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THE BLESSED DAMOZEL

DANTE GABRIEL
ROSSETTI


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280

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THE HELICON SERIES. XIII.

**THE BLESSED DAMOZEL,
LOVE'S NOCTURN AND
FOUR SONNETS**





**“THE BLESSED DAMOZEL LEANED OUT
FROM THE GOLD BAR OF HEAVEN.”**

**THE BLESSED DAMOZEL
AND LOVE'S NOCTURN
WITH FOUR SONNETS FROM
THE HOUSE OF LIFE
BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CONSTANCE ROWLANDS**



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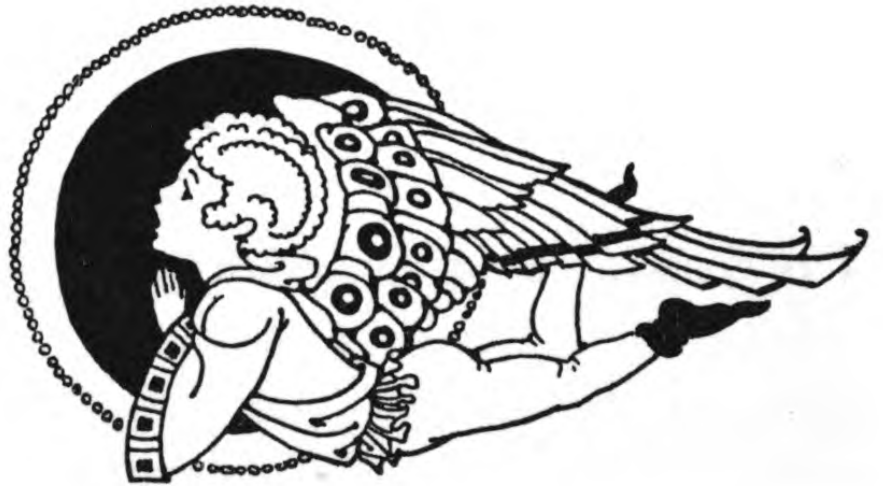
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THE BLESSED DAMOZEL

B



THE BLESSED DAMOZEL

THE blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven ;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even ;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were
seven.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift,
For service meetly worn ;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Herseemed she scarce had been a day
One of God's choristers ;
The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers ;
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

(To one, it is ten years of years.
 . . . Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me—her hair
 Fell all about my face. . . .
Nothing : the autumn fall of leaves.
 The whole year sets apace.)

It was the rampart of God's house
 That she was standing on ;
By God built over the sheer depth
 The which is Space begun ;
So high, that looking downward thence
 She scarce could see the sun.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge.

Heard hardly, some of her new friends
Amid their loving games
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their virginal chaste names ;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

And still she bowed herself and stooped
Out of the circling charm ;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

From the fixed place of Heaven she
saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still
strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path ; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

The sun was gone now ; the curled
moon

Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf ; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.

(Ah sweet ! Even now, in that bird's
song,

Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearkened ? When those bells
Possessed the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair ?)

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

“ I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come,” she said.
“ Have I not prayed in Heaven?—on
earth,
Lord, Lord, has he not pray’d?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?

“ When round his head the aureole
clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I’ll take his hand and go with him
To the deep wells of light ;
We will step down as to a stream,
And bathe there in God’s sight.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

“ We two will stand beside that shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirred continually
With prayer sent up to God ;
And see our old prayers, granted,
melt
Each like a little cloud.

“ We two will lie i’ the shadow of
That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes
touch
Saith His Name audibly.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

“ And I myself will teach to him,
I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here ; which his
voice
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause,
Or some new thing to know.”

(Alas ! We two, we two, thou say'st !
Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy
soul
Was but its love for thee ?)

