

And I could imitate the bark
And foliage, both in form and hue,
Or silvery-gray, or brown and dark,
Or rough with moss, or wet with
dew,

But thou, with one form in thine
eye,
Couldst penetrate all forms :
possess
The soul of form : and multiply
A million like it, more or less,—

Which were the Artist of us twain ?
The moral's clear to understand.
Where'er we walk, by hill or plain,
Is there no mystery on the land ?

The osiered, oozy water, ruffled
By fluttering swifts that dip and
wink :
Deep cattle in the cowslips muffled,
Or lazy-eyed upon the brink :

Or, when—a scroll of stars—the
night [away,
(By God withdrawn) is rolled
The silent sun, on some cold height,
Breaking the great seal of the day :

Are these not words more rich than
ours ?
O seize their import if you can !
Our souls are parched like withering
flowers, [gan.
Our knowledge ends where it be-

While yet about us fall God's dews,
And whisper secrets o'er the earth
Worth all the weary years we lose
In learning legends of our birth,

Arise, O Artist ! and restore
Their music to the moaning winds,
Love's broken pearls to life's bare
shore,
And freshness to our fainting
minds.

THE WIFE'S TRAGEDY.

I.

THE EVENING BEFORE THE FLIGHT.

TAKE the diamonds from my hair !
Take the flowers from the urn !
Fling the lattice wide ! more air !
Air—more air, or else I burn !

Put the bracelets by. And thrust
Out of sight these hated pearls.
I could trample them to dust,
Though they were his gift, the
Earl's !

Flusht I am ? The dance it was.
Only that. Now leave me, Sweet.
Take the flowers, Love, because
They will wither in this heat.

Good-night, dearest ! Leave the
door
Half-way open as you go.
—O, thank God ? . . . Alone once
more.
Am I dreaming ? . . . Dream-
ing ? . . . no !

Still that music underneath
Works to madness in my brain.
Even the roses seem to breathe
Poisoned perfumes, full of pain.

Let me think . . . my head is ach-
ing.
I have little strength to think.
And I know my heart is breaking.
Yet, O love, I will not shrink !

In his look was such sweet sadness.
And he fixed that look on me.
I was helpless . . . call it madness,
Call it guilt . . . but it must be.

I can bear it, if, in losing
All things else, I lose him not.
All the grief is my own choosing,
Can I murmur at my lot ?

Ah, the night is bright and still
Over all the fields I know
And the chestnuts on the hill :
And the quiet lake below.

By that lake I yet remember
How, last year, we stood together
One wild eve in warm September
Bright with thunder : not a feather

Stirred the slumbrous swans that
floated
Past the reed-beds, husht and
white :

Towers of sultry cloud hung moated
In the lake's unshaken light :

Far behind us all the extensive
Woodland blackened against heav-
en : [sive :
And we spoke not :—pausing pen-
Till the thunder-cloud was riven,

And the black wood whitened under,
And the storm began to roll,
And the love laid up like thunder
Burst at once upon my soul.

There ! . . . the moon is just in
crescent
In the silent happy sky.
And to-night the meanest peasant
In her light's more blest than I.

Other moons I soon shall see
Over Asian headlands green :
Ocean-spaces sparkling free
Isles of breathless balm between.

And the rosy-rising star
At the setting of the day
From the distant sandy bar
Shining over Africa :

Steering through the glowing wea-
ther
Past the tracks of crimson light,
Down the sunset lost together
Far athwart the summer night.

“Canst thou make such life thy
choice,
My heart's own, my chosen one ?”
So he whispered and his voice
Had such magic in its tone ?

But one hour ago we parted.
And we meet again to-morrow.
Parted—silent, and sad-hearted :
And we meet—in guilt and sor-
row.

But we *shall* meet . . . meet, O God,
To part never . . . the last time !
Yes ! the Ordeal shall be trod.
Burning ploughshares—love and
crime.

O with him, with him to wander
Through the wide world—only
his !
Heart and hope and heaven to
squander
On the wild wealth of his kiss !

Then ? . . . like these poor flowers
that wither
In my bosom, to be thrown
Lightly from him any whither
When the sweetness all is flown ?

O, I know it all, my fate !
But the gulf is crost forever.
And regret is born too late.
The shut Past reopens never.

Fear ? . . . I cannot fear ! for fear
Dies with hope in every breast.
O, I see the frozen sneer.
Careless smile, and callous jest !

