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THE GROVE
AND OTHER POEMS

By the same Author.

Poems New and Old.

Music : Lyrical and Narrative Poems.

.

A Portrait of George Moore in a Study of
his Work.

English Portraits and Essays.

.

The Gold Coast and Other Prose Stories
(*In preparation.*)

THE GROVE

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

JOHN FREEMAN

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PART ONE

THE CALIPHS

CALIPHS reclining upon lemon Moons
That sway boat-like with the long tides of air
While wanning fountain water shrills or croons
With voice forgot and echo rare;

Caliphs in endless twilight telling again
The silent story of unfathomed bliss,
Old and heroic ardours, scathe and pain,
And softer secret ecstasies;



Telling again—to no ear but the mind's—
Past splendours, and the hour's sleek-faced delight,
The dark couch, breath that drowns, hair that blinds,
Young breast that wakes and lulls the night;

Musing on the past, sunk on pale dusking arcs
Of falling Moons, muse they on what's to come? . . .
After the sweet sick Night, when the first larks
Are singing and the winged dragons hum;

And after many days and nights too fond,
An enemy stirs; the Caliphs lift their eyes—
A trampling, gathering, clashing, from beyond
The junction of faint hills and skies;

And there a glittering day-star host debouches
Through sore defiles; the dreaming Caliphs wake,
Marshal their arms with deft traditioned touches;
The old strife renews, the invaders quake

And are broken and die fighting or die flying
And Death noses the field till it rots and stinks;
The Caliphs ride back over the thirsty dying,
Another name into story sinks.

Reclining again on lemon Moons they dream,
And another enemy comes, not from the hills,
And not from the sea; and new hosts silent teem,
And the air with rumour and echo fills—

The feet of years that stamp, like ants or flies
Hardening a road, stamping on nerves and veins,
The worm that dies not and the flesh that dies.
—Only the evasive ghost remains

While yet the fountain water shrills or croons
Unheeded songs, echoes of heavier care,
And hang like empty boats the dusking Moons,
And timid eyes shroud in dark hair.

THE DANCERS

I DREAMED a dream more stable than the gross
Pyramid crushing those slow desolate sands,
Yet swift as time it sank into the sands
Like a bright snake that slides into his hole
Startled by shaking footsteps yet far off.

It was a dream of hoar and lonely hills
Snow-cloaked, and in their hollows hills of snow,
But in their lowest valleys melting hedges
Above the shaded snows. A garden crept
From a deserted house along the hedge,
Half snow, half a green ruin; but the rose,
The rose already bloomed above the snow,
Already mocked with her young lips the wan
And trembling lips of winter dying slowly
Upwards from foot to head, body to spirit.

The day passed in a flash to night, the rose
Nursed her cold cheek in dreams of whispered spring,
And slept. Then the deserted house awoke,
Lights danced out through the casement on the snow,
And shadows danced with echoes; for within
Moved the bright shapes of dancers happy and proud,
And music danced with them and all was dancing—
Lights, shadows, music, echoes and dancers together.
Last a new music marshal'd other steps,
Every quick heart was fluttered and leapt, for now
Sword dances and the thrill of shrilling reeds
Admonished them of other thoughts than love.
For mid the dancers stept two new-come figures,

Bright Honour, armed and ruddy, Death unarmed,
Serene. And Honour laughed and caught the hand
Shining with steady gems of tranquil Death,
And leaned his head, murmuring a heedless jest,
Nor shivered at the lifting of those lids
From shallow azure eyes. Then Death too smiled
And danced; they danced together while the reeds
Shrilled slower, hushed, and muted; but these danced
Yet with the silence until darkness drew,
And all within was still, without was snow.

The night lay like a heavier snow of time,
While some of battles dreamed and stratagems,
Of ancient fading splendours some, and some
Masculine dreams of sere and sad delight.
All dreamed and waking wondered which was dream.

And this that seemed more stable than the gross
Pyramid, stranger than the wrinkled Sphinx,
Sank in the sands like any mortal thing—
A life that burns its little life away,
A candle dying of its shining.

With a Copy of the Foregoing.

*With my quick hand I write this flickering verse
Like sullen woods flickering in crafty light;
With this familiar hand that's scored elm-like
By stealthy creeping life, by love deep-sunk,
And death that characters over all; with this
Fond hand that shakes with the slow stumbling pulse
Till the pulse fail—like a child stumbling on
Along a rutted road and laughing towards
His father who will catch him when he falls.*

DESDEMONA

So the slim Moon, a young girl, shines upon
The forest and its nodding ridge, and stream
That cleaves with fainter silver the prone earth;
The Moon, as fatal-fair as Desdemona,
Pouring her brightness over all the valley
Smiles and makes other moons of stream and weir.

And now the Moor, a deep and sudden cloud,
Risen up out of the East on moody winds,
Dilating, smothers her loveliness with his fear,
Darkens her innocent look—and all is gone
That made night happy, all that made the woods,
The stream, the clefted darkness brim with light:
As sudden anger blinds for ever love,
And all that stays is grief for all that's gone.

GODIVA

From the doorway when she crept,
Head abased and hand that kept
The shining shaking cloak around her,
The golden cloak that light enwound her
 Neck to knees,

Lone she moved; no other stirred,
No forbidden foot she heard,
No voice whispered as she passed
'Neath the morning shadow, cast
 Like a darker cloak.

No eye in a wanton glimpse
Sought the whiteness of her limbs,
No look scorched her with its fire
Covetous with wild desire
 As she rode.

All that silence was her praise,
Eyes adored her when their gaze
Sank beneath the throbbing lid.
Glowed her beauty as she hid
 Beauty in her hair.

 Neck to knees
Golden cloaked she rode, and now
Raised the brightness of her brow,
Drooped no more the tenderest eyes
Ever moist for miseries;
 Proud she looked.

Champed her horse the gilded bit,
Tossed his gilded head with wit
Of her gentleness, and paced
Proud with her that now outfaced
The sun's bright stare.

But one moment—one—she faltered,
Fell her look, her face was altered.
Was it the wind in her hair?
What unseen hand made a bare
Roundness of her breast?

Like a tree that hangs so still
When no breath falls from the hill,
So she hung; then moved again,
Along the silent eyeless lane
Riding on

As though the horse moved with her thought,
And paused when some quick wonder caught
At her heart; then, as she sighed,
Breathed anew with nostrils wide
And stepping slow was gone.

Knew she it was I that stirred
The golden cloak, my breath that bared
Half the roundness of her breast?
Mine the unseen lips that pressed
Soft as rain;

My eye that burned with sudden heat
And stung her thought with other sweet?
Not the wind, but love's swift wild
Fire invisible, undefiled,
Pleading in love's tongue?

.
In the hush a bell clapped loud,
Crawled a wan and anxious crowd
Up and down and wantoning
Again with hope, while children cling
And whimper yet.

But in the Castle's sullen walls
Godiva in a dark dream falls,
Then shady-gowned sits with her Lord,
Sick with thought and newly gored
By his lust abhorred.

DESERT

No hawthorn spray
For the robin's red rust throat;
No green gloom of hillside cell
To darken the note
Of the home-come nightingale;
No thicket for shy-voiced wren
And wren to answer again.

The birds that had sung
Flit all songless away:
No green and no deep in the heart
That's burning alway
With wild Love's hate or despair,
And pain's old embers that smoulder
While Time's ruins moulder.

THE ENCHANTER

To the cold height of the sky
Where only the swallows fly,
To the wanning middle of heaven
Is the Enchanter fled?
The flush has faded,
The light of his eyes is shaded,
The voice, sweet-fluted,
Is suddenly muted,
For that but an echo is
Fall'n featherlike from heaven,
A wailing waning
Faithless feigning
Of a muted music.

Whither is he fled,
The Enchanter wild?
To the earth's dark mid
Where gold lies hid,
And opals hueless,
Emeralds yet dewless,
And dull roseless marls;
To forests rootless,
Rainless, fruitless—
Whither is he fled,
The wild Enchanter?
To the sea's green deep
Where slow tides stay
And soothe the blanching bones' decay;
Where all motion is soundless,
Sightless and boundless?

Is he fled
To the cold height of the sky,
To the earth's dark mid,
To the sea's green deep?
He is fled.
No voice comes nigh,
No shape revisiting sleep.
For this cloud is not his
But mine, nor this
One sea-soft sigh
Is his.
The Enchanter is fled,
Without touch, without word or sigh,
Or flash in the sky.

THE CENTAURS

THE silken horses chafe and shift
Under the falling chestnut petals,
Tossing aloft cream-foamy crests.
A fine rain slants, the blown dust settles.

The silken horses leap at last,
Are curbed, released, recurbed, requickened:
Like swift rain slanted from the hills
Or thin beams before clouds have thickened

They flow down the hill's flowing breast.
Leap now the horses into meadows,
Through waves of grasses plunge and slide
Bearing their riders light as shadows.

The riders with the heaving shapes
Inblent wade through the grassy surges
In centaur-wise, lift glittering eyes
Nearing the salt sea's hoary marges.

The salt sea blossoms whiter fall,
Wilder the waves of the salt sea meadows.
Horses and horsemen centaur-wise
Plunge and vanish sudden as shadows.

SOULDERN POOL

It lies
Quiet as a star in lone pale skies,
A pool
Of light and water, shadow-cool:
At dark
An ebon shield against the stark
Vexed Shades
Advancing, when all hue and sweetness fades.

Around
Crouches the village—an old hound
That drinks
Briefly and into slumber sinks,
Anon
Wakes, drinks, then slumbers on
And lies
Drowsing and lapping through long centuries

Until,
Than the still pool more still,
The hound
Lies at last without stir, without sound,
Nor drinks
Again but into the meadow sinks
To wake
Where pools eternal stretch, his thirst to slake.

BITCHEREL

AGAIN—that melancholy
Quick-shaking folly,
Music's diminishing mock,
Foam shaken from Night's rock
When Time's vain vast
Wave is broken at last,
And the next wave again
Foaming as vain.
Hush thy wailing,
Startling yet unavailing.
Strumpet, still thy cry :
None hears, none heeds but I—
All the world snores gross.
Whine not of thy loss,
Never of love; else
Thy note were mocking false.
To the shrill swallow leave
Lamenting; thou canst not grieve.
Too-who! Night is for slumber,
And here, past number,
Men all are sleeping,
Prim angels keeping
Watch o'er each pious head,
And they sleep like the dead.
Too-who, Too-who!
—Not mocking, then, not pleading,
Not plaining of none heeding?
O thy quick sad shaking

Is of the heart's breaking,
Clear echo of unworded
Reproach unregarded.
O quavering cry too bitter,
Make thine accent sweeter,
O heart be still again,
It is in vain, in vain
Summoning all those years—
Wouldst more of tears?
O that night ran quick
As joy and strength, that pick
Fair vanishing things only
For soothe of lonely
Long hours.

Too-who,

So near. *Too-who!*
Why, 'tis but an owl,
Night's brainless fowl
Blundering upon the thorns
Of weary mind. . . But Morn's
Another music is
Than sick sore Memory's.
And hark, the rattled wings
And all night's craven things,
Blind heads, sly creepers,
Dusk horrors, never-sleepers,
The writhing, sliding,
In earth-entrails hiding,
Shrink now and sink to hear
One far answering one near
Ruddy Chanticleer.

THE BELDAM

BELDAM, what dost thou here
 Beckoning so sily,
Lids lifted, and cruel lips
 Writhen and wily?

The fiddles are lispig and sighing
 A slow lovesick air—
Like gnats are the notes circling
 In late sunset glare;

And swanlike the dancers,
 On a still pool gliding,
By the sweet sweet fiddles fluttered
 And a whispered chiding.

Beldam, chide now no more,
 To whom dost beckon?
Hushed are the sighing fiddles,
 The quick steps slacken,

And every shape heaves wildly,
 Shakes every mirror. . .
Beldam, is it thy thin lips
 Breathing such terror?