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

“ We two ”, she said, “ will seek the
groves

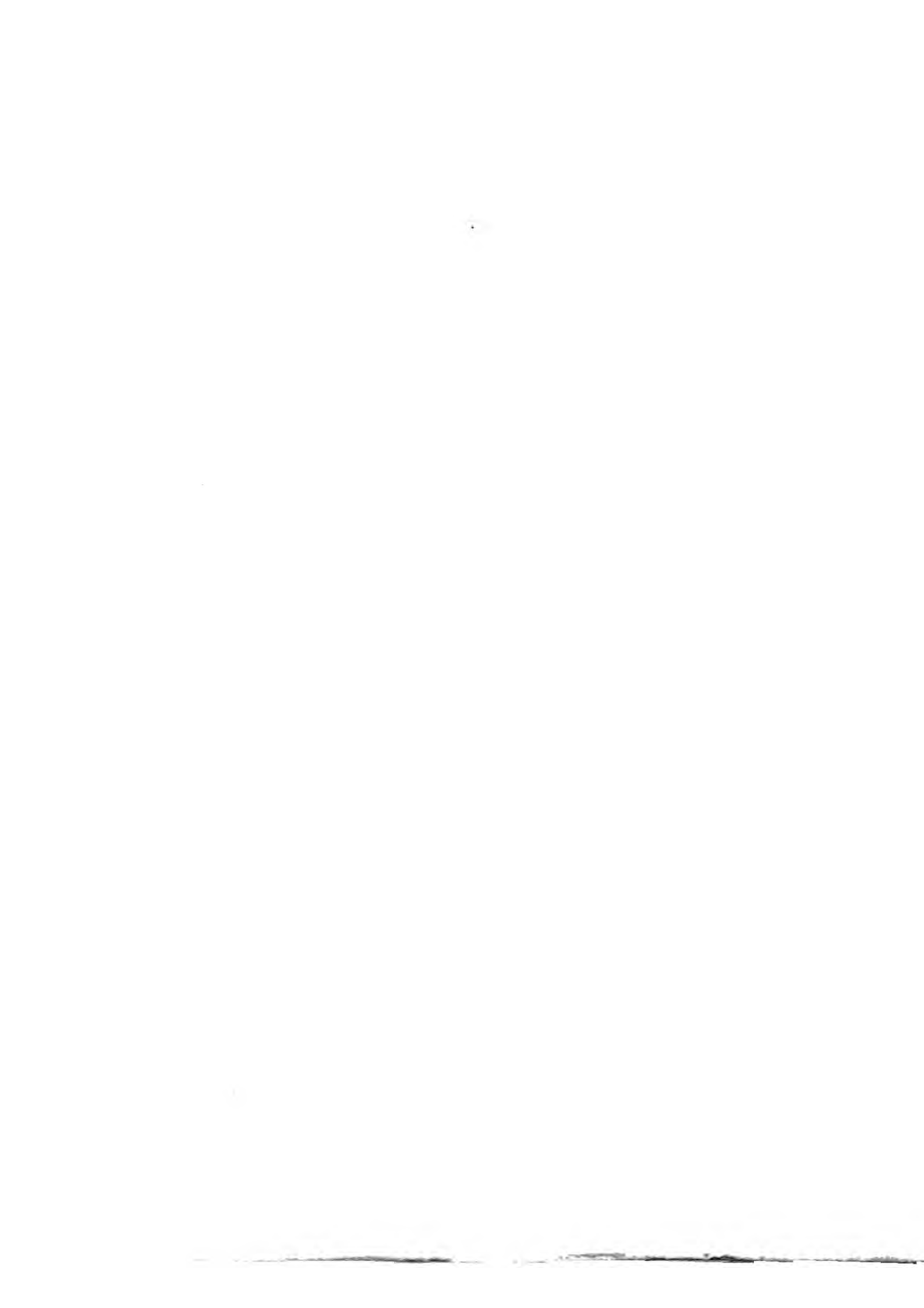
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose
names

Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret and Rosalys.

“ Circlewise sit they, with bound locks
And foreheads garlanded ;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robcs for them
Who are just born, being dead.



“THE SONGS I SING HERE; WHICH HIS VOICE
SHALL PAUSE IN, HUSHED AND SLOW.”



T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

“ He shall fear, haply, and be dumb :
Then will I lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abashed or weak :
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.

“ Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To Him round whom all souls
Kneel, the clear-ranged unnumbered
heads
Bowed with their aureoles :
And angels meeting us shall sing
To their citherns and citoles.

