

THE MAID-MARTYR.

ONLY you'd have me speak. Whether to speak

Or whether to be silent is all one;
Whether to sleep and in my dreaming front
Her small scared face forlorn; whether to wake
And muse upon her small soft feet that paced
The hated, hard, inhospitable stone —
I say all's one. But you would have me speak,
And change one sorrow for the other. Ay,
Right reverend father, comfortable father,
Old, long in thrall, and wearied of the cell,
So will I here — here staring through the grate,
Whence, sheer beneath us lying the little town,
Her street appears a riband up the rise;
Where 'tis right steep for carts, behold two ruts
Worn in the flat, smooth stone.

 That side I stood;
My head was down. At first I did but see
Her coming feet; they gleamed through my hot tears
As she walked barefoot up yon short steep hill.
Then I dared all, gazed on her face, the maid-
Martyr, and utterly, utterly broke my heart.

Her face, O! it was wonderful to me,
There was not in it what I look'd for — no,
I never saw a maid go to her death,
How should I dream that face and the dumb soul?

Her arms and head were bare, seemly she walked
All in her smock so modest as she might;

Upon her shoulders hung a painted cape
For horrible adornment, flames of fire
Portrayed upon it, and mocking demon heads.

Her eyes — she did not see me — opened wide,
Blue-black, gazed right before her, yet they marked
Nothing; and her two hands uplift as praying,
She yet prayed not, wept not, sighed not. O father,
She was past that, soft, tender, hunted thing;
But, as it seemed, confused from time to time,
She would half-turn her or to left or right
To follow other streets, doubting her way.

Then their base pikes they basely thrust at her,
And, like one dazed, obedient to her guides
She came; I knew not if 'twas present to her
That death was her near goal; she was so lost,
And set apart from any power to think.
But her mouth pouted as one brooding, father,
Over a lifetime of forlorn fear. No,
Scarce was it fear; so looks a timid child
(Not more affrighted; ah! but not so pale)
That has been scolded or has lost its way.

Mother and father — father and mother kind,
She was alone, where were you hidden? Alone,
And I that loved her more, or feared death less,
Rushed to her side, but quickly was flung back,
And cast behind o' the pikemen following her
Into a yelling and a cursing crowd,
That bristled thick with monks and hooded friars;
Moreover, women with their cheeks ablaze,
Who swarmèd after up the narrowing street.

Pitiful heaven! I knew she did not hear
 In that last hour the cursing, nor the foul
 Words; she had never heard like words, sweet soul,
 In her life blameless; even at that pass,
 That dreadful pass, I felt it had been worse,
 Though naught I longed for as for death, to know
 She did. She saw not 'neath their hoods those eyes
 Soft, glittering, with a lust for cruelty;
 Secret delight, that so great cruelty,
 All in the sacred name of Holy Church,
 Their meed to look on it should be anon.
 Speak! O, I tell you this thing passeth words!

From roofs and oriels high, women looked down;
 Men, maidens, children, and a fierce white sun
 Smote blinding splinters from all spears aslant.

Lo! next a stand, so please you, certain priests
 (May God forgive men sinning at their ease),
 Whose duty 'twas to look upon this thing,
 Being mindful of thick pungent smoke to come,
 Had caused a stand to rise hard by the stake,
 Upon its windward side.

My life! my love!

She utter'd one sharp cry of mortal dread
 While they did chain her. This thing passeth
 words,

Albeit told out forever in my soul.
 As the torch touched, thick volumes of black reek
 Rolled out and raised the wind, and instantly
 Long films of flaxen hair floated aloft,
 Settled alow, in drifts upon the crowd.
 The vile were merciful; heaped high, my dear,