Sad, sad now the fiddles
 Harsh sweet notes renewing,
Of all sad sounds the sorest;
 Their slow steps pursuing

Who now all heavily
Pass out and mourn
With thoughts like circling gnats
One cold, silent, forlorn.

· NO LONGER

STAY, thou art so beautiful!
Thy hair, thine eyes
Are lovely as a sudden dream
Of one in Paradise.

Thou art too beautiful, thy brow,
Thy voice, too rare.
Thou canst not die as colours fade
Out of the dusking air.

Yet colours sink—gold—rose—then gray:
Night glooms, the stars are dull.
No longer, Immortal, canst thou stay,
Thou art too beautiful.

SPIRIT FORLORN

O THY poor bosom prest
 'Gainst the world's thorn!
Thy crimson life a stain,
Voice mute in pain,
 Spirit forlorn.

Droops now thy head,
 It is thy heart that's torn.
How memory of delight
Deepens the starless night,
 While thine eyes mourn!

THE MURDERED FACE

WILLOW droops now her breast upon the breast
Of waveless water,
Leaning her cheek against a hueless cheek;
And her leaves speak
Tender as silence when the least wind trembles
And sinks at rest.

Floats on the stream the rippled argent round
Of the full moon,
Following with slower mood the faltering tide.
Willow's branches slide
Deeper to draw the moon close to her breast
In silver slumber.

But as a murdered face in agitation
Of windy flaw,
The argent moon wrinkles in angry pain.
Eyes stare in dream of pain.
Wind on the willow's bosom falls and moans,
Hides in a floating cloud the moon's torn face.

THE LIZARDS

THE great broad-headed sleeping beast lies prone,
Scarce heaving her thin flanks; her breasts are hid
In mists and shallow dells enridged with grey.
Is it the air trembles, or her body heaves,
As the cloud follows the sun then's stayed upon
Her brows, a darkening crown? And then the crown
Is all of light while darkness cloaks her sides;
And so she lies, Queen of the flowing hills,
Proud in her dream of ancient subject Kings
And lands beneath her limbs stretched—forest dusks,
Cold streams like sleepy thoughts, springs like desires;
And memories that sun their gold, as lizards
Breathe a shy life upon some thymy mound
Golden and happy.

Then the wind wakes again:
Disorbed, her dreams dissolving, the proud Queen
Murmurs and heaves, again the forest stirs,
Cloud deepens down her sides, and on their mound
The quick-eyed lizards shiver and disappear.

THE MEADOW PATH

THE little children along the wet footpath filing
Filing
Are happy as they pass beneath the tall hedge, smiling
Smiling,
And plucking the unripe berries hard and sour
Hard and sour,
And treading heedless the lingering clover flower.
“It is late!” the eldest cries, as she starts running
Running,
And all follow, and with nudges and rushes cunning
Cunning,
Hurl all together with a shout at the gate
At the gate,
And scrambling laugh and shout again, “It is late!”
The sun, when they are gone, is still wanly shining
Shining,
Still the cold Autumn wind in the elm tops is whining
Whining,
The pools gleam in the footpath, still and white
Still and white,
Noon passes, and afternoon, and then dusk light.
Now the children by the broken gate are returning
Returning,
Already the early sombre full moon is burning
Burning.
But they linger there forgetting the shade of Time
The shade of Time,
And laugh at the million small Moons of the rime.

THEN SILENCE ALONE

SIGHED the stone to the leaf,
"Shake thy cool airs over me."
Sighed the leaf to the cloud,
"Shake thy leaves over mine,
Over my shade stay thine."
To the wind breathed the cloud,
"Thou singer, sing not so loud:
Thou huntsman, thy fleet foot delay,
Cool the cheek of the day."

To the stone clung a quick-breathing lizard,
In the close shade a moth;
Footsteps came near and stumbled,
Fond eyes fell at rest in the shade.
Into the stillness strayed
An air from the north, awaking
Thoughts that slept, and shaking
Each fond bosom with fear;
A cold cloud stole near,

Stole near, spread, and parted
Tip-toeing remorseful away.
Cried then the wind to the sun,
"Down, down!" To the stars, "Arise,
Shine and flock in the skies."
Lip to lip whispered, "Here!"
Breast to breast, "Near, O, near!"
Then silence alone, and sight
Shut neath the brows of night.

THE RIDER

Who wakes on a morning in May
And rides in a cloud and wind
In the eye of day,
And his own eye bright
With an inward fountain light,
And a fairer land in his mind;

Who rides and riding seems
Again the grave rapt child
That arose from dreams,
Stept a-tip-toe forth
Unheeding of south and north,
Heart throbbing quick and wild,

In a land clearer and stranger
Than lands travelled in dream
And sweeter for danger,
Where the grasses muttered,
And sudden dew'd wings fluttered,
And a barr'd snake furrowed the stream;

Who, still reverting, anon
Sees youth's proud flag flying,
Hears echoing on
Love's sweet voice in Hers,
The unendurable sweet airs
Of love renewing and dying;

And now, this morning in May,
Knows it is Autumn swift,
Though soft winds play
Round his head as of old,
And the raven shadows cold
Westward dwindle and drift;

He dreams still as he rides
Of the far Fortunate Isles
That a spheral mist yet hides.
Still his unresting gaze
Searches the wide and wingless haze,
Riding the upland miles.

Until with quivering limb
At the last shuddering climb
Dismounted, where the pines swim
After the flown clouds—low,
Dark-spotted, with warm hues aglow,
The broad-heaving valley of Time.

HER LONELINESS

SPIRIT, how your spectre daunts me,
Dares me look.
Though my lids are shut, yet still
My eyes with quaking motions thrill.
Spirit, how your spectre haunts me.

Was it life so starkly shaped you,
Was it death?
Silent move you, but I hear
Harsh robes rustle as you near—
Was it death in dark robes draped you?

Now your hand the loose latch rattles
Here, here, here.
All's dark within, and yet I know
Your frost across the room doth flow,
On my tingling sense now settles.

O no more, cold spectre, grasp me—
Grasp me not.
Ah, but whose this warmth enfolds me,
Light illumines and quick shape holds me?
Whose flushed breast and arms now clasp me?

STILLBORN

WINTER gnawed the bones of Time,
Sallow lay the herbless wold;
Over hedges grey with rime
Did mist a pallid hue unfold—
 A pale-hued scarf
Over the aged turf.

She it was. I saw her carried
Neath the hoar and birdless thorn,
Now at last to cold earth married,
Yielded to this couch forlorn,
 Stifling grasp,
Chill unfruitful clasp.

Sighed the mourners as they trod
Adieu! along the frozen lane.
Anon a loosened stone or sod
Pattered on the boards—in vain
 Knocked, and stilled;
Silence was fulfilled.

Other footsteps nearer shuffled,
And one crawled with gleaming spade
Carrying a box sad-muffled
Swung against the swinging blade;
 Earth-stained figure,
Gnarled, dull-eyed gravedigger.

Winter's shepherd seemed he then
Bent and peering earth to earth.
Flocked like sheep the shades, and when
Low he stooped the boughs breathed forth
 A sighed lament,
For only farewell lent.

Like a dead stalk on a heap
Or frozen bud fall'n in the mire,
There he dropped a babe asleep
On the breast of vain desire—
 Unloved maiden,
Now at last love-laden.

—Hush thy longing now, and rock
Only with the rocking sphere;
Now thy passion's flood unlock,
No more wasting; whisper, "Here,
 Where no fingers'
Forgetful fondness lingers."

And draw near, cold lips to breast;
Virgin nipples, stint no more;
Stillborn babe unloved, now rest
Where no babe has sucked before . . .
 Longing stilled,
Love at last fulfilled.

NOAH'S ARK

Now Noah calls—calls thrice, and towards his Ark
Tread the red cattle, flock the lowering rooks,
Flow together the shades, faltering follow
Labourers from fading fields. Into his Ark
Grey-bearded towering Noah bids them—*Come,*
Come hither, birds and beasts, shadows and men,
Shadows and shadows.

And the wide door of the Ark
Falls behind as they enter and sink at rest.
Few are they that linger without, all night
Straying away, bewildered by stars in the height,
And ambushed glow-worms dying and shining again.

THE OWL

THE last song is singing, the last light fading,
The last airs are muted on the elm's breast.
It is the thrush singing, the last thrush calling,
"Come, come—nay, fly now"—
The last song falling on the flushed west.

The last song has fallen, the last flush faded,
Night calls the far and the near to one fold,
Calls the crowned hills and the pool-dappled pastures,
"Come, come—and lie now
Secret and shaded and footless and cold."

. . . All save the owl. She only forlornly
Wakes, and loosens her note from sleep,
A soul crying out in this night of the spirit,
"O, now, now—O, fly now,"—
Crying forlornly out of the deep.

THE SILENCE

SILENT the marsh, now silent the shining water,
All day sucking and lapping the banks of the river,
Hardly the plummy grasses stir in their long dreaming,
And the thin-voiced rushes mute and no more shiver.

All that was busy and harsh is hushed—pain's low
whining,
Even the heart's reproach of ancient days once sweet;
Silent is memory, silent of all is love; and even,
O even Death's drum is muffled, dulled the sound of
his feet.

WILD NIGHT

AMONG the tossing branches
Of almond blossom
The whiter stars than almond dance—
Heaving and tossing
As the thin arms of fading flush
Sway, droop and shiver.

The almond blossom blanches,
One star burns red.
Between the boughs his tawny locks
Shake in the wind . . .
As bright burns one Star on the wind
And rage of death.

THE RED COCK

THE red Cock crows
As wild night rides
Eyeless and broken away;
Her massy ranks unclose,
In cavern'd wood and clefted hill she hides
When the red Cock calls day.

Answer him then
Dun-feathered beams
And wakeful and cold airs,
And seven-hued vast shapes when
His cry they hear rise up; and stung from dreams
Gold-helmèd the Sun stares.

The red Cock crows
Again, again,
King calls to King awaking,
Proud tossing, as he goes,
Red helm to gold helm till the Sun, as vain,
Feathers of light is shaking.

And the red Cock
Among his dames
Calls to Gold-helm anon
In vainglorious mock;
Then Gold-helm answering pours his wingèd flames
Dusk-hollowed Earth upon.

THERE THE SEA ENDED

THERE the sea ended.
It was as though a great and lazy beast,
Lizard or summer snake,
Scarcely awake
Had crawled out of the fading east,
Crawled out of space and time with idle motion,
And there had slept—
Her purple flanks, the shallow dappled shoulder,
The near pale underside where younglings crept
Wantoning with feigned farewells and fond returns,
In lazy late ease swaying
Against the shingles of the flaxen shore.
The leagues-long sober-mooded slumbrous beast
Mused but of gentleness and quietness,
Her violent ages now in languor ended,
Old wars—than time's far memory older—
Diminished to the dying kiss
Of wave and wave.
Past, past
The agonies of flying storm,
And speary lightnings cast
Burning into her bowels with starry hiss.
—And now, no memory nor imagination save
The kiss
Of wave and wave.

LEVIATHAN

LEVIATHANIC natures,
Huge browed, vast spined,
That floated centuries
Unchallenged, unconfined,
Sleep now since age pre-Adam
In frozen marl and stone,
No more by seasons summoned
From zone to zone.

