goodness shone exprest.

THE SICK COUNTRY GIRL

A SORROWFUL thing it is and full of pity,
That one who was born in the still, green
country-side,
Should die in the city;
Should pass to the raucous stridor and grind and
gride,
To the vacuous bellowing pride,
Of the brazen city.

So calm and sealed I rest upon my bed
They deem my soul near sped,
And that my thoughts are duly fixed on God;
Thus muttering they nod
And bend one to the other stealthily.
How droll they seem to me!
For while they murmur pious things like these
My waning thoughts are all of trees, trees, trees . . .

I see them blown in rivulets
Of green along the upper blue,
Or litten all with fiery wings,
Or laced with star-rays through and through.
Or still as only trees can keep
When thunder turns him in his sleep.

THE SICK COUNTRY GIRL

I hear them singing with the rain,
Or with the South wind laughing low,
Or whispering to the summer night
The Eden spells of long ago . . .
Their leafy crowns they wear like kings
The lordliest of lordly things!

.
Could you but come and lift me,
On your branches cool,
They would need no coffin to shift me,
I would make death a fool!

.
Oh, magic and miracle!
What is this wonder?
Am I in Dunsinane?
Yonder! Look yonder!
Trees! Trees! . . . A forestful.
Coming to save me!
See how their branches all
Beckon and wave me!
In at my window now,
Up through the floor,
Rending the walls apart,
Riving the door,
Storm the magnificent
Legions beneficent
Bannered with leaves.

THE SICK COUNTRY GIRL

Lo! where the smothering roof up-heaves,
And falls aside in thunder!
High, high they lift me toward the windy heaven
With cradling boughs thrust under.
Gone is my heavy, heavy grief,
So light, so light, so light I feel and merry
As I were changed into a little leaf!
A little dancing leaf!
I hear a pompous voice say far below me,
. . . "All is over . . ."
And I am filled with leafy mirth and glee,
As light I hover;
O dusty eyes! O darkened one!
All is but just begun!

.
A blade of grass,
Shadows that pass,
The linnet and her call,
Waters that rise or fall,
Winds magical,
The fathering and devouring sun,
Laughter and grief,
A god, a star, a leaf,
It is all one,
As one is all.

And from man's wearisome heresies
I am well at ease
Being one with the trees.

COULD I BE GOD A LITTLE WHILE

To Helen

COULD I be God a little while,
A new and lovely law I'd make:
No longer when the time drew near
For us our homing flight to take
With Death our much abused good friend,—
For us to leave our shell of clay
And wing immeasurably far:—
Should we grow worn and pale and gray.

No! but in beauty we should wax
Like flowering flames upon a wind,
Until our burning loveliness
As with a mystic splendour shined,
Until all those who knew the law,
Would murmur: "Surely death is nigh,
For she has grown so exquisite,
So exquisite she can but die!"

THE PAGAN IN THE CHRISTIAN HEAVEN

THE purple amaranth in heaven blooms,
Between the golden paving-stones,
And all along the sea of crystal glass,
And round about the Elders' thrones,
And when before that greatest Throne of all
They cast their clanging crowns of gold,
The fadeless blossoms of the amaranth,
Lightly the heavy rings uphold.

And on the city's jewelled walls they wave,
Clad in immortal violet,
But I who love not cities love not them,
And in my heart is sore regret
For that fair, fading, many-petalled rose
A traveller upon earth did sing:
Below Mount Bermion it blows and doth adorn
The garden of an earthly King.

Oh, if some dream all unangelical
The Holy City would but dim,
From these poor eyes so aching with its glare,—
Would waft me to the shaggy rim
Of the dear, darkling, thrice beloved earth,

THE PAGAN

Whispering: "Here death is death,"
How would I kiss its fragrant mould for joy,
And like a lover drink its breath!

With what high heart if for a little while
My glad sweet dreaming should not pass —
Would I set forth on happy feet that thrilled
To feel once more the pleasant grass,
Would I set forth to find that earthly flower,
The tender, many-petalled rose,
Which all unlike the deathless amaranth,
Now sweetly fades, now sweetly blows.

Yea, its soft petals cool against my eyes,
Were worth all jewelled pomp of Paradise,
For I am that King, that most heaven-weary one
Whose garden lay below Mount Bermion.

FLOWER OF EROS

OH, Love is full of high disdains,
And Passion sharp with bitter pains:

Love is a rose that holds a bee,
Which stings and dies; but what care we?
The rose remains!

AT THE STRANGER'S BIDDING

IN a dream there came to me
As to Cædmon of old,
A Stranger, and "Sing!" said he,
"Sing! Be bold!"

And even as Cædmon did
I answered him, "Nay, my lord,
I have nothing to sing in truth,
No voice, no word."

"Aye, but you have," smiled he;
And I answered him, "I am fain,
But what must I sing?" He said,
"Sing the rain!"

• • • • •
The rain I sing,— the summer rain
Netting in its crystal skein
Field and forest, lawn and hill,
The wild rain that is never still,
The dervish rain that till it dies
Dances on in ecstasies.

Sweetest servant! Loveliest lover!
See how it doth kiss and cover

AT THE STRANGER'S BIDDING

All the burning earth with bliss,
Nor any littlest chance doth miss
Her tiniest vassals to rejoice
With offerings suited to their choice,—
The white magnolia's fragrant cup
Unto the very brim fills up
That humming-birds may wash therein;
The little tree-frogs gurgling din
Shows how the rain has brought him joy;
Each grass-blade has a sparkling toy,
The earth worms from the dark come out,
And if they could, be sure they'd shout,
So glad are they until, alas!
The robins pluck them from the grass.
Yet sometimes when too long it stays
The farmers growl in sour amaze,
For then, like any stay-too-long,
It falls to impish pranks and wrong;
The shocks of wheat it makes to sprout,
The gravid soil it washes out,
Undoes hard labour, piles up harder,
Chases the field-mouse from his larder
Into the barn where he's a pest;
Drowns fledgling swallows in the nest,
And lashes all the brooks so sore
That like a thousand bulls they roar.

AT THE STRANGER'S BIDDING

Yet even at its naughtiest
When ill it's doing with a zest,
I can but love the shining thing,
That with a veil all glimmering
Of magic crystals threaded fair
On silvery strands of fairies' hair,
Shuts out all visitors but these,—
The wilding birds, the scented breeze;
Shuts out the world and shuts in me,
With Leisure sweet and Phantasy!

The rain I sing, the summer rain,
That nets me in its crystal skein!

The stranger he nodded once,
“ That was not so bad,” said he,
“ But now sing another song.”
“ What shall it be? ”

Smiling, he looked me o'er,
“ Well done is only begun;
You have sung the rain,” he said,
“ Now sing the sun! ”

How shall I sing thee, Mighty One? —
As Shamash god of Babylon,
Or Persian Mithra, he whose rays
Upon the Christian Pyx now blaze;

AT THE STRANGER'S BIDDING

Or shining Vishnu, India's Lord,
Armed with the lotus and the sword;
Or gold Apollo, Pride of Greece,
Whose locks are like a flaming fleece;
Or that more grim, mysterious one,
Osiris, Egypt's burning Son?
These are too human, Mighty One!
Not theirs thy dread, impartial Might,
Begetter and Destroyer bright,—
Thou who wilt aid a dragon-fly
His tender, new-found wings to dry,
And in the self-same tick of time,
With bland indifference sublime,
Wilt smite a hapless man to death! —
Thou who dost quicken April's breath,
And upward draw the trusting corn
In green delight of being re-born,
From out the darksome earth, and then
Each blade wilt perfect or wilt burn,
With imperturbable unconcern
For good or ill as both are done
By thine imperial power, O Sun!

It were amiss to liken thee
To any pagan gods that be
Of love and hate and joy and fear
Compacted,— thou that all the year

AT THE STRANGER'S BIDDING

Dost deeds of love yet loveless art,
Dost deeds of hate, though far apart
From hatred throbs thine awful heart.

Implacable and magnificent,
All ruthless yet beneficent,
One flung thee into space as sign
Of godhead's attribute most divine
That little man might learn to kneel
Not to the force thou dost reveal,
But to that holier part of thee,—
Inviolable Mystery!

· · · · · ·
All love were the Stranger's eyes,
 And in Love's own voice spake he;
" I bade you sing the Sun,
 You have sung of ME! "

Whereon, as men say, I awoke;
 But I know beyond all shaking,
That wakefulness is a sleep,
 And sleep a waking.

ISOLATION

DARK Magian, thou didst set me in this isle
Of my sole self, and with thine implacable
wand
Draw round about the unnavigable deep
Of silence, where above no sea-birds sweep,
Nor any sail gleams, but for mile on mile
The fierce winds of desire
Hungrier than fire
Ravin, and sometimes far beyond
All reach of their violent pinions or my prayer
A god doth walk the waters as in sleep.
“Learn!” thou didst say, and left me, yet nowhere
Though eager to explore,
I have searched mine island o’er,
Climbed quickening to the heights, and in the caves
Shuddering have hid me,—nowhere have I
found
The task writ forth — only the silent waves
With silence answer me,
Inexorably,
And voices without sound,
Shake out my folded dreams like banners borne
to war.

ISOLATION

Yet not entirely desolate do I dwell,
Ringed by the noiseless swell
Of that deep-bosomed vast that cradles Death;
The seasons meetly drest
Each in her wild-wood best
Do visit me
With punctual charity.
And all mine island glows,
With flowers or snows,
As to them seemeth well.
Spring with her blossomy breath,
Unseals mine eyelids from their icéd tears.
“Wake! Come with me,” she saith;
“Thou art not yet the plaything of the years,
My playmate be
And I will comfort thee.”
Upon her bosom sweet with violets Love’s head hath
prest,
I stay me and so rest
A little while, then rise and follow — follow,
Swift as its shade the swallow,
Where’er she beckoneth.
Wise-foolish, faëry games we play together,
Striving to read the runes o’ th’ foam.
Or to track the lightning home
To this house of golden air.
Everywhere,
In every weather,
Spring and I go mad together!

ISOLATION

Thus for a little while
With innocentest guile,
My sweeting lures me from my melancholy;
Child-angels may not play
In more devout a way
Nor with a holier folly.
Her to remain with me I supplicate
Alas, too late —
For at a wing-beat arrogant Summer swoops
And in her blazing tresses,
My Ariel May dissolves like a white moth
By Psyche cast upon Love's altar-flame.

June wearieth me;
Such primal, fierce maternity
Lurks in her sharp caresses;
So bright she stares almost as she were wroth,
Her gold look never droops —
Her breast smells warm of nectarines through her
gown;
She hath no shame,
But suckles her bantling Autumn in the eye o'
the Sun.

I will lay me softly down,
Upon her kirtle's hem, there to repose
Till Autumn be a goodly wight, well grown
And in his cap one dark, half-petalled rose,
Foretelling the wild blossoming of the snows.

ISOLATION

Hark! I am roused by dithyrambic beat
Of scudding feet,—
Myriads that rush as one,
In sonorous monotone,
Down — down!
Bright from the vats they come,
Purpling the hills and waters where they pass;
No hamadryad lass
But dances home,
To tickling of her faun's ear on her cheek.
And me they mock at as they flitter by;
“Sullen,” they call me, “lovelorn ” and “amort,”
Because I will not join their revelry.
One strikes me with a thyrsus on the lips
Crying “Evoë Dionyson!” and I cry
“Evoë Aidon!” and she runs from me.

How should I love the season of fair fruit
Whose boughs hang empty? Once in maiden sport
I took October by his auburn hair,
And kissed him lip to lip, saying “Now god!
Speak!”
And I was full of glee
When all his prophecy
Was fame and fame and more fame unto
me!

ISOLATION

Alas! among my tree-of-life's dark leaves
One golden apple have I never found:
Such fruit as grew thereon
Dropped all too early bruised to the ground.
A windfall meet for Stepdame Circumstance.
The harvest-moon her golden goblet dips
Into the evening's wine — oh, not for me!
Who brings no sheaves
Only this broken lute.
Reaper and gleaner both have homeward gone;
I too must go, who have not any home,
Whose hands are empty and whose garners bare.

Come, holy Winter, and allay the smart
Of earth's perfervid heart;
Seal up her ardours in immaculate trance,
Give benison and rest
Unto that dark and ever troubled breast:
Redeemer sweet, who in one quiet night,
As any saved soul can make her white,
Come! and me too befriend.

My vesper orisons beneath the dome
Of thy Cathedral forest will I hold,
Where choring winds their sad recessional
By Autumn's bier intone.
— With wild-weeds overblown,
His faded pall, how sorrowfully strown!
Yet Summer's cramoisie were all too bold

ISOLATION

In exaltation of things temporal
For this lorn ritual.

Fairer the wan flowers in thy cloistered closes
Than any woodland glome
Flushed with the May.

So might heaven blossom when the children's angels,
Bear them away
From tears, by Mary's side forevermore to
stay.

And when for me tears also have an end,
May thy white petals only cover me,
Who was outworn with roses;
Thine icy posies
Death will adorn who'll then my lover be.

Lo, where thine Acolyte,
The young, pale night,
In chasuble of stars
Doth swing the frosted censer of the moon
Across the darkling bars
Of Day's confessional,
Shrive me, O High-priest, that hast care of men,
For if since sunrise I have little wrought,
I have wrought lovingly, and much destroyed
Unmeet for offering. Absolve me, then,
For I would listen to the pure evangels
Of Silence and of sleep with tranquil soul,
I must be wending soon.

ISOLATION

Great-hearted Death will bring my pain to nought.

I who with Life's too brackish sweet was cloyed,
Will from that beechen bowl
Drink and be whole.

I have woven my Winter house,
All of red-heart cedar boughs.

I have named it "Fortitude "

In a clear and solemn mood.

Out of Memory's drift-wood fragrant

Sweet as myrrh, I've built my fire.

All the wild winds of Desire

Fierce and vagrant,

May not pass the homely portal

Shelter of one sprite immortal.

Yet how with clangorous wings,

And wassailler's mutterings

The very lintel shakes: "O lonely fool,

Wilt be companioned by a broken lute

When Kings would house with thee?

Be learned — Confess our rule —

I am Lord Lust-of-Power who bid thee ope,

Art thou still mute?

My brother next to me

Is Lust-of-Gold. No mightier can there be

Save only our great sister Lust-of-Life

And her twin brother Strife.

Hast thou slain Hope,

ISOLATION

And art about her burying within,
That thou don't fear to let us enter? Fool!"

I listen unperturbed. My little door
Whose latch I kissed when I did fasten it
Is mightier than all their mighty brood.

More strong than sin,
Being seasoned with fortitude.

Yet who is this that creeps along the floor,
Pale as a stricken child,
With great eyes wild,
And torn wings all unfit
For any flight?

"Thou piteous, poor wight,
Come warm thee by my fire and in my breast;
— Take food and rest.

For thou art here by holy mystery.
Tell me thy name." Then did he answer me,
"I am Desire for dear Humanity."

Whereafter being sweetly comforted,
And cherished on my all of wine and bread,
Upon my heart,
He leaned his wistful head,
And with my broken lute such music made
As only he hath art
To waken, who with Seraphim apart
Did kneel and sing when on the bitter Rood,
Man's mightiest Lover hung in lowlihood.

ISOLATION

And I was half afraid,
So terrible the beauty of his eyes,
As they were lightnings from a heart on fire
So bright as blood his passionate melodies.
So pealed the whole world's anguish in his voice.
Yet to all airs these only words were set:
"I am Desire for dear Humanity."

Dark Magian, who didst leave me in this isle
Of my sole self, nor gavest me any choice,
Nor clearly written scroll wherein to read,
Though sore my need,—
Spare me the terror of thy ruthless smile,
Be pitiful, lest somehow I forget
The only thing I have learned to offer thee,
Master of Mystery!
It is the triumphing music of desire
For dear Humanity.
Ah, if grown merciful thou wouldst unbind
And set me free,
If thy grim rod might blossom with the May
And through the deep of silence cleave a way,
And I go forth with singing to my kind!

WHOM THE GODS LOVE

(1917)

"The Flower of England has perished in this War"

I

SHALL we then downcast fare with mournful
eyes,

Wear veils of cyprus, swathe ourselves in black,
Because those high-hearted Venturers came not
back

To homely solace, from their great emprise?

Shall we, made small by sorrow, send regret

To dog their radiant course, who now are sped
On errands of immortality and fled

Beyond our finitude of toil and fret?

Shall we not rather, knowing them so far

From all that racks us,—safe from grief and
Time's

Intolerable familiarities

With the shuddering flesh and spirit,—like a star

Of gladness set their memory that sublimes

All sorrow, in our night of agonies?

WHOM THE GODS LOVE

II

For could they choose, be sure they'd not return!
Nor love, nor fame could lure them who have
known

The ravishment of the spirit gladly blown
By winds of perilous purpose to the bourne
Of wild, exultant, ultimate escape
From beggaring Life, and Death's largesse have
taken.

In glory of youth, in splendour of wills unshaken,
These rode down Time and left Old Age a-gape.

Think you they would come back, they who have
wrung

The honey and gall from life in one great hour?
Who have been given the freedom of God's City?
Triumphant be their dirge who were the Flower
Of mourning England,—shame them not with
pity;

Whom the Gods love die young! die young! die
young!

WHEN SLEEP SETS FREE

BEYOND the coast of sleep where gleams
The moony hinterland of dreams,
I, sick and sore with being I,
Escaped from earthly entity;
Naked of conscience as an elf,
Cast off the trappings of the self,—
Cast love aside, and hope and fear,
And all the doting flesh held dear,
Became an atom dancing free
Through cosmoramic fantasy,
Yet knew my body waited there
Upon its bed as in a lair
A dozing lion waits its prey;
Knew that my spirit must obey
When sleeping flesh would live again
By spirit's intermingling pain,
And thought how death is lovelier far
Than life in any loveliest star,
Where youth endures a trillion years,
And love is loosed from all its fears,—
Since prisoning forms would still impress
The heritors of the limitless: —

WHEN SLEEP SETS FREE

Thought how, if sleep can thus set free
From thralling heliolatry
A waif of earth, and spatial night
Render more exquisite than light,
Then surely, of all hopes that are
Death is the glorious Avatar!

GARDE GLAMOURIE

MERLIN wrought it of dream and faërie,
And wafted it by the spell of melody
To the lost, lorn, lovely Isle of Gramarye.

