

Her mother, looking out toward her, sighed,  
 Then gave her hand in token of farewell,  
 And with her warning eyes, that seemed to chide,  
 Scarce suffered that I sought her child to tell  
 The story of my life, whose every line  
 No other burden bore than — Eglantine.

Black thunder-clouds were rising up behind,  
 The waxen taper burned full steadily;  
 It seemed as if dark midnight had a mind  
 To hear what lovers say, and her decree  
 Had passed for silence, while she, dropped to ground  
 With raiment floating wide, drank in the sound.

O happiness! thou dost not leave a trace  
 So well defined as sorrow. Amber light,  
 Shed like a glory on her angel face,  
 I can remember fully, and the sight  
 Of her fair forehead and her shining eyes,  
 And lips that smiled in sweet and girlish wise.

I can remember how the taper played  
 Over her small hands and her vesture white;  
 How it struck up into the trees, and laid  
 Upon their under leaves unwonted light;  
 And when she held it low, how far it spread  
 O'er velvet pansies slumbering on their bed.

I can remember that we spoke full low,  
 That neither doubted of the other's truth;  
 And that with footsteps slower and more slow,  
 Hands folded close for love, eyes wet for ruth:  
 Beneath the trees, by that clear taper's flame,  
 We wandered till the gate of parting came.

But I forget the parting words she said,  
 So much they thrilled the all-attentive soul;  
 For one short moment human heart and head

May bear such bliss — its present is the whole:  
 I had that present, till in whispers fell  
 With parting gesture her subdued farewell.

“Farewell!” she said, in act to turn away,  
 But stood a moment still to dry her tears,  
 And suffered my enfolding arm to stay  
 The time of her departure. O ye years  
 That intervene betwixt that day and this!  
 You all received your hue from that keen pain and  
 bliss.

O mingled pain and bliss! O pain to break  
 At once from happiness so lately found,  
 And four long years to feel for her sweet sake  
 The incompleteness of all sight and sound!  
 But bliss to cross once more the foaming brine —  
 O bliss to come again and make her mine!

I cannot—O, I cannot more recall!  
 But I will soothe my troubled thoughts to rest  
 With musing over journeyings wide, and all  
 Observance of this active-humored west,  
 And swarming cities steeped in easterly day,  
 With swarthy tribes in gold and striped array.

I turn from these, and straight there will succeed  
 (Shifting and changing at the restless will),  
 Imbedded in some deep Circassian mead,  
 White wagon-tilts, and flocks that eat their fill  
 Unseen above, while comely shepherds pass,  
 And scarcely show their heads above the grass.

— The red Sahara in an angry glow,  
 With amber fogs, across its hollows trailed  
 Long strings of camels, gloomy-eyed and slow,  
 And women on their necks, from gazers veiled,  
 And sun-swart guides who toil across the sand  
 To groves of date-trees on the watered land.

Again — the brown sails of an Arab boat,  
 Flapping by night upon a glassy sea,  
 Whereon the moon and planets seem to float,  
 More bright of hue than they were wont to be,  
 While shooting-stars rain down with crackling  
 sound,  
 And, thick as swarming locusts, drop to ground.

Or far into the heat among the sands  
 The gembok nations, snuffing up the wind,  
 Drawn by the scent of water — and the bands  
 Of tawny-bearded lions pacing, blind  
 With the sun-dazzle in their midst, opprest  
 With prey, and spiritless for lack of rest!

What more? Old Lebanon, the frosty-browed,  
 Setting his feet among oil-olive trees,  
 Heaving his bare brown shoulder through a cloud;  
 And after, grassy Carmel, purple seas,  
 Flattering his dreams and echoing in his rocks  
 Soft as the bleating of his thousand flocks.

Enough: how vain this thinking to beguile,  
 With recollected scenes, an aching breast!  
 Did not I, journeying, muse on her the while?  
 Ah, yes! for every landscape comes impressed —  
 Ay, written on, as by an iron pen —  
 With the same thought I nursed about her then.

Therefore let memory turn again to home;  
 Feel, as of old, the joy of drawing near;  
 Watch the green breakers and the wind-tossed foam,  
 And see the land-fog break, dissolve, and clear;  
 Then think a skylark's voice far sweeter sound  
 Than ever thrilled but over English ground;

And walk, glad, even to tears, among the wheat,  
 Not doubting this to be the first of lands;

And, while in foreign words this murmuring, meet  
 Some little village school-girls (with their hands  
 Full of forget-me-nots), who, greeting me,  
 I count their English talk delightful melody;

And seat me on a bank, and draw them near,  
 That I may feast myself with hearing it,  
 Till shortly they forget their bashful fear,  
 Push back their flaxen curls, and round me sit —  
 Tell me their names, their daily tasks, and show  
 Where wildwood strawberries in the copses grow.