Thou didst not suffer long. O! it was soon,
 Soon over, and I knew not any more,
 Till grovelling on the ground, beating my head,
 I heard myself, and scarcely knew 'twas I,
 At Holy Church railing with fierce mad words,
 Crying and craving for a stake, for me.
 While fast the folk, as ever, such a work
 Being over, fled, and shrieked "A heretic!
 More heretics; yon ashes smoking still."
 And up and almost over me came on
 A robed — ecclesiastic — with his train
 (I choose the words lest that they do some wrong),
 Call him a robed ecclesiastic proud.
 And I lying helpless, with my bruised face
 Beat on his garnished shoon. But he stepped back,
 Spurned me full roughly with them, called the pikes,
 Delivering orders, "Take the bruised wretch.
 He raves. Fool! thou'lt hear more of this anon.
 Bestow him there." He pointed to a door.
 With that some threw a cloth upon my face
 Because it bled. I knew they carried me
 Within his home, and I was satisfied;
 Willing my death. Was it an abbey door?
 Was 't entrance to a palace? or a house
 Of priests? I say not, nor if abbot he,
 Bishop or other dignity; enough
 That he so spake. "Take in the bruised wretch."
 And I was borne far up a turret stair
 Into a peaked chamber taking form
 O' the roof, and on a pallet bed they left
 Me miserable. Yet I knew forsooth,
 Left in my pain, that evil things were said
 Of that same tower; men thence had disappeared,

Suspect of heresy had disappeared,
 Deliver'd up, 'twas whisper'd, tried and burned.
 So be it methought, I would not live, not I.
 But none did question me. A beldame old,
 Kind, heedless of my sayings, tended me.
 I raved at Holy Church and she was deaf,
 And at whose tower detained me, she was dumb.
 So had I food and water, rest and calm.
 Then on the third day I rose up and sat
 On the side of my low bed right melancholy,
 All that high force of passion overpast,
 I sick with dolorous thought and weak through tears
 Spite of myself came to myself again
 (For I had slept), and since I could not die
 Looked through the window three parts overgrown
 With leafage on the loftiest ivy ropes,
 And saw at foot o' the rise another tower
 In roof whereof a grating, dreary bare.
 Lifetimes gone by, long, slow, dim, desolate,
 I knew even there had been my lost love's cell.

So musing on the man that with his foot
 Spurned me, the robed ecclesiastic stern,
 "Would he had haled me straight to prison," me-
 thought,
 "So made an end at once."

My sufferings rose
 Like billows closing over, beating down;
 Made heavier far because of a stray, strange,
 Sweet hope that mocked me at the last.
 'Twas thus,
 I came from Oxford secretly, the news
 Terrible of her danger smiting me,—
 She was so young, and ever had been bred

With whom 'twas made a peril now to name.
 There had been worship in the night; some stole
 To a mean chapel deep in woods, and heard
 Preaching, and prayed. She, my betrothed, was
 there.
 Father and mother, mother and father kind,
 So young, so innocent, had ye no ruth,
 No fear, that ye did bring her to her doom?
 I know the chiefest Evil One himself
 Sanded that floor. Their footsteps marking it
 Betrayed them. How all came to pass let be.
 Parted, in hiding some, other in thrall,
 Father and mother, mother and father kind,
 It may be yet ye know not this — not all.

I in the daytime lying perdue looked up
 At the castle keep impregnable,— no foot
 How rash so e'er might hope to scale it. Night
 Descending, come I near, perplexedness,
 Contempt of danger, to the door o' the keep
 Drawing me. There a short stone bench I found,
 And bitterly weeping sat and leaned my head
 Against the hopeless hated massiveness
 Of that detested hold. A lifting moon
 Had made encroachment on the dark, but deep
 Was shadow where I leaned. Within a while
 I was aware, but saw no shape, of one
 Who stood beside me, a dark shadow tall.
 I cared not, disavowal mattered naught
 Of grief to one so out of love with life.
 But after pause I felt a hand let down
 That rested kindly, firmly, a man's hand,
 Upon my shoulder; there was cheer in it.

And presently a voice clear, whispering, low,
 With pitifulness that faltered, spoke to me.
 Was I, it asked, true son of Mother Church?
 Coldly I answer'd "Ay;" then blessed words
 That danced into mine ears more excellent
 Music than wedding bells had been were said,
 With certitude that I might see my maid,
 My dear one. He would give a paper, he
 The man beside me. "Do thy best endeavor,
 Dear youth. Thy maiden being a right sweet child
 Surely will hearken to thee; an she do,
 And will recant, fair faultless heretic,
 Whose knowledge is but scant of matters high
 Which hard men spake on with her, hard men forced
 From her mouth innocent, then shall she come
 Before me; have good cheer, all may be well.
 But an she will not she must burn, no power—
 Not Solomon the Great on 's ivory throne
 With all his wisdom could find out a way,
 Nor I nor any to save her, she must burn.
 Now hast thou till day dawn. The Mother of God
 Speed thee." A twisted scroll he gave; himself
 Knocked at the door behind, and he was gone,
 A darker pillar of darkness in the dark.
 Straightway one opened and I gave the scroll.
 He read, then thrust it in his lanthorn flame
 Till it was ashes; "Follow" and no more
 Whisper'd, went up the giddy spiring way,
 I after, till we reached the topmost door.
 Then took a key, opened, and crying "Delia,
 Delia my sweetheart, I am come, I am come,"
 I darted forward and he locked us in.
 Two figures; one rose up and ran to me

Along the ladder of moonlight on the floor,
 Fell on my neck. Long time we kissed and wept.

