

POEMS OF LATER LIFE

THE RAVEN

ONCE upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered,
weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten
lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there
came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping—rapping at my
chamber door.

“’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my
chamber door—

Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember, it was in the bleak De-
cember,

And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost
upon the floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought
to borrow

From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the
lost Lenore—

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels
name Lenore—

Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple
curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never
felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood
repeating
“’Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my cham-
ber door—
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber
door;—
This it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then
no longer,
“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness
I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you
came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping—tapping at my
chamber door—
That I scarce was sure I heard you”—here I opened
wide the door:—
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there
wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared
to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness
gave no token,

And the only word there spoken was the whispered
word, “Lenore!”
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the
word, “Lenore!”
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within
me burning,
Soon I heard again a tapping, somewhat louder than
before.
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my
window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery
explore—
Let my heart be still a moment, and this mystery
explore;—
’Tis the wind and nothing more.”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a
flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days
of yore;
Not the least obeisance made he; not an instant
stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my
chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber
door—
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into
 smiling,
 By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance
 it wore,
 "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I
 said, "art sure no craven,
 Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the
 Nightly shore—
 Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's
 Plutonian shore!"
 Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear dis-
 course so plainly,
 Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy
 bore;
 For we can not help agreeing that no living human
 being
 Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his
 chamber door—
 Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his
 chamber door,
 With such name as "Nevermore."

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust,
 spoke only
 That one word, as if his soul in that one word he
 did outpour.
 Nothing further then he uttered—not a feather then
 he fluttered—

Till I scarcely more than muttered, "Other friends
 have flown before—
 On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have
 flown before."

Then the bird said, "Nevermore."

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly
 spoken,
 "Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock
 and store,
 Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerci-
 ful Disaster
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one
 burden bore—
 Till the dirges of his Hope the melancholy burden
 bore
 Of—'Never—nevermore.'"

But the Raven still beguiling all my sad soul into
 smiling,
 Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird
 and bust and door;
 Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to
 linking
 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird
 of yore—
 What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and
 ominous bird of yore
 Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing

To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;

This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining

On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamplight gloated o'er,

But whose velvet violet lining with the lamplight gloating o'er,

She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer

Swung by Seraphim whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor.

"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee

Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!

Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,

Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—

On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—

Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!

By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—

"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still
 is sitting
 On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber
 door;
 And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that
 is dreaming,
 And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his
 shadow on the floor;
 And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating
 on the floor
 Shall be lifted—nevermore!

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THE BELLS

I

HEAR the sledges with the bells—
 Silver bells!
 What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
 How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
 In the icy air of night!
 While the stars, that oversprinkle
 All the heavens, seem to twinkle
 With a crystalline delight;
 Keeping time, time, time,
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
 To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
 From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
 From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II

Hear the mellow wedding bells,
 Golden bells!
 What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
 Through the balmy air of night
 How they ring out their delight!
 From the molten golden-notes,
 And all in tune,
 What a liquid ditty floats
 To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
 On the moon!
 Oh, from out the sounding cells,

What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
 How it swells!
 How it dwells
 On the future! how it tells
 Of the rapture that impels
 To the swinging and the ringing
 Of the bells, bells, bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
 To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

III

Hear the loud alarum bells—
 Brazen bells!
 What a tale of terror now their turbulency tells!
 In the startled ear of night
 How they scream out their affright!
 Too much horrified to speak,
 They can only shriek, shriek,
 Out of tune,
 In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
 In a mad exostulation with the deaf and frantic fire
 Leaping higher, higher, higher,
 With a desperate desire,
 And a resolute endeavor
 Now—now to sit or never,
 By the side of the pale-faced moon.
 Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
 What a tale their terror tells
 Of Despair!

How they clang, and clash, and roar!
 What a horror they outpour
 On the bosom of the palpitating air!
 Yet the ear it fully knows,
 By the twanging,
 And the clanging,
 How the danger ebbs and flows;
 Yet the ear distinctly tells,
 In the jangling,
 And the wrangling,
 How the danger sinks and swells,
 By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the
 bells—
 Of the bells—
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
 In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!

IV

Hear the tolling of the bells—
 Iron bells!
 What a world of solemn thought their monody
 compels!
 In the silence of the night,
 How we shiver with affright
 At the melancholy menace of their tone!
 For every sound that floats
 From the rust within their throats
 Is a groan.