You may not win your way to it by asking,
You may not win your way to it by willing,
Nor may you come on it by any pleading.

Its moony towers pierce immemorial darkness;
Far, far below its crags of glass and jasper,
Winds a river of stars all wanly shining.

Blue air-flowers float above its shadowy doorway,
And flowers of quickgold tremble on its turrets,
Within a sealéd chamber Joy lies sleeping.

Only her dreams come forth, shy and beautiful,
Softly, delicately bewildered and bewildering,
To wander by enchantment through the Castle.

A man would give all bright, fierce, fleshly pleasures,
If to Garde Glamourie he might be winning,
For one wild, worshipful hour of ghostly joyance.

GARDE GLAMOURIE

You may not win your way to it by weeping,
You may not win your way to it by working,
Nor may you enter in by gold and silver.

He only that was given the crystal cithern
Strung with the hair of Israfel and Azraël,
May sound the magic chord that wafts him thither.

For Merlin wrought it of dream and faërie,
And wafted it by the spell of melody,
To the lost, lorn, lovely Isle of Gramarye.

BALKAN SONGS

THE FIRST LULLABY

THE Lady Eve was singing to her first-born;
Adam, her lord, worked in the ripe corn-
field.

Happy was she; her song came forth with smiling:
“Sleep, little Cain, a secret I will tell thee:
God came in likeness of a snake to Eden Garden.”

Awake, O loving bride! Come forth glad bride-
groom!

Thy spade leans idle and the corn is ready;
Thy pitcher, girl, stands empty at the fountain.
Work after love, and loving after working,
God came in likeness of a snake to Eden Garden.

THE STRANGER WOMAN

MY eyes are the eyes of a stranger woman,
Blue they are as the wings of a blue moth;
My mother came from a far country.

For my eyes he loved me;
Now have my tears washed away their colour.
He loves them no more.
Though I was born in the village,
In the village I am a stranger.
I will go back to the country of my mother.

All the winter I stayed alone painting eggs for
Easter.

With my tears stained by my eyes
I made them a beautiful blue colour;
With the blood that had left my heart,
Scarlet I made them.
With the gold of the ring never to be worn,
I gilded them in little patterns.

My heart is empty as the shells I have painted
In the long, long winter;
Out of them will come no little life.
For me there will be no Easter
When I return to the far country of my mother.

THE FLIGHT

MY hands are fast in the mane of his young
stallion,
The earth flies backward like a spindle unwinding.
The wind drinks my breath,
But the breath of my lover is on my neck.
His hand is on the lock of my heart.
Close he holds me and safe,
As the earth flies backward like a spindle unwinding.

Now if Death should drink my breath, like the wind,
Glad would I be.
For then would I never feel the hand of my lover
Fall from the lock of my heart.

My hands are fast in the mane of his young stallion, ^
The earth flies backward like a spindle unwinding.

AFTER LOVE . . .

THERE is that in my heart that will not let me
sleep;
There is that beneath my heart that cries without a
voice.

(I was not alone in the summer;
In the winter I was all alone.)
The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire.

Many times he kissed me on the eyes,
And many, many times upon the mouth.
And he said to me: "Thou art mine."
And to him I said: "I am thine."
The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire.

Then when I had waited many days
He came to me, and all the bells were ringing.
He came only to say that he must go.
"Why must you go?" I asked that fair evil.
And he answered: "They wait for me at the wed-
ding."
Then that beneath my heart cried without a voice,
And I spake to him as it bade me:
"Go then, but not until I have given thee a last kiss."

AFTER LOVE

And as he lay upon the wolf-skin before my fire,
I, with my dagger dear,
Made a new mouth to kiss, above his heart.
Red, red its lips: I kissed them many times.
The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire.

STORMS

WHY are thy long black tresses always dripping,
O maiden?

My hair is wet with my tears and the water that
drowned my lover.

In anger they parted. The heavens also were
wrathful.

Dark was the lake, but darker their hearts within
them.

The lover went to his fishing: the maid to her spin-
ning.

Drowned in the storm was he. Her reason went
with him.

Now, folks say, she wanders by night to see him.
Under the waves, hand in hand, all the long night-
tide

They fare together (thus say the old folks).
The fishes go through their hair and against their
pale faces.

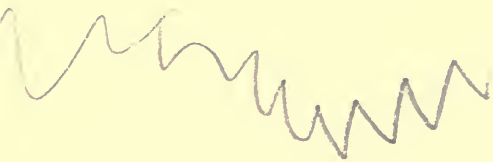
Cold as that touch are the kisses they give each other.
(The old folks tell it.)

STORMS

Why are thy long black tresses always dripping, O
maiden?

My hair is wet with my tears and the water that
drowned my lover.

THE WONDERFUL CHILD



THE WONDERFUL CHILD

I

OH, that was a quickening sight to see
In the quiet fields of Galilee,—
A beautiful lady seated aloft
In a painted car, and with jewels coifed,—
Drawn by asses more white than milk
In harness of silver and tassels of silk,
While after her followed another car
Loaded down to the swingle-bar,
With chests of ivory, cedar and gold.

The harvesters gaped as past she rolled,
With her smile so warm and her eyes so cold,
And a whisper ran rustling from near and far; —

“ ’Tis the golden harlot of Magdala . . .
She hath bided with Cæsar a year or more,
Now she would knock at Herod’s door,
For her face is set toward Jerusalem . . .
May Jah protect the diadem! ”

But the Magdalene kept her faint, fixed smile,
Though she knew every thought in these hearts of
guile.

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

Now on a sudden came oaths and shouts
And the crowding forward of curious louts,
For the oxen that hauled the treasure wain
Had yawed aside, and split in twain
Was the yoke that held them obedient.

The Magdalene down from her chariot leant;
In the voice that made mammals of men she spoke:

“ To him who first will mend me that yoke,
I’ll give both silver and gold,” said she.
But they eyed one another sheepishly,
For none had the skill or the tools at hand.

Then a little lad who had ta’en his stand
Apart from the rest, drew shyly near,
And lifted his dark eyes still and clear
To the harlot’s face. “ If thou ’lt trust to me,
Lady, I’ll mend that yoke,” said he,
“ For my father he is a carpenter,
And I make good yokes as ever were.”

But the Magdalene could not answer him,
So did the bright fields round her swim —
So did her sins like bats at eve
Round about her flit and heave.
The silence in those boyish eyes
Seemed like as music when it dies

In dreams of innocence long dead.
Oh, heavy, heavy felt her head,
With fumes of lust long vanishéd.

Still as in dream, she saw him bend

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

The splintered yoke to smooth and mend,
But when she would have given him gold,
He smiled and said, " I am paid threefold,
Dear lady, in that thou art pleased
And the poor oxen's task is eased,
For easy now, indeed they'll prove
This yoke; their burden light to move."

Then came her heart out at her eyes,
In a look more terrible than cries:
" If I had borne a son like thee,
I had let the sons of others be! "
Thus having spoken she hid her face
From those clear, unendurable eyes of grace.

The boy gazed on her with soft surmise:
" Mourn not, lady,— in Paradise
A holy saint thou wilt surely be;
The Spirit whispereth it to me."

But lo! When love in her shame's despite,
Made her look again, he had vanished quite.
Of a gleaner woman, kindly and mild,
She asked, " Oh, who was that wonderful child? "

" Wonderful? Nay, I know not that,
But a dear, douce lad as was ever gat,"
Smiling fondly, the woman saith,

" 'Twas little Jesus of Nazareth."

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

II

Now it befell, while the yoke was a-mending,
A master thief to his task was bending:
Hid by the tail of the treasure cart,
A brazen lock he had pried apart
On the chest where the harlot's gems were stored.
No time had he to filch a hoard,
But the jewel his hand clutched, that took he,
And sped for a place of secrecy.

Flat he lay in the ripened corn,
Till the train of the Magdalene should be gone,
And sliding the jewel from his breast,
Gloated upon it with lustful zest,
And oaths of marvelling. Well he might!
For Solomon had not for his delight
A bauble wrought more cunningly
With jasper, sapphire, chalcedony,
Sardius, sardonyx and chrysolite,
Rubies, opals, diamonds white,
Chrysoprase, beryl, topaz and pearls,
Amethyst, jacinth. . . . The rogue's head whirls,
Merely to gaze on a thing so rare,
This bird of gems for a harlot's hair.

But as he reckoned the joys 'twould buy,
There spake to him from close anigh,
A sweet voice full of gentillesse,

“ Good-morrow, friend, and God thee bless.”

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

The thief's hand to his dagger went,
But all on a sudden his wrath was spent,
For through those dark eyes still and clear
That held him, he felt Jehovah peer.
And the hair of his flesh began to stir,
And his blood to chill, and his heart to whirr,
"What wouldst thou with me?" he muttered low.

"That beautiful thing that shineth so,"
The lad said smiling, "Of your grace
I would like to hold it a little space."
Then marvelling at his own consent,
The thief laid the priceless ornament
In those little hands so tender and slim,
And stood there humbly watching him.

The boy gazed down with dreamy eyes:
"Once in a vision of Paradise,
I saw the Holy City drest
Like a bride adorned for the bridegroom's breast,
And her walls with precious stones were laid
Like unto these I hold," he said.

"Strange that I should see them now
In a bauble wrought for a sinner's brow."

The thief brake out in a sweat of fear,
And his thought it clamoured grim and clear:
"Naught is there from this suckling hid,
He knoweth all things I ever did."

But e'en as he trembled, the little lad
Turned with a countenance gay and glad:

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

“ What if this bird should fly and sing?
Were not that a marvelous thing? ”

“ Poor babe, he’s away in his head,” thought the thief,

But he smirked with guile and made belief: —
“ To behold a miracle such as that,
I’d walk to the top of Ararat! ”

Then the boy breathed soft for a little time
On the jewel, chanting a childish rhyme:
“ Pretty bird! Pretty bird! Fly away home,
Your brothers are lonely, your sisters roam! ”

Now till the stars like figs are shed,
At the ultimate blast of the trumpet dread,
No man a wonder more wild shall see,
Or a thing of lovelier glamourie.
For that bird of gold and jewels made
Quivered all as though afraid,
Quivered all, and stirred and quaked
As though from sleep it had awaked;
Opened its crest, and eyes of beryl
Timidly peering for hidden peril;
Parted its jasper beak in amaze,
Spread its wings of chrysoprase,
Then, with a clear, sweet, starry cry,
Out and up and away did fly.

The thief he shuddered where he stood,
As though he hung on the bitter rood,

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

Then cast himself the ground along :

“ Be merciful as thou art strong ! ”

But the other lifted him up again,
And quenched his fear, and soothed his pain,
And kindled hope in his eyes forlore.

“ The lady will have one jewel more,
And thou one sin the less,” smiled he,
“ For the life I lent will vanished be,
When the bird thou’st stolen is safe in its nest,
Ere the steward of Magdalene make a quest.
But I charge thee, tell no man what thou hast seen,
For my time it is not yet, I ween.”

The thief gazed on him with troubled mien :

“ Art thou a thing of flesh and bones,
That thou canst quicken precious stones ? ”

“ Nay, I but do my Father’s will,”

The lad saith, gently smiling still.

“ I have flesh and bones as thou hast,— See,”
And he held out his two hands brown and wee,
For the thief to touch them and be content.

The poor rogue strived with his grief up-pent :

“ If I’d had a brother like to thee,
I’d ne’er have ta’en to this knavery !

But thou comest too late ; I know full well,
For my many sins I must fare to hell.”

The lad looked on him with ruth and love,

“ Nay, the Spirit whispereth from above,

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

And it saith that we shall fare together
To Paradise, poor thief — and brother ! ”
Then turned the thief with a laugh and a groan,
When he turned him again he was alone.

He asked of a waggoner passing slow,
“ Good stranger, dost thou chance to know
A wondrous lad with eyes of heaven,
That make thee deem thy sins are shriven ? ”
“ Aye, verily,” the waggoner smiled,
“ ’Twould be Mary and Joseph’s darling child,
No dearer and goodlier e’er drew breath,
Than little Jesus of Nazareth.”

III

Now it chanced that eve by his father’s door,
Judas was counting his earnings o’er :
Of iron and bronze coins there were many,
Of silver pieces he had not any.

“ An I had but silver pieces three,
Methinks I should be content,” saith he.

Then a pitying voice from a little space
Apart, spake softly : “ God give thee grace,
Or one day thou wilt have surely
Of silver pieces,— ten times three.”

Uprose Iscariot to his feet :
“ What imp art thou with voice so sweet
And words so bitter ? ” he asked in wrath,
“ Shall a wandering boy that treads in the gath,

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

(Aye! the wine-stains red on thy feet I see!)
With Judas Iscariot thus make free?
Begone! for something, angel or devil,
Warneth that thou wilt bring me evil!"

"Not so, but I'll bring thee heavenly balm,
When every other shall wish thee harm.
For a vision I had this night is past,
And therein I saw thee at the last
For a Sin of sins to that pit descend,
Where is wailing and weeping, world without end,
And lo! I also descended there
To bring thee comfort; for stark despair
I had bound by a withe from the Vine of Love
Whereo'er broods ever the Mystic Dove;
And vengeance I'd bound too, and wrath, and fear;
There was only forgiveness left, Judas dear!"

But Judas raged out where he stood:
"Shall I do evil that thou mayest do good?
If thou wert bond-boy unto me,
I'd sell thee for a groat!" cried he.
"Suckling prophet of Satan! Away!
Else will I make thee rue this day!"
And as with hatred he did glare,
Behold! The child was no more there.

But he asked none who the boy might be,
For he thought that a ghostly thing was he.

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

IV

All that night the Magdalene
Turned and turned her with bitter teen
On her bed of Damascus silk and amber,
As though she lay in a prison chamber,
Upon a pallet of straw, for so
Did her sharp dreams harry her to and fro.
And herseemed that bird-of-paradise
Wrought with jewels and pearls of price,
She bartered for a box full fair
Of alabaster pure and rare,
Filled with spikenard to the brim
Sweet as the breath of Seraphim.
And saith she in her troubled sleep,
“ This precious ointment I must keep
Against the piteous burying
Of one more great than any King,—
Of one to whom proud Cæsar’s power
Will bend as to the wind a flower.”

And lo! In her dream, the wondrous child,
With a crown of thorns on his forehead mild,
Seemed to whisper: “ I am He
Thou seekest Mary: Follow me.”
Then cried Mary: “ Rabboni! — Yea,
I will follow thee all the bitter way;
I will follow thee to my parting breath,
Sweet King Jesus of Nazareth,—

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

And when I have found thee again, dear Lord,
Thy head I'll anoint with this precious nard,
But thy feet I'll wash with tears instead,
And wipe them with the hairs of my head!"

Then did she hear that sweet Voice say:
"And I will wash thy sins away."

V

That same night, the sorry thief
Who deemed himself of sinners chief,—
Who troth had given unto his heart
That on an honest way he'd start,—
With his last farthing bought him wine
And off a mouldy crust did dine.
But alack! When he laid him down to rest,
His empty belly got the best
Of his prentice soul, and up rose he
And set again to his roguery.

Two loaves and a fat fowl roasted whole,
And a cask of Syrian wine he stole,
And when he laid him down once more
Full quickly he began to snore.
But he never dreamed of the Crosses three
That would stand one day on Calvary.

VI

And the son of Simon dreamed that night
How he was counting for his delight

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

Thirty pieces of silver o'er
And o'er and o'er; but to goutts of gore
Ever they turned as the count was done,
And dripped through his fingers one by one,
That his bloodied hands affrayed his soul
With grisly horror and dread and dole;
Then back to silver they would turn
And Judas could but clutch and yearn
Telling them o'er again, till lo!
Once more in drops of blood they'd flow.

— To rid him of this dream of dread,
Iscariot got him out of bed,
And all in haste a rushlight kindled,
And read until the darkness dwindled,
How David unto hell did fare,
And found that God was even there.
Yet never a single dream had he,
Of the Garden of Gethsemane.

VII

Now little Jesus of Nazareth
Could not sleep or draw easy breath
All that night, for the burden sore
Of woe and pity his fair heart bore
Because of the sorrows and sins of men,
And so he rose and went forth again
Or ever it was the spring of day,
Unto a secret place to pray.

THE WONDERFUL CHILD

“Father, forgive my sin,” prayed he,
“For I fear I love men more than Thee,
Yet if Thou wilt their sins forgive,
I will gladly die that they may live.
Accept my flesh and the soul within,
And let men no more taste of sin:
Accept my body and blood and breath,
And let men no more taste of death:
For while one brother were bound in hell
I could not rejoice with Thee to dwell;
And if forever but one be given o’er
To hell, I can call Thee Father no more.”

The Spirit’s Voice his anguish eased:

*“Thou art my Son in whom I am pleased;
Not I, but man will require this price,
And man, not I, this sacrifice.”*

OF BABYLON

THE PRIESTESS OF ISHTAR

I

WATCHMAN, *what of the night? Watch-*
man! Watchman!

What of the night?

Babylon is fallen, is fallen

That mighty city,

Great Babylon is fallen!

An hundred gates of brass hath Babylon,

Proud Babylon,

All as big as lesser cities,

They are not fallen?

The brazen gates are fallen!

With sun and moon her god of gold is crownéd,

Foolish Watchman!

The golden God of Babylon

Upholds the heavens;

Bêl hath not fallen?

Yea, Bêl, her god of gold, he too is fallen,

Fallen, fallen!

All the gods of Babylon,

Or gold, or silver,

Brass or iron, are fallen!

THE PRIESTESS OF ISHTAR

*Her Seven Magnificent Deities will raise them
Israelite!*

*Bêl-Merodach great son of Ea,
Lord of the Abyss,
Will set them higher!*

Nay! For the God of Israel is stronger
Babylonian!

Your gods about your city run
For the last time,—
— In molten rivers!

*Accurséd be the God of Israel!
Accurséd be I,
That with an Israelite have lain,
I who was priestess
Of glorious Ishtar!*

*I will arise and go to Babylon,
Dear Babylon,
I will return again to her,
My Babylon,
Though she be falling!*

You speak as one whom Beelzebub hath smitten,
Heathen woman!
Her flowers are smoke along the heavens,
Her breath is fire,
Her glory ashes!

THE PRIESTESS OF ISHTAR

That were a funeral-pyre a god might envy!
I am mortal,
Yet with Babylon I'll burn:
Let me pass!
I go to Babylon!