Their many cubits shining
In landless seas—
Black islets ever restless,
Unanchored Cyclades,
Round whose steep cliff the foam-bows
Gathered and tossed and died,
And milk-white wake spread seething
In troublous tide;

From Arctic to Antarctic
Through wan brief days
To tropic seas o'erspangled
By wasting starry blaze;
Placid in sunny Pacifics,
Deep-caved neath Polar storm,
Sea's shallow bed for nuptials
And couch enorm;

Leviathanic creatures,
 God's Ancients, you.
The cyclic springs and winters
 Like snows on water flow;
And now when ebon nights
 Of frozen time we scan,
Staring at callous shadows
 Leviathan;

Now if the primal flux
 Seem falsely stayed,
And men gaze back and forwards
 At fuming gloom thin-rayed;
And cyclic springs and winters
 Are guessed from this scarred hull,
From gibbous arch, stone ribs,
 Unbuoyant skull;

Or wonderers, wit-wandering,
 Tormented brood
On time that's past, the failing
 Breath of earth's multitude;
On the green domestic shores,
 On the unvalleyed sea,
On man's faint, fading passage
 To infinity;

And how the sober earth
 Flows with the wave,
Upheaved, dissolving, sinking
 Sighlike in the sea's grave;
How man's inhabitation
 No longer space may last
Than the falling sea-hawk's feather
 In the sea cast—

Staring so at your shadows
 And fossil'd signs,
Phantasms of fled aeons,
 God's young and fierce designs,
Imagination burns
 And like a star from the height
Falls and is quenched in the hissing sea
 Of time and night.

THE IMMORTAL GLADE

(For the Centenary of Christopher Wren.)

“ Is THIS his ghost, so grave and trim,
So trim and grave?
Raised we our temple, height to height,
With arches lifted light to light,
And echoes shut and loosened slowly
To make unseen procession holy—
Built we for him
To mock with his cold soothless cave? ”

*“ I am his ghost, O honoured Shades,
His spirit am I.
Mourning the ruin of your hands,
Mourning the absence of your hands,
O nameless builders most I mourned
Their hot and restive urge that scorned
Your honoured Shades,
And tricked my fond art's piety.”*

“ Another faith our faith outcast,
Cast out our faith.
Your wanton mode forgot our art,
Your faithless folly strayed apart,
Your worldly spans and spaces now
No echo hold of ancient vow :
The voice is passed,
Stilled even echo's lingering breath.”

*" O nameless builders, Change and Time,
Time and strong Change,
Master men's minds, yet things beloved
Are loved and honoured though removed.
But those great Masters spoke, and I
To their severe voice made reply,
That hasty Time
A while be pleased, and patient Change."*

*" But think, our broken starry Spire,
Our Spire long broken—
Never to pierce the clouds again,
Never the new Moon on her vane
To stay in promise; but a gross
Dark dome and bossy gilded cross,
Where once the Spire
Symbol'd men's prayer and hope unspoken."*

*" I saw in vision the rounded Earth,
The Earth in vision.
Then that dark rondure of the dome
I drew, that men might flocking come;
And I heard music's aery tones
Syllabled around from echoing stones;
Saw heaven and earth
Shape 'neath the dome as in my vision. . . ."*

*“Who builds his dream builds he not well,
Rounding his dream?”*

—They breathed an answer low and clear,
And one called to that bright ghost, “Here,
Here at our side, O honoured Shade.”

He passed to their immortal glade—

Where who may tell

What build they now who build their dream?

THE MAP

Here are dragons.
Mid this Island's tooth-edged bound,
River-enwound,
Lake like narrow-lidded eye,
Mountains nigh;
Full in mid-desert, legendary,
Lure of wanton youth unwary,
Here are dragons.

Villages to rivers stoop,
Plum'd trees droop,
Ships full-bellied ever glide
Serene in pride,
And in mid-desert, lone and dread,
Lashing tail and tossing head,
Here are dragons.

Dragons hidden—such as men
Start from when
Nameless terrors shake the brain,
Shapes that stain
Sleep's pale dawn and dry the tongue,
When the nerves' alarum's rung :
Here are dragons.

Bossy head, bowed bronzed spine,
Eye malign—
O, more evil, threatening more;
Sick and sore;
Torment of the fork-tongued mind,
Torture in Time's womb designed,
Here are dragons.

And that dragon, Prince of ill,
Wrathing still,
Death the dragon, proud in the light,
Proudest at night,
Death the dragon, drowsing while
Clouds deceive and flushing smile,
Here are dragons.

Hunt the dragon. Dare his eye
Till he fly,
Vexed and shrill his soldiery cry,
Or broken sigh;
Death and his worms now panting lie
Drinking the dark, with visage sly—
Here are dragons.

THE ASH PLUMES

ON the hill's shoulder the cloud stoops darkening,
Tremble the ash plumes, the tall trunks shiver.
In the clefted valley flutter pale aspens,
Hush, then whisper: "Cold are the fingers,
And cold the arms thrust into our bosom,
Cold are the arms of the wind!" And shrunken
All as with eld, with chill in their bones,
The aspens sway, bowing entreaty,
Sighing in vain.

While the ash-plumes toss,
Stream in a flood one way, and sudden
Are caught in a tangle of gusts untethered,
Loosed down the long hill.
Sighs are none but the scream of the wind,
Groan of the gray wide-branchèd bodies,
Groan of branches heaving and falling.
Then silent the ash-trees: till as the cloud
Slow draws down from the hill's shoulder,
And softly sounds the rain again,
Half spent, on each green ruffling tent,
Voices with the rain's mild voice mingle,
Singing high, singing low.

And over the Plain floats now the eyeless
Cloud, and the wind whips the murmuring orchards,
Wanders and wrangles within the hedgerows;
Then, tossed from densest thorn to thorn
(Ancient of days in the ancient Plain),
Falters and with the dark cloud passes
Sullenly, slowly, eve-ward away.

ENEMIES

SHUDDER not when I come near, O thou too-conscious
Beech.

My hand upon thy trunk feels now the slow pulse
quicken,

Feels thy breast uneasy, heaving as in despair—

O that in tenderness not despair thine eyes might droop,
In tenderness not fear thy shadows fall and thicken.

For some thine eyes are kind, thy leaves breathe
melody;

In fierce tormented winds they answer thunder with
thunder,

Then hushing as the winds unharnessed snarl and
plunge

Disordered down the hill, thine arms rest on the dark :
But now, when I draw near and stand thy shadow
under,

Thy Samson strength it fails, falls, falls the crested
head,

Rock thine enarmoured thews, loosen the bronzed
greaves;

Thou art all dizzy-swaying as in a falling sickness.

Men have feared thee and silenced neath the silence
of thy tower :

Fearest thou now the flight of archery through thy
leaves?

Fearest thou now the fatal hand of an evil spirit,
That thy lips mutter *Depart!* and green boughs sweep
 thee round
Defending? What sign glows in these green glooms
 thine eyes?
—It is I that shake with thy shaking, scarce witting
 what malign
Spirit steps forth from me and knocks, knocks without
 sound.

SLEEP AND WAKE

SLEEP in the light, and wake then in the dark.
—When the air is chill and all your branches stark
Lift toward the firmament, and but one spark

Of starry fire, then from your sleep awake,
Too happy trees. . . But now your vast boles quake
And hugest boughs in terror heave and shake,

Ghosts ride astream at your towers' tottering steep,
Thick-trooping hordes from glinting marshland sweep
And like wild hounds on folded flocks that leap,

Tear at your peace, plucking at memories
Of other time and lost divinities,
Fallen altars and forgotten sacrifice.

It is for this you wake, O trees, when near
And nearer night draws, chill and lone and drear;
Then those most ancient ghosts—Death, and gaunt
Fear.

That subtle twain writhe grinning round your root,
And when the bat or the owl's malignant hoot
Awakes they step forth with harsh hoary foot

Crushing the grass. 'Tis against these your cry
Is loosed, and your boughs toss uneasily
Till the grey Haunters of the dusk pass by.

But now you sleep, the sun lying on your breast,
Even as a mother and child in the same rest,
Head bent o'er head, sleeper to sleeper prest;

While this November sabbath of the year
Lingers, and leaves still hang, though thin and sere
The hedgerows lean; and Winter stumbles near,

Whose hoarse throat and age-crookèd fingers soon
Will strip each bough and in brief afternoon
Your sable heads crown with an icy moon.

THE ELEGY

BEAUTIFUL past sense! Poor senses, fading away
Like the rosy and soft dawn-feathers of brief day
Paling from rose to gray.

Poor senses, flaming so soon to fade so soon,
Before the heady fullness of their June
Stream toward one golden noon:

Proud senses, all forgetting till all forgot,
And in serene stars' loneliness your hot
Wild-shaking fingers hunger not,

But fall, as pale hands on a nun's breast fall,
And far world's wasted wailings fainter call
From Time's slow crumbling wall . . .

Stars' loneliness—if loneliness may be
In clear bright neighbourhood, and colony
Of starless mute infinity.

But here, here even the stars seem lone and still
To senses that, if but a leaf stir, thrill,
And any worm or fly speaks ill.

Poor proud vain senses, that all shows please and vex,
And loved life wastes, shadows of death perplex,
Furious and faithless ministers of sex;

Ere yet corruption seize ye, fervent and wan,
Rise, be again as once ere Death began,
The spirit's faithful fogleman;

Shake off, like rotten leaves in storm blast rude,
Your vows to death's or sorrow's servitude.
So his sly touch and lewd,

Nor swollen cloud, morose and angry mock,
Shall shake you, but as western seas the rock
Shearing the Atlantic's shock.

God's spirit shall your elegy breathe in
Pine trees' unending sway, and sudden spin
Of golden beechen showers thin;

In nodding hill-crest elm, lonelier than spheres
Wandering the sky; in berried yew that dares
Death out of fire-hung fears;

And humming wind and the loud waterfall,
Shrill grasses, and the mew's unsyllabled call
Lamenting over all.

THE HUSH

SOMETIMES a storm, anon a tender stir
As of light kisses amid a young girl's dark soft hair;
Sometimes a storm that tosses breaking ships
Like spray; anon as kind as the child's innocent lips .
Even such is Love, yet in his gentlest mood
Wakes fury that by fury only is subdued,
When hate and fear and anguish at his side
Whirl like those Genii who my young heart terrified
With huge dark shape and huger shadow flung
Their shoulders round, and burning eye and lolling
tongue.

Then am I left a broken nerveless frame
Stung by regrets, by pardon mocked, low-bowed by
shame;

Then sleep, or silence, or the indifference
Of sensuous things, is sweet past any sweet of sense.
And then the hush that swells and sinks all round
Murmurous as with faint echoes of age-distant sound—
The soft unease of willows when a wind
Plays in their branches that an older wind has thinned,
Or whisper of shallow water in the lakes
That under bearded rocks the tide returning wakes;
The far soft syllabing of things forgot
Long, long ago, that sing how simply in the sleep of
thought.

IN A HAZEL MAZE

IN a hazel maze I walked,
Mused confused, unheedful stalked.
Every bird I heard was sweet,
And dew-flowers dying in June's heat.
Sweet the smell that fell from rose
Wreathing high, breathing close.
Willows green and thin stooped low,
Kine slept near or crept with slow
Step towards the shade.

But the thought that strayed
Like lean fingers of the wind
Through the shadows of the mind
All this light and bright forgot;
Lovely things were not.
In the hazel maze there grew
A cloud that like a grey shroud drew
Darkness round.

If birds sang, I heard no sound;
If breathed the rose and shook the dew
All its sweet of fleeting hue,
Nought I knew.
For a cloud crept from behind
The dusk horizon of the mind
And grew how huge, yet with no wind.
And I mused confused and made
With inward shade a darker shade.

ADAM

My spirit drowsed within his den,
His den of dull desires and scorns,
And blunted hopes, fond foul regrets—
Dark miry woods of poison thorns.

Those antique toads, old passions, crawled
Upon my bones with breathing chill;
A torpid snake within my breast
Couched Adam's wanton wasting will.

—Drowsed, drowsed. Till Eve came breaking through
The red-tongued thorn and virgin bud,
And leaned her warmth against my stone,
And quick'd with hers this Adam's blood.

THE LAKE STORM

FALL now those buds upon my breast.
As lily buds heave on the lake
Let thine upon my bosom shake,
 And birds above the nest
Quarrel around in their unrest.

And if a sudden tempest sweep
Even at the light touch of those buds,
Fear nothing—not though roaring floods
 Plunge from the steep;
It is love's storm tormenting sleep.

