

Float near me :—faces pure from sin ; strange music ; saints with splendor crowned :

I seem to feel my native air blow down from some high region there,

And fan my spirit pure : I rise above the sense of loss and pain :  
Faint forms that lured my childhood's eyes, long lost, I seem to find again :

I see the end of all : I feel hope, awe, no language can reveal.

Forgive me, Lord, if overmuch I loved that form Thou mad'st so fair ;  
I know that Thou didst make her such ; and fair but as the flowers were,—

Thy work : her beauty was but Thine ; the human less than the divine.

My life hath been one search for Thee 'mid thorns found red with Thy dear blood ;

In many a dark Gethsemane I seemed to stand where Thou hadst stood :  
And, scorned in this world's Judgment-Place, at times, through tears, to catch Thy face.

Thou suffered'st here, and didst not fail : Thy bleeding feet these paths have trod :

But Thou wert strong, and I am frail : and I am man, and Thou wert God.

Be near me : keep me in Thy sight : or lay my soul asleep in light.

O to be where the meanest mind is more than Shakespeare ! where one look

Shows more than here the wise can find, though toiling slow from book to book !

Where life is knowledge : love is sure : and hope's brief promise made secure.

O dying voice of human praise ! the crude ambitions of my youth !  
I long to pour immortal lays ! great pæans of perennial Truth !  
A larger work ! a loftier aim ! . . . and what are laurel-leaves and fame ?

And what are words ? How little these the silence of the soul express !  
Mere froth,—the foam and flower of seas whose hungering waters heave and press

Against the planets and the sides of night,—mute, yearning, mystic tides !

To ease the heart with song is sweet : sweet to be heard if heard by love.  
And you have heard me. When we meet shall we not sing the old songs above

To grander music ? Sweet, one kiss. O blest it is to die like this !

To lapse from being without pain : your hand in mine, on mine your heart :

The unshaken faith to meet again that sheathes the pang with which we part :

My head upon your bosom, sweet : your hand in mine, on this old seat !

So ; closer wind that tender arm . . . How the hot tears fall ! Do not weep,

Beloved, but let your smile stay warm about me. "In the Lord they sleep."

You know the words the Scripture saith . . . O light, O Glory ! . . . is this death ?

## THE EARL'S RETURN.

RAGGED and tall stood the castle wall	And the flakes of the spray that were jerked away
And the squires at their sport, in the great South Court,	From the froth on the lip of the bleak blue sea
Lounged all day long from stable to hall	Were sometimes flung by the wind, as it swung
Laughingly, lazily, one and all.	Over turret and terrace and balcony,
The land about was barren and blue,	To the garden below where, in desolate corners
And swept by the wing of the wet sea-mew.	Under the mossy green parapet there,
Seven fishermen's huts on a shelly shore ;	The lilies crouched, rocking their white heads like mourners,
Sand-heaps behind, and sand-banks before ;	And burned off the heads of the flowers that were
And a black champaign streaked white all through	Pining and pale in their comfortless bowers,
To a great salt pool which the ocean drew,	Dry-bushed with the sharp stubborn lavender,
Sucked into itself, and disgorged it again	And paven with disks of the torn sunflowers,
To stagnate and steam on the mineral plain ;	Which, day by day, were strangled, and stripped
Not a tree or a bush in the circle of sight,	Of their ravelling fringes and brazen bosses,
But a bare black thorn which the sea-winds had withered	And the hardy mary-buds nipped and ripped
With the drifting scum of the surf and blight,	Into shreds for the beetles that lurked in the mosses.
And some patches of gray grass-land to the right,	Here she lived alone, and from year to year
Where the lean red-hided cattle were tethered :	[appear
A reef of rock wedged the water in twain,	She saw the black belt of the ocean
And a stout stone tower stood square to the main.	At her casement each morn as she rose ; and each morn
	Her eye fell first on the bare black thorn.

This was all : nothing more : or  
sometimes on the shore  
The fishermen sang when the fish-  
ing was o'er ;  
Or the lowing of oxen fell dreamily,  
Close on the shut of the glimmering  
eyes,  
Through some gusty pause in the  
moaning sea,  
When the pools were splashed pink  
by the thirsty beeves  
Or sometimes, when the pearl-  
lighted morns drew the tinges  
Of the cold sunrise up their amber  
fringes,  
A white sail peered over the rim of  
the main,  
Looked all about o'er the empty sea,  
Staggering back from the fine line of  
white light again,  
And dropped down to another world  
silently.  
Then she breathed freer. With  
sickening dread  
She had watched five pale young  
moons unfold  
From their notchy cavern in light,  
and spread  
To the fuller light, and again grow  
old,  
And dwindle away to a luminous  
shred.  
"He will not come back till the  
Spring's green and gold.  
And I would that I with the leaves  
were dead,  
Quiet somewhere with them in the  
moss and the mould,  
When he and the summer come this  
way," she said.  
And when the dull sky darkened  
down to the edges,  
And the keen frost kindled in star  
and spar,  
The sea might be known by a noise  
on the ledges  
Of the long crags, gathering power  
from afar  
Through his roaring bays, and crawl-  
ing back [dragged  
Hissing, as o'er the wet pebbles he