See you that monstrous, vasty shape vermilion
O'er Imgur-Bêl?
'Tis the damnéd scarlet soul
Of Babylon,
The red whore Babylon!

Stand back! For I will pass! What better ending
For one a harlot,
Born of the harlot Babylon,
Than there to die,
With my sweet mother Babylon!

Guard! Seize her! She hath escaped! The Bab-
ylonian!
Bring torches!
No need. The torch of Babylon
Makes day of night,
Let her perish with Babylon!

THE PRIESTESS OF ISHTAR

Watchman, what of the night? Watchman!

Watchman!

What of the night?

The burning sorceress Babylon

To day hath turned it.

Great Babylon is fallen,

And burning, burning!

Is fallen, is fallen and burning!

THE SISTER OF OWLS

II

GRIM centuries had sifted out the mighty ruins
Of Babylon,
Within the pleasant chambers of her kings and
queens
The lion couched,
Her cunning water ways were choked with reeds and
rushes,
Her precious fruits
Brought thither from far lands, to knotty wildings
grown
Bestrewed her ashes,
And over them her flowers, the rare, the hundred-
petalled
Blossoms of magic,
Unto their simpleness returned, with dock and darnel
Burgeoned lowly,—
With wild wheat, sesamé and spice that no man gar-
nered,
Waved on the tomb
Of her that had been Babylon, magnificent Babylon,
Thus fallen, thus fallen.

THE SISTER OF OWLS

Where once had soared the temple of Ishtar, Queen
of Heaven,
The Moon-God's daughter,
A Satyr piped, and near him drowsily enfolden
Within her thought,
She who had named herself to him *The Sister of
Owls*,
Leaned listless.
Her shadowy eyes all quenched with dreaming and
her eyelids
Stirless above them.
Drawn by that music wild and sweet, a youngling
Dragon
Blue, green and purple
As were the Babylonian shards o'er which he rippled
His glassy armour,—
Crept ever closer, closer, with fierce crest humbly
folden
And eyes of agate,
Meek as a wounded bird's that ask forbearance only
Of man mysterious:
The Satyr laughed upon a note that shook to silence
Through lips unshapen,
Seeing that fiery Worm all mild and meekly smoothen
So dove-like gazing,
But The Sister of Owls nor smiled, nor broke her
dreaming,
Uplifted merely

THE SISTER OF OWLS

One silver-spangled foot, careless, imperial,
 And let it rest
Light as a flower of moonlight on the head horrific
 Sleeked with fawning.
The Satyr gaped on her aghast, his hot blood chill-
 ing,
 His lust all frosted,
And "What are you? — And Who?" he asked her,
 edging farther.
 "O shaggy Grecian!"
Gravely she smiled, "There are in Babylonia
 Secret Beings,
And who they are, or what, is not for idle Satyrs
 To know by asking.
Yet, do you tell me one thing first, perchance there-
 after
 I may return it
By telling you some hidden wonders unrevealéd
 To little Zeus
Who was a suckling when my gods were gods and
 older
 Than Time, his father!"
"What would you know?" The Satyr whispered
 meshed in horror
 Yet half adoring,
"That pipe of yours?" the woman said, "How
 came you by it?
Your pipe of ivory?"

THE SISTER OF OWLS

The half-man's eyes grew light and strange as opals
That sicken slowly,
Then flared with darkling memories of dread and
terror
And humanish pity.
“ 'Twas on the night when she against whose craggy
haunches
We now are leaning,
Great Babylon the Evil, fell and flamed in splendour
To ruin eternal.
All beasts, both small and great, all woodland gods
and half-gods
In haste were fleeing.
Before that blaze supernal and abhorred whose
breath alone
Dried up Euphrates
Like as the Sun-God drinks a drop of dew, and all
the heavens
As brass were molten.
Even with the rest I fled, nor looked to see forever
The cooling dawn;
With scorching pelt and blood that bubbled not for
passion
Madding I raced
When lo! A woman toward me running,— toward
Babylon!
She seemed a goddess,

THE SISTER OF OWLS

With hair all purple scarlet in that glare outstream-
ing

And fire-washed feet.

On, on she sped, toward Babylon, toward Babylon,
Toward Babylon!

And as she ran she ever cried: ' Sweet mother Bab-
ylon;

Forgive my turning!

I come to die upon your breast, O mother beloved,
My Babylon! '

I tried to check her with these hairy arms of iron
But flame herself,

She blazed athrough them and went wailing on to
Babylon.

Aië! Aië! The horror!

Or ever she had sped a nestling's flight, the fiery ban-
ner

Licked her to ashes,

She fell, a poor, white moth the gods for cruel
laughter

Had struck with lightning."

Shuddering he paused, yet all in silence wrapt and
stilly

The Sister of Owls

Waited, her cobweb-colored eyes athrough her dusky
tresses

Fine as cobwebs

THE SISTER OF OWLS

Drowsing upon the burnished, heat-waved plain of
 Babylonia,

 Her nether eyelids

Updrawn a little as birds' are when they drink in
 rapture

 A long flight ended.

The Satyr, glancing sidelong, blinked thus to behold
 her

 As though her grayness

A ghostly dazzlement out-poured from inner radi-
 ance

 Supreme and mystic.

Then holding forth the little pipe so smooth as ivory
 Beside her laid it:

“When to these ruins I came again, long, long years
 after,

 I went with trembling,

To look upon the place where one so wild and lovely
 The gods had smitten.

Alas! Of all that marvellous, more than earthly
 beauty,

 Remained only

This little bone so pitifully bleached and shining.

 In memory of her,

I wrought this pipe and ever since have played upon
 it.”

 The Shadowy Woman

THE SISTER OF OWLS

Her hand reached forth and lifting up the piteous
relic

Gazed on it longly;

Then at the Satyr looked with eyes of icy burning

Bland yet awful:

“ Well do I know to whom this toy belonged,— a
priestess

Of Mighty Ishtar;

Think you that Ishtar,— she beside whose glory and
splendour

Your Greek Diana

Would seem a serving maid decked out in cast ap-
parel,

Hath not the power

A worshipper repentant and beloved to rescue,

Bestowing life

Immortal and a form imperishable, far fairer

Than Aphrodité's? ”

The Satyr shyly bold for hidden wrath so hearing

His gods defamed,

Leered cunningly from goatish eyes aslant and
quicken'd

With secret malice:

“ Nay,” murmured he, all feign'd humbleness. “ If
Babylon

Your Bêl could save not,

How should a woman-god like Ishtar save a mortal
Fallen with Babylon? ”

THE SISTER OF OWLS

Then laughed the Sister of Owls, aye, laughed as
 though triumphant
 For secret power,
That all the Satyr's matted, wiry hair rose bristling,
 And sweat like frost
Stung him with chillness that his strong teeth clacked
 and clattered
 Yet was he bound
Unto the rock beside her as by chains of adamant;
 He would have prayed
To Pan, great Pan, for succour, but those eyes terrific
 Drank all his thought,
He could but stare on her with spell-bound, charméd
 loathing,
 And yearn for Hellas.
"Tri-natured, simple thing!" she cried, her laugh-
 ter over,
 "Beast, man and god,
Doth not the god in you however dimmed by goat-
 hood
 Some truth discern
While thus you crouch upon the all-sacred sepulcher
 Of Babylon?
Do you not feel within the womb of death the quick-
 ening?
 Do you not know
That mighty cities hallowed by the gods primæval
 Have mighty souls,

THE SISTER OF OWLS

And that forever and forever and forever

These souls arise

Though every stone that bodied forth their pride
should crumble

With fire or flood?

Yea, though great Babylon be fallen she riseth ever
By night in splendour

Even as of yore, and they who look with eyes un-
sealéd

Again behold her,

The mighty, the magnificent, still mighty though
fallen!

They hear again

The long, gold temple horns of Ishtar smoothly
blown

By deep breath'd Nubians.

While far above, the wild, entranced, all-lovely
voices

Of Ishtar's choir

Hymning the imperial Moon, rill up in crystal foun-
tains

To lave her Throne

With immemorial melodies forgotten of men,—

May even behold

Ishtar herself in shining vesture clad and crowned
with stars

Of seven colors,

THE SISTER OF OWLS

As through the hanging gardens by Imgur-Bêl en-
circled

She fareth softly,

Musing in bland, immortal leisure of a goddess,

On things eternal.

And they shall see the hundred gates of brass roll
open

And hear the shouting

Of stalwart ferry-men these thousand years and over

Returned to dust,

Yet making merry in the empurpled night o'erladen

With flowering spices.

As though but yestereve on gentle sleep they had
fallen

To wake the lustier.

And Babylon's proud kings and queens, through
countless ages

Backward speeding

Shall throng her empty palaces and make oblation

In all her temples,

Where shadows of violet cinnamon float thinly
wavering

O'er golden glooms,

And constellations wrought of magic gems thrice
holy

Through veiling incense,

Glare from the onyx vaultings underlaid with cedar.

And there shall blaze

THE SISTER OF OWLS

Within the outer courts three times three thousand
torches
Of precious amber
Mingled with frankincense and rarest gums Arabian
Upheld by statues
Of living gold and silver,— young men all, most
beauteous,
While through the streets
A jubilant multitude shall fare with song and danc-
ing,
With pipes and timbrels,
Trumpets and dulcimers and double flutes and cym-
bals
Praising Ishtar,
And Bêl and all the lesser gods and glorious Babylon.
Then shall the gate
Stupendous and superb of Imgur-Bêl, swung inward
By mighty engines,
Reveal to them the palace of their Kings deific,
With portals open,
That for one swooning pulse-beat of delirious joy-
ance
They may adore
The secret loveliness of Babylonian Queens
From death re-flowering,
All thirsty for the vain desire and lustful worship
Of multitudes.

THE SISTER OF OWLS

With violet tresses cunningly enwoven through gold
and silver,
With broad, still eyelids
Painted like Persian moths, and breasts of amber
circled
By far-famed jewels,—
In silken webs of purple, emerald, vermilion,
Azure and orange,—
Perfumed with musk and tamarisk and coriander,—
With oil of roses,
And oil of jessamine and priceless nard of India,—
Throned on ivory
Deep carven and embossed with jade and gold of
Ophir
And precious crystals
Bearing the seven all sacred colours of Babylon,—
Her queens reign nightly:
And nightly till the golden hour of Bêl's awakening,
Her kings triumphant
Delicious revels hold with her their delicate city
Great Queen of Queens,
That once more crieth: 'I sit a queen and am no
widow
And know not sorrow!'
And they who hated her, the prophets of Israel
Jehovah's bondmen,
Will cry aloud from out their foolishness and folly,
'Behold, ye chosen!

THE SISTER OF OWLS

How Babylon hath become the hold of evil spirits,
And house of devils!'
For fear and dread and trembling shall twist their
heart-strings
And smite their Watchmen
When word shall come to them that Babylon is risen
Shining, resplendant
Not with consuming fire but with her ancient glory.
These things, O Satyr,
You may bear witness to, for I myself will give you
That City's freedom,
Because of this," and as he spoke once more she
lifted
The Ivory pipe,
"Yea, this poor, little bone shall prove the key of
entrance
To Babylon
And from the rising of the Moon you may rejoice
there
With free delight,
Until the shimmering clash of Bêl's seven hundred
cymbals,
Shrills a warning
And twice seven hundred trumps of jasper, crystal
golden,
Sound the return
Of Babylon's high god unto his throne aerial
And hers to sleep."

THE SISTER OF OWLS

She ceased with smouldering eyes and eyelids as of
ashes

Bent upon him,

So still, she seemed a shape of silver dim with ages

Fixed forever,

But as he shook, up blazed the circled Moon tremendous

Of Babylon

And on a sudden that silver shape flaring effulgent

Fused with its splendour

As might a flame drawn backward to the incandescence

It had sprung from.

Then breathed the earth beneath him as awaking

And deep within it,

Smooth, long-drawn notes through hollow gold upwelling

Blared triumphant.

Not such a mighty leap hath Pan himself e'er taken

As took that Satyr

From off the heaving ruins of Ishtar's fearful temple,

Nor sped more fleetly

The stone of Sisyphus adown its echoing mountain

Than he toward Hellas.

No backward glance gave he as on he fled distracted,

Being well aware

THE SISTER OF OWLS

In all his crisping flesh of how the sorceress city
Upreared behind him
Her monster walls and seven-staged temple towers
gigantic
Crowned with idols
Of aspect terrible and evil powers known only
To Gods of Asia.
Far, far before him all the moonlit plain was red-
dened
With glare of torches,
Far, far there followed him the sound of pipes and
timbrels
And festal shouting:
"Great Babylon is risen again, our Mighty City
Is risen and shining!"

Watchman, what of the night? Watchman!
Watchman!

What of the night?
The ghost of mighty Babylon
With all her devils
Is risen again despite Jehovah!
Is risen and shining,
Is risen, is risen and shining!

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

I

BELÂNU the Poet, son of Mar-irsitim, to the Lady Iltani, daughter of the widowed Lady Taram-Sagila, by his chief slave Damgula :

Not direct do I dare speak,
Not direct do I dare speak
To the most beautiful Lady in Babylon,
Not direct to the wondrous Lady Iltani
Do I, all unworthy, venture to speak.
These are but the thoughts of my heart
Upon first beholding her,
Which I set forth
That she may look upon them
Or not look upon them
As seemeth best to her.

In the Street of Procession it was,
Near the gate of Ishtar
On this seventh morning
Seven times blessed
Of the fourth month
That I first beheld her.

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Not foreknowing, I lifted up mine eyes
Not forewarned by a kindly dream,
I lifted up mine eyes
Thinking to look on usual things,
Thinking to behold only
The sacred Unicorns and Dragons
That adorn the gate of Ishtar,
When lo! the beauty of the Lady Iltani!
Like a sword of glorious elmêshu,
Like a sword wrought from the precious stone
elmêshu,
That is brighter and clearer than rock crystal,
And whose heart is a rainbow,—
Like a spear cast by Bêl-Marduk
From the armoury of the Sun,
Her beauty smote my eyes,
Pierced my heart,
Severed my heart-strings.
My heart twanged and ceased
Like a broken lyre.
I was as one blind, dead,
As one cast into the Terrible Cave Aralû
Where is existence without life.

O all wonderful life! Gift of Shamash!
Greatest gift of the great Sun-God!
It was taken from me

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

And given back again,
But not by Thee, O Shamash!

For through my darkness,
Through my sick darness,
Shined the smile of Iltani
Knitting again my severed heart-strings,
Restoring to me one part of that which she had taken,
Restoring my life,
But O Shamash! Bêl! Ishtar, Princess of Love!
Keeping in her little hands
That which alone makes life precious
My sweet desire!
Holding in her soft throttling hands
As children hold a bird,
My wild wingéd desire!

Against the fierce blue and emerald scales
Of a dragon of Ishtar,
Cunningly enamelled
Upon the wall of her Sacred gate,
The face of Iltani,
Crowned by her hair as by a flower of copper,
Shone wonderful,
Milder than a moonstone.

Little moon-fair face,
Little face of Iltani!

BELĀNU AND ILTANI

Shall I ever feel you against my heart?
My heart that is all unlike the moon,
My heart that you, O tiny thing,
Yet greater than Shamash,
Have turned into a blazing sun of love!
Far and wide have I journeyed,
Over many waters, in many lands,
Yet never have I beheld a sight so lovely
As the face of the Lady Iltani
Shining like a moon-jewel,
Against the blue and emerald armour
Of Ishtar's dragon.

II

Iltani to Sikku, my friend: May Bêl and Nabu bless my friend and grant her health and joy: I am well and my mother also is well. Because it is the fourth month there are many flowers in Babylon. I went this morning with my mother to the temple of Marduk. Many others went also. The litter was stopped some time at the gate of Ishtar through so many people. A young man looked much at me. He had a beautiful beard. It was the colour of wild grapes. It was curled tighter than the wool of my black Persian lamb. But the curls were like rods, not like rings. I smiled to see such a beautiful beard. The Lady Ishtar be my witness, I did not smile at him, but at his beard. Yet now he has

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

written a poem to me saying that I smiled at him. This is wrong. There are also words in the poem about love. This is foolish. If he loves me why does he not write to my mother and my father's brother Nabu-zer-ibini? I must tell you, dear Sikku, that the Arabian powder you sent me by Ikisha has made my hair very pretty. It is now like a flower of copper. Because of distress I am sending you this message. What must I do regarding the poem of Belânu, son of Mar-irsitim? Answer quickly by all means, Sikku.

III

Belânu, son of Mar-irsitim, to the Queen Iltani:

O queen Iltani,
Great queen of queens,
Queen of the soul of Belânu,
Live forever!

Because of your heart
Harder than a graver's point of sapphire,
Because of your sharp-pointed heart
Which has graven upon mine
The terrible characters that signify silence,
I, your servant and lover Belânu,
Am like to one who has lost his wits,
Am like to a corpse of Egypt .
Whose brain the pitiless embalmers

BELĀNU AND ILTANI

Have drawn forth with a hook!
O Iltani, merciless Queen
Who might so easily have mercy,
Why did you not send me one little word
By my slave Damgula,
My slave more faithful to me than two mothers
Since my mother died at my birth?
Was it that you scorned my dear slave-mother
 Damgula?
Or was it that you scorned my love?

I am dying for love of you, Iltani!
I am dying for love of you,
Yet must I die for love of you
Rather than ask you in marriage of your lady mother
Not knowing whether I have found favour in your
 eyes.

Rather than bargain for you
With shekels of silver,
Offering for you like a merchant
The marriage gift,
Not knowing whether you will give me in return
The gift of love.
Iltani! Iltani!
The demon of fever,
Dread Ti'u,
Hath touched me!
Mine eyes are clouded,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

I am like one thrown into a brazen furnace seven
times heated!

Iltani! Iltani!

Though you are far away,
Though the infinity of seven streets divides us,
Ti'u brings you to me,—

You, unaware of me,

Yet you, you Iltani!

All the night gone by you were dancing against the
curtains of my eyes,

Shining between me and darkness,

Between me and sleep.

Not knowing you were there,

Thus Ti'u mocks me!