So passed the day in this delightful land:  
 My heart was thankful for the English tongue —  
 For English sky with feathery cloudlets spanned —  
 For English hedge with glistening dewdrops hung  
 I journeyed, and at glowing eventide  
 Stopped at a rustic inn by the wayside.

That night I slumbered sweetly, being right glad  
 To miss the flapping of the shrouds; but lo!  
 A quiet dream of beings twain I had,  
 Behind the curtain talking soft and low:  
 Methought I did not heed their utterance fine,  
 Till one of them said softly, "Eglantine."

I started up awake, 'twas silence all: [clear,  
 My own fond heart had shaped that utterance  
 And "Ah!" methought, "how sweetly did it fall,  
 Though but in dream, upon the listening ear!  
 How sweet from other lips the name well known —  
 That name, so many a year heard only from mine  
 own!"

I thought awhile, then slumber came to me,  
 And tangled all my fancy in her maze,  
 And I was drifting on a raft at sea,  
 The near all ocean, and the far all haze;

Through the white polished water sharks did glide,  
And up in heaven I saw no stars to guide.

“Have mercy, God!” but lo! my raft uprose;  
Drip, drip, I heard the water splash from it;  
My raft had wings, and as the petrel goes,  
It skimmed the sea, then brooding seemed to sit  
The milk-white mirror, till, with sudden spring,  
It flew straight upward like a living thing.

But strange! — I went not also in that flight,  
For I was entering at a cavern’s mouth;  
Trees grew within, and screaming birds of night  
Sat on them, hiding from the torrid south.  
On, on I went, while gleaming in the dark  
Those trees with blanchèd leaves stood pale and stark.

The trees had flower-buds, nourished in deep night.  
And suddenly, as I went farther in,  
They opened, and they shot out lambent light;  
Then all at once arose a railing din  
That frightened me: “It is the ghosts,” I said,  
“And they are railing for their darkness fled.

“I hope they will not look me in the face;  
It frighteth me to hear their laughter loud;”  
I saw them troop before with jaunty pace,  
And one would shake off dust that soiled her  
shroud:

But now, O joy unhopèd! to calm my dread,  
Some moonlight filtered through a cleft o’erhead.

I climbed the lofty trees — the blanchèd trees —  
The cleft was wide enough to let me through;  
I clambered out and felt the balmy breeze,  
And stepped on churchyard grasses wet with dew.  
O happy chance! O fortune to admire!  
I stood beside my own loved village spire.

And as I gazed upon the yew-tree’s trunk,  
Lo, far-off music — music in the night!  
So sweet and tender as it swelled and sunk;  
It charmed me till I wept with keen delight,  
And in my dream, methought as it drew near  
The very clouds in heaven stooped low to hear.

Beat high, beat low, wild heart so deeply stirred,  
For high as heaven runs up the piercing strain;  
The restless music fluttering like a bird  
Bemoaned herself, and dropped to earth again,  
Heaping up sweetness till I was afraid  
That I should die of grief when it did fade.

And it did fade; but while with eager ear  
I drank its last long echo dying away,  
I was aware of footsteps that drew near,  
And round the ivied chancel seemed to stray:  
O, soft above the hallowed place they trod —  
Soft as the fall of foot that is not shod!

I turned — ’twas even so — yes, Eglantine!  
For at the first I had divined the same;  
I saw the moon on her shut eyelids shine,  
And said, “She is asleep:” still on she came;  
Then, on her dimpled feet, I saw it gleam,  
And thought, “I know that this is but a dream.”

My darling! O my darling! not the less  
My dream went on because I knew it such;  
She came towards me in her loveliness —  
A thing too pure, methought, for mortal touch;  
The rippling gold did on her bosom meet,  
The long white robe descended to her feet.

The fringed lids dropped low, as sleep-oppressed;  
Her dreamy smile was very fair to see,  
And her two hands were folded to her breast,

With somewhat held between them heedfully,  
O fast asleep! and yet methought she knew  
And felt my nearness those shut eyelids through.

She sighed: my tears ran down for tenderness —

“And have I drawn thee to me in my sleep?  
Is it for me thou wanderest shelterless,  
Wetting thy steps in dewy grasses deep?  
O if this be!” I said — “yet speak to me:  
I blame my very dream for cruelty.”

Then from her stainless bosom she did take

Two beauteous lily flowers that lay therein,  
And with slow-moving lips a gesture make,  
As one that some forgotten words doth win:  
“They floated on the pool,” methought she said.  
And water trickled from each lily’s head.