While drenching birds bunch mid the tree
And that dark cloud's wings brush the lake,
And fierce delights the waters shake,
 Sink thou in me
And I will sink my strength in thee.

CANST THOU NOT UNDERSTAND

TAKE it and break it,
Sigh for it, cry for it,
Spurn it and burn it and yearn then—in vain.

What was it—Love? Winged from above?
Light as a shadow on thorn-hedged May meadow,
There did Love lie, the thorn-hedge by, the brook
crooning nigh.

What was it died—stilled in thy side?
Slain, and by thee. Love shrank to see,
Shrank, and close pressed the sharp thorn to his breast;
spring flew afraid from her nest.

The wind strips the hedge and rattles the sedge.
That pale clay, ungrassed, is the grave of the past . . .
Still dost thou stand, the bright spade in thy hand?
canst thou not understand?

BE STILL NOW

BE still now, for the wood is still, the light is still upon
the wood,

And all the heavenly watchers brood between the
moveless flakes of cloud.

The light that trembles in the dew is still, the breathing
grass is hushed and still,

The restless shadeless pool is still, and shadow-pools
beneath the hill,

Beneath the hill and all is still.

Why beats your heart so loud, so loud, beneath my
gentlest finger leaps?

All through your veins the wild blood sweeps, your
sight its agitation keeps.

O heart be still, O blood be tame; be hushed the shaking
of thy frame;

Be dim the violence of that flame . . . Never to
such fury came

Aught but sorrow, morning-shame.

Be still! There's only madness lies before when all
but passion flies.

Unseal thy breast from mine and rise, ere fierce love
into fierce hate dies.

I am but man, and woman thou: one moment may the
gods allow

To primal bliss and passion's vow . . . Ah, pause,
and hush, ah still thee now.

Be still and sleep as night sleeps now.

WAS IT THY VOICE

Was it thy voice that cried, "Back, come back to me?"
Was it mine that replied, "I cannot turn back to thee?"
Dark woods, and time's great pool, waveless and
stagnant pool,
Dividing stretch afar and gray cloud drifting slow.
When longings whisper *Yes*, then memory's solemn
No!
Sounds like a falling wave—I cannot return to thee.

But if in a happy hour the drifting cloud is rent
From the sad height to the deep, and on the gray is bent
A seven-hued bow that burns the clouds' dark roots
away—

Narrows then the waste, flushes the pool with light,
And a child playing alone, dressed in grasses bright,
Pauses, looks, laughs—and I run back to thee.

FULL DEEP

IN your eyes have I seen and you in mine
A shadow falling,
And in our voices other sound have heard
Soft calling—
No echo, but the mother of many echoes,
Now speaking near, and now far-off replying.

It is that shape begotten of our thought,
In our eyes growing,
In our voice 'tis the deep swell of the sea
Full flowing;
And like a boat on the mirrored boat slow heaving,
Love's body floating upon the body of love.

THE ARGUMENT

WHY does he never sing of street and town,
The labouring life of men, the friendly stir
Of crowds and the familiar touch of kindness
Softening griefs, the troubled unushing air?

Why sings he only of sad naked hills,
Forlornest forests darkening with mystery,
Cold kinless downs where only ghosts are walking,
The menacing thunders of the chill-lipped sea?

.

Not reared by forces wanton, wild and harsh,
But made by hands like mine for needs like mine,
Heaved from the dust, serene amid corruption,
And like old airs yet echoing fond and fine;

Paul's like a giant amid the west wind's snows
Heaped round his head; the Thames' time-blanchèd
 Hold,
Still watchful as a toothless shag-haired mastiff;
The eyeless fortress of the nation's gold;

The many altars of a Church that stays
Honoured, unhearkened, like some fading Dame
Whose rule is passed, deep in her drowsy mutterings,
Beautiful altars of a dwindling flame;

And those, the comely houses, that yet bloom
Perennial mid the waste of slate and stone,
Than trees in any droughty land more welcome,
Or willowed waters in a shire unknown;

Palaces, terraces, towers, the exuberant blossom
Of man's imagination and delight,
Painfully builded out of his quick fantasy
To outface the fantasy of death and night—

Why sings your poet never of these, nor sings
Of the inhabitants of all that maze
Of seething streets, the town's slow-heaving entrails,
Where the sun sullenly shines and the wind strays

Like a sick-spirited cur that sniffs and snarls,
And seasons palely burgeon, shrivel and fall?
Why is your singer silent amid the murmur
Of hearts that shake, nor know on Whom to call?

Mirth sleeps with sadness, pride lies down with want,
Men live, and know not why, nor why they die,
Strung on a necklace down the breast of Being
Until sleep falls—then all forgot put by.

But look, your singer takes his moody way
As these were not and all the world was mute,
Save the owl with the hunched woods conferring
And the wind fingering a hillside flute.

Wherefore the world he heeds not heeds not him,
Each scornful, each enwrapt with dream or care,
Sundered though brothers: he with his worshipped
Nature,
They with unwasting hope or shy despair.

Why sings he not—

His secret is not mine.
I cannot tell, except his spirit is filled
With ancient shadows withdrawing into darkness,
Echoes whose note exalts, and then is stilled.

Not Nature's worshipper—her born slave he,
Hunted with visions, stung with sudden bliss;
Loving or unloving, still her fatal vassal,
Betraying or betrayed with any kiss.

Remote her purpose but her whims in fire
Charactered and smouldering in sombre sign;
She of his blood is the eternal torment,
Sly Gipsy, with flushed cheeks and eyes malign.

How should he answer save that Gipsy's breath?
Even in the scurf'd and greedy town he spies
Her fluttering shape, her tawny tatters seizes,
Follows her bloodied feet and haunting eyes.

She in the soft yew heaves, from brambled tomb
And scarpèd hill mocks with her whispered, *Here!*
Where the generations of his blood are lying,
He feels the dust stir as his dust steps near.

Maybe he cannot choose but hark, and cry
Out of reverted muse when the past sweeps
Trampling, triumphant, and the humbled present
Sinks and a palsy through each member creeps.

In that quick company he draws again
Through woods of hush, and myriad gaze that burns,
By falling, falling streams; and from the hill-slope
Stares at a distant glittering dust—and turns.

EPILOGUE

FROM sadness, Robin, have we asked, *What sweet?*
And sick of madness, *Whither to turn our feet?*
Ignorance, sly fear plucking man's outworn cloak,
Faith's follies, unfaith's disease, the blind hour's yoke,
War's undispersing shadow, darkening still
Our quaggy time and the steep trackless hill
Others will front, not we; and ever that strife
Between our members, the sting and wound of life—
Spirit with flesh—on these we thought that night
When Martin, Conrad, you and I watched the light
Shrink from the cliffs and on the Atlantic waste
Fade like a flower upon other dead flowers cast.
Such thoughts unspoken quickened what was spoken,
For all could not be said; like seas rock-broken,
Between us stretched the silence of the mind
Shaking with apprehension.

And what then?

The prophet-puppets might speak once again,
Fabulists tease the heart with longed-for lies,
New sorceries of the senseless sense arise,
Wax, wane; and one yet falser mutter, *Peace!*
And servile echoes whisper anon, *Peace! Peace!*
Of these we knew, we knew and would no more.
Yet what remained more stable? What far shore
Unseen, unmapped, might bid us through the years,
Restlessly faithful, laughing at our own fears?
There is no land. Who says there is no land?
This stony Titan, half sunk in tawny sand.

There are no stars to guide. That murmur creeps
From a drugged dreamer, murmuring while he sleeps.
A mocking tone, *Who shall endure such labour?*
Breathes from some wanton wasting Judas-neighbour,
Locked in his grave.

None answered these fond lispers,
But the air between us stirred with other whispers—
Echoes of voices infinitely far
Without, or deep within. And like a star,
Eve's first and loveliest, tranquil in her height,
Through the thin spiritual air of empty night
Shone a clear cresset from the dark shadowy tower
Upreared in imagination's sudden hour—
The noble folly of our life's rich dream
Fleeting upon the mind's Atlantic stream,
A shape, a shapeless shadow; seen, unforgotten
Though all else prized and durable proved rotten.
War's sable thinned, even the sting of sex
No longer could with cherished smart perplex.
The sea gulls flying and crying over the sea,
The brooding cloud quenching the smouldering sky,
The walls with all their blossoms nodding asleep
Above the livid bay, the cleft and steep
Of sullen cliff—held, and yet could not keep
Passionate secrets that our hearts had yielded.
'That shade, remote as death, our hearts had builded,
That cresset was imagination's purest light,
Darkening the dark; no unachieved delight
But the undwindling altar lamp of vows

Silently uttered. That faint shape was the house,
The fortress of the spirit's habitude,
Foamed by vain seas' and winds' caresses rude,
By coil and care. And none now spoke a word,
But each the other's flying thought we heard
As still we heard the gulls' unbodied cry
Flitting about the sea and naked sky.

Then turned we from the west. In the gilt glow
Of the lamp-light as we sat talk flitted now
Sparrow-like released about each jesting head,
Wantonly chirruping, but nothing said;
And like a sulky cat sunken in sleep
Unheeding what brief wings about him sweep,
Heaved our cold silent secret shape of thought,
In proud contempt of ease so lightly sought. . . .
*We were young, we were merry, we were merry
though old—*

*Feathers neath the eaves, the owl shakes with cold.
We were merry, being old, who were sad though
young--*

*The wind in the flue has found her tongue,
Merry, foolish. The owl's complaining hoot
Muffles in the fall of the chimney soot.*

So quicker than our jests the moments flew,
The last light from the livid bay withdrew,
And the air that crept in smelt of chill and dew . . .
Good-night.

So soon? Good night.

Good-night, good-night!

PART TWO

THE GROVE

SHAKE, shake thy shadows down, thy dark leaves down,
Thy gentle leaves upon the parched dull grass,
And let thy silver leaves between the black,
And silver pools outspread between dark islands,
Mirror the steady tranquil light that lies
Round thy lone station in the skies.



I

Lightly along the lime tree avenue
A wind tip-toed, careless of the tired arms
Stretched wide for any breath, and lifting only
In his irregular motion thin boughs here,
Large branches there and, passing, leaving but
A few faint-stirred and many unrefreshed.
There was a bay of younger trees about
A frail old bench, and these the wind ran through
Ruffling every bough until they breathed out peace,
All wakeful and all waiting his return.

“She is not here to-night,”
A slim lime said. “Again she is not here,”
Another said: “A third night now has fallen
And she comes not.” At the crescent’s shadowy tip
An older dense tree spoke: “Three nights she came,
Three nights she’s absent: she will not come again—
Not again, again.” The sound shook from his leaves
Like heavy dew falling on leaves below.

A young tree whispered, "When she waited here
She came and touched me with her foot, tap-tapping
Impatient, maybe angry."

"No, no," breathed
The dust in quiet syllables. "No, not angry,
Her footstep quivered on me, not in anger,
And when he came the lightest shaking ceased."

"Even so quiet," mused another lime,
"For when she leaned her hand here and uplifted
Her face, looking along the path, her breath
Stirred not the greedy spider's web above her.
She was so quiet then."

"Ah, but the owl,
That large loud foolish owl tumbling about
Half the night through, that harsh owl startled her
With his near note and quick and soundless wings;
And when a moth struck smartly on her cheek,
I felt her—like a dizzy moth herself."

The tufted grass between the fissured footstone—
"Quiet at first, but yet not quiet for long.
Sitting here last time she thrust her foot on me,
Grinding me with her heel as she stood up."

"'Twas then she scorched me as she motioned on,"
The dust said softly and then sank in silence.

Now the bench muttered, "And still no one knows,
None knows why she is absent or if she'll come."
One answered then, "You must have heard, you heard
More than our senses told us. Tell us now."

And all the listeners in a sudden breath said, "Tell us, Tell us."