But for that other, while she stood appeased
 For cruel parting past, locked in mine arms,
 I had been glad, expecting a good end.
 The cramped pale fellow prisoner "Courage" cried.
 Then Delia lifting her fair face, the moon
 Did show me its incomparable calms.
 Her effluent thought needed no word of mine,
 It whelmed my soul as in a sea of tears.
 The warm enchantment leaning on my breast
 Breathed as in air remote, and I was left
 To infinite detachment, even with hers
 To take cold kisses from the lips of doom,
 Look in those eyes and disinherit hope
 From that high place late won.

Then murmuring low
 That other spake of Him on the cross, and soft
 As broken-hearted mourning of the dove,
 She "One deep calleth to another" sighed.
 "The heart of Christ mourns to my heart, 'Endure.
 There was a day when to the wilderness
 My great forerunner from his thrall sent forth
 Sad messengers, demanding *Art thou He?*
 Think'st thou I knew no pang in that strange hour?
 How could I hold the power, and want the will
 Or want the love? That pang was his—and mine.
 He said not, Save me an thou be the Son,
 But only *Art thou He?* In my great way
 It was not writ,—legions of Angels mine,
 There was one Angel, one ordain'd to unlock
 At my behest the doomèd deadly doors.

I could not tell him, tell not thee, why.' Lord,
 We know not why, but would not have Thee grieve,
 Think not so deeply on 't; make us endure
 For Thy blest sake, hearing Thy sweet voice mourn
 'I will go forth, thy desolations meet,
 And with my desolations solace them.
 I will not break thy bonds, but I am bound,
 With thee.'"

I feared. That speech deep furrows cut
 In my afflicted soul. I whisper'd low,
 "Thou wilt not heed her words, my golden girl."
 But Delia said not aught; only her hand
 Laid on my cheek and on the other leaned
 Her own. O there was comfort, father,
 In love and nearness, e'en at the crack of doom.

Then spake I, and that other said no more,
 For I appealed to God and to his Christ.
 Unto the strait-barred window led my dear;
 Not table, bed, nor plenishing; no place
 They had for rest: maugre two narrow chairs
 By day, by night they sat thereon upright.
 One drew I to the opening; on it set
 My Delia, kneeled; upon its arm laid mine,
 And prayed to God and prayed of her.

Father,
 If thou should ask e'en now, "And art thou glad
 Of what befell?" I could not say it, father,
 I should be glad; therefore God make me glad,
 Since we shall die to-morrow!

Think not sin,
 O holy, harmless reverend man, to fear.
 'Twill be soon over. Now I know thou fear'st

Also for me, lest I be lost; but aye
 Strong comfortable hope doth wrap me round,
 A token of acceptance. I am cast
 From Holy Church, and not received of thine;
 But the great Advocate who knoweth all,
 He whispers with me.

O my Delia wept
 When I did plead; "I have much feared to die,"
 Answering. (The moonlight on her blue-black eyes
 Fell; shining tears upon their lashes hung;
 Fair showed the dimple that I loved; so young,
 So very young.) "But they did question me
 Straitly, and make me many times to swear,
 To swear of all alas, that I believed.
 Truly, unless my soul I would have bound
 With false oaths — difficult, innumerable, strong,
 Way was not left me to get free.

"But now,"
 Said she, "I am happy; I have seen the place
 Where I am going.