His skirt of foam frayed, dripping,  
and jagged,  
And reluctantly fell down the smooth  
hollow shell  
Of the night, whose lustrous surface  
of black  
In spots to an intense blue was  
worn.  
But later, when up on the sullen sea-  
bar  
The wide large-lighted moon had  
arisen,  
Where the dark and voluminous  
ocean grew luminous,  
Helping after her slowly one little  
shy star  
That shook blue in the cold, and  
looked forlorn,  
The clouds were troubled, and the  
wind from his prison  
Behind them leaped down with a  
light laugh of scorn ;  
Then the last thing she saw was that  
bare black thorn ;  
Or the forked tree, as the bleak  
blast took it,  
Howled through it, and beat it, and  
bit it, and shook it,  
Seemed to visibly waste and wither  
and wizen.

And the snow was lifted into the air  
Layer by layer,  
And turned into vast white clouds  
that flew  
Silent and fleet up the sky, and  
were riven  
And jerked into chasms which the  
sun leaped through,  
Opening crystal gulfs of a breezy  
blue  
Fed with rainy lights of the April  
heaven.  
From eaves and leaves the quivering  
dew  
Sparkled off ; and the rich earth,  
black and bare,  
Was starred with snowdrops every-  
where ;  
And the crocus upturned its flame,  
and burned

Here and there.  
"The Summer," she said, "cometh  
blithe and bold ;  
And the crocus is lit for her welcom-  
ing ;  
And the days will have garments of  
purple and gold ;  
But I would be left by the pale green  
Spring  
With the snowdrops somewhere  
under the mould ;  
For I dare not think what the  
Summer may bring."

Pale she was as the bramble blooms  
That fill the long fields with their  
faint perfumes.  
When the May-wind flits finely  
through sun-threaded showers,  
Breathing low to himself in his dim  
meadow-bowers.  
And her cheek each year was paler  
and thinner,  
And white as the pearl that was hung  
at her ear,  
As her sad heart sickened and pined  
within her,  
And failed and fainted from year to  
year.  
So that the Seneschal, rough and  
gray,  
Said, as he looked in her face one  
day,  
"St. Catherine save all good souls,  
I pray,  
For our pale young lady is paling  
away.  
O the Saints," he said, smiling bitter  
and grim,  
"Know she's too fair and too good for  
him !"  
Sometimes she walked on the upper  
leads,  
And leaned on the arm of the  
weatherworn Warden.  
Sometimes she sat 'twixt the mildewy  
beds  
Of the sea-singed flowers in the  
Pleasaunce Garden.  
Till the rotting blooms that lay  
thick on the walks

Were combed by the white sea-gust  
like a rake,  
And the stimulant steam of the  
leaves and stalks  
Made the coiled memory, numb and  
cold,  
That slept in her heart like a dream-  
ing snake,  
Drowsily lift itself, fold by fold,  
And gnaw and gnaw hungrily, half  
awake.

Sometimes she looked from the  
window below  
To the great South Court and the  
squires, at their sport,  
Loungingly loitering to and fro.  
She heard the grooms there as they  
cursed one another.  
She heard the great bowls falling all  
day long  
In the bowling-alleys. She heard  
the song  
Of the shock-headed Pages that drank  
without stint in  
The echoing courts, and swore hard  
at each other.  
She saw the red face of the rough  
wooden Quintin,  
And the swinging sand-bag ready  
to smother  
The awkward Squire that missed the  
mark.  
And, all day long, between the dull  
noises  
Of the bowls, and the oaths, and the  
singing voices,  
The sea boomed hoarse till the skies  
were dark.  
But when the swallow, that sweet  
new-comer,  
Floated over the sea in the front of  
the summer,  
The salt dry sands burned white, and  
sickened  
Men's sight in the glaring horn of the  
bay ;  
And all things that fasten, or float at  
ease  
In the silvery light of the leprous  
seas

With the pulse of a hideous life were quickened,  
 Fell loose from the rocks, and crawled crosswise away,  
 Slippery sidelong crabs, half strangled  
 By the white sea grasses in which they were tangled,  
 And those half-living creatures, orbéd, rayed, and sharp-angled,  
 Fan-fish, and star-fish, and polypous lumps,  
 Hueless and boneless, that languidly thickened,  
 Or flat-faced, or spikéd, or ridgéd with humps,  
 Melting off from their clotted clusters and clumps  
 Sprawled over the shore in the heat of the day.