"Words are not all. Women are like trees,
That speak in wordless rustle. But I will tell
Of all her lips and hand and bosom said, the pulse
That shook me when she could not speak aloud.
Words are not all."

*"Not all, not all," they murmured,
Their leaves like the sound of a hushing crowd
Doing its reverence to death and sorrow.*

"When last she came and waited, and when he came,
Here sat they; and she but sighed, 'At last,
At last.' And he, 'I could not come—forgive.'
She smiled then, saying, 'However soon you came,
I still should breathe, *At last.*'

'My dear,' he cried—
No more; but yet I know his thought went on,
'I dare not tell her I had nigh forgotten.
Good Lord, there's no forgetting in a woman.'

"Awhile she sat contented with his touch
Until a thought spread over her, and then:
'These many months we've met, now here, now there,
And time flows on with habit; but now, my dear,
Thinking of all I've thought, I cannot still
Meet you, and ever so—thus in the dark,
In secret.'

He started, and cried, 'Why?''

*"I heard that 'Why?'" the listeners breathed,
"I heard."*

"She paused, and then 'I hate to meet in the dark . . .'
But he broke in, 'The kindly, friendly dark,
That shuts the world out, every other eye
And every other ear.'"

*"Not ours, not ours!"
Breathed all together.*

And the bench went on,
"The friendly dark? Ah, no. It is too still,
Too secret, silent—all ear and no tongue.
O there's a time when the world awakes, all tongue,
No ear. I do not fear the light,
I fear the thief-like secrecy of the dark.
O listen!
I would go naked through the gabbling town—
As *she* did once—mindless of eyes and tongues,
Rather than wear this falseness—like a shroud
For honour that is dying, already dead,
Feigning all that my heart can never feel,
And feeling . . . shame. O I'd rather be
Open, and despised, than—'
There was no more to hear."

"She didn't mean that, a woman," murmured the lime,
That saturnine dense tree the farthest off.

“ She did, she did!” declared the grass. “ Her foot
Pressed sharp against me, as if she had a hurt
To hide and could not hide it or endure.”

“ *Hush, hush,*” cried others. “ *What then, what then?* ”

“ He paused,
Then whispered low, ‘ We may be lovers still,’
And leaned his shape to hers, a dark fond cloud.
But she, ‘ Deceivers still?’ cried quick and clear.”

“ *I heard her,*” every ruffling listener breathed.

“ ‘ Ah, let us not deceive ourselves.’ His voice
Was smooth and gentle but did not speak his thought,
His thought that curled coldly within and watched.

‘ Let us think of the future and not trust—’

“ ‘ Trust nothing, do you mean, not even love?’

She cried; ‘ is nothing, nothing left to trust?’

She quivered as she lifted then her head,

And though the words came not, her bosom was saying,

‘ Trust nothing—what are you teaching me? Trust
nothing,

What have you done to me, what are you doing,

You that I love?—Deceive, deceive ourselves,

Deceive?’

Then his voice with its old and cool

Caress (and hand that slid upon her bosom

And stayed to calm her), cried, ‘ O hush, be still

Be not so wildly foolish; rock not, but rest
Here.' And he drew her."

"She was crying then,"

Muttered the hollowed footstone; "her tears fell
Heavily." None else spoke, all listened. Then
The voice went on: "At last she breathed, 'Ah, true.
You are right: I will not deceive myself again.
I will lock my heart away and be all fear
And care . . . But no, no, I cannot
Learn cowardice and cunning now, for love
Cries out against me. All these weeks and months
Too sweet are, and too bitter—and must end,
Must end—have ended. I will come to you
When you say come—but not to part again,
But not to shun the light and hug the dark—
The friendly, false, unfaithful dark. I will come
Freely and openly, annulling so
These present bonds . . . that other bonds be fast.
For love, I know, needs bonds, as moon and tides
Need laws to bound their wide and homeless ways.
Chain me, my dear, but chain me in the eye
Of common day. Shame gnaws these bonds of night,
And sorrow gnaws deceit.'"

*Mused the listeners, "We
We too are chained, we too,
And our fall'n leaves return, and bud anew;
And all we know the gnawing of the worm
That writhes within."*

Their hushed voice faded away,
And the grave tone took up the tale again.
“A while he crouched, cold as a winter'd snake,
No longer whispering subtly at her ear;
And feeling him so chill she shook, and I
Shook with her motion; then, ‘Forgive!’ she cried,
And in a lower note, ‘Forget!’ she cried;
‘Let all be now forgotten between us.’ Again
She trembled head to foot.”

“I felt her trembling,”
Said the stone and tufted grass.

“He spoke at last,
‘Say not again, Forget. My dear, you are right;
We must end this, and now begin anew.
But a little while, a few short days, and then
We will meet—’

‘To part no more?’ she echoed clear.”

*And all they round re-echoed, “To part no more!”
For all they heard that clear, “To part no more.”*

“‘To part no more,’ he answered, bending his head.
Then silence: but his mind went rattling on
Purposeless and perplexed with *Why, What, How!*
Repeated in the twitching of his hand.
At last, ‘Then three nights hence, and here,’ he said.
‘Three nights hence,’ she repeated; and she rose
And drew him to her and they moved away,
Two figures and one shadow, and her head
Uplifted as her eyes would face the stars.”

*"They passed beneath us and her step was light,
Her head was steady as she faced the stars,"
The trees said swaying, mingling shade in shade.*

II

The owl was hooting wildly now; his shrill
And thrilling shriek had stilled all cries beside—
Then silence, and "Scream away now, old owl,"
The dense lime said: "lift up your luckless tune,
Your loveless burden. Hoot on now, if ever."

*"Hush, hush thy evil leaves, thine owlish lips,"
Murmured the grove.*

"It is to-night they come, to-night they meet
To part no more."

"No more, no more," all whispered.

Said one, "How many scores of restless lovers
Have met and kissed and parted in our shade?"
Said one, "How many generations rose
Before ours grew here." "There were forests once,"
Said one, "before men journeyed east to west:
Forests—and now our thin trim ranks are all
Of forest left."

"How many restless scores,"
Began the young tree again; but the dense lime in
His deep tone said, "Not always lovers parting,
None's faithful ever—none."

“ Save these, save these ! ”

The large lime shook his dark and heavy locks,
Stirring the clinging moths. “ Wait, wait, ” he
answered ;

“ From eager meetings angry partings. ” And
His swaying boughs made echo, “ Eager—angry. ”
And then he wrapped his leaves around and ceased
Like some sad moody dreamer dreaming ill.

Shivered the prisoned grass, “ I wish her happy. ”
And, “ Wishes—wishes ! ” murmured a mellow throat.

Many steps had approached the watching crescent,
Lingered and passed ; no one sat on the bench.
The place was empty when her foot was heard
Slow on the dust, and when she saw she passed
And moved behind the bench and leaned her there,
Hands silent, but their throbbing filled the timbers.
All the trees listened as with a myriad filmy
Threads that must shake if but her longings stirred.

Sometimes an idle shape thickened upon
The shadow-checked dark, or satyr face
Peered greedily at her woman's shape withdrawing,
Till the wind drew a sudden sinister hiss
From quickly rocking boughs ; and when the bad face
Had passed, she moved again and stood tap-tapping,
Tap-tapping rapidly, incessantly repeating.
At last her head drooped and her body sank
Heavily on the bench and there was stiff ;
Only she raised her hands, covering her eyes—

Her body rigid as an iron cage
And spirit flapping to and fro within
Till the wings were bruised or broken.

And all they heard
The beating of the wings and the dull murmur
Of the smitten cage and tumult of her heart.
And like the suspiration of a prayer
Echoed to stony lips from human lips
At midnight mass, those green Cathedral arches
Redoubled and reiterated, *Come!*
Yes, every dusky hollow echoed *Come,*
Come, come!

Soundless a shadow deepened :
She felt its chill and looked and breathed, " Here, here,
At last?" And then, past doubtful, " Look I am here.
Have I drawn you, so you could not choose but come?
Speak . . . O, it wears your very guise,
It is your shadow—the shadow of a shadow,
The shadow of your love that rose and faded.
Go! Since I called you I will bid you go.
I would not keep you though your substance now
Clasped me—O fickle, feigning, faithless clasp."
And at her whispered *Go!* he thinned and passed.

Again a soundless movement caught her sense.
" Torment me not," she cried, her look dismayed,
Seeing a satyr face and restless form

Drawn on the dark. "Whisper not, *I am love.*
'Tis from without you come, not from my heart.
Corrupting image, go, torment me not—
Go, and steal no more unawares within
My bosom that lies unbarred to all distress.
Torment me not."

The writhing shade departed,
And the limes washed the darkness as he went
With a pure air; until another shape
Silently called. She lifted up no more
Her eyes to whisper, "O, lost happiness,
O lost contentment and lost innocence,
Forgive me, and cleanse me now of thoughts of love.
The woman that I might have been I see. . . .
Torment me not, except tormenting saves."
—Too low her syllables for hearing now,
But all they, listening, knew her mind went on,
"How much of folly is in evil, only
Eternal God knows—look with pity then
On me who ask for pity now, not love.
How lightly once I shook you off from me,
Child from the girl and the girl from the woman,
And now would sink back to your harmless breast
As though all since were but a sick sore dream.
Torment me not, except you save me now."

*And "Save me now!" was murmured through the grove,
And "Save me now!" rose dew-like from the earth.*

Her figure stirred, with thoughts reverted to
Days yet remembered as she stood up and breathed
Familiar words, forgotten many years—
“I will arise”—then silently turned back.

A voice from a young lime tree cried, “For ever.”
And that tall moody tree breathed “Never, never.”
And another whispered, “Ever, ever, ever.”
“I wish her happy,” sang another; but he,
That saturnine, discordant dark-cloaked tree
Rustled again, “Ah, wishes, wishes!”

“*Hush!*”
Murmured the rest.

And folded in their thought
Slept, with the wind close to their bosom caught.

THE WOUNDED BIRD

STRANGE was that dream. If it was more than dream
I cannot tell.

Under a roof of stars,
Tamarisk wove another thicket roof
With hawthorns whose late lingering rank perfume
Still clung the air. Flowers slept within the grass,
And in the meadow near I stirred the sorrel
Dew'd in the evening hour: the dew was bright
In the swung lantern's smoky ray. Within
The tamarisk thicket the grass sunk saucer-like,
Longest and wettest where the saucer dipped.
Music, and that rank hawthorn must, had drawn
My wandering feet and, as I neared, the light
Slipping from my hand was dowsed in unheard ripple
Of meadow water. So I stood unseen,
At first unseeing, but all ear the while
Thin music wove its bindweed round my sense,
Holding me tranced until beneath the lids
Sight waked, and pierced the impleached gloom. And

first

I looked whence music came and saw against
A hawthorn bough, bending and brooding over
A hidden fiddle, out of whose womb he drew
Ravishment with each glide upon the strings,
A green-garbed figure, twenty inches high
As he crouched there, dream-wrapt unheeding dwarf.

Nor was that fiddling all: for next I heard
Threading the gossamer lines that music hung
And shook between the stars and starry grass,
Skipping of many feet, now quick, now slow,
Anon heavy-heeled, then tapping of light toe.

There in the dusky light of stars and dew
Were two bright dancers, and around them stept,
First as I looked, pigeons and crooling doves
That flapped their wings, rose, fluttered, sank, stept
again

Thridding the changing paces of those dancing
Who moved as music or their silent thoughts
(Another music) bade, and dizzied slowly
Up from the long wet grass to the circle's brink,
Then stood half-faint by low-drooped feather-boughs
And watched in turn the pigeons and pale doves
Still curvetting. Clothed were the resting dancers
In sober green like that their fellow dwarf
Showed as his yet untiring shoulder swayed
Over the fiddle; all ageless and all ancient
As grass and rock and water seemed the three,
And flushed the dancers' cheeks, and their brown eyes
Were dancing yet though limbs were faint and slack
As hand in hand, fast breathing, stood they following
With quick-flashed glance the fiddle and fluttered birds.
And now it seemed the echoing air's self danced
Quivering in the dewlight as in noon's fresh heat;
The thin sound circling up and passing into

A cry that seemed not joy's nor sorrow's only
But each, then neither—both transcending, rising
Purely beyond the last peak of mortal sense
That gleams in white lone converse with deep heavens.
Half thankful was I when the music fell
On altered circuits into lower zones
Where I might listen only with my ear
And turn new eyes (which in that climbing shut)
Again upon the green and fay-like shapes.