On the lowered curtains of my eyes you shone
Like the paintings on the wall of the King's love-
chamber,

Your eyes glowed dark as sandu stones,

But they turned the darkness to lapis-lazuli

All glittering with golden sparks,

They turned the darkness as it were to magic wine

Freckled with scales of sunlight,

And in this wine of magic you swam

Like a daughter of Bahi the sea-goddess,

And of Gibil the Fire God,

Very tiny,

Tinier than your own foot,

Than your own hand,

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Gleaming, glowing
Like a little fish of fire.
I drank the wine of darkness,
I drew you in with it,
O little fish of fire!
And you darted into my heart,
You swam into my heart made liquid by love,
Turning it to scalding steam.
Little fire-fish! little fire-fish!
Iltani! Iltani!
The steam of desire is bursting my breast asunder!
Return to your former shape,
Send me some word,
Some token,
If only a common rose of Babylon,
One petal of a rose,
Even a thorn,—
Or a stalk of sesamé;
Even a blade of grass that you have set your foot on,
So that it mean
Iltani looks with favour on Belânu!

IV

Iltani to Sikku my friend: A terrible thing. A terrible thing. Baal Belânu has gone mad. The Demon Ti'u has entered into him with madness. He has sent me another poem calling me Queen and fish of fire. What may a man not do who thinks

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of such a thing as a fish of fire? What may he not do to her he calls fire-fish? My knees are loosed with fear. Great is my fear, O Sikku. By the life of the gods write to me with comfortable words, Sikku. In the name of the goddess Irnini send me a message of advice quickly.

Damka my nurse has brought your letter. May all the highest Gods and the Igigi also, bless you, Sikku. I will perform your advice straightway. I will tell the lady Taram Sagila, my mother, of Baal Belânu. Since as you write to me, he has so many cows and slaves and a fine country seat near Borsippa, my mother may be moved to help his madness. Very wise is my mother in such things. For one who lives in a small city like Hish, you have large thoughts, Sikku. But in one thought you are mistaken. Baal Belânu might wish to kill me through the madness of love, but he means me no harm such as you think. For even in his madness he writes of making the marriage gift for me. And if you ask me why I call him Baal, I will say to you that I think he should be called Lord! None but a Baal could have such a beautiful beard, or write so beautifully, when Ti'u is torturing him. Be not afraid for me, Sikku, because you are married and I am not. In a great city like Babylon, things do not take place in the same manner as in a small city like Hish. How

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could Baal Belânu mean me wrong when I never walk abroad save with my mother or with my nurse Damka? He does not mean me wrong. Good are most of your thoughts, Sikku. I send you thanks for them. But I also have good thoughts. This is one of my thoughts. I will make a small clay image of Ti'u and set it in a little boat. I will fasten a long cord to the boat and I will go to the river side with Damka and place the boat on the river with Ti'u's image in it. Then I will upset the boat and drown the image of Ti'u, repeating for Baal Belânu the incantation which begins:

*“ Away, away, far away!
Be ashamed Ti'u, be ashamed!
Sink deep, deep where you cannot rise!
Out of Belînu's body away,
Out of his body far away.”*

Do you also make an image of Ti'u and do the same Sikku, for I would not that any man should be mad and call me fish of fire.

I forgot to say that because of pity I sent by Damgula to Baal Belânu a small little rose of Babylon. I did not gather it for him. It was not a fresh rose. I bade Damgula say this message: “This rose was gathered by the lady Taram-Sa-

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gila to place with others on the house-altar before the image of Irnini. The lady Iltani allows Damgula to take it to you only because of pity for your fever. May Irnini cause it to cause Ti'u to depart from you." I will also tell my mother that I did this thing, Sikku, so it will not be necessary for you to send me a message of advice about it, either against it or for it. Write again quickly, dear Sikku.

V

Belânu the Happy, to Iltani the Thrice Blesséd:

Iltani has sent me a tiny rose,
Tinier than her little ear
Which is so small, so small
That I fear my great love can never,
Never all be poured into it!
Iltani has sent me a rose,
A little, little rose,
Yet so great has she made it seem to me
By the magic of her graciousness,
That it shuts out heaven and earth,
It shuts out everything to me
But the face of Iltani,
The lovely, lovely face of Iltani,
Which by the magic of her graciousness,

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She has imprinted on the heart of the rose she sent
me.

For the rose that Iltani sent me,
For the tiny rose greater than heaven and earth
I will have made a cylinder of crystal,
Of crystal clear and pure as Iltani's heart,—
I will have a cylinder of purest, clearest crystal
Split in twain and hollowed delicately,
And between the halves of this crystal
I will place the rose that Iltani sent;
I will cause the King's jeweller
To rivet the halves together again
With bands of finest gold,
With bands of gold of Ophir
Rich as my love for Iltani
And with studdings of male rubies
Fiery as my love for Iltani
And with sparks of elmêshu
Lasting as my love for Iltani.

And this crystal,
Whose heart will be the rose of Iltani,
I will cause to be made into a seal,
Into a most precious seal of love
For sealing the love that I bear unto Iltani;
Our names shall be mingled upon it,
Together with the names of Ishtar and Tammuz,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Mingled in deep engravure,
That neither Time nor the jealous Gods,
Nor Fate, nor Iltani herself
Can ever efface!
Such shall be the chief seal of Belânu
Which he will wear about his neck forever,
Even in the dark Cave of Aralû!

Ah, small rose, sweet rose,
Rose of the rose Iltani!
When she sent you to Belânu,
When she sent you to me from the altar of Irnini,
Did she know,
Did she remember
That another name of Irnini is Ishtar?
Does she know,
Does she remember
That Ishtar is the goddess of love?
You have cast out Ti'u and his fever, darling rose,
But you cannot cast out the fever of love
For you come from the altar of Ishtar,
From the hands of Iltani!

What is this you are saying, dearest rose,—
Rose of Iltani and Ishtar?
Is it indeed you that are speaking
In a voice sweet and faint as your fragrance?
Verily the rose is speaking!

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Thus saith the rose:

“ Send a message to Iltani,
From me, the rose offered to Ishtar,
Send a message to Iltani
From Ishtar who told it to me
As I lay upon her altar,
Say there is another rose to be offered,
Another rose to be offered by Iltani
To Ishtar,
And this other rose is Iltani herself! ”

Verily I will obey you, rose of Ishtar,
Rose of Iltani,
The message shall go straightway
To that lady, the rose Iltani!

VI

Iltani to Sikku my friend: May Marduk and Nabu and Irnini whose other name is Ishtar, all be praised. The device of the image of Ti'u and the little boat has borne fruit. Baal Belânu is cured of his fever. Ti'u has departed out of him. He wrote me these things. He also wrote me other things. But I do not think they would interest my friend Sikku. He thought the rose very small. It was indeed a small rose, as I wrote you, Sikku. But it found favour with him. This will not be interesting news to you. This news will be more

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interesting. My lady mother was not angered against me when I told her of the message of Baal Belânu. Neither was my uncle Nabu-zer-ibini with whom she consulted. He laughed softly at me out of the fatness of his face and said: "Belânu son of Mar-irsitim, though a poet, has twenty gan of fertile land in his own right, many herds and much gold and silver. Belânu has also a good eye for seeing. When I was young I had such an eye. Let him be invited to this my brother's house, O Taram-Sagila, my sister-by-marriage." And my mother, who always looks sour when she is much pleased, looked very sour and she answered: "Since such is your wish, Nabu-zer-ibini my brother-by-marriage, do you yourself seek out the young man and bring him hither." Thus it was settled. So Baal Belânu will cross this threshold. May Ishtar and Bêl keep his foot from slipping upon it. I think this news is interesting Sikku. Send me word quickly what you think of it.

VII

Belânu the blissfully enchanted, to Iltani, Enchantress by the grace of Ishtâr:

Behold how great a miracle,
How mighty a miracle you have wrought,
O lady Iltani! —

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Lady of my heart,
Enchantress Iltani,
Enchantress of the heart and mind of Belânu!
Behold the miracle;
Thus it befell;
Yestereve, at the seventh hour,
As I was lingering near the gate of Ishtar,
Gazing with tenderness
On the blue and emerald dragon
Against whose enamelled scales
I had first seen the face of Iltani
Shining like a moon-jewel
Beneath the copper blossom of her hair,—
Accosted me courteously
An old gentleman
Exceeding fat,
A gentleman beyond peradventure,
And fat beyond imagination,
His nose, lips and ears
Were fat,
His very eyes, moist and smiling,
Were fat,
Even his beard had a fat appearance;
And round about his body
The overlapping pleats of his garment
Stood out because of his fatness,
Like the neck-ruffles of angry game birds.
I will whisper to you, O enchantress

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

(You who in your wisdom will surely shatter this
letter),
That it is not pleasant for a young lover
To look upon the fatness of an agéd man,
For it brings to mind questionings,
Painful doubtings,
As to whether perchance someday,
Some terrible day,
His own joyful leanness of youth
May not become like unto that fatness
Joy destroying.

Wherefore,
(Oh, forgive me belovéd!)
I looked coldly,
Though with politeness,
Upon this very fat,
This unusually fat
Old gentleman.
When lo! the Miracle!
He did but pronounce these words,
And the Miracle!
These words:
*"I who address you am Nabu-zer-ibini,
Uncle of the lady Iltani —"*
And behold the Miracle!
In a heart beat,
In the twinkling of an eye,

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In the flash of an eyelid of Shamash,
This corpulent old gentleman
Became to me as Tammuz,
The ever young lover of Ishtar!
Became all beautiful
As her father Sin, the Moon god,
When slender from desire,
A thin crescent of silver
He holds to his breast
That other part of himself,
The shy moon-bride
Veiled in dun-color.

Far have I journeyed,
Over many waters, in many lands,
But never have I seen so fair a sight
(Save the face of Iltani)
As the appearance of Nabu-zer-ibini
When he declared himself
The uncle of Iltani!
But lo! when he spoke again,
Inviting me to that house,
That house more desired than the King's palace,
Inviting me to cross with him that threshold
More sacred to me than the threshold of a temple,
That threshold beyond which dwells Iltani,
In the house of her lady mother
Who graciously sent word to me

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By the illustrious, all-charming Nabu-zer-ibini,
Then verily I could have fallen down before him,
As before the image of Tammuz,
And saluted his feet,
Which now seemed to me almost as beautiful,
Almost as slender,
As the feet of Iltani herself!
Wherefore, beloved Iltani,
My beloved,
Belovéd beyond all women,
Beyond all goddesses,
Prepare to greet me to-morrow
At the twelfth hour,
Together with Nabu-zer-ibini
Your god-like, all-glorious uncle,
Beneath the holy roof
Of the house of your sacred mother,
The lady Taram-Sagila.

May Marduk the Strong One,
Ruler of heaven and earth,
May Ishtar, the Lovely One,
Ruler of the hearts of all beings,
Watch over you forever;
May they fill the hour of my coming with joy for
you,
My beloved,
My beloved!

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VIII

Iltani to Sikku, my dear friend: It is the day of his coming. But it is only the eleventh hour. There is this hour to wait. I am already adorned for the occasion. My mother has left me to see that the cakes of sesamé and cinnamon, and the clarified honey, and the frothed cream, and the wine and conserves of citron are set forth in fit order. Damka also has gone to assist her. I feel that I must speak to some one. I will speak to you, O Sikku, my kind friend. I would wish you to put your arms about me. I would wish you to put your necklace of blue and green stones about my neck. I am sure that you would lend it to me for this occasion. I would wish you to tell me that I look charming. Damka says that I look charming, but Damka always speaks thus, no matter what I put on. My mother smiled at me kindly, but she is a woman of fixed words. She said only what she always says when I am dressed:

“It is well, Iltani. Be careful not to rumple the pleats when you seat yourself. It is so difficult to smooth out pleats.” I will tell you how I am dressed, Sikku. Then you can write to me about it. I have done my hair on the top close to my head, turning out the edges like flower petals. I have made it shine with oil of white roses. It

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smells very sweet. I have taken the longest strands and braided them to fall over my shoulders as in the image of Ninsun which we admire. It is hard at times to be poor and well-born. I wish to-day for blue and green stones. It is a wish like being hungry and no food. If only you were here, Sikku, to lend me your necklace. I have no green stones. I have no blue stones, neither turquoise nor sapphire nor even any bits of uknu. I wish much for precious stones the colour of the enamelled dragons on the gate of Ishtar. I have them not. So this is what I have done, Sikku. I went this morning at dawn and gathered many buds of Ishtar's flower. They are hard and blue like turquoise. I ravelled out threads of silk, knotting them together. Upon these I strung the blue buds. When I braided my long hair I twisted among it these strings. It seems to me that they look like turquoise. But I have no necklace, Sikku. My mother would not lend me her wedding necklace. "When you marry is time enough," is what she said. And I have no perfume except for my hair. When I asked her for two drops of spikenard from the carnelian box my father gave her at my birth,—only two drops, one for each breast, she said, "Nay." What do you think of that, Sikku? And on such an occasion? When I implored, she answered: "Young girls should not smell of spikenard. It is only for mar-

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ried women." Did she jest, or is this true, Sikku? Do not forget to answer, and also to tell me why it is, if it be so. My dress is of thin Persian linen, in little rows of pleats one above the other, but the pleats are too fine, like the under side of mushrooms. This year in Babylon the women are wearing the pleats broader. How is it in Hish? Perhaps in small towns like Hish, the fashions do not change so often as in Babylon. It is hard to be poor and also in the fashion. My dress would set badly if Damka pressed the pleats broader. I have on very pretty shoes, Sikku. They are made of snake-skin studded with silver. My uncle gave them to me on the great festival of Marduk. It was also the day of my birth. I have put a rose between my breasts, a little rose of Babylon. I have stained my fingers with paste of red rose leaves. I wish you were here to see me before Baal Belânu comes, Sikku. I am sure there is something wrong which no one has noticed. You would notice it because you are young, and have not forgotten about love, like my mother and Damka. There is one thing I wish you to tell me. Do not fail by any means to tell me in your next letter. It is this. Do husbands come first, and love after? or does love come first and husbands after? My mother and Damka say that husbands come first. I do not wish to believe this. But I am ignorant. You are not

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ignorant, Sikku,— so tell me by the life of the Gods. Do not fail to tell me, as you have failed to tell me other things. Certain things that you promised on your heart to tell me after you were married. You have not told them. I grow angry a little with you, Sikku, when I think of it. But this you must tell me — If you . . . I hear voices . . .

IX

Belânu-Tammuz to Iltani-Ishtar:

I have seen my jewel in its pure setting,
I have seen Iltani in the silver setting
Of her mother's love,
Yet fair as was that setting of silver,
Lovely as Iltani shone within it,
I long with a mighty longing
To take forth from it my jewel,
To reset my jewel beyond price
In the fiery gold of my love.

Oh, how beautiful,
How much sweeter than fine myrrh,
How beautiful and sweet was Iltani
In that setting of mild silver!
How far more beautiful than precious stones
Were the blue buds of Ishtar's flower in her hair!

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How far above rubies
Was the rose between her young breasts!

Oh, when may I take you for my own, Iltani!
When will you come to me as my bride?
When may my fingers be woven in your hair
Like the strands of Ishtar's flowers;
When like the rose
May I sleep between your breasts?

My heart is too full for much speaking,
Iltani! Iltani!
My heart will sing for you without words,
When you rest upon it,
Iltani! my sole desire!

X

Iltani, to Sikku my dearest friend: Sikku, he has come. He has gone. Sikku, he ate and drank, though not much. I could neither eat nor drink. Tell me, Sikku, when Etiatim, your husband, came to see you for the first time, did he eat and drink? Did you do so? I shook under my garments. My teeth wished to knock together, but I would not allow them to. When he drank the red wine of Eridu, his beard glistened. He smiled at my mother, and wiped it delicately on the napkin of purple linen which she handed him. His mouth was red from

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the wine and his teeth were white within it. I did not know that men could have beautiful mouths. My uncle's mouth is not beautiful. But then he has few teeth and they are brown. Belânu's teeth are white as almonds when Damka peels them in heated water to make almond paste. My little Egyptian cat came and jumped up on his knee. This astonished me. It is a shy little cat. But it was not shy with Belânu. He wore a wondrous garment, like a peacock's neck, with threads of gold curling through it. Yet he let my cat jump upon it and stroked her kindly, though she ran her claws in and out through it. He said to me: "A little cat like this is a very pretty beast, lady Iltani." And I said a foolish thing in answer. Is it not strange, O Sikku, how the words that come out of the mouth, can be different from the words that are in the heart? I was thinking: "He is more beautiful than the images of the hero Gilgamesh. The gods must have long hands like Belânu." But, Sikku, what I said was: "If there were little lions as small as cats, they would be prettier. I have often wished for a little lion." Tell me, Sikku, can you think of any reason why I should have spoken thus? For it was also a lie about the little lion. Never, never have I wished for a little lion. Sikku, I will now say what is really important. Baal Belânu has asked

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for me in marriage. My kind mother, and my considerate uncle will not force me to say yes. But they have told me plainly that I will be a wicked girl and a temptress of the gods' wrath if I do not say yes. I will now tell you the strangest part of all. I wish to marry Belânu and I do not wish to marry Belânu. Did you ever hear of another one who felt in this way? Did you ever feel thus about Etiatim? Write me a message of advice very quickly, or by Ishtar! I may have to decide for myself.

Sikku! He has sent me a little lion. He has sent me a baby lion. How could he find a baby lion and send it to me so quickly? It is no longer a lie that I wish a little lion. Never was there anything so charming. It's head is round like a bowl, and downy as apples of Persia. It's clumsy paws make soft my heart. When it licks my fingers, its tongue is pinker than the core of conch-shells and rough like sand. It has a collar of lapis-lazuli and green jasper. It has eyes like yellow jasper and black onyx. It would be hard to say "no" to Baal Belânu, for then I should have to return to him the little lion! Do you think I am perhaps hiding my true feelings from you, Sikku? So be it. Think that it is my little lion who writes to you. See — I have made

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him set here the print of his paw as a seal to this letter. Greetings to Sikku from the little lion that Belânu gave to Iltani.

XI

Belânu, King of the Four Quarters, to Iltani,
Queen of Belânu and all that he possesses:

Since by the promise of Iltani
I have been crowned,
I am a king indeed.

The Four Quarters of the earth are mine,
The Four Quarters of the heaven are mine!
The mighty King who dwelleth delicately
In his palace beside E-Sagila,
In his house near the lofty House of Marduk
Walketh as in a sleep,
Dreaming that the Four Quarters are his;
But I, Belânu the poet,
I Belânu, Lord of Iltani,
Am King of Kings
Being King of Iltani!