T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

“ There will I ask of Christ the
Lord

Thus much for him and me :—
Only to live as once on earth
With Love,—only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he.”

She gazed and listened and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild,—
“ All this is when he comes ”. She
ceased.

The light thrilled towards her, fill'd
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes prayed, and she smil'd.



“WE TWO”, SHE SAID, “WILL SEEK THE GROVES
WHERE THE LADY MARY IS.”

C



T H E B L E S S E D D A M O Z E L

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
Was vague in distant spheres :
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)



LOVE'S NOCTURN



LOVE'S NOCTURN

MASTER of the murmuring courts
Where the shapes of sleep convene !—
Lo ! my spirit here exhorts
All the powers of thy demesne
For their aid to woo my queen.
What reports
Yield thy jealous courts unseen ?

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Vaporous, unaccountable,
Dreamland lies forlorn of light,
Hollow like a breathing shell.
Ah ! that from all dreams I might
Choose one dream and guide its flight !
I know well
What her sleep should tell to-night.

There the dreams are multitudes :
Some whose buoyance waits not
sleep,
Deep within the August woods ;
Some that hum while rest may steep
Weary labour laid a-heap ;
Interludes,
Some, of grievous moods that weep.

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

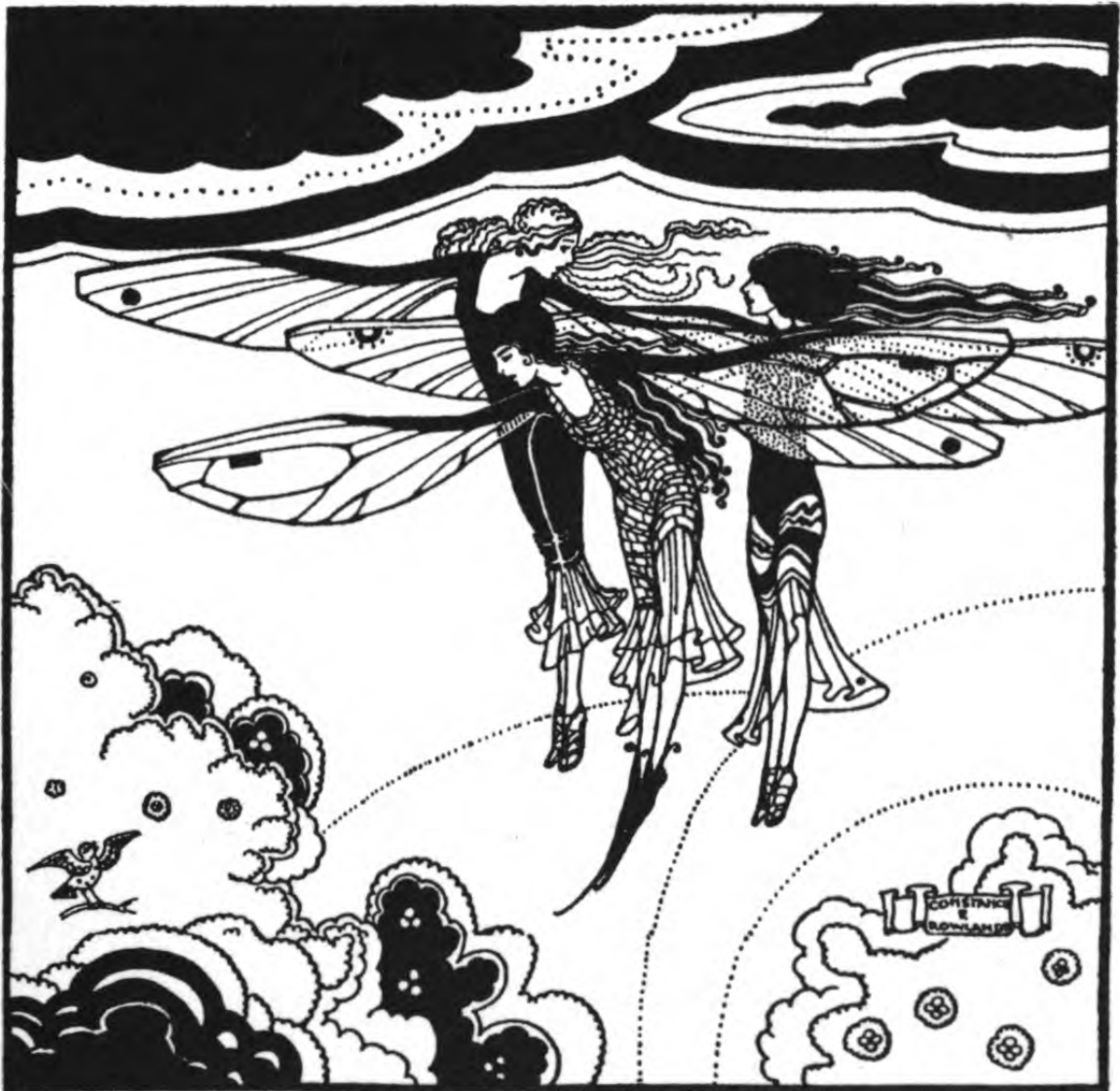
Poets' fancies all are there :
There the elf-girls flood with wings
Valleys full of plaintive air ;
There breathe perfumes ; there in
rings
Whirl the foam-bewildered springs ;
Siren there
Winds her dizzy hair and sings.