But my shame shall yet be worn
Like the purple of a Queen.
I can answer scorn with scorn.
Fool ! I know not what I me

Yet beneath his smile (*his smile!*)
Smiles less kind I shall not see.
Let the whole wide world revile.
He is all the world to me.

So to-night all hopes, all fears,
All the bright and brief array
Of my lost youth's happier years,
With these gems I put away.

Gone! . . . so . . . one by one . . .
all gone!
Not one jewel I retain.
Of my life's wealth. All alone
I tread boldly o'er my pain.

On to him . . . Ah, me! my child—
My own fair-haired, darling boy!
In his sleep just now he smiled.
All his dreams are dreams of joy.

How those soft long lashes shade
That young cheek so husht and
warm,
Like a half-blown rosebud laid
On the little dimpled arm!

He will wake without a mother.
He will hate me when he hears
From the cold lips of another
All my faults in after years.

None will toll the deep devotion
Wherewith I have brooded o'er
His young life, since its first motion
Made me hope and pray once
more.

On my breast he smiled and slept,
Smiled between my wrongs and
me,
Till the weak warm tears I wept
Set my dry, coiled nature free.

Nay, . . . my feverish kiss would
wake him.
How can I dare bless his sleep?
They will change him soon, and
make him
Like themselves that never weep;

Fitted to the world's bad part:
Yet, with all their wealth afford
him
Aught more rich than this lost
heart
Whose last anguish yearns toward
him?

Ah, there's none will love him then
As I love that leave him now!
He will mix with selfish men.
Yes, he has his father's brow!

Lie thou there, thou poor rose-
blossom,
In that little hand more light
Than upon this restless bosom,
Whose last gift is given to-night.

God forgive me!—My God, cherish
His lone motherless infancy!
Would to-night that I might perish!
But heaven will not let me die.

O love! love! but this is bitter!
O that we had never met!
O but hate than love were fitter!
And he too may hate me yet.

Yet to him have I not given
All life's sweetness? . . . fame?
and name?
Hope? and happiness? and heaven?
Can he hate me for my shame?

"Child," he said, "thy life was
glad
In the dawning of its years;
And love's morn should be less sad,
For his eve may close in tears.

"Sweet in novel lands," he said,
"Day by day to share delight;
On by soft surprises led,
And together rest at night.

"We will see the shores of Greece,
And the temples of the Nile:
Sail where summer suns increase
Toward the south from isle to isle.

II.
THE PORTRAIT.

YES, 'tis she! Those eyes! that
hair

With the self-same wondrous hue!
And that smile—which was so fair,
Is it strange I deemed it true?

Years, years, years I have not drawn
Back this curtain! there she
stands

By the terrace on the lawn,
With the white rose in her hands!

And about her the armorial
Scutcheons of a haughty race,
Graven each with its memorial
Of the old Lords of the Place.

You, who do profess to see
In the face the written mind,
Look in that face, and tell me
In what part of it you find

All the falsehood, and the wrong,
And the sin, which must have
been
Hid in baleful beauty long,
Like the worm that lurks unseen.

In the shut heart of the flower.
'Tis the Sex, no doubt! And still
Some may lack the means, the power,
There's not one that lacks the will.

Their own way they seek the Devil,
Ever prone to the deceiver!
If too deep I feel this evil
And this shame, may God forgive
her!

For I loved her,—loved, ay, loved
her
As a man just once may love.
I so trusted, so approved her,
Set her, blindly, so above

This poor world which was about
her!
And (so loving her) because,
With a faith too high to doubt her,
I, forsooth, but seldom was

"Track the first star that swims on
Glowing depths toward night and
us,
While the heats of sunset crimson
All the purple Bosphorus.

"Leaning o'er some dark ship-side,
Watch the wane of mighty moons;
Or through starlit Venice glide,
Singing down the blue lagoons.

"So from coast to coast we'll range,
Growing nearer as we move
On our charmed way; each soft
change
Only deepening changeless love."

'Twas the dream which I, too,
dreamed
Once, long since, in days of yore.
Life's long-faded fancies seemed
At his words to bloom once more.

The old hope, the wreckt belief,
The lost light of vanished years,
Ere my heart was worn with grief,
Or my eyes were dimmed with
tears!

When, a careless girl, I clung
With proud trust to my own pow-
ers;
Ah, long since I, too, was young,
I, too, dreamed of happier hours!

Whether this may yet be so
(Truth or dream) I cannot tell.
But where'er his footsteps go
Turns my heart, I feel too well.

Ha! the long night wears away.
Yon cold drowsy star grows dim.
The long-feared, long-wisht-for day
Comes, when I shall fly with him.