Hands that have touched her hands
In the clasp of betrothal,
Ye too should become poets,
Ye too should sing a song,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Ye should make a promise also!
Speak, hands of Belânu!
By the magic of love,
In the name of Iltani,
I, your master, conjure you!
Speak!

Thus say my hands:
“ Beautiful deeds only will we do
Forevermore,
Beautiful deeds only from henceforth forever
Will we perform,
We the hands of Belânu,
The happy hands that have touched Iltani’s! ”

But for you, O my mouth,
You that have touched the fire of the inner altar,
Silence!
No words outworn by the mouths of others
Could tell fittingly
Of that wonder;
New words would you need, mouth of Belânu,
To sing that miracle;
Words fresher than the first flowers
Blooming in the first dawn
From an earth still virgin.
Silence only can sing of it,
Silence of the lover’s heart,

BELĀNU AND ILTANI

More wonderful than the sound of a thousand dul-
cimers

In the hands of rejoicing gods;
Sweeter than the shrilling of Ishtar's heart-strings
When the breath of Tammuz her lover
Plays across them.

Answer me, O my beloved,
Whisper it to me across the dark blossom of night
My heart will hear.

Answer me this thing, O my beloved!
Was not the silence of my mouth upon yours
A song of songs?
The silence of your mouth beneath mine
Said more to me than all the poems ever uttered.

O flower of life,
Mouth of Iltani!
The venomous wild-bee, Death,
When he drinks your honey
Will forget to sting.
You will not know the sting of Death, beloved,
But on his wings you will be borne
To the land at the confluence of waters,
To the immortal, shining land,
At the meeting of rivers
Fairer than the river of Babylon
By which we met,—

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

The rivers of everlastingness!
Far from the dark Cave of Aralû
Will the wild-bee Death soar with you
Having forgotten to sting!

What of the night, Iltani?
What of this night blossoming from our day of days
Whereon you sprang so wildly awake,
Beneath my kiss?
Will you sleep to-night?
Can you sleep, beloved,
Apart from me, tossed by the wonder of love,
Apart from me, tossing as on a sea of fire
With none to comfort you?
With none to hold in a strong hand
The tiller of your boat of dreams,—
To make fast the cord of the wild sail
Swelling with the wind of love?
With none to lay his other hand beneath your head,
Your tender head dizzy with sweet desire,
Bewildered by the tossing of those waves of flame
Will you sleep to-night, beloved?

I shall not sleep!
But my waking will be more delicious
Than any sleep,
Yea, though Ishtar herself descended with it
Crowned by stars of seven colours,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Bringing dreams of seven colours.
Not for the glory of Marduk, son of Ea,
Would I sleep this night, O my belovéd!
For my dreaming might be empty of you,
But my waking will be filled with you,
As a lotus with fragrance,
As a lute with music,
As the sun with fire!

XII

Iltani, to her dear lord, Belânu: May Bêl-Marduk and Ishtar, Mistress of the gods, cause my lord to live forever. Such was also my prayer to them all the night that is past. Iltani tells her lord that she did not sleep. Iltani tells her dear lord, that she lay on a couch in the garden this night that is gone, because of the house being too little for her heart. But sleep visited her not. The Star of Ishtar was her companion. All night she gazed upon the Star of Ishtar. Iltani has no sister — the Star was her sister. A mother she has — but the Star was more than a mother. There are things the Star of Ishtar comprehendeth which mothers do not comprehend. All night it smiled upon me, though my thoughts were not of its Lady but of my Lord. Iltani tells her lord that she has made a little shrine and set upon it his beautiful words. Not one of them has she broken, nor ever will break. She has

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burnt frankincense before them as before an image of a god. If this be wrong, she is sorry, but she cannot do otherwise. The gods must do as they decree. If they will punish, they will punish. Iltani will bear it even with gladness. To burn the frankincense comforts her heart which has pain to write so poor a letter to her lord. Why did not the gods make me a poet also? I send my lord by the hand of Damgula his dear slave-mother and mine, a girdle of faded jasmine. By my fingers it was woven. It is faded because of being all night around me. It seemed to Iltani that the girdle of jasmine was her lord's arm around her. This lotus flower I send is crushed because it lay all night beneath Iltani's head. It seemed to her sweet, like the hand of her lord, of her beloved. Iltani has sharp pain in her heart because of sending such poor, naked words. She would wish to send words beautiful as precious stones. Iltani prays all the gods and goddesses, both great and small, to give her the gift of beautiful speech that she may write worthily to her lord. May my lord live forever and ever, though Iltani should remain after death in the dark Cave of Aralû.

XIII

Iltani, to Sikku my poor friend: I call you poor, O Sikku, because of thinking that all women are poor compared with Iltani,—Iltani who has Bel-

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ânu for her own. It is not that Etiatim is not worthy, it is that none are worthy compared with Belânu. It is not that you do not love Etiatim, or that Etiatim does not love you, it is only because of none having the power to love like Belânu and Iltani. Be not wroth with me, Sikku. Thus do I feel. Yet though I have such great love for my lord Belânu, greater has grown my love for others, even for my little lion and my cat and my Persian lamb. Judge then, O Sikku, of how much more I must love you than formerly I loved you. This is a mystery. It is as if my heart were a magic cup filled with the wine of Ishtar: though I pour it forth continuously, my heart remains full.

I will now tell you, Sikku, what I forgot to say at the beginning. Belânu the great poet and Iltani the dumb girl are betrothed. Why have I no words, so that I feel verily like a dumb-girl? Why was not I also born a poet? By the life of the gods! Why did they not do that for me? Sikku, my lord made the marriage gift in gold. He also gave to me brooches and arm-bands of un-pierced pearls. They are upon me now. Also a long necklace of pierced pearls to wear after marriage. Also a little dragon like that on the gate of Ishtar wrought of sapphires and emeralds and enamel. I would wish my lord less rich, Sikku. Could it be possible for him to think that some of my joy is because of his riches?

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

If so it could be, I would wish him to have no more than sufficient to pay the marriage gift, and in silver. Sikku, I will tell you a secret. Though I have not the gift of poetry, yet I have written a poem. Yet not I, but my heart has written it. I will not show it to Belânu because of shame. But I will show it you, Sikku, because of knowing your kind heart and because of knowing also that you could not make even such a little cripple poem as this. I charge you on the head and feet of Ishtar, not to show it to Etiatim. It is not a wise poem. Indeed it has much foolishness mixed with it. But does it not seem to you, Sikku, that all poems, no matter how beautiful, have a sweet foolishness mixed with them? To me it seems so. This is my poem.

I was like a little stranger bird,
A little honey-bird of Africa
That had wandered to Babylon
Blown by the winds of fate,
The flower I longed for,
The flower I seemed to remember
Far away as in a land before birth,
The flower whose honey I pined for,
I could not find.
The honey of jasmine flowers,
The honey of lotus flowers,
The honey of moon-flowers,

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The honey of garden lilies,
The honey of wild lilies,
Even the honey of the little roses of Babylon
Could not satisfy my desire.
Always I was longing for that nameless flower,
I could not quite remember,
The flower whose honey would be as life to me.

One day to my mother's house
Came the Lord Belânu,
The poet Belânu.
More beautiful than Tammuz,
Ishtar's lover.
His beard was like a shrub of pomegranate,
His mouth within it like a flower of pomegranate.
Again he came,
Bringing this time the marriage gift.
We clasped hands in betrothal,
My mother and my father's brother
Smiling upon us.

My mother and my father's brother
Went forth into the garden,
Leaving us together,
Leaving us alone together
For a little space,
For a small, sweet space of time,
Such as a nightingale would take
To fly across the waters of Babylon.

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Then Belânu put his arms about me,
Lifting me to his face.
Against his beard that was like a shrub of pome-
granate,
I was as a bird nestling;
His mouth like a flower of pomegranate
Was the flower I had longed for.
I sipped its honey,
And lo! new life flowed into me,
Wonderful, sparkling!
I am no longer like a little stranger bird,
I have found my nest,
I have found my flower,
I have found my lord!

I forgot to say that when the beard of my lord is observed closely, it is curled in rings as well as in rods. Near his mouth are the ring-curly as in the statue of the hero Gilgamesh, but more beautiful. Write to me quickly with wishes of love. Sikku, I charge you on the head of your little son not to show my poem to Etiatim, and not to laugh at it in secret. If you should do so, I am sure that it would bring misfortune upon you, O Sikku.

XIV

Iltani, the almost destroyed one, to Sikku in whom is her hope: Woe has overtaken me, Sikku. Black

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woe has cast me down like a cup of alabaster. I am broken in pieces. My joy is spilt upon the hungry earth. Like a greedy dog the earth has lapped up my joy. I am dry and empty like a broken reed from which the pith has been drawn. My hand shakes for lack of sleep, for fulness of anguish. All this night that is past the night spirits tortured me. Lilu and Lilitu his handmaiden tore my breast, dug into my heart with sharp talons, rent my heart to ribbons. Labasu, the overthrower, cast me down from the seven-staged tower of my joy. I am crushed upon the pavement of despair. Rabisu, the lyer-in-wait, seized upon me, springing from behind the curtain of delight. All the evil demons have hunted me down, Utukku, Shedu, Etimmu. Help, Sikku, or I perish.

Thus it befell: Yesterday at the seventh hour of the second half, Belânu having departed, came to my mother's house lord Sin-idinnam, Chief Steward of the King's chief concubine, the lady Ilat-akhe-shu. In a litter of cedar overlaid with silver did he come, robed in scarlet of the King's household, terrible to behold as a pillar of fire. Accompanied by the chief eunuch of the lady Ilat-akhe-shu, also wearing a mantle of scarlet but of smaller size, did he come. Accompanied also by my Uncle Nabuzer-ibini, with fat face fatter for much smiling, did he come. Never, O Sikku, in an evil dream brought

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by the eating of unripe fruit, shall so terrible a face be seen as the face of Sin-idinnam. A face of devouring. Eyes of devouring. A beard like iron-wires, like the mane of wild horses. Interwoven like a dark forest wherein dwell evil beasts and demons. With a nose great as the Stele of the greatest King. A nose causing sinking of the liver to behold; laced with veins of purple and vermilion, like the hideous orchids of Sheb-Ur which are sold by venders on the Spring Festival, because of difficulty in finding. With small warts upon it as upon the orchids of Sheb-Ur. With small hairs upon it as upon those orchids. Sikku, this dread man wishes to take me in marriage.

To my uncle Nabu-zer-ibini he has offered double the marriage gift of Belânu and in gold, to be returned to Belânu as forfeit money. May Bêl have mercy upon me and deal harshly with my uncle, for my uncle has accepted this money. He wishes me to cast off my lord, and marry with this terrible man. He tells me for reason, that he is ten times as rich as Belânu, and that I will be a lady of high station in the palace of the King. My mother also coaxes me, saying that I will bear the right-hand fan of the lady Ilat-akhe-shu, and be almost as a lady of the queen. What is this man's riches to me? What is the fan of the lady Ilat-akhe-shu to me? What is Ilat-akhe-shu herself to me, or the Queen

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even, or the King himself? Though I had never seen my dear lord Belânu, I would wish to drink flame and die before wedding with Sin-idinnam and his terrible nose, and his devouring eyes. His eyes upon me were the eyes of a butcher regarding a lamb. Of a hungry butcher regarding a lamb. Oh, for the eyes of Belânu to wash away the evil of that look from off my face! The eyes of Belânu which are like springs of love welling from a clean heart. I will light a flame on the little shrine I have made for the words of Belânu and drink it, before I will marry with this terrible man. My uncle and my mother are banded against me. I have none but you to help me, O Sikku. O Sikku, daughter of my mother's kind sister Kudashu, whom I ever loved more than my mother, but who is now in Aralû — help me. Send help. Come yourself with Etiatim to help me. If you cannot help me, O Sikku, I shall destroy myself utterly. By the life of all the gods I swear it.

I forgot to say that I do not know whether my lord has been told. I have had no word from my lord. But what can he do if my uncle returns him double the marriage gift? Even the King makes obeisance to the law. Send a quick runner with help if you cannot come yourself, or by the heart of Ishtar! I will drink flame and go down to

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Aralû where Sin-idinam cannot find me, no! Not even through the power of the King!

XV

Belânu to Iltani who is all his as he is all hers, by the decree of Marduk and Ishtar which changes not:

Belovéd, I have heard, I have been told. May Ishtar's terrible sister Ereshkigal, Queen of the place of darkness, by the power of Namtar, her dire messenger, god of Pestilence, torment the perfidious Nabu-zer-ibini, through countless ages. Forgive me, O my belovéd, that I do not write to you a song. Gone is song from my heart, fled far away like a bird that urchins stone with pebbles from a sling. In the temple of my heart resound only cries of mourning, lamentations of one who has no hope. For though my love for you is of such strength that it moves the gods, it cannot avail to move the heart thrice petrified of your seven times accurséd uncle, the false Nabu-zer-ibini. In your father's stead the law gives him power of a father over you. Implacable is the law. Even love may not avail against the law, love that maketh to relent the hearts of gods.

Therefore since the bright world has become to us as the dark Cave of Aralû, since in this darkened

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world we may not even be together, let us descend hand in hand to Aralû, where none can divide us. Damgula, my mother of compassion who bears you this message, will show you the way. Go forth with her, O my beloved, if your love be strong as Belânu's.

At that gate of the city which is nearest your mother's house, a litter awaits you. Go with Damgula and mount within it. Thence my runners will bear you to my house "The Envy of Princes" in my fair gardens near Borsippa. You shall be sacred to me as the memory of my mother's face in the last sleep. This is what I would do, my beloved. From India I brought with me a potent drink — "Rest of Brahma" it is called. It brings death without pain. Like a lover's kiss it stills the anguish of the heart without torment. I will have saddled my white horse Zôr, who is without blemish like our love — my horse Zôr that I captured alone in the mountains,— that I tamed alone. Having put the vial of soft release in the breast of my garment, I will mount upon Zôr, lifting you to the saddle before me. His fleet hoofs shall bear us far from trouble, toward the North, toward the mountains for which he neighs in dreams, deep into the forests that lie between Babylon and the hills of the North. There we will free him to his delight, and hand in hand, having drunk of "The Rest of Brahma," we will

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sink together to the dim Kingdom of Aralû. We will dwell together there. Better together in the Shadow, than apart in the light of the Sun. Let us do this thing for the sake of our love, Iltani, if your love be strong as mine. Afterwards, our Mother of Pity, Damgula, will pray the prayer for release to Ishtar. But if Ishtar will not grant our release, then to Tammuz, the lover of her youth; with a festival garment adorning his image, that he may at least play for us on his flute of lapis-lazuli, with his ring of porphyry.

May Ishtar strengthen your heart, O my beloved, and send you to me quickly.

XVI

Sikku, to the little Iltani, her lamb: Fear not, my little lamb Iltani, almost as dear to me as my first-born,— Fear not, nor think a second time of drinking flame. I send strong succour for you. This ring which belongs to Etiatim my lord, dear to me and worthy to me as is Belânu to you, take straightway, going in secret, to the lady Ina-Esagila — Mayoress of the central quarter of the city of Babylon. Etiatim, your brother because of devotion, bids you so to do. Tell her all, offering her your little lion as a thank-offering. Great is her longing towards the young of lions saith Etiatim. He knows of this weakness in a woman otherwise strong, be-

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cause of relationship through the second marriage of his father with her third niece. Go straight-way to the house of Ina-Esagila bearing this ring and the little lion, and tell her all. I will not lengthen time by reasons for this advice. I send it by the swiftest runner in Hish. Trust the wisdom of Etiatim my lord, who in most things is as a god.

May Bêl and Ishtar count the hairs of your head and direfully punish all who may harm one of them.

XVII

Iltani, to Belânu her lord both in life and in death: I send, my lord, dearer to me than heaven and earth, and all that is in heaven and earth, this letter from my friend and mother's sister's daughter, the lady Sikku, wife of Etiatim of Hish in Parâga. The lady Sikku of Hish is to be relied on next to the lady Ishtar of Arbela. Suffer Damgula to return quickly with your consent, O my dear lord, that we may hasten together in secret, bearing the ring of Etiatim and the little lion to the lady Mayoress Ina-Esagila. If this fail, gladly will I go with you to Aralû. May all the gods preserve your life as their own life.

XVIII

Iltani, to my sister-mother Sikku, best beloved after Belânu:

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May you bear fifty sons, O Sikku, like to Etiatim as twin-brothers. May you bear fifty daughters like to you as twin-sisters. My hands about the feet of Etiatim and my blessings upon his head. My love and blessings upon Sikku like a Queen's Festival garment of purple and fine gold. As Etiatim commanded so I did. With the ring and the little lion I sought the lady Mayoress, Ina-Esagila, in her own house. Sending in the ring and the little lion before me I was admitted straightway to her presence. But Damgula was not admitted beyond the second chamber. In this chamber were many others, both men and women. Their faces were heavy with waiting or sharp with fear. They stared upon me exceedingly. This was a moment of great trial. When I passed into the presence of the lady Mayoress, the trial became greater. She received me alone. My knees felt as though bending backward. My heart-strings were slackened. I did not dare to lift my eyes. Her voice came to me as from a far place, across troubled waters. She called me "child" and bade me look upon her face. Her voice was deep like that of a man, but full of kindness. When I obeyed her command my fear was softened, for her countenance though stern was comely. Beneath the eyebrows of a judge, her eyes were the eyes of a mother. Her robes of office caused her form

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to appear awful, but under her robes I saw the breasts of a mother-woman. She held the little lion in her arms and he played with the dread Seal of Office about her neck, as a child unknowing might play with the neck-jewels of Namtar when he carries it to the cave of death. Looking into her eyes, and perceiving her lips smiling, my confidence became as that of the little lion. I drew near to her and placed my hands about her feet. O Sikku, do not think that I would lie to you. This mighty lady lifted me against her knees. She spoke comfortable words to me, laying her hand upon my head and saying "Fear not." So I told her all. But my fear returned, beholding the change of her countenance as she hearkened to me. When I had made an end of speaking, she did not speak. Her eyes gazed through me as I had been an image of glass. It was as though she saw beyond me some evil sight. Then she spoke twice like one in sleep: "This man Sin-idinnam — This man Sin-idinnam —" Terrible was my fear, Sikku, not understanding the meaning of her voice or of her words; perceiving her to be as one fallen suddenly on sleep. What could I do, O Sikku, but tremble and wait? I could do nothing. It seemed to me that I grew to be very old in that waiting. It seemed to me that I should go forth from her presence with white hairs upon my head. But lo! all at once her face shined again with kind-

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ness. Her dream passed from it like smoke, and she said to me with smiling — Never could you imagine, Sikku, what the lady Mayoress then said to me. This is what she said: “Strange may it seem to you, O little one, but in my youth I also, even I, loved and was beloved by a poet.” Sikku, I was sure that I was in my little bed in my mother’s house and dreaming. The roundness of my eyes caused the lady Mayoress to laugh. She laughed greatly, pinching my chin and my ear. They were great pinches like her laugh, but they seemed sweet to me like kisses, for I saw she would be on our side. And she said further: “O little giver of little lions, let not your heart be troubled. Though I know not the poems of Belânu, whether they be good or whether they be bad, the young man Belânu himself, I know to be very good. As for Sin-idinnam, Chief Steward of the lady Ilat-akhe-shu, I know many things concerning him,—more things indeed than he would have me know. For I know things that he has done here in the Central quarter of the city, which would ill please the King, may he live forever! — should he come to know them also. Therefore return to your mother’s house in peace, bearing with you the order which I will give you.” Whereon she kissed me, and I wept, and threw my arms about her and the little lion which licked my tears. Does it seem strange to you, Sikku, that I should have been

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so afraid of her in the beginning, and in the end even froward with her? This no one could understand who was not with her as I was with her.