Thence the one dream mutually
Dreamed in bridal unison,
Less than waking ecstasy ;
Half-formed visions that make moan
In the house of birth alone ;
And what we
At death's wicket see, unknown.

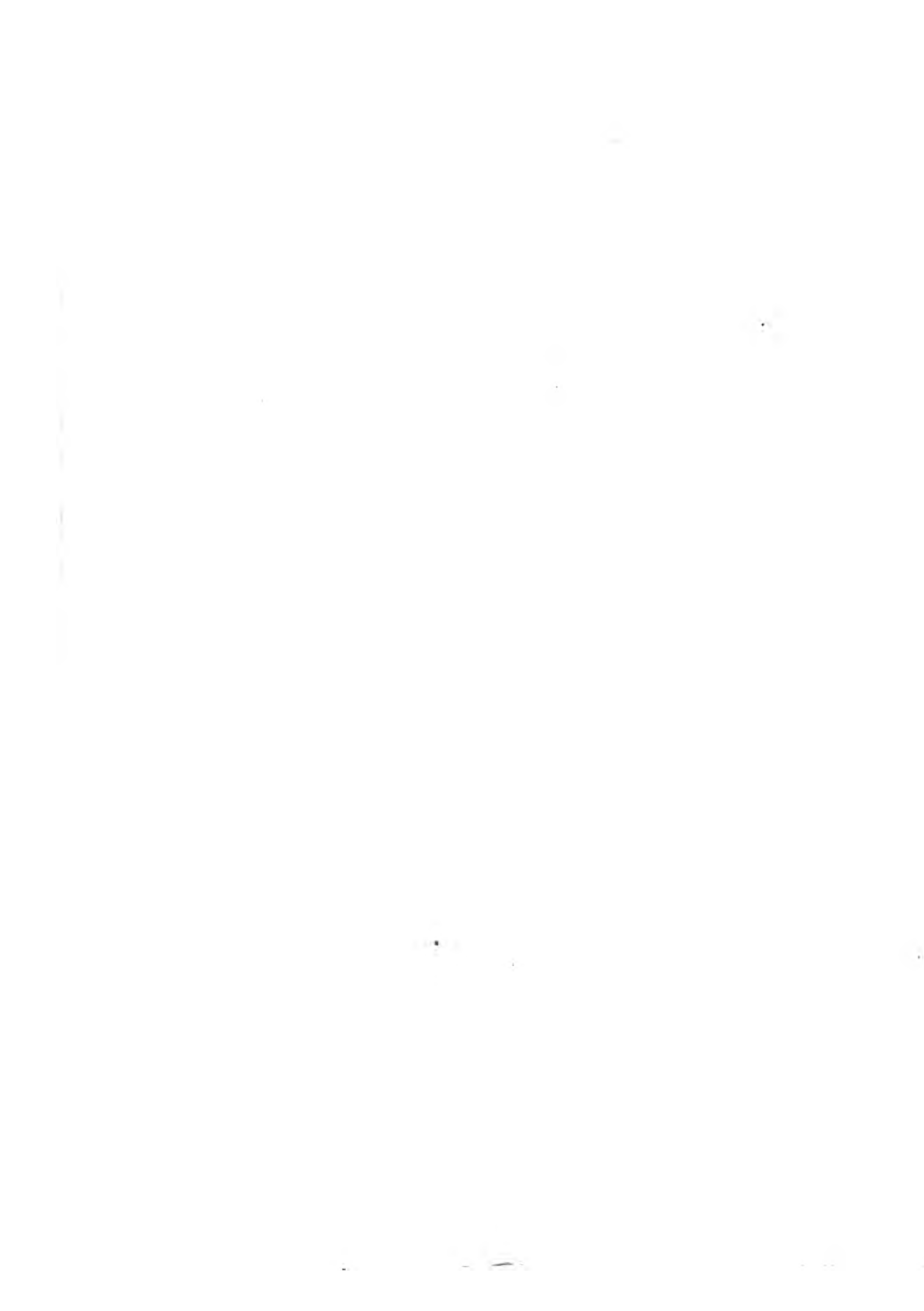
L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