In the laurel wakes the thrush.
Through these dreaming chambers
wide

Not a sound is stirring. Hush;
—O, it was my child that cried!

At her feet with clamorous praises
And protested tenderness
(These things some men can do),
phrases
On her face, perhaps her dress,

Or the flower she chose to braid
In her hair,—because, you see,
Thinking love's best proved unsaid,
And by words the dignity

Of true feeling's often lost,
I was vowed to life's broad duty;
Man's great business uppermost
In my mind, not woman's beauty;

Toiling still to win for her
Honor, fortune, state in life.
("Too much with the Minister,
And too little with the wife!")

Just for this, she flung aside
All my toil, my heart, my name;
Trampled on my ancient pride,
Turned my honor into shame.

O, if this old coronet
Weighed too hard on her young
brow,

Need she thus dishonor it,
Fling it in the dust so low?

But 'tis just these women's way,—
All the same the wide world over!
Fooled by what's most worthless,
they
Cheat in turn the honest lover.

And I was not, I thank heaven,
Made, as some, to read them
through;
Were life three times longer even,
There are better things to do.

No! to let a woman lie
Like a canker, at the roots
Of a man's life,—burn it dry,
Nip the blossom, stunt the fruits,

This I count both shame and thrall!
Who is free to let one creature
Come between himself, and all
The true process of his nature,

While across the world the nations
Call to us that we should share
In their griefs, their exultations?—
All they will be, all they are!

And so much yet to be done,—
Wrong to root out, good to
strengthen!
Such hard battles to be won!
Such long glories yet to lengthen!

'Mid all these, how small one grief,—
One wrecked heart, whose hopes
are o'er!
For myself I scorn relief.
For the people I claim more.

Strange! these crowds whose in-
stincts guide them
Fail to get the thing they would,
Till we nobles stand beside them,
Give our names, or shed our blood.

From of old this hath been so.
For we too were with the first
In the fight fought long ago
When the chain of Charles was
burst.

Who but we set Freedom's border
Wrenched at Runnymede from
John?

Who but we stand, towers of order,
'Twixt the red cap and the
throne?

And they wrong us, England's Peers,
Us, the vanguard of the land,
Who should say the march of years
Makes us shrink at Truth's right
hand.

'Mid the armies of Reform,
To the People's cause allied,
We—the forces of the storm!
We—the planets of the tide!

Do I seem too much to fret
At my own peculiar woe?
Would to heaven I could forget
How I loved her long ago!

As a father loves a child,
So I loved her:—rather thus
Than as youth loves, when our wild
New-found passions master us.

And—for I was proud of old
('Tis my nature)—doubtless she
In the man so calm, so cold,
All the heart's warmth could not
see.

Nay, I blame myself—nor lightly,
Whose chief duty was to guide
Her young careless life more rightly
Through the perils at her side.

Ah, but love is blind! and I
Loved her blindly, blindly! . . .
Well,
Who that ere loved trustfully
Such strange danger could fore-
tell?

As some consecrated cup
On its saintly shrine secure,
All my life seemed lifted up
On that heart I deemed so pure.

Well, for me there yet remains
Labor—that's much: then, the
state:
And, what pays a thousand pains,
Sense of right and scorn of fate.

And, O, more! . . . my own brave
boy,
With his frank and eager brow,
And his hearty innocent joy.
For as yet he does not know

All the wrong his mother did.
Would that this might pass un-
known!
For his young years God forbid
I should darken by my own.

Yet this must come . . . but I mean
He shall be, as time moves on,
All his mother might have been,
Comfort, counsel—both in one.

Doubtless, first, in that which moved
me
Man's strong natural wrath had
part.

Wronged by one I deemed had
loved me,
For I loved her from my heart!

But that's past! If I was sore
To the heart, and blind with
shame,
I see calmly now. Nay, more,—
For I pity where I blame.

For, if he betray or grieve her,
What is her's to turn to still?
And at last, when he shall leave
her,
As at last he surely will,

Where shall she find refuge? what
That worst widowhood can
soothe?

For the Past consoles her not,
Nor the memories of her youth,

Neither that which in the dust
She hath flung,—the name she
bore;

But with her own shame she must
Dwell forsaken evermore.

Nothing left but years of anguish,
And remorse but not return:
Of her own self-hate to languish:
For her long-lost peace to yearn:

Or, yet worse beyond all measure,
Starting from wild reveries,
Drain the poison misnamed Pleas-
ure,
And laugh drunken on the lees.