An hour before the sun was set  
 A darker ripple rolled over the sea ;  
 The white rocks quivered in wells of jet ;  
 And the great West, opening breathlessly  
 Up all his inmost orange, gave Hints of something distant and sweet  
 That made her heart swell ; far up the wave  
 The clouds that lay piled in the golden heat  
 Were turned into types of the ancient mountains  
 In an ancient land ; the weeds, which forlorn  
 Waves were swaying neglectfully,  
 By their sounds, as they dipped into sparkles that dripped  
 In the emerald creeks that ran up from the shore,  
 Brought back to her fancy the bubble of fountains  
 Leaping and falling continually  
 In valleys where she should wander no more.

And when, over all of these, the night

Among her mazy and milk-white signs,  
 And clustered orbs, and zigzag lines,  
 Burst into blossom of stars and light,  
 The sea was glassy ; the glassy brine  
 Was paven with lights,—blue, crystalline,  
 And emerald keen ; the dark world hung  
 Balanced under the moon, and swung  
 In a net of silver sparkles. Then she  
 Rippled her yellow hair to her knee,  
 Bared her warm white bosom and throat,  
 And from the lattice leaned athirst.  
 There, on the silence did she gloat  
 With a dizzy pleasure steeped in pain,  
 Half catching the soul of the secret that blended  
 God with his starlight, then feeling it vain,  
 Like a pining poet ready to burst  
 With the weight of the wonder that grows in his brain,  
 Or a nightingale, mute at the sound of a lute  
 That is swelling and breaking his heart with its strain,  
 Waiting, breathless, to die when the music is ended.  
 For the sleek and beautiful midnight stole,  
 Like a faithless friend, her secret care,  
 Crept through each pore to the source of the soul,  
 And mocked at the anguish which he found there,  
 Shining away from her, scornful and fair  
 In his pitiless beauty, refusing to share  
 The discontent which he could not control.

The water-rat, as he skulked in the moat,

Set all the slumbrous lilies afloat,  
 And sent a sharp quick pulse along  
 The stagnant light, that heaved and swung  
 The leaves together. Suddenly  
 At times a shooting star would spin  
 Shell-like out of heaven, and tumble in,  
 And burst o'er a city of stars ; but she,  
 As he dashed on the back of the zodiac,  
 And quivered and glowed down arc and node,  
 And split sparkling into infinity,  
 Thought that some angel, in his reveries  
 Thinking of earth, as he pensively  
 Leaned over the star-grated balcony  
 In his palace among the Pleiades,  
 And grieved for the sorrow he saw in the land,  
 Had dropped a white lily from his loose hand.

And thus many a night, steeped pale in the light  
 Of the stars, when the bells and clocks  
 Had ceased in the towers, and the sound of the hours  
 Was eddying about in the rocks,  
 Deep-sunken in bristling broidery between the black oak Fiends sat she,  
 And under the moth-flitted canopy  
 Of the mighty antique bed in her chamber,  
 With wild eyes drinking up the sea,  
 And her white hands heavy with jewelry,  
 Flashing as she loosed languidly  
 Her satins of snow and of amber.  
 And as, fold by fold, these were rippled and rolled  
 To her feet, and lay huddled in ruins of gold,  
 She looked like some pale spirit above  
 Earth's dazzling passions forever flung by,

Freed from the stains of an earthly love,  
 And those splendid shackles of pride that press  
 On the heart till it aches with the gorgeous stress,  
 Quitting the base Past remorsefully.  
 And so she put by the coil and care  
 Of the day that lay furled like an idle weft  
 Of heaped spots which a bright snake hath left,  
 Or that dark house, the blind worm's lair,  
 When the star-wingéd moth from the windows hath crept,  
 Steeped her soul in a tearful prayer,  
 Shrank into her naked self, and slept.

And as she slumbered, starred and eyed  
 All over with angry gems, at her side,  
 The Fiends in the oak kept ward and watch ;  
 And the querulous clock, on its rusty catch,  
 With a quick tick, husky and thick,  
 Clamored and clacked at her sharply,  
 There was  
 (Fronting a portrait of the Earl)  
 A shrine with a dim green lamp, and a cross  
 Of glowing cedar wreathed with pearl,  
 [writ,  
 Which the Arimathæan, so it was  
 When he came from the holy Orient,  
 Had worn, with his prayers embalming it,  
 As with the San-Grael through the world he went.  
 Underneath were relics and gems  
 From many an antique king-saint's crown,  
 And some ('twas avouched) from the dusk diadems  
 And mighty rings of those Wise Kings  
 That evermore sleep 'mid the marble stems,

'Twixt chancel and chalice in God  
his palace,  
The marvel of Cologne Town.  
In a halo dim of the lamp all night  
Smiled the sad Virgin, holy and  
white,  
With a face as full of the soul's af-  
fliction  
As one that had looked on the Cru-  
cifixion.