But for mine own sleep, it lies
In one gracious form's control,
Fair with honourable eyes,
Lamps of an auspicious soul :
O their glance is loftiest dole,
Sweet and wise,
Wherein Love descries his goal.

Reft of her, my dreams are all
Clammy trance that fears the sky :
Changing footpaths shift and fall ;
From polluted coverts nigh,
Miserable phantoms sigh ;
Quakes the pall,
And the funeral goes by.



**“THERE THE ELF-GIRLS FLOOD WITH WINGS
VALLEYS FULL OF PLAINTIVE AIR.”**



L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Master, is it soothly said
That, as echoes of man's speech
Far in secret clefts are made,
So do all men's bodies reach
Shadows o'er thy sunken beach,—
Shape or shade
In those halls pourtrayed of each ?

Ah ! might I, by thy good grace
Groping in the windy stair
(Darkness and the breath of space
Like loud waters everywhere),
Meeting mine own image there
Face to face,
Send it from that place to her !

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Nay, not I ; but oh ! do thou,
Master, from thy shadowkind
Call my body's phantom now :
Bid it bear its face declin'd
Till its flight her slumbers find,
And her brow
Feel its presence bow like wind.

Where in groves the gracile Spring
Trembles, with mute orison
Confidently strengthening,
Water's voice and wind's as one
Shed an echo in the sun.
Soft as Spring,
Master, bid it sing and moan.



**"BID IT BEAR ITS FACE DECLIN'D
TILL ITS FLIGHT HER SLUMBERS FIND."**

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Song shall tell how glad and strong
Is the night she soothes alway ;
Moan shall grieve with that parched
tongue
Of the brazen hours of day :
Sounds as of the springtide they,
Moan and song,
While the chill months long for May.

Not the prayers which with all leave
The world's fluent woes prefer—
Not the praise the world doth give,
Dulcet fulsome whisperer ;—
Let it yield my love to her,
And achieve
Strength that shall not grieve or err.

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Wheresoe'er my dreams befall,
Both at night-watch (let it say),
And where round the sundial
The reluctant hours of day,
Heartless, hopeless of their way,
Rest and call ;—
There her glance doth fall and stay.

Suddenly her face is there :
So do mounting vapours wreathe
Subtle-scented transports where
The black firwood sets its teeth.
Part the boughs and look beneath,—
Lilies share
Secret waters there, and breathe.

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Master, bid my shadow bend
Whispering thus till birth of light,
Lest new shapes that sleep may send
Scatter all its work to flight ;—
Master, master of the night,
Bid it spend
Speech, song, prayer, and end aright.

Yet, ah me ! if at her head
There another phantom lean
Murmuring o'er the fragrant bed,—
Ah ! and if my spirit's queen
Smile those alien words between,—
Ah ! poor shade !
Shall it strive, or fade unseen ?