—But sank at last that music to a sob
Among her lowest tones as grieving for
Old loss or loss to come. Lower he leaned,
And grey hairs fell over his bended forehead
While yet that plaintive note prolonged.

How harsh
That strange step was, without the tamarisk bower!
What hand was there? The startled birds rose high,
And a shot sounded hollow and close. Then all
The agitated wings and voices flew
Away, dancers and fiddler all withdrew
Unseen; distrest, I stumbled amid the dew.

COMES back my broken dream . . . June's clear
light now
Was in the sky and creeping over hedges
As I walked sleep-refreshed. Last eve's wheel-tracks
Ran unerased: no foot nor wheel was heard,
No bleat of flock nor hoarse-throat drover's cry.

But I thought of the dancers and the fiddler
And doves and pigeons: wondering, Had I dreamed?
When near above came pigeons in a cloud
Flying and halting and returning and flying
Onward again, with one that scarce could fly.
A minute's span she'd plough her painful way
As through a denser element than thin air,
And faltering, sink; while round her, busy vans
Beat as they'd force the weak void to sustain her:
And she would rise again and flutter and stagger,
Flutter and stagger again, and again sink low.
Last time their hasty wings availed no more.
Into the grassy roadside ditch she fell,
Few hundred yards away.

Quickened I walked;
But all those anxious wings before I neared
Rose, as two children from the bridle-path,
Frieze-clad, ran to the wounded bird. They stooped,
And then the elder struck her, and she shrilled
When his foot scattered stones at her white breast.
"Stop!" I yet distant cried; but the boy cared not
Lifting a broken bough to strike the bird.
It seemed she waxed then strangely tall, to height
Of the dwarfed dancers, flapping her healthy wing
Against the boy's limbs though he cried and still
Flogged the bird with his rotten twig until it snapped.
By this I reached and caught the boy away,
Who scowled, his fat, round, red face blubbered with
tears,

And then, with an angry sob, his sister dragging
After him, shuffled away.

Large yet, with more
Than heron's height, the ruffled faint bird stood
And, moving on slowly, spattered the dust with blood.

I with like weak step walked. If now I smile,
Seeing myself beside that painful bird
Slow-paced, I smiled not then. Behind the breast
Under the whitest wing the down was crimson
With blood that still oozed, richly wasting, staining
All one side to the pink dust-feathered feet.
Now in her throat new sound of measured bubbling
Began, like the beginnings of babes' speech,
Till I distinguished the as yet all-unmeaning
Syllables. Then I said, "How far away
Is your nest hung, for what safe woodland's breast
Seeks your torn breast?"

The bird then answered—"There,
In the scant spinney beyond the gathered elms—
Could I but reach it—but I thirst, I thirst!"
Her words were thick, but pity gave me wit.
Then saw I where a runnelet damped the road
And by the side glinted a cressy pool
With flowerless mint above.—"Here may you drink!"
Eager her beak plunged into the cold trench;
And sipping long, it seemed her body shrank,
Smaller her wings grew, and a white pigeon now
With clotted blood smearing her stiffened quills,
Was all I saw before she rose in the air

And slowly flapped towards her wanted nest.

Then I turned back, following the spattered blood,
Thinking of her and of her dancing kin,
For kin they were, and of all cruelty
Spilt on the earth; and where the blood-spots failed
(The rotted twig I snapped again) I turned
Down a steep path to seek the tamarisk bower,
But woke—all dark—and heard the sounding hour.

Such was the dream. If it was more than dream,
Shadow of approaching wrong, image of ill
That wounds the eternal beauty of the world,
I cannot tell.

BESIDE THE POOL

CLAD with soft wind and sacred virgin light
Against the shock of my too insolent sight,
Or with your hair's smouldering and gleaming shroud
The neck and quickening bosom's globe to cloud
(As those thick wreaths the world's unsetting sun,
That take and give new splendour)—

*“Speak not so
Of that ill thing a shroud.
Thy breath is loud
And Death who knows how near!
I, that fear not, fear
For her.”*

—Hair that's spun
By that invisible worm of light and dew,
Now dense and dark, now shaken to let through
Your shoulder's snow—

*“O worm, spin slow,
And Time, stoop
Down from thy throne
To grope
Blind and alone.”*

Clothed only so and all unclothed you stand
With calm hand nursing white unfretful hand,

And firm and shady thighs like faint-swayed trees
On beechen hill, and never trembling knees
Where swiftness hides with strength—

*“Hush, Death—even so.
Vaunt not thy speed—I know.
Thou and thy flying worm
Dost unbuild the firm,
Outrun the swift.
I know, who does not know?”*

—And now your feet
Press the year's first pale clover of its sweet . . .
Stay! Here, if here thou must, beside thy pool
Dress thee, but leave thine image in its cool
Scarce quivering depth, that I when thou art gone
May find thy body still to gaze upon.

*“Now sleep, or go
Whither thou wilt. No eye
Thee will now defy,
No ear
Forget to fear
If thy gnat wail near.”*

SILK to thy skin—bring not acquainted thus
With tissue of thy flesh the emulous
Craft of the worm who spins—ah, silk is nought
But a reproof—and spur—of my wild thought
Abashless. What now will those hands do?

Bind up your burning hair : so tall slaves go,
Nose-ringed and bearing on each ebony skull
Queen's treasure when the gilded dynasts fall.
Bears your neck's tower that weight of dusk and gold?
Even so. But what needs else, why new enfold
Garment with garment? What shame has shamefaced
you,

Bosom and body and thighs and legs to endue
With tinct of peacock and dust-feathered dove,
And deathlike black—unmeet, unmeet for Love?
Was nakedness disgrace, showed my eyes sin
In their repleaded plea, that you hid in
Your silks and hues, and last the greedy black
Swallowing from foot to knee?

You turn your back.

It is no more you—your lightfoot walk, your sway
Like hill-crest beeches when the winds affray,
Your still unhurried motion like the cloud
Breasting the south-west wind, your wide and proud
Averting look on me who stand, and stare
Then on the pool's calm deep—and find you there.

*“ And you asleep?
Looked you not when
Her beam she dimmed—
Bright-hued, black-limb'd?
Is that wailing, dizzy
Worm no longer busy? ”*

OLD TESTAMENT

I SLEPT awhile, then woke. The night was wild
With the high East Wind's howling—a black hound
That snarled, and rattled at the casement latch,
And shook dry mortars down the twisted flue.
Hound answered hound and both together lifted
Harsh angry notes, and sadder notes that filled
The hapless ear with fright.
I slept and waked at whiles, all hours, and heard
The howling though I slept.
At last, asleep or waking, all was hushed
And from the hush and dark—

Childish familiar images, ghosts of the nights
Of childish loneliness and wonders and fears,
Terrors that drummed my heart then echoing now
The aching drumming. Whose was that figure, tall
Gray and still as a juniper at twilight?
Lot's wife, Pillar of Salt, with blind face towards
Sodom and Gomorrah smouldering in the Plain.
Turn, turn, hoar frozen Pillar, turn yet thine eyes!
Smouldering and guttering in the Plain they lie,
A sullen bubble of fire, Sodom and Gomorrah,
Abhorred and obscure names yet in my ears,
As in my sight the sullen fiery worms
That wrapped them strangling round . . . *Turn,*
turn thine eyes!
And yet she stood, and stands, hoar Pillar of Salt.

And now two figures climbed Moriah's steep,
A young lad bearing wood : and an old man fire,
With a bright knife at his thigh, who mournfully
Upon the topmost mound heaved a new mound,
With shaking purpled hands and eyes that filled.
He laid the wood there, bound
And laid the startled boy there, and uplifted
The knife—already bloody in my eyes
Ere plunged—until a Voice shook from above,
A dreadful Eye hung in the middle of heaven
Pouring sharp rays upon the tawny Mount.
O dreadful Eye, pursuing sleep and dreams
And waking thought,
From cloudless azure casting golden arrows
Into every hole and noisome nook of fear,
Fire-lidded Eye, fire-brow'd. 'Twas not the Voice,
It was the Eye that sank Abraham down
With another horror than the sacrifice,
And Isaac prone upon the waiting pyre
Burned by that Eye of fire.

Whose that tall shape and shining fallow front,
Beaked nose, black brush-like hair and hawk-like eyes,
Lean callous figure by the river's waste
Or desert waste casting his shadow on
Myriad slaves? And what the dreadful cloud,
Darkening and humming death, infinite hordes,
Dusking Imperial Egypt's self with fear?
Horde after horde, hosts of that angered God

Whose smoky fire burned through the locust rivers,
These like another fire ate substance up
And left white famine in a desert of bones.
Saw Pharoah this dark cloud, and snuffed that fire
Of famine?

—Now Elijah's ravens
Flying to the brook to drink, beheld him prone,
And dropped, as grim Jehovah bade, foul meats
For the sad prophet's need,
Who in the loneliness of loneliness
Raised fleshless arms to plead
For death, or the Lord's judgment on his foes.
The ravens dropping offal, craking death,
Black missive wings between starved earth and hell,
Black wings that rose,
Circled and fell—

Gave place and rose no more.
Jordan's pale shallow stream it was and on the shore
Tumult of wondering tongues; no ravens now,
A dove between John and Jesus fluttering,
Neck-ringed with black, and nimbus'd with pale flame,
And tipt with sapphire flame the light-like wing,
And treading fire when o'er the twain she hung
Between the fierce face and the patient brow
Of John and Jesus as they stood and parted.
—And then the raven wings, and notes
Returned of desert throats.

MAYBE the wind was slaked awhile and slept,
Or I slept though it raved; but as I turned
The vixen East barked out anew and brought
Voices again that muttered in childish sleep
When sleep was innocent.

Beneath a white Tower lay the tissued corpse
Yet gleaming and yet warm with cunning blood.
The city curs crept out and smelt the blood
Oozing upon the supple golden tissue,
Less supple than the breast and thighs beneath.
Their yelping called new yelping and the dogs
Of that dense kennel sprang and wrangled together,
Their muzzles bloodied with the Queen's warm veins,
While others stood and snarled, "Behold the Queen,"
And one leaned evil from the tower and snarled,
"So ends Queen Jezebel, blessed be the Lord!"
His sharp teeth gleaming like the writhing curs'
That licked the blood and dust that late was hers.

The blood and dust. I saw the cloud curl up
Chasing the bronz'd wheels of the car that drew
The corse of Hector soiled in the dust of Troy;
Moody Achilles frowning as he threw
His armour down like a discarded toy.

And there Prince Absalom, murdered yet beloved,
Hanging from the fatal tree,
His long hair caught amid the ravaged boughs
Of the sere festering wood,
And grey-winged shafts amid his careless breast,
Under the Judas tree.

And other ghosts I saw—
King David casting dust upon his head,
And Sheba's satraps decked on camel towers,
And weary Solomon, wise and cold,
Nodding on a throne of gold;
Caesar's chill craft lined in his hueless smile,
Great-helmèd Antony clamouring on Egypt's sands
Beside the ageless Pyramids and old Nile . . .
Image with image self-confused confusing,
And in the wind's rage all old fears reviving,
Terrors that startled childhood, quick and numbing,
Again, the haunting drumming;
And O, again, as once, again thy breast,
Mother, that rocked my heart to rest;
Though when I woke and knew that not again
Thy breast would still me, sharper yet my pain.

THE RED PATH

The Red Path records and slightly expands the story of a crime which was discovered some years ago.