"I will tell it you,
 Love, Hubert. Do not weep; they said to me
 That you would come, and it would not be long.
 Thus was it, being sad and full of fear,
 I was crying in the night; and prayed to God
 And said, 'I have not learned high things;' and said
 To the Saviour, 'Do not be displeased with me,
 I am not crying to get back and dwell
 With my good mother and my father fond,
 Nor even with my love, Hubert — my love,
 Hubert; but I am crying because I fear
 Mine answers were not rightly given — so hard
 Those questions. If I did not understand,

Wilt Thou forgive me?' And the moon went down
 While I did pray, and looking on the floor,
 Behold a little diamond there,
 So small it might have dropped from out a ring.
 I could but look! The diamond waxed — it grew —
 It was a diamond yet, and shot out rays,
 And in the midst of it a rose-red point;
 It waxed till I might see the rose-red point
 Was a little Angel mid those oval rays,
 With a face sweet as the first kiss, O love,
 You gave me, and it meant that self-same thing.

"Now was it tall as I, among the rays
 Standing; I touched not. Through the window
 drawn,
 This barred and narrow window, — but I know
 Nothing of how, we passed, and seemed to walk
 Upon the air, till on the roof we sat.

"It spoke. The sweet mouth did not move, but all
 The Angel spoke in strange words full and old,
 It was my Angel sent to comfort me
 With a message, and the message, 'I might come,
 And myself see if He forgave me.' Then
 Deliver'd he admonition, 'Afterwards
 I must return and die.' But I being dazed,
 Confused with love and joy that He so far
 Did condescend, 'Ay, Eminence,' replied,
 'Is the way great?' I knew not what I said.
 The Angel then, 'I know not far nor near,
 But all the stars of God this side it shine.'
 And I forgetful wholly for this thing
 My soul did pant in, a rapture and a pain,

So great as they would melt it quite away
 To a vanishing like mist when sultry rays
 Shot from the daystar reckon with it — I
 Said in my simpleness, 'But is there time?
 For in three days I am to burn, and O
 I would fain see that He forgiveth first.
 Pray you make haste.' 'I know not haste,' he said;
 'I was not fashioned to be thrall of time.
 What is it?' And I marvelled, saw outlying,
 Shaped like a shield and of dimensions like
 An oval in the sky beyond all stars,
 And trembled with foreknowledge. We were bound
 To that same golden holy hollow. I
 Misdoubted how to go, but we were gone.
 I set off wingless, walking empty air
 Beside him. In a moment we were caught
 Among thick swarms of lost ones, evil, fell,
 Of might, only a little less than gods,
 And strong enough to tear the earth to shreds,
 Set shoulders to the sun and rend it out
 O' its place. Their wings did brush across my face,
 Yet felt I naught; the place was vaster far
 Than all this wholesome pastoral windy world.
 Through it we spinning, pierced to its far brink,
 Saw menacing frowns and we were forth again.
 Time has no instant for the reckoning aught
 So sudden; 'twas as if a lightning flash
 Threw us within it, and a swifter flash,
 We riding harmless down its swordlike edge,
 Shot us fast forth to empty nothingness.

"All my soul trembled, and my body it seemed
 Pleaded than such a sight rather to faint

To the last silence, and the eery grave
 Inhabit, and the slow solemnities
 Of dying faced, content me with my shroud.

“And yet was lying athwart the morning star
 That shone in front, that holy hollow; yet
 It loomed, as hung atilt towards the world,
 That in her time of sleep appeared to look
 Up to it, into it.

“We, though I wept,
 Fearing and longing, knowing not how to go,
 My heart gone first, both mine eyes dedicate
 To its all-hallowed sweet desired gold,
 We on the empty limitless abyss
 Walked slowly. It was far;

“And I feared much,
 For lo! when I looked down deep under me
 The little earth was such a little thing,
 How in the vasty dark find her again?
 The crescent moon a moored boat hard by,
 Did wait on her and touch her ragged rims
 With a small gift of silver.

“Love! my life!
 Hubert, while I yet wept, O we were there.
 A menai of Angels first, a swarm of stars
 Took us among them (all alive with stars
 Shining and shouting each to each that place);
 The feathered multitude did lie so thick
 We walked upon them, walked on outspread wings,
 And the great gates were standing open.

“Love!
 The country is not what you think; but oh!
 When you have seen it nothing else contents.

The voice, the vision was not what you think —
 But oh! it was all. It was the meaning of life,
 Excellent consummation of desires
 Forever, let into the heart with pain
 Most sweet. That smile did take the feeding soul
 Deeper and deeper into heaven. The sward
 (For I had bowed my face on it) I found
 Grew in my spirit's longed-for native land —
 At last I was at home.”