And the order she gave me, Sikku, was that my mother, Taram-Sagila and my father's brother Nabu-zer-ibini must appear before her privily next morning at the eighth hour without fail. Nor was I afraid because of this order, for the lady Mayoress told me that she would speak to them with authority yet without anger. This she did, dear Sikku, but the authority must have been exceeding great, for my mother returned having the countenance of a chidden child that has promised to be good. And as for my uncle, I had shame for him because of his fawnings and prostrations before my lord Belânu. It is well to repair wrongdoing, but it is not well to eat dirt when no one requires it. Yet men are very strange, O Sikku. For I think that it pleased my lord that my uncle should eat dirt before him, even though he was my uncle and of my blood. Yet women also are strange. For though it did not please me to be ashamed for one of my own blood, yet it did please me that my uncle should be humbled before my lord, having so greatly wronged him.

Thus all befell two days gone. Thus it is now arranged. The marriage contract is signed. Belânu and Iltani will go to the temple of Bêl-Marduk,

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on that day of next week sacred to Ishtar. Before her shrine they will be blessed as man and wife by the high priest of Marduk.

O Sikku, blessed be your name and the name of Etiatim forever. Blessed be your children forever. I forgot to say that the lady Mayoress charged me with kind greetings to Etiatim and to you. I forgot to say, that when the lady Mayoress bade me farewell she made a beautiful prayer for me. These were her words: "Grant O Ishtar, that the children of this child may be as the flowers on a flowering tree in a fruitful season." Do you pray for me that I bear only sons, O Sikku, and that each one will be more like Belânu than a pomegranate is like to a pomegranate.

XIX

Belânu to his bride the lady, the rose Iltani, on their bridal day:

I

Hear, O my rose!
Rose of roses,
Blossom of blossoms,
Whose heart is a jewel from the sky,
For you all the morning
I have been gathering roses!
Begging them from laughing friends in Babylon,

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From smiling friends in Borsippa,
Buying them from the gardens of wondering venders,
Buying them even from the sellers in the streets
Who gaped in amazement,
Thus selling all their roses at one time,
To one man,
Divinely mad!

Full of roses are the gardens of "The Envy of
Princes"

Yet not one would I gather,
For these are the gardens thrice blessed
Through which Iltani will pass
On the night of bridal.
The walls of my house shine with roses.
Not a rose would I gather
From the walls that will shelter Iltani
On the night of bridal.
Thus all the bridal morning,
I have been gathering the roses of others,
Roses brought from far cities and distant lands,
Heaping them on the shoulders of my slaves,
Roses, roses, ever more and more roses!
The way from Babylon to Borsippa
Is as a garden walking;
Is as a moving way of roses;
Roses of India,
Roses of China,

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Roses of Persia,
Roses from Baalbec and Damascus,
From the banks of Pharpar and Abana,
Little dark roses of Babylon fairest of all to me,
Because of my Rose of Babylon,
That lady the rose Iltani!

Under a trellis of roses
Sheltered by secret walls
Hung with roses,
I have caused to be set the bridal couch of ivory
On a platform of precious Thyine wood,
Carved with roses.
Like the couch of a queen,
Like a queen's bridal couch.
It is adorned with purple and fine linen;
With fine linen
Edged with needlework
Of golden roses,
With purple silk embroidered cunningly
In roses of silver.

With my own hands
Of a worshipper,
As upon an altar
I have sprinkled upon it
Attar of roses.
The bridal couch of Iltani
Is like a rose!

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Hear, O my rose!
Rose of roses,
Blossom of Blossoms,
You shall walk to delight
Over roses.
For I have strewn with them my garden paths
And the floors of my house,
So deep they lie about the bridal couch
That I am jealous.
For they will kiss your girdle
Before I can.
My bride is a rose,
Queen of roses,
King of Bees am I,
Belânu, her bridegroom!

II

Hear, O beloved, another song
Of how longing for worthiness
As bridegroom of Iltani,—
Longing to be in all things worthy
Of that honour the highest, the most delicious,
I, Belânu, upon my bridal eve
Repaired to E-Sagila, to the temple of Marduk
For purification at the shrine of Ishtar
From lesser loves of days gone by,
From loves that were as poisonous gnats

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Stinging me in days gone forever,
Stinging my flesh but not my heart
Where now nestles that dove of silver flame
Iltani, the bird of Ishtar.

At the shrine of Ishtar
I offered as burnt offering
A female ruby having many sides,
Pale in hue as had been the loves it represented,
Of many facets little as had been those loves.
I burnt also upon the Altar,
In the name of Iltani
A pure pearl, unpierced, perfect,
Flawless as the heart of Iltani.

As votive offering
I hung above the shrine a necklace of lordly em-
eralds,
Of the immaculate stones that repel impure desire,
Vowing faithfulness in the name of Ishtar, to my
belovéd,
To her whose heart is winged with silver fire,
Iltani, dove of Ishtar.

Then did the holy *âshipu*
Chant over me the words that drive out evil;
Then did the holy *pashishu*
Pour upon my head the sacred ointment;

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Then did the holy *nisakku*
Pour out in my name to Ishtar
The wine of libation;
Then did I stand gladly before the shrine of Ishtar,
With heart purified,
Worthy to be the shrine of the bird of Ishtar.

Great was my joy,
Great was my heart with devotion to Ishtar,
With devotion to her brother, Marduk, the resplendent
I made obeisance also at his shrine,
At the shrine of him who is Lord of E-Sagila,
Lord of the Lofty House
And of the world.
Seven shekels of gold did I give to his high-priest
That songs might be sung in his honour
By the holy *zammeru*,
That music might be played in his honour,
By the holy *lallaru*,
In the name of Belânu and Iltani,
Night and day without ceasing,
During the month of bridal.

So great now was my joy
That I wished not to leave the house of Marduk,
That I desired to keep vigil in E-Sagila
All the night preceding my bridal day.

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Therefore I made offering of a star-sapphire
To the holy *barû*, who watches the stars,
Who interprets the divine writing on the heavens,
And he also blessed me,
Suffering me to mount with him to the seventh stage,
Even to the topmost stage of the Temple Tower
Whereon is the golden statue of Bêl-Marduk
Twelve cubits in height, all magnificent,
Blazing against the onyx sky like a pillar of sunlight.
The priest of the holy stars
Would not suffer me to approach the shrine of Bêl
At the foot of his golden image,
That shrine sacrosanct,
For worship of his priests only:
But to the observation place of the stars,
He made me welcome,
Saying in the voice of a father,
“ Be you welcome, my son ;
Watch here on the eve of love,
Under the beams of the star of love.
The Star of Ishtar, lady Goddess of love.
Be you blessed, my son, in your vigil,
You and your love and the lady of your love.”

And standing upon the top of the Temple Tower
I beheld Babylon spread beneath me
Like a mantle of divers colours,
Like the mantle of a king

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

That the dyers have spread out to dry.
Flowers of light were as fallen stars upon it,
The shadows of its folds were marvellous,
Full of awe.

Round about its borders,
Like an edging of dim silver,
Like a purfling of glass,
Wandered the sacred river.

I could see the ferrymen in their boats
Moving as water-flies upon it,
I could see the reflections of their torches
Lacing it from bank to bank
As with serpents of fire,
As with glistening embroideries of gold upon silver
That shine round about the border of a King's
mantle.

Also the hanging gardens of the King,
The secret gardens circled by Imgur-Bêl,
Were revealed to my wondering eyes.
I was as a slave who should behold suddenly
The uncovered breast of a queen.

I withdrew my eyes, looking upward
And lo! Night as high-priest of all the gods
Bending above me,
Wearing a breast-plate of stars,
Mitred with the moon,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Having about his neck as seal of his high office
The Star of Ishtar.

I trembled and looked down again,
Searching for the little, well-loved street
Where stands the house of your lady mother,
Soothing the vertigo of infinity
By thinking on my little rose of Babylon
Folded warm and mortal beneath its roof,
In the sweet sleep of earth.

Then a second time I looked upward,
Gazing now only upon the Star of Ishtar,
Making obeisance to it,
In your name and mine.
And as I rose from making obeisance
The priest drew near to me
With the smile of an indulgent father,
Saying, "O Belânu, son of Mar-irsitim
I, even I, Iddin-Marduk, watcher of the holy stars,
Have for you a bridal gift."
Whereon, ever smiling,
He took my hand in his, leading me,
Saying to me, "This is my bridal gift to you,
That you shall gaze upon the Star of Ishtar
Through the sacred lens of crystal
More precious by far,
Than the great elmêshu stone
In the diadem of the King."

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

With awe I approached the sacred lens
Which is set in a cylinder of virgin gold,
In a golden tube longer by many lengths
Than the golden temple-horns of E-Anna,
Of the Heavenly House at far famed Uruk
Sacred to Ishtar.

With awe I held aloof from it,
Saying unto the priest of the holy stars:
"What if I be unworthy of this gift, O father?"

Thus he answered me:

"Not you but your love is worthy, O my son.
For I who read the hearts of men,
Even as I read the stars on Nabu's tablet,
Have read your heart,
Have read your love,
Finding it worthy.

Know that there is a love beyond love, O my son,
Beyond the hunger of man for woman,
Beyond the thirst of woman for man.

And in your love for your lady,
I have discerned this love also,
Like a thread of pure light
Woven through a tapestry of flame.

Wherefore, my son, approach,
Looking without fear through the sacred lens
Upon the Star of Love."

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

And looking through the lens of crystal
I beheld as it were a fountain of precious stones
Playing athwart a mist of pearl dust;
As it were a shield of silver fire
Bathed in rainbows,
And lo! on a sudden I was falling upward
Drawn by the irresistible magic of celestial beauty,
Helpless as a spark in the talons of the wind,—
I, Belânu, yet not Belânu,
I, in the body, yet not in the body,
I, myself, yet more than myself,
I, ever Iltani's, yet more than Iltani's.
And I perceived suddenly
That I was standing in the centre of space,
Upon the summit of the Mountain of the West,
Upon the dread Mountain that upholds the firmament,
And gazing awe-struck
I beheld the shining bark of Sin, the Moon-God,
Sailing toward me across the ocean of ether.
Within it was Sin himself, steering it,
Resplendent beyond splendence,
At the prow stood the Lady Ishtar,
Beautiful beyond beauty.
I fell upon my face in worship
But they bade me rise,
They bade me rise and enter into the bark with them

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

And being entered in, the Goddess of goddesses spake
to me,

Saying: "Thou that art said to know the love be-
yond love,

Thou that hast been purified in an earthly temple,

Thou shalt be purified in heavenly temples

If — thou knowest verily the love that is beyond
love!"

And it seemed to me that in her voice was mocking,

And it seemed to me that the smile of Sin, her father,

Held mockery.

Yet was my heart strong within me,

For I knew that I loved my lady beyond hunger

Even as my lady loved me beyond thirst,

Yea, I knew that I loved Iltani beyond the love of
man for woman,

With that love which seeks even beyond the gods,

For a god still greater

With the love of the poet for poetry

Which is as the love of that God beyond gods

For the beauty that is beyond beauty.

And again Ishtar spake, saying:

"Thou shalt be purified in heavenly temples of the
god,

With gods as witnesses;

Thou shalt be purified and consumed

Or thou shalt be purified and live,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

According to thy love ;
For if thy love be mortal only
Thou shalt perish,
But if thy love contain within it,
Even so much as a mote of the love beyond love,
Thou shalt survive.
Behold the witnesses ! ”

And I lifted up mine eyes,
And lo ! a fleet of heavenly ships
Terrible in effulgence,
Gathering from the four quarters of the heavens.
In the nigh-most ship blazed the form of Marduk,
And of Sarpanit, his shining consort,
And of Nabu, his mighty son,
The glorious Legitimate,
Scribe of the gods,
Together with Tashmit his consort ;
And following them sailed all the chief gods,
With the goddesses their consorts,
In barks of light,
And all the Anunnaki
With their consorts
In lesser barks,
And the heavens glared with insufferable splendour.

Again Ishtar spake, saying :
“ First thou shalt enter into the Temple of the Moon,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

O Belânu, aspiring one,—
Into the heavenly house of Sin, my father,
Which is wrought of frozen fire,
Burning with coldness
More than all the fires of earth with hotness! ”
And the gods cried as with one voice:
“ Let him enter into the Temple of the Moon! ”
Sin steered to the portals of the moon,
Sin and Ishtar thrust me within them,
The glory of the moon was as a million swords of
 crystal
Piercing my eyes:
The frozen fire of the moon was as a million spears
 of ice
Piercing my heart:
The thought of my heart was
“ O how bitter is the jesting of the gods,
That Iltani’s lover should perish of frozen fire! ”
And behold! the thought of Iltani,
The thought of my belovéd,
Kept me warm even in the house of Sin,
Even in the midst of the frozen moon-fire!

Ishtar called to me with mocking:
“ Come forth again! ”
Sin called to me with mocking;
“ Come forth again! ”

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

And the gods all laughed together
As when Ramman clashes the cymbals of thunder.

I came forth,
I came forth unhurt,
And there fell silence upon the gods.

Then spake Marduk, Lord of Heaven and Earth,
Lord of the gods:

“ Verily, this mortal is a mighty lover!
He hath survived the ordeal of the Moon,
Let him now withstand the ordeal of the Sun.
Let him enter into my heavenly house
Wherein Shamash only of all the gods
May dwell in safety.”

And all the gods cried as with one voice:
“ Let him enter into the heavenly temple of the
Sun! ”

Marduk took me within his ship of light,
Steering to the portals of the Sun:
Marduk and Sarpanit thrust me within them.
The glory of the Sun was as a billion dragons of fire
Devouring my eyes:
The raging hotness of the Sun was as a billion de-
mons of fever
Devouring my heart:

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

The thought of my heart was:

“ O how merciless is the jesting of the gods
That Iltani's lover should perish of fire
Whom the fire of love could not consume! ”

And behold my love for Iltani

Was as an armour about me

Casting off the terrible shafts of the Sun-fire

As they had been arrows of cassia wood tipped with
yellow flowers!

Marduk called to me with mocking:

“ Come forth again! ”

Sarpanit called to me with mocking:

“ Come forth again! ”

Sin and Ishtar laughed and the gods with them.

I came forth as they bade me,

I came forth unharmed.

The gods were silent,

Some bowing their heads as in thought.

Nabu the scribe of the gods,

The patron deity of poets

And of fair Borsippa,

Inscribed these things upon his tablets,

Resting them against the knees of Tashmit

His belovéd consort,

Smiling a secret smile.

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Then spake Marduk a second time,
Addressing his words to me,
Even to me all unworthy,
Thus said Marduk:

“Thou hast won the right to ask two questions of
the gods,

Two questions mayest thou ask the gods, O Belânu,
And the gods will answer thee.”

Making obeisance, thus did I reply:

“O mighty Lord, Marduk Lord of the Gods,
Praised be thy name forever!

This would I know:

Are ye, the gods here assembled, all in all?
Or is there above ye yet another god?”

And the gods veiled their faces.

Marduk also having veiled his face, answered thus:
“There is a god above us.”

Then for a second question I asked this thing:

“Grant me to know the name of that god, O Mar-
duk!

That I may worship him!”

And Marduk answered me from behind the veil:

“Not even to us the gods is His name known,
But the fear of him is called the Rose of Wisdom.”

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

Thereat, I found myself again upon the tower
Of the earthly temple of Bêl-Marduk
In dear, familiar Babylon,
And the priest of the holy stars knelt beside me,
Laving my forehead, breathing into my nostrils,
Whispering to me:

“ Was the vision beneficent, O my son? ”

And I said: “ The vision was beneficent, O my
father.”

So he bade me go in peace,
Blessing me a second time,
For the dawn was breaking,
The dawn of my bridal with Iltani.

And thus, O my rose!
I bring you as crowning gift
The Rose of Wisdom,
Which is the worship of the God beyond the gods,
Whose name even the gods know not:
Yet my heart knoweth it,
Yea, sure is my heart, O beloved,
That the name of the God beyond the gods
Is Love-beyond-love.

XX

Iltani, the bride, to her Lord the bridegroom, Be-
lânu:

A little song of belief and unbelief on the day after
Marriage.

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

I believe in love,
I believe in my lord Belânu:
I believe in joy,
I believe in my lord Belânu:
I believe in light,
I do not believe in darkness:
I believe in Ishtar the loving,
I do not believe in Ereshkigal the implacable:
I believe in life,
I do not believe in Aralû the place of death;
I believe in my lord Belânu
And in the new-found God of Belânu
The God beyond gods,
Whose name is Love-beyond-love:
I believe that he will deal with us the greatly loving,
As Enlil with Ut-napishtim and his beloved
When after the terrible flood had abated,
Taking them by the hand he led them up,
Touching their foreheads, blessing them,
Saying: "Hitherto Ut-napishtim was only a man,
Now he and the wife of his love shall be as gods.
They shall dwell in the high distance,
At the confluence of heavenly waters
In the shining land above the earth,
At the meeting of the rivers of everlastingness."
This I believe, I the joyous apostate Iltani,
Who have turned from the dark god,
From the dark goddess,

BELÂNU AND ILTANI

From Nergal terrible king of Aralû,
From Ereshkigal terrible queen of Aralû,
To worship the God of Belânu
Because of my love for Belânu,
Because of my faith in Belânu,
Because of my worship for Belânu
Who himself is as a god to me!