At moonrise the land was suddenly  
brighter ;  
And through all its length and  
breadth the casement  
Grew large with a luminous strange  
amazement,  
And, as doubting in dreams what  
that sudden blaze meant,  
The Lady's white face turned a  
thought whiter.  
Sometimes in sleep light finger-tips  
Touched her behind ; the pain, the  
bliss  
Of a long slow despairing kiss  
Doubled the heat on her feverish  
lips,  
And down to her heart's-heart  
smouldering burned ;  
From lips long mute she heard her  
name ;  
Sad dreams and sweet to vex her  
came ;  
Sighing, upon her pillow, she turned,  
Like a weary waif on a weary sea  
That is heaving over continually,  
And finds no course, until for its  
sake  
The heart of the silence begins to  
ache.  
Unsoothed from slumber she awoke  
An hour ere dawn. The lamp  
burned faint.  
The Fiends glared at her out of the  
oak.  
She rose, and fell at the shrine of  
the Saint.  
There with clasped hands to the  
Mother  
Of many sorrows, in sorrow, she  
prayed ;

Till all things in the room melted  
into each other,  
And vanished in gyres of flickering  
shade,  
Leaving her all alone, with the face  
Of the Saint growing large in its one  
bright place.  
Then on a sudden, from far, a fear  
Through all her heart its horror  
drew,  
As of something hideous growing  
near.  
Cold fingers seemed roaming through  
her damp hair ;  
Her lips were locked. The power of  
prayer  
Left her. She dared not turn. She  
knew,  
From his panel atilt on the wall up  
there,  
The grim Earl was gazing her  
through and through.

But when the casement, a grisly  
square,  
Flickered with day, she flung it wide,  
And looked below. The shore was  
bare.  
In the mist tumbled the dismal tide.  
One ghastly pool seemed solid white ;  
The forked shadow of the thorn  
Fell through it, like a raven rent  
In the steadfast blank down which  
it went.  
The blind world slowly gathered  
sight.  
The sea was moaning on to morn.

And the Summer into the Autumn  
waned.  
And under the watery Hyades  
The gray sea swelled, and the thick  
rained,  
And the land was darkened by slow  
degrees.  
But oft, in the low West, the day  
Smouldering sent up a sullen flame  
Along the dreary waste of gray,  
As though in that red region lay,  
Heaped up, like Autumn weeds and  
flowers

For fire, its thorny fruitless hours,  
And God said, "burn it all away !"

When all was dreariest in the skies,  
And the gusty tract of twilight mut-  
tered,  
A strange slow smile grew into her  
eyes,  
As though from a great way off it  
came  
And was weary ere down to her lips  
it fluttered,  
And turned into a sigh, or some soft  
name  
Whose syllables sounded likest sighs,  
Half smothered in sorrow before  
they were uttered.

Sometimes, at night, a music was  
rolled—

A ripple of silver harp-strings cold—  
From the halls below where the  
Minstrel sung,  
With the silver hair, and the golden  
tongue,  
And the eyes of passionless, peaceful  
blue  
(Like twilight which faint stars gaze  
through),

Wise with the years which no man  
knew.  
And first the music, as though the  
wings  
Of some blind angel were caught in  
the strings,  
Fluttered with weak endeavor : anon  
The uncaged heart of music grew  
bold  
And cautiously loosened, length by  
length,  
The golden cone of its great under-  
tone,  
Like a strong man using mild lan-  
guage to one  
That is weaker, because he is sure of  
his strength.

But once—and it was at the fall of  
the day, [seem  
When she, if she closed her eyes, did  
To be wandering far, in a sort of  
dream,

With some lost shadow, away,  
away,  
Down the heart of a golden land  
which she  
Remembered a great way over the  
sea,  
There came a trample of horses and  
men ;  
And a blowing of horns at the Castle-  
Gate ;  
Then a clattering noise ; then a  
pause ; and then,  
With the sudden jerk of a heavy  
weight,  
And a wrangling and jangling and  
clinking and clanking,  
The sound of the falling of cable and  
chain ;  
And a grumbling over the dewy  
planking  
That shrieked and sung with the  
weight and strain ;  
And the rough Seneschal bawled out  
in the hall,  
"The Earl and the Devil are come  
back again !"

Her heart stood still for a moment  
or more.  
Then suddenly tugged, and strained,  
and tore  
At the roots, which seemed to give  
way beneath.  
She rushed to the window, and held  
her breath.  
High up on the beach were the long  
black ships  
And the brown sails hung from the  
masts in strips :  
And the surf was whirled over and  
over them,  
And swept them dripping from stern  
to stem.  
Within, in the great square court be-  
low,  
Were a hundred rough-faced men,  
or so.  
And one or two pale fair-haired  
slaves  
Whom the Earl had brought over  
the winter waves,