It dropped upon her feet — I saw it gleam

Along the ripples of her yellow hair,  
And stood apart, for only in a dream  
She would have come, methought, to meet me  
there.

She spoke again — “Ah fair! ah fresh they shine!  
And there are many left, and these are mine.”

I answered her with flattering accents meet —

“Love, they are whitest lilies e’er were blown.”  
“And sayest thou so?” she sighed in murmurs  
sweet:

“I have naught else to give thee now, mine own!  
For it is night. Then take them, love!” said she:  
“They have been costly flowers to thee — and me.”

While thus she said I took them from her hand,

And, overcome with love and nearness, woke;  
And overcome with ruth that she should stand  
Barefooted in the grass; that, when she spoke,

Her mystic words should take so sweet a tone  
And of all names her lips should choose “My own.”

I rose, journeyed, neared my home, and soon

Beheld the spire peer out above the hill:  
It was a sunny harvest afternoon,  
When by the churchyard wicket, standing still,  
I cast my eager eyes abroad to know  
If change had touched the scenes of long ago.

I looked across the hollow; sunbeams shone

Upon the old house with the gable-ends:  
“Save that the laurel-trees are taller grown,  
No change,” methought, “to its gray wall extends  
What clear bright beams on yonder lattice shine!  
There did I sometime talk with Eglantine.”

There standing with my very goal in sight,

Over my haste did sudden quiet steal;  
I thought to dally with my own delight,  
Nor rush on headlong to my garnered weal,  
But taste the sweetness of a short delay,  
And for a little moment hold the bliss at bay.

The church was open; it perchance might be

That there to offer thanks I might essay,  
Or rather, as I think, that I might see  
The place where Eglantine was wont to pray.  
But so it was; I crossed that portal wide,  
And felt my riot joy to calm subside.

The low depending curtains, gently swayed,

Cast over arch and roof a crimson glow;  
But, ne’ertheless, all silence and all shade  
It seemed, save only for the rippling flow  
Of their long foldings, when the sunset air  
Sighed through the casements of the house of prayer

I found her place, the ancient oaken stall,  
 Where in her childhood I had seen her sit,  
 Most saint-like and most tranquil there of all,  
 Folding her hands, as if a dreaming fit—  
 A heavenly vision had before her strayed  
 Of the Eternal Child in lowly manger laid.

I saw her prayer-book laid upon the seat,  
 And took it in my hand, and felt more near  
 In fancy to her, finding it most sweet  
 To think how very oft, low kneeling here,  
 In her devout thoughts she had let me share,  
 And set my graceless name in her pure prayer.

My eyes were dazzled with delightful tears—  
 In sooth they were the last I ever shed;  
 For with them fell the cherished dreams of years.  
 I looked, and on the wall above my head,  
 Over her seat, there was a tablet placed,  
 With one word only on the marble traced.—

Ah, well! I would not overstate that woe,  
 For I have had some blessings, little care;  
 But since the falling of that heavy blow,  
 God's earth has never seemed to me so fair;  
 Nor any of His creatures so divine,  
 Nor sleep so sweet:—the word was—EGLANTINE.

MOTHER SHOWING THE PORTRAIT OF  
 HER CHILD.

(F. M. L.)

LIVING Child or pictured cherub  
 Ne'er o'ermatched its baby grace;  
 And the mother, moving nearer,  
 Looked it calmly in the face;

Then with slight and quiet gesture,  
 And with lips that scarcely smiled,  
 Said, "A portrait of my daughter  
 When she was a child."

Easy thought was hers to fathom,  
 Nothing hard her glance to read,  
 For it seemed to say, "No praises  
 For this little child I need:  
 If you see, I see far better,  
 And I will not fain to care  
 For a stranger's prompt assurance  
 That the face is fair."

Softly clasped and half extended,  
 She her dimpled hands doth lay;  
 So they doubtless placed them, saying,  
 "Little one, you must not play."  
 And while yet his work was growing,  
 This the painter's hand hath shown,  
 That the little heart was making  
 Pictures of its own.

Is it warm in that green valley,  
 Vale of childhood, where you dwell?  
 Is it calm in that green valley,  
 Round whose bournes such great hills swell?  
 Are there giants in the valley—  
 Giants leaving footprints yet?  
 Are there angels in the valley?  
 Tell me—I forget.

Answer, answer, for the lilies,  
 Little one, o'ertop you much.  
 And the mealy gold within them  
 You can scarcely reach to touch;  
 O how far their aspect differs,  
 Looking up and looking down!