O false heart! O woman, woman,
Woman! would thy treachery
Had been less! For surely no man
Better loved than I loved thee.

We must never meet again.
Even shouldst thou repent the
past.

Both must suffer: both feel pain:
Ere God pardon both at last.

Farewell, thou false face! Life
speeds me
On its duties. I must fight:
I must toil. The People needs me:
And I speak for them to-night.

III.

THE LAST INTERVIEW.

THANKS, Dear! Put the lamp
down . . . so,
For my eyes are weak and dim.
How the shadows come and go!
Speak truth,—have they sent for
him?

Yes, thank Heaven! And he will
come,
Come and watch my dying hour,—
Though I left and shamed his home.
—I am withered like this flower

Which he gave me long ago.
'Twas upon my bridal eve,
When I swore to love him so
As a wife should—smile or grieve

With him, for him—and not shrink.
And now? . . . O the long, long
pain!
See this sunken cheek! You think
He would know my face again?

All its wretched beauty gone!
Only the deep care survives.
Ah, could years of grief atone
For those fatal hours! . . . It
drives

Past the pane, the bitter blast!
In this garret one might freeze.
Hark there! wheels below! At last
He is come then? No . . . the
trees

And the night-wind—nothing more!
Set the chair for him to sit,
When he comes. And close the
door,
For the gust blows cold through it.

When I think, I can remember
I was born in castle-halls,—
How yon dull and dying ember
Glares against the whitewasht
walls!

If he come not (but you said
That the messenger was sent
Long since?) Tell him when I'm
dead
How my life's last hours were
spent

In repenting that life's sin.
And . . . the room grows strangely
dark!
See, the rain is oozing in.
Set the lamp down nearer. Hark,

Footsteps, footsteps on the stairs!
*His . . . no, no! 'twas not the
wind.*

God, I know, has heard my prayers.
We shall meet. I am resigned.

Prop me up upon the pillows.
Will he come to my bedside?
Once 'twas his . . . Among the
willows
How the water seems to glide!

Past the woods, the farms, the tow-
ers,
It seems gliding, gliding through.
*"Dearest, see, these young June-
flowers,
I have pluckt them all for you,*

*"Here, where passed my boyhood
musing
On the bride which I might wed."*
Ah, it goes now! I am losing
All things. What was that he
said?

Say, where am I? . . . This strange
room?

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Ah, his voice! I knew it
But this place? . . . Is this the
tomb,
With the cold dews creeping
through it?

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Will you stand
Near me? Sit down. Do not
stir.

Tell me, may I take your hand?
Tell me, will you look on her

Who so wronged you? I have wept
O such tears for that sin's sake!
And that thought has never slept,—
But it lies here, like a snake,

In my bosom,—gnawing, gnawing
All my life up! I had meant,
Could I live yet . . . Death is draw-
ing
Near me—

THE EARL.

God, thy punishment!
Dare I judge her?—

GERTRUDE.

O, believe me,
'Twas a dream, a hideous dream.
And I wake now. Do not leave me.
I am dying. All things seem

Falling from me—even my breath!
But my sentence is from old.
Sin came first upon me. Death
Follows sin, soon, soon! Behold,

Dying thus! Ah, why didst leave
Lonely Love's lost bridal bowers
Where I found the snake, like Eve,
Unsuspected 'mid the flowers?

Had I been some poor man's bride,
I had shared with love his lot:

Labored truly by his side,
And made glad his lowly cot.

I had been content to mate
Love with labor's sunburnt brows.
But to be a thing of state,—
Homeless in a husband's house!

In the gorgeous game—the strife
For the dazzling prize—that moved
you—
Love seemed crowded out of life—

THE EARL.

Ah fool! and I loved you, loved
you!

GERTRUDE.

Yes. I see it all at last—
All in ruins. I can dare
To gaze down o'er my lost past
From these heights of my despair.

O, when all seemed grown most
drear—
I was weak—I cannot tell—
But the serpent in my ear
Whispered, whispered—and I fell.

Lood around now. Does it cheer
you,
This strange place? the wasted
frame
Of the dying woman near you,
Weighed into her grave by shame?

Can you trace in this wan form
Aught resembling that young
girl's
Whom you loved once? See, this
arm—
Shrunken, shrunken! And my
curls,

They have cut them all away.
And my brows are worn with woe.
Would you, looking at me, say,
She was lovely long ago?

Husband, answer! in all these
Are you not avenged? If I

Could rise now, upon my knees,
At your feet, before I die,
I would fall down in my sorrow
And my shame, and say "for-
give."
That which will be dust to-morrow,
This weak clay!