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

How should love's own messenger
Strive with love and be love's foe ?
Master, nay ! If thus, in her,
Sleep a wedded heart should show,—
Silent let mine image go,
Its old share
Of thy spell-bound air to know.

Like a vapour wan and mute,
Like a flame, so let it pass ;
One low sigh across her lute,
One dull breath against her glass
And to my sad soul, alas !
One salute
Cold as when death's foot shall pass.

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Then, too, let all hopes of mine,
All vain hopes by night and day,
Slowly at thy summoning sign
Rise up pallid and obey.
Dreams, if this is thus, were they :
Be they thine,
And to dreamland pine away.

Yet from old time, life, not death,
Master, in thy rule is rife :
Lo ! through thee, with mingling
breath,
Adam woke beside his wife.
O Love bring me so, for strife,
Force and faith,
Bring me so not death but life !

L O V E ' S N O C T U R N

Yea, to Love himself is pour'd
This frail song of hope and fear.
Thou art Love, of one accord
With kind Sleep to bring her near,
Still-eyed, deep-eyed, ah how dear !
Master, Lord,
In her name implor'd, O hear !



FOUR SONNETS

THE CHOICE

I

EAT thou and drink ; to-morrow thou
shalt die.

Surely the earth, that's wise being
very old,

Needs not our help. Then loose me,
love, and hold

Thy sultry hair up from my face ; that I
May pour for thee this golden wine,
brim-high,

Till round the glass thy fingers glow
like gold.

We'll drown all hours : thy song,
while hours are toll'd,
Shall leap, as fountains veil the changing
sky.

T H E C H O I C E

Now kiss, and think that there are really
those,
My own high-bosomed beauty, who
increase
Vain gold, vain lore, and yet might
choose our way !
Through many days they toil ; then
comes a day
They die not,—never having lived,—
but cease ;
And round their narrow lips the mould
falls close.

T H E C H O I C E

II

WATCH thou and fear ; to-morrow thou
shalt die.

Or art thou sure thou shalt have time
for death ?

Is not the day which God's word
promiseth

To come man knows not when ? In
yonder sky,

Now while we speak, the sun speeds
forth : can I

Or thou assure him of his goal ?
God's breath

Even at this moment haply quickeneth
The air to a flame ; till spirits, always
nigh

T H E C H O I C E

Though screened and hid, shall walk
the daylight here.

And dost thou prate of all that man
shall do ?

Canst thou, who hast but plagues,
presume to be

Glad in his gladness that comes
after thee ?

Will *his* strength slay *thy* worm in
Hell ? Go to :

Cover thy countenance, and watch, and
fear.

T H E C H O I C E

III

THINK thou and act ; to-morrow thou
shalt die.

Outstretched in the sun's warmth
upon the shore,

Thou say'st : " Man's measured path
is all gone o'er :

Up all his years, steeply, with strain
and sigh,

Man clomb until he touched the truth ;
and I,

Even I, am he whom it was destined
for "

How should this be ? Art thou then
so much more

Than they who sowed, that thou shouldst
reap thereby ?

T H E C H O I C E

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-
washed mound
Unto the furthest flood-brim look
with me ;
Then reach on with thy thought till it
be drown'd.
Miles and miles distant though the
grey line be,
And though thy soul sail leagues and
leagues beyond,—
Still, leagues beyond those leagues,
there is more sea.

LOVE-SWEETNESS

SWEET dimness of her loosened hair's
downfall
About thy face ; her sweet hands
round thy head
In gracious fostering union garlanded ;
Her tremulous smiles ; her glances'
sweet recall
Of love ; her murmuring sighs me-
morial ;
Her mouth's culled sweetness by thy
kisses shed
On cheeks and neck and eyelids, and
so led
Back to her mouth which answers there
for all :—

L O V E - S W E E T N E S S

What sweeter than these things, except
the thing
In lacking which all these would lose
their sweet :—
The confident heart's still fervour ;
the swift beat
And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing,
Then when it feels, in cloud-girt way-
faring,
The breath of kindred plumes against
its feet ?