Such are the beliefs and the unbeliefs of Iltani,
The happy apostate, Belânu's bride, Iltani!

FANTASIA

LIFE

I THOUGHT I really knew Life,
For I had known her a long time,
But she is a various wench,
Hard to be wholly known
'At any time,
Something indeed of a witch-wife
Is Life.

I came upon her suddenly in a trench
Gnawing a bone,
A boy's breast-bone.

Her dress was in tatters,
Party-colored like tattered flesh;
Her hair was a wet scarlet mesh,
Her eyes greedy and bleared.

There were flakes of unspeakable disgust upon her
head,

Her face was abominably smeared,
Even her teeth were red:
And she snarled: *Nothing matters!*

Let me alone!

Slavering and mumbling that awful, piteous bone.

I did not stay,
I fled away, away, away

LIFE

With a thundering of horror in my ears,
And my heart lanced with fears,
And my heart-strings clanging with grief and pain.
I thought, "*Never again, never again*
Will I care for Life!
She is not friendly to us,
She is a ghoul-wife,
A Succubus."

I longed to know Death,
Because I thought he hated Life as I did,
He was coming to visit me,
But something happened to forbid;
And wandering drearily
Forth from the room where I had awaited him in
vain,
I came again
On Life.
Oh, she *is* a witch-wife!
She was beautifully drest,
Clean and fragrant as rain
In her April best;
Her smooth hair smelt of the sun,
The buds of her breast
Shone through leaves half undone.
She was nursing a half-blown flower
With a look in her mild eyes,
Of the Madonna nursing the little Jesus,

LIFE

Part love, part holy surprise:
She whispered: "*You may look at us,
But do not speak. Steal away!
This is my most sacred hour!*"
I did not stay:
On tiptoe I went away.
With a strange music in my ears,
In my eyes pleasant tears.
In my heart an enchanting pain.
I thought: *Now once again,
I am tempted to love Life,
It cannot be that she is really unfriendly to us,
She is only various,
Not a witch but a fairy-wife!*

I came on her a third time;
It was in a city,
She was going about the street
In winter of a cold clime,
Quite naked save for a coating of rankly scented
powder,
And a lynx-pelt dyed purple over one shoulder,
There were soiled, high-heeled, white boots with
many buttons on her feet,
Vulgarly, wantonly fashionable little boots,—
Her eyelids were painted blue,
Her eyes were lasciviously watchful and without
pity;

LIFE

She looked both younger and older,
Having in her air something ancient yet very new;
Something at once servile yet much prouder;
Walking with the harlot's gait,
Rotating her limber hips,
Shaking her pointed breast-fruits
That had suckled flowers:
Her prim smile was a little red-beast lying in wait,
Her mouth had the carnivore's flat glistening lips;
She had lost all memory of her sacred hours.
Yet there was still about her
Something of the witch, even of the goddess,
She might have been Venus Cloacina
Herself, no less,
Questing through that modern city
As through ancient Rome,
Lascivious without cleanliness or pity,
Without shrine or home;
For I do not agree with Plinius about Cloacina,
Being sure that there is a Venus of Sewers,
And that I have seen Life in her likeness.
She flounced against me
As I gazed at her with heart-sickness,
Leaving on the folds of my dress
A loathly odor of chypre and warm musk,
Crying roughly: "Get out of my way!"
For I stood between her and a redly corpulent Jew,
Yellow of tusk,

LIFE

Studded with diamonds
Like the lump of flesh brought by the Roc to Sinbad
From the Valley of Diamonds.
I turned and flew;
My heels seemed to sprout wings I was so glad
To be going away from her,
From Life in that odious guise.
I thought: *Never again, never,*
Never again, either for joy or pain
Can she bring me surprise,
This terrible witch-wife,
This creature that men call Life!

Yet when for the fourth time I saw her,
Quite unexpectedly,
I confess that I was staggered;
If there is any vocation more avowedly,
More meticulously opposed to Life
Than that of being Chela to a Buddhist priest,
I, at least,
Have not heard of it from book or philosopher;
Yet there sat Life,
Exactly as though she might have been Siddartha's
 wife
Piously attired in bombastically humble yellow,
At the feet of her rigidly denatured Guru,—
So meek of mien that her meekness actually swag-
 gered,

LIFE

So wasted with fasting that the shadow,
Darkly bluish in hue,
Of Death's bony symbol within,
Showed through her rarefied flesh
As the shadow of a chick shows through an egg-shell
Lifted against the sun.
Shorn away was the voluptuous mesh
Of her violently animate hair :
Her eyes were like pious tapers that had never kindled a sin,
Like holy tapers burning only with desire for extinction
In the airless spaces of Nirvana.
Never, never was there,
No never, a more devoutly sexless nun,
Her sacred attitude was a perfect imitation of death,—
You would have said she had learned to exist,
Without *prana*,
Without breath,
On theological mist.
It was odious to see Life thus aping Death.
But she was sincere entirely
Even thus denying herself through negation
Blaspheming against herself with fanatic ardour,
With a sort of ecstatic gusto in abandoning all savour.
She neither looked at me nor spoke to me,

LIFE

Being paralyzed with contemplation,
But her silence urged me not to stay.
I went heavily away,
Bent beneath my pack of thought,—
Wondering whether Life
Is really a witch-wife,
Is everything in pell-mell succession,
Or is — nought.

I begged Ti'u the fever-demon
To tell me what Life is verily,—
Whether only the incontinent leman
Of Necessity,
Or something still more divinely outrageous.
Ti'u giggled merrily
Sitting cross-legged upon my breast,
And searing my lips with red-hot finger nails,
By way of a minor deity's little jest:
“*What does it signify,*” said Ti'u,
“*What Life is verily?*
You and I are thus:
Except this present moment nothing avails
For either of us. . . .”

I implored Ti'u,
Not even protesting
When he set my hair on fire
Causing my brain to boil in my skull

LIFE

Like *ministrone* in a pot:

“ O *Ti'u*,

I will submit to anything

So you grant my desire!

I will even go without a whimper to Aralû.

What is it to you,

O *Ti'u*,

Whether I am amused or not

While you are torturing me?

I am convinced that it is equally dull

For both of us, to be solely preoccupied with fever;

Show me, if only in a dream,

Life, in her primordial form;

For she is always a-masking,

At other times. How can I believe her,

*Or even you, O *Ti'u*!*

Or that I am I, or that any of us are us,

When all things seem

Even as Life does, to be something essentially dif-
ferent

From what we think them to be?

Surely it is not much that I am asking,—

I do not require you to create a magic storm,

Or anything of that sort;—the favour is not pro-
digious

Really.”

Ti'u became intent

LIFE

Upon making one blazing second seem a thousand
years.

I would not scream

Even in the apparently endless boredom of fever,

And my indifference bored Ti'u,

Who prefers having us howl out our fears

And agonies,—

A demonic fad of his.

He said at last, with infernal sulkiness;

"Very well:

I will give you a dream of Life in her true likeness;

That will make you yell!"

Into a cavern of hot, black cobwebs he plunged me

There was no time there:

Whether I remained for æons or for a moment,

I have no power of reckoning:

Darkness was everywhere,

And suffocating immensity,

Without content.

All at once I became horribly aware

That the cavern wherein Ti'u had plunged me

Was Space;

And as suddenly I beheld Life,

Grown gigantic, overwhelming,

Incredibly monstrous,

Moving through it from zenith to nadir,

From nadir to zenith,

LIFE

From the four quarters to the four quarters,
Backward, forward, upward, downward, far, near,
Implacably and supernally industrious.
I could not discern her face,
But her breath was burning nebulæ,
The black flame of her hair filled the interstellar re-
gions,
Eternity was unrolled beneath her feet like a carpet;
She moved to the sound of immemorial waters:
Like the winnowing of innumerable legions,
Like the cohorts of heaven in strong flight,
Was the sound of her unresting pinions,
And the beating of her garments therewith;
As she moved upon her terrific way,
Her shadow athwart eternity was more blinding than
light.

At her side sped Death,
Eager as a docile lad to do her will:
She bade him quench suns and he quenched them:
She bade him stop the breath
Of a special pismire upon a special grass-blade of
earth,
And he obeyed.
He ran, as she ordered him, to kill and kill;
Or he came back when she beckoned him, without
killing.

LIFE

Once at her command he slew an Emperor and all
his minions

Yet spared the palace kitchen maid.

Whenever she ordered: "Do thus and thus, my
son,"

He bowed to her garment's hem,

Murmuring, "Thy will be done, my mother,"

Obsequiously over-willing.

What he destroyed

She took again into her huge grasp

Re-modelling, re-animating:

I could hear her thinking:

Good! That is better done this time.

She ripped dead stars from their sockets

And flung them about one by one,

Re-kindling them to super-terrestrial rockets.

She undid the clasp

Of Saturn's belt and drew it tighter,

Loosened the ribbon of the Fishes,

Re-strung the Lyre,

Breathing upon it to make it brighter,

Set a new comet's mane a-fire:

Upon the Pleiades rang a stupendous chime

Carrying out all her most whimsical wishes;

Gathering universes into the lap of her garment

And tossing them into a distant void,

As on earth another

Would toss seed into fresh loam for re-birth,

LIFE

Doing exactly as she pleased with the firmament.
I felt passionately annoyed,
She was so like a domineering house-wife
Setting space in order.
If this is indeed Life,
I thought angrily,
And there is a god in Israel,
Then she is no less than God's wife,
And Jahweh is henpecked verily,
Else he would not be content,
No matter what befell,
To muse apart in philosophic detachment
Contemplating his own magnificence
And allowing Life to do just as she chooses
With supernal insolence
While he muses,
Rather than enter into a celestial wrangle.
There should certainly be a Recorder
To force this matter upon the notice of God,
That he might re-consider it from a new heavenly
angle
And once more take up his official rod.
As it is, we have over us not Jahweh, but his wife,
This omnipotent hussy Life!
And suddenly Life seemed so horrific to me,
That I shrieked desperately. . . .
And there was only Ti'u,
Sitting cross-legged upon my breast,

LIFE

Grinning at me with excessive enjoyment.

He asked: "*Well? Have you had a pleasant rest?
Are you content?*"

I laughed at him fiercely, saying: "*I know you!
You are no demon, T'iu,
You are only a fever —
But I,— I am a believer!*"

These things I heard with my ears, and saw with my
eyes,

When I was sick of a fever;

Now that I am well again, I think otherwise.

JEWELS OF DARKNESS

(To my Collie)

DARKNESS hangs many veils
Between waking and sleeping,
Some most beautiful, others terrible;
One by one they unfurl,
Drifting downward
In delicate folds, at first elusively diapered,
Burning later to clearness
Of moving forms
Diverse and myriad.
None can tell what manner of veil fair or horrible
Darkness will choose as the last
To close him in from waking.

Most of all do I dread the curtain of wavy crimson
Broidered with terrible jewels,
Jewels of eyes unsocketed
Patterned by twos and twos on the gauze of Dark-
ness,
Eyes of helpless creatures that lived and died in be-
wilderment
In a dim confusion of patience
Having endured to the utmost man's bitter injustice
Without bitterness.

JEWELS OF DARKNESS

Eyes of nightingales blinded with red-hot needles
That for their torturers
They might sing more sweetly ;
Eyes of half-starved horses
Flogged to death because of their weakness
By the man who starved them ;
Eyes of desert creatures,
Of crag-born eagles
Dying of fierce nostalgia
In iron cages :
Eyes that belonged to pitiful, cringing bodies
Shredded while sentient,
Nerve by nerve, with bright, inquisitive scalpels
In eager hands of the self-same substance,
In hands of flesh threaded also with nerves.

O terrible, terrible almost beyond endurance
Are the jewels of darkness,
The jewels of eyes ever asking, asking,
In patient bewilderment
For the answer that no one knows.
All the night that is past
Their mournful, submissive questioning
Troubled my heart to anguish . . .
So that I turned my own eyes away from them
Looking toward God,
That God by Christians and Jews called Jahweh,
By Mahomedans Allah,

JEWELS OF DARKNESS

But I knew that my look toward him
Was one with their look toward me,—
That he would not answer:
And horror stiffened my heart,
Horror of God, of this God and his immemorial
indifference,
His Omnipotent self-complacency.

And I cried aloud in unbelief and rebellion,
“ It cannot be that there is that one God only,
Dwelling in calm aloofness,
Creator of endless suffering,
Bland and scathless tormentor of all things living.
It is not enough, no! it is not enough
That once as Man he descended,
Once only,
To share in the pangs that all flesh is forever en-
during.
One God cannot atone by one Cross only,
For all the anguish of beast and man through the
ages,
Through ages past and to come!
Oh, that some younger, humaner God would an-
swer me. ”

Then from the smother of silence
Laughter jetted,
Clear and chill as a spurt of April water

JEWELS OF DARKNESS

Shot from a shadowy fountain into sunlight;
Into my dream he flashed with it,
Radiant, beautiful, adolescent,
A boy god shaken with mirth celestial,
Divinely heartless.

“O little Mortal,” his words came broken with
merriment,

“Answer me first this thing,
Then you may question me;
Why, since men who are verily gods to the beasts
Show them no mercy,
Should we the gods above men
Show men compassion?”

But I could not answer him this
And awoke weeping.

THE MAGIC TREE

(To Amy Lowell)

SHE said in her heart,
In her strange various heart
Brimmed with magic:
*The Tree of Life in the garden near Babylon,
The Tree of Life that bears only one kind of fruit,—
It is not sufficient for me,
I will create my own Tree of Life;
Out of the soil that poets have tilled for ages,
Out of that soil still gravid
My tree of Life shall spring.
Bearing many fruits,
Many blossoms,
Bearing things no other tree has borne,
Amazing,
Different,
The cup of my heart is filled with magic,
Into the cup of my heart
Like a bird diving
Shall dart my thought
Bringing forth the jewel of power.
The pearl that dissolves not*

THE MAGIC TREE

*In the acid of Magic,
The mystic jewel beyond price,
That I may create for myself
By myself
My Tree of Life.*

She went apart quietly
To a quiet place
Of steadfast winds and stars that waited for sunrise
Her quiet mind as steadfast,
She locked triply
Against all things alien,
Awaiting sunrise
With the winds and stars.
And when the golden mast
Of the first day-beam
Thrust above the horizon,
It was as if the galleon of the sun
Bore down upon her freighted with treasure,
With innumerable promises,
With fulfillment.
And breathing upon the soil consecrated to poets,
She cried: "*Now! Now, spring forth!
Spring forth my tree of Life!
Arise! Glitter!*"
And from that soil long delved,
Worn with fruitage,
Twigs of crystal, many coloured, antlered up

THE MAGIC TREE

Bearing leaves of silver,
Of gold, of copper,
Of jade pallid as the white of women's eyes,
Darker than the scales of dragons,
Clearer than the core of polar ice,—
Bearing blossoms more incredible than orchids
Redder than the red in dreams,
Bluer than the blue of visions,
Of shapes fourth dimensional,
And fifth dimensional,
Terrible as the faces seen in fever,
Beautiful as the faces seen in the fever of love,—
Bearing fruit of precious stones,
Bearing samtu-stones as fruit
Like the tree in the sanctuary of Irnina;
And the crystal branches
Rhyming in form and sound,
Gave forth music,
And the jewelled fruit sang also
But with sweet dissonance
Dissimilar,
As in shape and colour;
Even the leaves and blossoms
Chimed delicately,
Trembling,
As though one should shake the Tree of Heaven
And set the stars ringing against one another.
Higher and higher rose the marvel

THE MAGIC TREE

Till it stood with strong roots
Knuckling down into the warm earth,
And lo! its massive trunk
Was not of crystal
But of living wood,
And its bark clothed with fungi
Shaped fantastically,
Charmingly,
Ludicrously,
Like little men and women,
Like imps, leprechauns, pucks, satyrs,
Things animate,
Uttering little laughs,
Little cries of rage, or grief, or pleasure,
Little songs rapid as the drumming of wood-peckers,
Little choruses of sharp notes,
Passionate as the thrumming of hares' feet in Spring!
Never, never before had such a tree
Sprung from the soil consecrated to poets!

And gazing at it she smiled,
A secret smile.

And she said:

“ Now I shall have a house fitted to my spirit! ”

Whereon she slipped within it,
After the mysterious fashion of dryads,
For she knew that to keep it blossoming,

THE MAGIC TREE

She must give it her heart's blood for sap,
And to keep it fruitful,
She must quicken it with her thought
Which like a bird diving,
Had brought forth from the depth of her heart
The jewel of power,
That she might create for herself
By herself,
Her Tree of Life.

THE SKY DANCER

(*To Michael Strange*)

YOU, the balancer upon star-beams,
You, the height intoxicated,
With forehead sparkled by star-dust
As by strange pollen from Celestial flowers,—
You, dancing rapt over infinite abysses,
On a thread of light
More subtile than the most subtile thought,—
You having plucked from Hermes the Caduceus
To serve as balancing rod
In your aerial gyrations,
In your prisms flashings
On courses forbidden
To the meek and obedient planets,—
You, flinging yourself even from that thread of light
Grasping only the wingéd rod
And diving headlong into space
Hearing the soft hiss of the twin serpents
Urging you on, on,—
You, enamoured of the inexpressible,
In love with the unutterable,
Frantic for the non-existent,

THE SKY DANCER

You, the soul that slipped through God's fingers
Before He could tame it,
You pulsing with divine resentment
That God should be one and you another,
You heaven-sick for regions that no god has yet ap-
propriated,
Thirsting to gulp eternity at a draught
And pour infinity into the cup of your thought,
You that would shatter heaven like a crystal bowl
Could you but grasp it in your little hands
For the sheer delight of exploring what lies be-
yond it,
You, a voice singing in the spatial wilderness of your
own amazement,
The wingéd lute of gods yet to be born,
You are young, young, and I love you for it!