THE EARL.

Poor sufferer, live.

God forgives. Shall I not so?

GERTRUDE.

Nay, a better life, in truth,
I do hope for. Not below.
Partner of my perisht youth,

Husband, wronged one! Let your
blessing
Be with me, before, to-night,
From the life that's past redressing
This strayed soul must take its
fight!

Tears, warm tears! I feel them
creep
Down my cheek. Tears—not my
own.

It is long since I could weep.
Past all tears my grief hath grown.

Over this dry withered cheek,
Drop by drop, I feel them fall.
But my voice is growing weak:
And I have not spoken all.

I had much to say. My son,
My lost child that never knew me!
Is he like me? One by one,
All his little ways come to me.

Is he grown? I fancy him!
How that childish face comes
back

O'er my memory sweet and dim!
And his long hair? Is it black?

Or as mine was once? His mother
Did he ever ask to see?
Has he grown to love another—
Some strange woman not like me?

Would he shudder to behold
This pale face and faded form
If he knew, in days of old,
How he slumbered on my arm?

How I nurst him? loved him?
missed him
All this long heartbroken time?
It is years since last I kissed him.
Does he hate me for my crime?

I had meant to send some token—
If, indeed, I dared to send it.
This old chain—the links are
broken—
Like my life—I could not mend it.

Husband, husband! I am dying,
Dying! Let me feel your kiss
On my brow where I am lying.
You are great enough for this!

And you'll lay me, when I'm gone,
—Not in those old sculptured
walls!

Let no name be carved—no stone—
No ancestral funerals!

In some little grave of grass
Anywhere, you'll let me lie:
Where the night-winds only pass,
Or the clouds go floating by;

Where my shame may be forgot;
And the story of my life
And my sin remembered not.
So forget the faithless wife;

Or if, haply, when I'm dead,
On some worthier happier breast
Than mine was, you lean your head,
Should one thought of me molest

Those calm hours, recall me only
As you see me,—worn with tears:
Dying desolate here; left lonely
By the overthrow of years.

May I lay my arm, then, there?
Does it not seem strange to you,
This old hand among your hair?
And these wasted fingers too?

How the lamp wanes! All grows
dark—

Dark and strange. Yet now there
shined [hark!
Something past me . . . Husband,
There are voices on the wind.

Are they come? and do they ask me
For the songs we used to sing?
Strange that memory thus should
task me!

Listen—

Birds are on the wing:

*And thy Birthday Morn is rising.
May it ever rise as bright!
Wake not yet! The day's devising
Fair new things for thy delight.*

*Wake not yet! Last night this
flower*

*Near thy porch began to pout
From its warm sheath: in an hour
All the young leaves will be out.*

*Wake not yet! So dear thou art,
love,*

*That I grudge these buds the bliss
Each will bring to thy young heart,
love,
I would claim all for my kiss.*

Wake not yet!

—There now, it fails me!
Is my lord there? I am ill.
And I cannot tell what ails me.
Husband! Is he near me still?

O, this anguish seems to crush
All my life up,—body and mind!

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude! Gertrude!
GERTRUDE.

Hush!

There are voices in the wind.

THE EARL.

Still she wanders! Ah, the pluck-
ing
At the sheet!

GERTRUDE.

Hist! do not take it

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From my bosom. See, 'tis sucking!
If it sleep we must not wake it.

Such a little rosy mouth!
—Not to-night, O not to-night!
Did he tell me in the South [bright?
That those stars were twice as

Off! away! unhand me—go!
I forgive thee my lost heaven,
And the wrong which thou didst do.
Would my sin, too, were forgiven!

Gone at last! . . . Ah, fancy feigns
These wild visions! I grow weak.
Fast, fast dying! Life's warmth
waned

From me. Is the fire out?

THE EARL.

Speak,

Gertrude, speak! My wife, my
wife!

Nay she is not dead,—not dead!
See, the lips move. There is life.
She is choking. Lift her head.

GERTRUDE.

* * * * *
Death! . . . My eyes grow dim, and
dimmer.

I can scarcely see thy face.
But the twilight seems to glimmer,
Lighted from some distant place.

Husband!

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Art thou near me?

On thy breast—once more—thy
breast! [me,
I have sinned—and—nay, yet hear
And repented—and—

THE EARL.

The rest

God hath heard, where now thou art,
Thou poor soul,—in Heaven.

The door—

Close it softly, and depart.

Leave us!

She is mine once more.