After the death of a solitary old man, his house was being made ready for a new tenant, and one of the workmen happened to have been employed in making a red-tiled path when the house was built years before. Being vexed to see that in one place the tiles had sunk, he felt constrained to reset them. In this way he found human bones beneath, and it was then recalled by the neighbours that the old man had been in the habit of sitting over the spot evening after evening. Investigation showed that the remains were those of his younger son, and from the evidence of the neighbours, his widow and elder son, it was concluded that in a fit of jealous madness he had murdered the lad, buried his body, and sat over the spot in nightly communion with the ghost.

I

LYING there, in a quiet October air,
He waited, tired of so long lying there
For yet unhurrying death; and as he waited
The neighbour waited too, and they both hated
The thought of that slow Shadow moving on belated—
Which of them the more impatient I know not,
But she, being woman, less concealed her thought.

She asked him once and dared not ask again,
“Shall I send for your wife?” but the old man when
“Your wife!” he heard, shook his weak head and
frowned

And cast pale angry orbs the room around,
Lest his wife should be there.

She never came.
He died keeping almost to the end the same

Smouldering fury, with quick sparks of rage
Which the neighbour bore with as the whim of age.
“ ’Twas strange,” she said “ how he turned from his
wife and sons!

Never a word of the boys—fine boys—though once
They lived together. How he hated his wife—
A poor thing she—terrified out of her life
If he swore at her. Now lying here he seems
Small and gentle as a child that sleeps and dreams”—
Sole elegist, this was her elegy.

And he out of his cloud looked mad to see
His widow stand unmourning at the grave,
Still timid as if she feared the very grave
That held his angry bones. Yes, as she moved
Away, remembering her sons beloved,
In his dark cloud the self-vexed ghost grew mad
To see what sweetness even illusion had.

II

“ Go, and go now!” in his anger he had cried,
The harsh hands twitching cruelly at his side.
Her fingers clasped, her rainy eyes, her breast
Lifting with sobs in quick and desperate unrest
Were scorned—all tears and words alike unheeded
Except he hated more as she repleaded
The old pleas. Always had he hated her
Since motherhood rubbed away the little fair
For which he’d chosen her; the children’s growth
Cost all her peace, as their birth stole her youth.

He hated them all three; her most because
She was the gentle thing she ever was,
But less the transient pleasing:—his sons then
He hated since they shadowed happier men.
They vexed him with remembrance of those days
Far off, and half unreal to his gaze,
When he was happy, and most when he had returned
With nervous step, quick eye, skin deeply burned,
From Africa, after voyaging long
The wreckful, typhoon-haunted tropic seas among;
Days that glowed as with phosphorescent lights
Beneath the spawning stars of southern nights;
Days when he had come to this sea-neighbouring town,
Lingered and stayed—and thirty years had gone.

There he had met her, in her springtime's flush
That makes youth lovely till the shadows brush
Too soon the brightness. Was it love had kept
Brief sentry in his empty heart, then slept
And sleeping died, and dying yielded him
To the mastery of his own unmerciful whim?
If it was love, love slept and sleeping died
Of a nightmare that pressed snakelike at love's side .

She for a while feared not and was content,
Being of his delight the instrument.
But he, turning his money to a little more
And yet a little, grew more nervous than before,
With angers flashing at a word or touch
Amiss, or look of humbleness too much.

Once he had seen her, thinking herself unseen,
Almsgiving to a beggar cunning and mean,
And snatched her gift, and drawn her fainting home.
“ You give to a beggar—my money you give, give—
Come!

A beggar to a beggar—my money—Come!”
Her arm showed long the red sting of his hand,
But dread and shame stung deeper than his hand;
And she, left to her household tasks, felt all
That tyranny rising round her like a wall,
Or a great chimney with one small disc of blue
Above, to slide its beamy brightness through
Her spirit.

It was her sons that brightness poured
Into the starven breast, and each neglected chord
Plucked to a plaintive lovely air of love
Trembling so thin her ill-feigned calm above
Her husband scarce might hear, or if he heard,
Darkening, the music muted at a word.

When the first child was born so happy was she
That she forgot her old anxiety,
Loosening the long suppression of the flood
Of mother-love that, swifter than her blood,
In veins and nerves, through fingers, eyes, lips, feet
Leapt, and left in her the sole painful heat
Of utmost giving. But her husband loured
And stung her again, seeing that love outpoured,
By him despised—outpoured on his own son.

Might he not love his son—her flesh, his own,
Born of her body, bone of his very bone?
He might not, for a madness in him ran—
From what gnat-haunted, hid miasmic fen
Secretly flown, who knows?—He could but hate,
As she could not but love. Once as she sat
Nursing her sick child, singing a wordless song,
Tenderness quickening the hours so long,
Suddenly he spoke angered from the door
Where unheard he stood hearing—“ I tell you, no more,
No more. Put the child down, let it alone,
Let it die!”—Startled, she stooped down,
Clasped the child and sobbed; while he looked aching on.
“ My curse on you both!” he muttered. She heard
no more,
If more he said.

Yet another child she bore,
Begotten of his hate and her dumb fear.
Gladness renewed brief spring awhile in her,
Feeling that young life drawn by blinded longings near.
For now two sons her despised body had brought
Into the sensual world out of her womb of thought—
So blessed she—and so more hapless when
Sadness renewed long winter’s ache again.

So John and Robert grew in that ill home,
Nourished in love and terror, light and gloom,
While she, with love suppressed, fears unsuppressed,

Grew wan and wretched, then more wretched lest
Her looks vex him anew, as vex they would,
As she sat at meals, patient, silent, subdued.
Sometimes for weeks he'd leave her—she knew why—
Returning with new angers in his eye.
Sometimes at night he'd lock her in her room,
Return next noon and mocking call, "Come, Come!"
And bid John to unlock his mother's door.
Long past humiliation, this she bore
Complaintless. When her mother dying lay
She dared not visit her save by stealth, or stay
Longer than lies might serve . . . So his long hate,
Perverted from brief love, made her life desolate.

—And his too desolate. In high barren lands
Wolves howl all night over the frozen sands,
And in that desolation their long cry
Torments an unsleeping brain to agony—
Hearing to wild throats wilder throats reply:
Only that sound beneath the starry sky.
So in his brain the savage thoughts crept out,
And crying in his darkness, and about
The naked desert of his spirit, made
Madness of its own energy afraid.
Time wantoned with him, pinched his veiny cheek,
Sharpened his nose, and made his shrill voice weak
For all that simmering fury, and more lean
His hands, and the thin body yet more thin
For all that burning fury.

And within
The lean and sinewy flesh, time made more stark
The human spirit. The eternal lamp grew dark,
Passion wove denser clouds of stifling fume;
Came no pure wind or fire's lip to relume
The fading light. Dark grew the light in him,
Only his reinless sense became not dim,
Till he seemed but sense and anger, nothing more,
Except at whiles a mortal worm would bore
(That worm he knew!) deeper into his mind;
Then sadness followed, moaning like a wind.
Sadness and loneliness renewed the sound
Of the wild wolvis howling all around.
To evil, loneliness new evil brings,
And sadness to the neck of evil clings.

III

Kindlier was time's wantoning with his boys;
Escaped the house, they gathered summer joys.
The gloom of home had no power to pursue
Their parting steps—like any boys they grew,
Like any boys careless of love and pride
Breathed over them by mother thoughts and cried
In whispered timid words of welcome and farewell.
. . . But the old man hated them: no need to tell
He hated them. They knew it in his eye,
Words, silence and perpetual tyranny.

They did not know what poison in him stirred,
What savage, wild-pursuing cries he heard;
They did not know, and John, being elder, swore
Many times he would bear no stabbing more.
“ I’ll stay no longer,” he’d cry. His mother wept
Or dread with love fought in her bosom and crept
Into her eyes dim with forbidden tears.
At last, grown bold with his long nineteen years,
Without farewell hastening at dawn away
He disappeared, and wrote from Canada
Once, and no more. His mother could but pray
For his return, yet dread lest he return,
And the embers of old hatred newly burn—
Embers of fire that leapt when the old man heard
That John had gone and, to a fury stirred,
He walked all night up and down and up and down
Chafing as a beast because his quarry is flown;
Or stared out gloomy at the rainy street
Where emptiness bemocked his senseless feet
Up and down all night pacing.—While she lay
Orphaned, unhusbanded, awaiting hopeless day.
Robert more patient stayed yet; but he too
Fretted in the prison of his father’s view,
And after much enduring, much resenting,
Tired of abuse, threats and his mother’s lamenting,
Persuaded her that he might leave the town
For London, there to live a life of his own
And make a home for her too if need be,
Or she take courage also to be free.

When the old man knew his second son had gone
He swore and foamed and laughed and swore anon,
Glad that the boy had fled, but sick to feel
The boy no longer quivering under his heel;
And in the old furious way his wife upbraided,
As false, undutiful, sullen and degraded—
All the old maggot's spitefulness. Then, "Go,
Go, and go now!" And he barked again, "Go now!"
And she, glad to be bidden, sick to obey,
Went trembling, adread to hear his shouted "Stay!"
But no recall echoed to her faint sense:
Sorrowful, unreluctant passed she thence,
And glancing timorously half-turned back
She saw him at the door, with aspect black
Stirless—because the maggot in his brain
Bored a thought deeper, paused, and bored again.

IV

So to the refuge of her son she hasted,
With fears all around her and no fear untasted;
Till she reached Robert, the burning fears subsided,
And slowly resting, from the past divided,
Quieter her quick pulses beat; she stirred
No more with nerve controlless if she heard
A sudden noise, no graying of her cheek
Told of a shadow, or thought she could not speak.

No word from the old man came : no word she sent ;
All day over her needle she was bent,
While at a factory Robert worked : at night
The tired eyes rested, and her inward sight
Clearing, brought back bitterness and regret,
Or for an hour the past she could forget.
Yet always was she grieved that no news came
From John, far wandering, although his name
Every night she repeated in her prayer
Again and again to the unreplying air :
Unanswered went her letters.

So a year
Passed, and she grew perforce content to fear
And hope. And then another trouble fell,
For Robert lost his work. In those days still
Men starved because their strength was needed not
And starving they devoured their patient thought
Or bitter thought, and waited till perchance
Their skill was needed for the world's advance
—O barren Peace, thy bony shade keep far,
Plentitude is the gift of full-girthed War.
Not now men famish, but each day work and thrive,
And children eat, whom Peace would not let live.—
Robert, a silent lad, grew silent more
Since so superfluous, and was heart-sore
That youth and strength and skill should be despised :
And so, thus inly sick, his mother surprised
By saying suddenly, he'd return home,
And see if better fortune there might come.

“Write to your father first,” she urged, “Write first,
Or maybe”. . . He broke in, “This is the worst!
To starve here is the worst, and starve you too.
Anything were better—yes, I’d rather do
Anything, than stay here to shiver and beg,
And slink about, a lean avoided rag.
No, I’ll not write but go.” And so he started
On his long walk, intent and sober-hearted,
Through Hertford, Hitchin, Huntingdon, Peterbro’,
Past the great fens, diverging to and fro
At any rumour of luck; turning again
Weary with February wind and rain
Northward; by casual tasks half-charity,
Half-slavery, sustained—Till he could see
The smoking native town, black edging woods,
And in the east the suburb’s slaty clouds.

In the low western ward the old home lay,
A small house of chill stone, leafless and gray,
With a narrow garden of dwarf’d fruitless trees
And one long red-tiled path. With ill-worn ease
He knocked. His father opened and out-peered,
Searching his son’s face. “Is it you? O, I feared
One day you would come back, and now you’ve come.
Speak boy! What do you want? Speak, are ye
dumb?

Dumb and a beggar, hey? Come in, my dear,
Be pleased to be seated. Take my seat, sit here . . .