HEAVENS

(To Helen my Kinswoman)

ACHING with many ignorances,
With the Supreme Ignorance
Hardest of all to bear,
I laid myself down upon my bed
Longing to win through sleep
To the Place of Blueness;

There are many places in many lands of sleep
Where I have wandered wondering
Through all my life of dreaming,—
Places sweetly or terribly familiar as those of earth,
But this that I call the Place of Blueness
Is by far the loveliest and most marvellous.
Its peace is as the stillness of beings invisible
Waiting for the Great Disclosure
That shall bring fulfillment of unimaginable beati-
tude
To all that was, or is, or ever shall be.
Its blueness is more ineffable
Than skies and flowers of long vanished Aprils
Remembered by one dying in a desert.
If there are children angels with blue eyes,
Such is the blue of its fields of lilies

HEAVENS

Blowing lightly even to the mild horizon;
Such also is the blue of its blossoming orchards
And the far hills that float above them.
If the Maiden Mary indeed wears veils of blue in
 heaven,
Of that colour is the shining scarf of water
That girdles this fairest of the lands of dreaming.
Blue are all the stars in its blue heaven
And a moon of crystal azure hangs above it
Like a magic jewel
Swung from threads of silver.
There is also the pool that I call "Expectation,"
Rayed with five rays of light like a star-sapphire,—
The pool beside which I love to rest from living,
Hoping always that some compassionate angel
May trouble the rapt waters,
May descend and interpret for me
The wonders that lie veiled in the depths of my
 ignorance
Which has no rays of light wheeling through it
Like the wonderful pool of expectation.
And suddenly as I lay longing,
The Place of Blueness unfolded about me like a
 flower,
And the starry pool gleamed beside me,
And in my heart I said with exultation:
This night will the waters surely be troubled,

HEAVENS

This night there will be answering.
Yet when the waters trembled,
I saw coming toward me no lordly angel
But a little maid girt with silvery wings,
Having buds of blue heaven-flowers in her hair —
A little child that I had loved dearly
When she dwelt on earth.
Smiling, answering my thought, she called to me:
“ I know! It’s about heaven that you want me to
tell you! ”
And balancing happily on the blue lilies
In her little frock of spun glass
And rainbow shoes,
Furling and unfurling her silvery wings
Like a celestial butterfly
She told me of Heaven in these words:

“ Heaven is a place where you can play all the time,
Where you have new toys every hour that don’t break,
Where you can pick all the flowers and fruit you
want to
And nobody says anything cross to you about it,
Where you can eat heavenly sugar plums by the
bushel
And never, never be sick afterwards.
Heaven is a place where there are no nurses or nurse
maids

HEAVENS

To put soap in your ears and eyes,
Or to curl your hair on horrid curl-papers
That are so bumpy you can't sleep at night;
It's a place where you never have to go to bed
Or to school,
And can play even on Sunday
Because there aren't any Churches or Sermons there,
And where you don't have to say your prayers,
Because what's the use? When God is there with
 you,
Always thinking up nice, new joys for you:
It's a place where you can wish for any sort of frock
And there it is on you, without having to be hooked
 or buttoned up,
And doesn't ever get dirty;
And where people always kiss you and never slap
 you,
And where you dance and sing beautifully
Without having to learn how;
And where there are no books
But the grown-up angels tell you fairy tales
Out of their heads, as many as you want,
Forever and ever.
There! one is calling me now!
I'll really have to go
Because she's the best fairy-tale teller in heaven!
Good-by! ”

HEAVENS

And blowing me a kiss she was gone,
The little, radiant one,
Gone back to heaven.

“ Ah, yes,” I thought, “ yes, yes,— of course,—
That is truly heaven — for little Cynthia.”

But my heart was not satisfied,
And I waited, eagerly hoping that another angel
More grown-up than little Cynthia
Would descend to trouble the waters
And tell me something further of heaven.

And presently the waters trembled again
And a young man-angel of whom I had been very
fond

When he lived upon earth,
Came rather shyly towards me,
Balancing on strong, beautiful wings
As if a little embarrassed by them,
And he said to me, nodding back at them,
“ These aren't really there, you know.
It's only because of your dream that you see them.”
I said “ Of course,” and made him welcome
To the Place of Blueness,
And he remarked presently,
“ This is really a very jolly sort of place you've
dreamed of.”

HEAVENS

Then I ventured to ask him what sort of a place
 heaven is,

And he answered:

“ It’s really not at all unlike earth,

Only much more beautiful,—

There are trees, flowers, colours,— all that sort of
 thing;

And awfully interesting people.

We work a bit, and amuse ourselves a bit.

Music, of course,— perfectly wonderful music —

On all sorts of instruments,

Better than those we had on earth

But still very much like them,—

No pianos though.”

He told me a good deal more of such things

And then I asked him with reverence

About the Holy Family.

(He was an ardent Catholic)

Had he seen the Madonna?

“ Oh, yes! She is wonderfully kind,

Amazingly gracious,

It helps a chap not to miss his own mater so awfully,

Our Blessed Lady is so understanding and motherly.”

The Lord Jesus he had seen also,

But only for a moment.

“ There was such a tremendous crowd about Him,

HEAVENS

All more fit to be there than I was," he answered
humbly,

As if relieved to change the subject

He added suddenly,

" I'm going on with my painting, you know ;

The angels are most awfully obliging —

Michael is posing for me now in full armour.

It's simply ripping to paint with heavenly pigments,

They're like those on earth but better.

I wish I could explain exactly."

" And you are happy? " I murmured.

" Oh, perfectly! I wouldn't come back to earth for
anything.

Don't you see? It's almost exactly like earth

Only a thousand times better. . . .

And then one's so much nearer to God. . . .

As for ceremonial . . .

You should hear High Mass chanted by the Sera-
phim! "

I was sorry when he had to go back to heaven,

And yet my heart was not satisfied.

Two or three more of the angels who had been men
and women

Descended to tell me about heaven,

Yet though they spoke very eloquently,

HEAVENS

With none of the heavens that they described
Was my heart satisfied.
And there even came down to me my dear black
“ Mammy,”
Though how I knew it was my “ Mammy ” I cannot
tell,
For she did not look in the least as she did on earth,
But this is all that she said to me about heaven:
“ Honey, heaven is a place where every nigger is
white! ”

And when she had left me I cried out bitterly:
“ Oh, if some angel who had never been child, or
man, or woman,
Would come down and tell me of his heaven! ”
And immediately the waters shook as with awe,
And there stood before me one that I could see but
as light,
Who spoke to me with a voice that I could hear only
as music remembered,
Yet so beautiful he was,
And so wonderful his speaking,
That my spirit shook like the waters.

“ How shall I tell you of heaven? ” he questioned me,
“ How shall I tell you of the illimitable,
You that are sealed within your five wits,
Like a djinn sealed within an iron vessel
With five imprints of the seal of Solomon? ”

HEAVENS

In heaven there is a colour unknown to earth,
It is not blue, nor green, nor red, nor yellow, nor vio-
let, nor orange,
It's name is called *Zervâdin*,
And it is more glorious than sunrise and sunset.
Can you see it through my words?
Does its name set it before you?

“ In heaven there is a sound unknown on earth,
It is not a sound of wind, or of water, or of thunder-
ing, or of fire,—
Harp-strings and oboes and cymbals,
Viols and lutes,— children's voices and the songs of
birds
Are as silence compared with it,
Its name is called *Lâreth*,
And it is sweeter than the voice of love sounding
back across death.
Can you hear it through my words?
Does its name set it within the porches of your ears?

“ In heaven there is a form,
And upon earth exists not even the shadow of the
illusion of its likeness,
Yet is it more marvellous a million fold
Than the imagining of poets creating through
thought
The image of the Supernal.

HEAVENS

Its name is called *Valtôran*,
And he who hath seen it hath seen behind the seven-
 enth veil
Of the Holy of Holies which is Mystery.
Can you behold it through my words?
Does its name set it before you?
Hear and remember
Throughout that other dream which is life:
As many as are the cups
They shall be filled,
Whether cups on mosses of earth
Or the cup of space,
Or the great and little cups of souls,
All shall be filled.

“As for the heaven which men imagine with their
 five wits,
How should it satisfy them when their wits shall be
 myriad?
I say to you as one said of old, being truly enlight-
 ened:
The heaven imagined of men while yet they are men,
Is as a little hut on the mountain side of Reality.”

BOX HEDGES

Castle Hill, Virginia

HEDGES of Box,
Magical, severe, serene,
Full of promises,
Promising strange fulfilments,
Welcoming their own,—
Swaying with somber witchery,
With threatening even
For intruders, for inquisitive strangers;
Tirelessly watching,
Waiting,
Sentinels of centuries,
Content with the wisdom of root and leaf,
With the mystic bondage of earth,—
Themselves mystical, magical, secret,
Possessed of unknown powers and beatitudes. . . .

I came home to you, marvellous ones,
From the obsessed uproar of the city,
From the furious to-and-fro
Of beings herded and goaded by petulant desires;
I came back to you on an evening of April,
Climbing the wild hill a-foot

BOX HEDGES

That I might greet you alone, in simplicity,—
And you towered above me like the beauty of Dark-
ness,
You lifted against the crocus-bright air
Your superb gloom
In a barrier of strong enchantment
Behind which I should rediscover reality;
Your bitter-sweet fragrance upon me
Was as a potent charm
Sealing my wits of every day,
Unsealing others long forgotten . . .
I gathered your great branches in my arms
Leaning my breast against yours,
And you held me up like a lover . . .

The old house benign and wistful,
Is glad of my presence,
So long it has stood companionless
Guarded only by the huge box hedges:—
I have sent the old negress away
To sleep in her cottage
Beyond the hedges . . .

My candle under its antique, crystal shade
Burns quietly,
The long, white hall flowers with shadows,
White acacia blossoms slide over the glassy floor
Stirred by the breathing of night;

BOX HEDGES

Outside, between the Doric columns
The air hangs a cloak of purple feathers
Spotted with silver . . .
The silence rings like Benares brass . . .
Rings, rings. . . .

I am called by something more potent than a
voice,—
By a bitter-sweet fragrance,
Pungent,
Imperially insistent . . .
My heart is being tuned high, high,
By something beyond my will,
My heart-strings are stretched fine as gossamer . . .

What is it that I shall see within your circling walls,
If I go forth to you,
Hedges of box,
Hedges of Magic?
Will a milk-white Unicorn come to drink
From the pool where you mirror your magnificence?
I should love to see a moon-coloured Unicorn
With silver hoofs
And spiked forehead-horn of silver
Cantering delicately along your curved ramparts!
.
.
.
.
.
.
Cantering delicately it came,
More beautiful and clear-cut than a naked nymph

BOX HEDGES

Cameoed against the flying buttresses of box;
About its neck, satiny hard and pale as feldspar,
One had hung a garland of blue roses
And opals of fire-fly green,
Its forehead-horn shone like Venetian glass whorled
with silver,
Its hoofs were of silvered crystal.
As it drank from the cloud paved-pool
Its milky lustre blended with the clouds
And its necklace of azure roses and gold-green opals
With the sky and stars. . . .

I would have been content to stroke the heraldic per-
fection of its neck,
But a woman darted suddenly between us
And swung herself upon its back;
She struck it lightly with the looped garland of
roses,
Turning to smile at me
As they sped off together,
And I saw that she was myself
As I had been at one and twenty.

Evoë!
Hedges of box,
Hedges of Magic.
Evoë! Evoë!
Behind your barrier of glad enchantment
I have rediscovered reality.

AUTUMN AND WINTER

AUTUMN HAUNTING

A RED cloak blowing, blowing,—
Swift and thin as the shadow of a racing
cloud,

Curving out as with passion,
Blinding the heavens in its web of scarlet,—
Who is it, what is it that runs sky-high at evening
Vaulting from star to star
In a clear vermilion cloak
Blowing mysteriously, enticingly?

A cloak of elusive scarlet,
Paling, deepening, vanishing and reappearing elf-
ishly,

Beyond patterns of maroon and orange leaves,
Staining the gauzy violet of shadows

As with cinnebar,

Whipping into the sunshine

Its resonant red

Like the twang of a loosed bow-string; —

Something is fleeing on windy tiptoe

Along the crystal threshold of the October day,

In a vermilion cloak

Blowing elfishly, tauntingly.

AUTUMN HAUNTING

A cloak of translucent, gold-washed crimson,
Shining, throbbing like an enchanted sail,
Pours its folds through the dusk of my dreams,
Waking me with its joyous redness,
Then having woken me,
Flicks over my ceiling in the fire-light
And out across the sill of my open window,
To pass blowing, blowing, with the huge wind
Down the aisles of the Autumn night
In wild, exultant curves
As of visible laughter.

Who is it, what is it that runs sky-high at evening
Vaulting from star to star,
That flees on windy tiptoe
Along the crystal threshold of the October day
In a clear vermilion cloak
Blowing mysteriously, enticingly, tauntingly?

SEPTEMBER SHADOWS

THE long, clear shadows across the lawn
Pointing toward evening, toward sleeping,
Are patterns for quiet resting.

Across the gold-green grasses the clear shadows
Are like plaintive memories
Across sunlit joys long ago mown
By the scythe that never needs whetting,
That is ever sharp.

In long, white-nights of remembering
The long shadows
Seem still to be near me
Like folded wings of dreaming.

If in heaven there shall be no shadows,
I shall wander through the unchanging light
Of wakefulness everlasting,
With weary nostalgia,
Remembering the gold-green grasses
Of earth at sunset,
And the long, clear shadows across them,
Pointing toward evening, toward sleeping,
Like patterns for quiet resting.

IN VIRGINIA, THE FIFTH OF OCTOBER

OCTOBER is drowsing still
Under a coverlet of mauve-blue haze;
From half-open eyes
Misted with sleep,
He gazes indolently,
Hesitating to put on his chilly glass sandals
And cap of shell-ice
Winged with flamingo feathers.
His cloak of gilt cobwebs
Is folded under him;
On the brown of his lazy limbs
The little chicory flowers cast tickling shadows,
The shadow of a planing hawk
Strokes him from head to heels,
Yet he drowzes on,
Supine, stirless.

Wake! Wake, October!
We long to see your gilded cloak
Flying between us and the downy turquoise of
the sky,
We long to see you change the sky to violet
crystal,

IN VIRGINIA, THE FIFTH OF OCTOBER

And throw huge silver balloons against it
From your purse of winds,
For the apple gathering is over,
The apple trees stand somberly,
In dark green robes
Stripped of their jade and carnelian orna-
ments —

You cannot harm them now
Though you turn your purse of winds
Lining outward.

Wake! Wake, October!
While you are dozing
April has stolen back a-tiptoe;
She is playing lovely pranks on you,
On your fields and forests;
The horse-chestnuts glisten with sticky buds
Holding little five-fingered leaves
Packed like jewels in white cotton,
Some of the upper branches are even in full
blossom.

The lilac under my window
Flaunts a purple plume;
Near my door step
She has set a dandelion
And three butter-cups.

Wake! Wake!
Snatch up your amber palette

IN VIRGINIA, THE FIFTH OF OCTOBER

And your brushes of hoar-frost.
You had only painted a bough here and there
When you fell a-napping,—
Slug-a-bed!
Now April is plucking off your beautiful painted
 leaves
Of yellow and scarlet,
And setting in their places
New leaves green as her own eyes.
She has waked the locust
And set him chirring again;
The birds, deceived by her,
Trill their mating-calls,
We shall have the year exquisitely topsy-turvy
If you do not waken at once,
October!

DECEMBER EVENING

THE black, iced sail of night thrums, thrums . . .
But the wind is weakening,
Now it falls away,
Drifting slowly down upon the Southern waste:
In the dark glass of my window
I see my hearth fire leaping among snowy zig-zags
Of winter boughs.
Oh, memories of youth,
Thus you flame among the snows of age
Without melting them!

AUTUMN LONELINESS

ONE gray cricket is fluting,
One only,
In the brown November field:
Clear little lonely voice,
You are like the voice in the heart
When age has come,
And the Belovéd has gone forever.

REVELATION

MADE humble through beauty
I knelt upon the autumn grass
Looking into the fair face of a rose . . .
And suddenly its loveliness became to me
As the heavens at dawn;
Its golden heart half hidden by petals
Was not less marvellous and overwhelming
Than the morning star seen through petals of sun-
lit cloud:
Thus gazing upon it
My soul was drenched with the dew of wisdom
And I knew that in eternity
Great and small are one,
And that the Angel of a rose
Can prevent hell
Without a sword of flame.

JANUARY NIGHT

SILVER moth-dust of moonshine
Sifting on far horizons.
Quickgold of winter stars
Through fountains of iron blue branches,
Pearl-blue glimmer of snow . . .
Sheer above me Orion
Superbly balancing,
Belted with green-spiked jewels
Aiming his violet diamond bolts at Nirvana.
Stillness . . .
Stillness utter, impassioned,
As of a Mystic rapt and swooning for long-drawn
ecstasy.

Suddenly —

Frrt — frrt — frrt of a hare's pads

Crushing the gauze of ice: —

In the room behind me

Frrt — frrt — frrt of my red-heart cedar fire

“Treading snow.”

EXPERIENCE

(Snow in Autumn)

ROSE of November,
It was only yesterday that I saw you quivering
Warm with sunshine
Under the last, wild honey bee; —
Now to your freezing heart
Cling spectral snow-moths.
Yet you should die proudly,
Rose of November,
For you have known more than all the roses of June
Through immemorial summers.

AUTUMN LONGING

(To the author of "The Flowery Scroll")

THE sculptural masses of box-shrubs crowding
close together,
Are like a carving in night-green jade
After curdled mountains
In a picture by Chao Meng-Fo;
Against their superb stolidity
Flights of yellow acacia leaves flit glittering
Borne on the south-west wind . . .

O golden acacia leaves,
Could I but follow you to your ultimate destination
As the pilgrim of olden time
Followed the blowing petals of peach-blossoms,
I am convinced that also like him
I should discover a garden of clear delights
Beyond a stream of celestial ensorcelment.

LEAVES

THROUGH the leaves of my Tulip tree,
Through the dim, green leaves
Faded by Summer,
Glistens the sky of Autumn;
My thoughts like the leaves are dim,
Faded by memories more passionate
Than the burning of Summer.
Frost will brighten the faded leaves,
But my thoughts will not glow again
Under the frosty touch of age:
Only when Death draws near,
Ardent and luminous,
Will they quicken,—
Death that I imagine to be like April sunrise
Through leaves.



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