And the people—ah, the people—
 They that dwell up in the steeple,
 All alone,
 And who tolling, tolling, tolling,
 In that muffled monotone,
 Feel a glory in so rolling
 On the human heart a stone—
 They are neither man nor woman—
 They are neither brute nor human—
 They are Ghouls:
 And their king it is who tolls;
 And he rolls, rolls, rolls,
 Rolls
 A pæan from the bells!
 And his merry bosom swells
 With the pæan of the bells!
 And he dances, and he yells;
 Keeping time, time, time,
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
 To the pæan of the bells—
 Of the bells:
 Keeping time, time, time,
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
 To the throbbing of the bells—
 Of the bells, bells, bells—
 To the sobbing of the bells;
 Keeping time, time, time,
 As he knells, knells, knells,
 In a happy Runic rhyme,

To the rolling of the bells—
 Of the bells, bells, bells—
 To the tolling of the bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
 To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

1849.

ULALUME

THE skies they were ashen and sober;
 The leaves they were crispèd and sere—
 The leaves they were withering and sere;
 It was night in the lonesome October
 Of my most immemorial year;
 It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
 In the misty mid region of Weir—
 It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
 In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic,
 Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—
 Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
 These were days when my heart was volcanic
 As the scoriac rivers that roll—
 As the lavas that restlessly roll
 Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
 In the ultimate climes of the pole—
 That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
 In the realms of the boreal pole.

Our talk had been serious and sober,
 But our thoughts they were palsied and sere—
 Our memories were treacherous and sere—
 For we knew not the month was October,
 And we marked not the night of the year—
 (Ah, night of all nights in the year!)

We noted not the dim lake of Auber—
 (Though once we had journeyed down here)—
 Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber,
 Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

And now, as the night was senescent
 And star-dials pointed to morn—
 As the sun-dials hinted of morn—
 At the end of our path a liquescent
 And nebulous lustre was born,
 Out of which a miraculous crescent
 Arose with a duplicate horn—
 Astarte's bediamonded crescent
 Distinct with its duplicate horn.

And I said—"She is warmer than Dian:
 She rolls through an ether of sighs—
 She revels in a region of sighs:
 She has seen that the tears are not dry on
 These cheeks, where the worm never dies,
 And has come past the stars of the Lion
 To point us the path to the skies—
 To the Lethean peace of the skies—
 Come up, in despite of the Lion,
 To shine on us with her bright eyes—
 Come up through the lair of the Lion,
 With love in her luminous eyes."

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
 Said—"Sadly this star I mistrust—
 Her pallor I strangely mistrust:—

Oh, hasten!—oh, let us not linger!
 Oh, fly!—let us fly!—for we must.”
 In terror she spoke, letting sink her
 Wings till they trailed in the dust—
 In agony sobbed, letting sink her
 Plumes till they trailed in the dust—
 Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.

I replied—“This is nothing but dreaming:
 Let us on by this tremulous light!
 Let us bathe in this crystalline light!
 Its Sibyllic splendor is beaming
 With Hope and in Beauty to-night:—
 See!—it flickers up the sky through the night!
 Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,
 And be sure it will lead us aright—
 We safely may trust to a gleaming
 That can not but guide us aright,
 Since it flickers up to Heaven through the
 night.”

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
 And tempted her out of her gloom—
 And conquered her scruples and gloom;
 And we passed to the end of a vista,
 But were stopped by the door of a tomb—
 By the door of a legended tomb;
 And I said—“What is written, sweet sister,
 On the door of this legended tomb?”

She replied—“Ulalume—Ulalume—
 ’Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!”

Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
 As the leaves that were crispèd and sere—
 As the leaves that were withering and sere;
 And I cried—“It was surely October
 On *this* very night of last year
 That I journeyed—I journeyed down here—
 That I brought a dread burden down here!
 On this night of all nights in the year,
 Ah, what demon has tempted me here?
 Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber—
 This misty mid region of Weir—
 Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber,—
 This ghoulish-woodland of Weir.”

1847.

TO HELEN

I saw thee once—once only—years ago:
 I must not say *how* many—but *not* many.
 It was a July midnight; and from out
 A full-orbed moon, that, like thine own soul, soaring,
 Sought a precipitate pathway up through heaven,
 There fell a silvery-silken veil of light,
 With quietude, and sultriness and slumber,
 Upon the upturn'd faces of a thousand
 Roses that grew in an enchanted garden,
 Where no wind dared to stir, unless on tiptoe—
 Fell on the upturn'd faces of these roses
 That gave out, in return for the love-light,
 Their odorous souls in an ecstatic death—
 Fell on the upturn'd faces of these roses
 That smiled and died in this parterre, enchanted
 By thee, and by the poetry of thy presence.
 Clad all in white, upon a violet bank
 I saw thee half-reclining; while the moon
 Fell on the upturn'd faces of the roses,
 And on thine own, upturn'd—alas, in sorrow!

Was it not Fate, that, on this July midnight—
 Was it not Fate (whose name is also Sorrow),
 That bade me pause before that garden-gate,
 To breathe the incense of those slumbering roses?
 No footstep stirred: the hated world all slept,
 Save only thee and me—(O Heaven!—O God!