I'll stand, walk, kneel, because my son's returned :
Nobody knows how I've sat alone and mourned,
And now he's returned—to beg. Sit still, sit still
And beg." The old man gabbled in his shrill
Indistinct fury, and Robert could not speak
Until his father paused; and then was sick
With sadness. But at last, "I'm sorry I'm here,"
He answered slowly, "but you need not fear.
I'd thought perhaps, father—"

"You thought, you thought!

Of course—the things your pious mother taught.
I know! You're to get round me with your cant—
Hardships, homesickness; but I know what you want.
John was the first, then you went and your mother;
Now you're back, then she'll come, and soon your
brother,

And live like lords here, thinking I'll keep you all :
You'll sit, and I'm to run whenever you call
And give you what you please."

"That isn't true,

You know it's not. I'll take nothing from you
Now, though I never break bread again." So much
The neighbour heard through the open door. A touch
Or a wind shut it, and no more was heard
As her retreating steps the stiff grass stirred
And crossed the path. "Robert's come back next door,"
She cried. "Poor lad, he'll not come back any more—"

Such a storm has the old man raised—he's mad,
he's mad,
He must be mad!"—As if none were bad
And none else raged tormenting and tormented
But madmen.

V

"If things go wrong, then I'll not write," he'd said
Kissing his mother good-bye. She shook her head.
"O, but I'll write when things go well, but why
Speak if they don't?" She answered with a sigh.

She waited: all her life was lost in waiting,
And disappointed patience unabating.
But even that last stony refuge failed;
Face to face with midnight thoughts her spirit quailed,
And with sick mind she wrote to Robert, pleading
For a little news with gentle sad upbraiding:
"For," said she, "it's too too lonely now you're gone,
And I've but thoughts of you to feed upon!"—
And sent the letter home, for there, maybe
Robert might shelter yet. And she could see
The silent boy in each familiar room
Darkened at mid-day with the sudden gloom
Of her feared husband. "If but for a little while,
Dear Lord, let Thy kind light on Robert smile,
Even through that gloom . . . for a little while,
dear Lord,"
She prayed: and many a muted prayer outpoured.

From Robert came no answer, and a week
Passed . . . then a letter flushed her cheek,
In the old man's nervous hand. "You need not write,
He's at rest now, don't worry." And all night
She anguished, seeing in the void the very face
She sought—sad, unintelligent, adaze.

Morn brought no brightness. While her needle flew
Threading the air with light, her worn mind knew
No task but to stab itself with terror through,
Pluck the barb, and stab again. At length distraught
She sent to the neighbour, but dared not hint her
thought.

—What joy in the answer! Yes, Robert had gone
there,

Quarrelled, and gone again, nobody knew where.
But a few days since, voices were guessed once more
Angry; they'd heard the old man shut the door,
And from the casement in late twilight seen
The poor lad turn again, disappearing in
The dark of the trees at the garden's edge.

She read,
Smiled, and dreamed all night upon a happier bed.

And happy she mistaken, since she slept
And a false image of the beloved boy kept,
Seeing him moving in the world of sense:
Evil awhile was robbed of its influence,
And touched her not. She knew not it was John

That broke then the sad silence, and was gone—
Not Robert, who would break no silence more . . .
Happier mistaken!

John had knocked at the door
Twice, then his father opened, looked and shivered,
Cowering and white: the smoking candle quivered
In his infirm hand. "Don't you see father—it's John,
I've come back!" The old man rested his eyes upon
The undreamed-of face. "I thought 'twas Robert
again,"

And held the door with his foot, till he saw plain
It was not Robert. "What do you want?" he gasped,
His eyes and voice recovered, his knuckles clasped
Round the candlestick. "Can't I come in awhile?"
The old man moved a little, then stood still,
Murmuring, "Not Robert? Go away!" John
stepped by,

Sat down, and stared at his father hopelessly.
"I've come three thousand miles. I've worked
across . . .

Better to have stayed—little would be the loss
With this for welcome." The old man glowered
unspeaking.

On a loose hinge the door moved slowly creaking,
All else listened. "Where are mother and Robert
now?"

I know they've left and are living God knows how:
Tell me where, and I'll go." "I'll tell you nothing,
go!"

You come with Robert's knock and speaking so—
Just as he speaks; but you're not Robert—go, go!"
His voice rose high, his blind hands thrust, he clutched
The door, steadied himself anon, then touched,
Shaking, uncertainly, John's shoulder. "Go,
Go where they've gone; I'll tell you nothing! Go!"

And so John went miserable away,
Left the town, and at the river port next day
Meeting a shipmate joined him again and sailed
At evening.

VI

The old man drew the bolt again and faltered
To his tall chair; and now his face was altered,
And tears flowed. "Robert—not Robert? O, my son!"
Again and again; and, "Robert, what was done,
"What was done to you that night? You came indeed
That night: where are you now? I heard you plead
For something—where are you, why do you ask nothing
now?"—

Again and again, head bent, voice fallen low
. . . Till repetition died. The candle guttered,
And he rose and lit another, and then muttered,
"I'm coming, coming Robert!" opening the door.
The trees and the rising moon hung bright before.
He carried the tall chair out and set it down
In the middle of the path. The rising moon
Made all so plain that he fetched a folding screen.
There then he sat, save by the moon unseen

And that clear Eye that travels through the night
Of time and space and sees the dark all bright.
Bending low he tap-tapped on the tiles, "I am here!
Robert, Robert, Robert, Robert can you hear?"
And at the interstices of mould would peer
And lift with shaking finger a tile or two,
Whispering, "I am here, Robert, where are you?"—
Caressing the cold earth, then gently pressing
That earth back lest it weary of caressing.
"Who was it, Robert, when you came that day,
Who was it you spoke to? Who would drive you away?
Why did you come, and never come again?
O, had you come not, had you come not then!
Whose hand was't struck you, Robert, tell me whose?
Why did you cry out, that I could not choose
But hear? Why had you turned your back to me?
It was your face I feared—didn't you see?
Why did you cry 'Father, O father?' Why
Don't you answer now, 'Father, here am I?'"

"But I know how it was done. How should such power
Be in so weak a hand at such an hour?
It was not my hand, for my hand is too weak.
Look, Robert, at my hand. Look, can't you speak
But once now—'Father, here am I?'"

No word
With charmed deceitful ear the old man heard,
But sat on, lightly touching the dark mould,
Insensible of the hour and the air's cold;

Until he coughed and coughed, and at length stood,
Stamped the tiles firm, and slowly in that flood
Of dead light crawled back to the house and slept.

And night by night along the path he crept,
For night by night the maggot in his brain
Bored a thought deeper, paused, and bored again.

But not unseen he sat. For neighbours watched,
Pitied, and then a pitying pleasure snatched
Seeing him sitting there, screened and yet unscreened
From laughter. Out of the topmost window leaned
They might see just his bald head bent, or drooped
It seemed on his knees; as if he groped and groped—
Gathering moonbeams. "Or maybe it is there
His money's buried: perhaps he can't think where
It's buried; perhaps he hides it and finds and hides.
He was always mad, and bad and cunning besides.
There he is now. He'll sit so hour after hour,
Night after night, in moonshine. starshine. shower . . .
Now let's to bed."

But he stayed, burned and froze
And trembled; and at last, coughing, uprose.
Then would he go back to the silent house
Where every step must bitter echoes rouse,
And every silence thoughts more bitter than
Even echoes of lost voices to a lost lonely man.
But with the dawn the angry humour woke:
Seven waiting devils entered in and broke
The loneliness, as though to them was given
Each day his soul new plucked from sorrow's heaven.

But age was kind at length. After a night
When storm had drenched the earth and made the light
Of morning wan and strange, he was found prone
Across the doorway, lying there alone
No one knew how long; lying yet alive.
They raised him—so! Mixed in his brain did strive
Sadness and madness yet, together enlocking
And parting; still the old abuse and mocking,
And words at times of tenderness profounder
Than madness speaks. The neighbour filled with
wonder,
Hearing in the reworded curse entangled
“Robert, Robert, where are you?” till the voice was
strangled
In sobs, and then the restless whisper again,
As it were an echo bubbling in his brain.
Then he grew quiet a little and would say,
Looking around apprehensively, “Stay, stay
Don’t leave me alone, don’t let them take me away.
Soon I’ll be well. Don’t leave me, or she’ll come
And curse me with herself and bring them home.”
He darkened with the thought. “Don’t leave me alone,
Get someone who will stay when you are gone.
I’ll pay you, for I’ve money, money, d’you hear?
I’ll pay. I’ll soon be well—what is there to fear?
There’s money, money!” So he gibed and coughed
Till, weakening, his wild voice grew soft,
And “Robert, Robert!” whispering, he would sleep
Uneasy, awakening at any step,

Angry, or crying pitifully. A week
Another week, and he forbore to speak,
And other weeks. Slowly he wore away
And, strangely gentled, died one late October day.

VII

O, brief the sweetness that illusion had
For her who turning from the grave was sad
To tears, waiting, waiting, still in vain
For her beloved sons to return again.

Back to the tragic house she could not go:
It must be sold since she hated it so.
She then, alone, to London hastened, turning
The past over and over in her mind and yearning
Almost for the familiar hell, if they
Might sweeten hell with one communing day.
Again her needle threaded its aery dance,
At night again her unrewarded glance
From clock to door flew, wearied was her ear
With the deceit of steps that sounded but came never
near.

So the forsaken house was sold and stripped,
Trees were lopped, creepers cut. The silence slipped
Into the greater silence. Strange feet trod
The long-neglected rooms. A workman stood
One day and looked from the garden's edge, and
cried—
“Yes, I remember! It's the old man that died

I worked for years and years ago. I slated
 Half the roof again when the great storm had
 abated
 I remember!—and walked up to the house and stared
 At ceilings, walls, floors, casements unrepaired.
 Going each day to and fro he was vexed to see
 How the red tiles of the path unevenly
 Lay, for a space, sunken and damp; 'twas odd,
 'Twas odd, he mused, whenever his footsteps trod
 The path. "I set them, bedded on decent rubble—
 Well I remember now!—sparing no trouble.
 I thought 'twas honest work. The tiles are sound,
 And I set them all." At length, because it irked
 His pride to see how slackly he had worked,
 Though twenty years ago, one eve he stayed
 To repair the fault and lift the tiles ill-laid,
 Then setting them anew. The watching neighbour
 Smiled to see such uncontracted labour.
 "It's where the old man sat, night after night.
 We used to laugh, it was such a funny sight
 Why should you trouble?" He smiled back and lifted
 Tile by tile, turning them aside, and sifted
 Surprised the soft mould: and thrusting lower found
 Sad human fragments mixing in the ground.
 He called. "For God's sake come! look, look at that!"
 "Why, it's horrible—it's where the old man sat
 Night after night. I told you he sat there
 But I never thought . . . O, I can't come near—
 Show me. How could he do it, and he so small?

He can't have done it. They were both too tall.
Which one is it? Why, I was with him when he died.
He went so quiet I could almost have cried;
And to think I nursed him!" So she rambled on
Happy in rich horrors to sup upon,
Like Kings on dainties fetched by famished slaves
From tributary islands over tributary waves.

VIII

Even pain is mortal; though dying and born anew,
Yet dying again and buried where no yew
Laments with changing green and gold and red. . . .
Pain dies, pain dies! The widow drooped her head,
Hurt even to death in the death of her son.
Who shall tell her thought? for thought itself was one
With agony, inseparable. But days
Treading on days pressed smoother the harsh ways
She needs must pass in loneliness; her tears
Fell, but soured not the unevadable years.
Love pierced his dust with deeper roots; she heard
His voice in the soft grasses when they stirred
With the wet south winds, and saw his hazel eyes
In the clear colour of late-unclouding skies.
And then John, when the unhappy news was tost
Abroad of Robert's murder, once more crossed
The Atlantic, and his mother found; and grief
With wild grief mingling, each to the other brought
relief.

THE END



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THE
GROVE
and
other
Poems

by
John
Freeman

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Selwyn &
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