How my heart beats in coupling those two
 words!)—
 Save only thee and me. I paused—I looked—
 And in an instant all things disappeared.
 (Ah, bear in mind this garden was enchanted!)
 The pearly lustre of the moon went out:
 The mossy banks and the meandering paths,
 The happy flowers and the repining trees,
 Were seen no more: the very roses' odors
 Died in the arms of the adoring airs.
 All—all expired save thee—save less than thou:
 Save only the divine light in thine eyes—
 Save but the soul in thine uplifted eyes.
 I saw but them—they were the world to me.
 I saw but them—saw only them for hours—
 Saw only them until the moon went down.
 What wild heart-histories seemed to lie enwritten
 Upon those crystalline, celestial spheres!
 How dark a woe! yet how sublime a hope!
 How silently serene a sea of pride!
 How daring an ambition! yet how deep—
 How fathomless a capacity for love!

But now, at length, dear Dian sank from sight,
 Into a western couch of thunder-cloud;
 And thou, a ghost, amid the entombing trees
 Didst glide away. *Only thine eyes remained.*
 They *would not* go—they never yet have gone.
 Lighting my lonely pathway home that night,

They have not left me (as my hopes have) since.
 They follow me—they lead me through the years.
 They are my ministers—yet I their slave.
 Their office is to illumine and enkindle—
 My duty, *to be saved* by their bright light,
 And purified in their electric fire,
 And sanctified in their elysian fire.
 They fill my soul with Beauty (which is Hope),
 And are far up in Heaven—the stars I kneel to
 In the sad, silent watches of my night;
 While even in the meridian glare of day
 I see them still—two sweetly scintillant
 Venuses, unextinguished by the sun!

1848.

ANNABEL LEE

It was many and many a year ago,
 In a kingdom by the sea,
 That a maiden there lived whom you may know
 By the name of ANNABEL LEE;
 And this maiden she lived with no other thought
 Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and *she* was a child,
 In this kingdom by the sea:
 But we loved with a love that was more than love—
 I and my ANNABEL LEE;
 With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
 Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
 In this kingdom by the sea,
 A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
 My beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
 So that her highborn kinsmen came
 And bore her away from me,
 To shut her up in a sepulchre
 In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
 Went envying her and me—
 Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,
 In this kingdom by the sea)

That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my ANNABEL LEE.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE.

For the moon never beams without bringing me
dreams
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
And the stars never rise but I see the bright eyes
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the side of the sea.

1849.

A VALENTINE

FOR her this rhyme is penned, whose luminous eyes,
Brightly expressive as the twins of Leda,
Shall find her own sweet name, that, nestling lies
Upon the page, enwrapped from every reader.
Search narrowly the lines!—they hold a treasure
Divine—a talisman—an amulet
That must be worn *at heart*. Search well the meas-
ure—

The words—the syllables! Do not forget
The triviallest point, or you may lose your labor!
And yet there is in this no Gordian knot
Which one might not undo without a sabre,
If one could merely comprehend the plot.
Enwritten upon the leaf where now are peering
Eyes scintillating soul, there lie *perdus*
Three eloquent words oft uttered in the hearing
Of poets by poets—as the name is a poet's, too.
Its letters, although naturally lying
Like the knight Pinto—Mendez Ferdinando—
Still for a synonym for Truth.—Cease trying!
You will not read the riddle, though you do the
best you *can* do.

1846.

[To discover the names in this and the following poem read the first letter of the first line in connection with the second letter of the second line, the third letter of the third line, the fourth of the fourth and so on to the end.]

AN ENIGMA

"SELDOM we find," says Solomon Don Dunce,
 "Half an idea in the profoundest sonnet.
 Through all the flimsy things we see at once
 As easily as through a Naples bonnet—
 Trash of all trash!—how *can* a lady don it?
 Yet heavier far than your Petrarchan stuff—
 Owl-downy nonsense that the faintest puff
 Twirls into trunk-paper the while you con it."
 And, veritably, Sol is right enough.
 The general tuckermanities are arrant
 Bubbles—ephemeral and *so* transparent—
 But *this* is, *now*—you may depend upon it—
 Stable, opaque, immortal—all by dint
 Of the dear names that lie concealed within't.

1847.

[See previous page.]

TO MY MOTHER

BECAUSE I feel that, in the Heavens above,
 The angels, whispering to one another,
 Can find, among their burning terms of love,
 None so devotional as that of "Mother,"
 Therefore by that dear name I long have called
 you—
 You who are more than mother unto me,
 And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed
 you,
 In setting my Virginia's spirit free.
 My mother—my own mother, who died early,
 Was but the mother of myself; but you
 Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,
 And thus are dearer than the mother I knew
 By that infinity with which my wife
 Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life.
 1849.

[The above was addressed to the poet's mother-in-law, Mrs. Clemm.—Ed.]