And here she paused:
 I must needs weep. I have not been in heaven,
 Therefore she could not tell me what she heard,
 Therefore she might not tell me what she saw,
 Only I understood that One drew near
 Who said to her she should e'en come, “Because,”
 Said He, “My Father loves Me. I will ask
 He send, a guiding Angel for My sake,
 Since the dark way is long, and rough, and hard,
 So that I shall not lose whom I love — thee.”

Other words wonderful of things not known,
 When she had uttered, I gave hope away,
 Cried out, and took her in despairing arms,
 Asking no more. Then while the comfortless
 Dawn till night fainted grew, alas! a key
 That with abhorred jarring probed the door.
 We kissed, we looked, unlocked our arms. She
 sighed

“Remember.” “Ay, I will remember. What?”
 “To come to me.” Then I, thrust roughly forth —
 I, bereft, dumb, forlorn, unremedied
 My hurt forever, stumbled blindly down,
 And the great door was shut behind and chained.

The weird pathetic scarlet of day dawning,
 More kin to death of night than birth of morn,
 Peered o'er yon hill bristling with spires of pine.
 I heard the crying of the men condemned,
 Men racked, that should be martyr'd presently,
 And my great grief met theirs with might; I held
 All our poor earth's despairs in my poor breast,
 The choking reek, the faggots were all mine.
 Ay, and the partings they were all mine.— mine.
 Father, it will be very good methinks
 To die so, to die soon. It doth appease
 The soul in misery for its fellows, when
 There is no help, to suffer even as they.

Father, when I had lost her, when I sat
 After my sickness on the pallet bed,
 My forehead dropp'd into my hand, behold
 Some one beside me. A man's hand let down
 With that same action kind, compassionate,
 Upon my shoulder. And I took the hand
 Between mine own, laying my face thereon.
 I knew this man for him who spoke with me,
 Letting me see my Delia. I looked up.
 Lo! lo! the robed ecclesiastic proud,
 He and this other one. Tell you his name?
 Am I a fiend? No, he was good to me,
 Almost he placed his life in my hand.

Father,

He with good pitying words long talked to me,
 "Did I not strive to save her?" "Ay," quoth I.
 "But sith it would not be, I also claim
 Death, burning; let me therefore die — let me.
 I am wicked, would be heretic, but, faith,

I know not how, and Holy Church I hate.
 She is no mother of mine, she slew my love."
 What answer? "Peace, peace, thou art hard on me.
 Favor I forfeit with the Mother of God,
 Lose rank among the saints, foresee my soul
 Drenched in the unmitigated flame, and take
 My payment in the lives snatched at all risk
 From battling in it here. O, an thou turn
 And tear from me, lost to that other world
 My heart's reward in this, I am twice lost;
 Now have I doubly failed."

Father, I know

The Church would rail, hound forth, disgrace, try,
 burn,

Make his proud name, discover'd, infamy,
 Tread underfoot his ashes, curse his soul.
 But God is greater than the Church. I hope
 He shall not, for that he loved men, lose God.
 I hope to hear it said "Thy sins are all
 Forgiven; come in, thou hast done well."

For me

My chronicle comes down to its last page.
 "Is not life sweet?" quoth he, and comforted
 My sick heart with good words, "duty" and
 "home."

Then took me at moonsetting down the stair
 To the dark deserted midway of the street,
 Gave me a purse of money, and his hand
 Laid on my shoulder, holding me with words
 A father might have said, bade me God speed,
 So pushed me from him, turned, and he was gone.

There was a Pleiad lost; where is she now?
 None knoweth,— O she reigns, it is my creed,

Otherwhere dedicate to making day.
 The God of Gods, He doubtless looked to that
 Who wasteth never aught He fashioned.
 I have no vision, but where vision fails
 Faith cheers, and truly, truly there is need,
 The god of this world being so unkind.
 O love! My girl forever to the world
 Wanting. Lost, not that any one should find,
 But wasted for the sake of waste, and lost
 For love of man's undoing, of man's tears,
 By envy of the Evil One; I mourn
 For thee, my golden girl, I mourn, I mourn.

He set me free. And it befell anon
 That I must imitate him. Then 't befell
 That on the holy Book I read, and all,
 The mediating Mother and her Babe,
 God and the Church, and man and life and death,
 And the dark gulfs of bitter purging flame,
 Did take on alteration. Like a ship
 Cast from her moorings, drifting from her port,
 Not bound to any land, not sure of land,
 My dull'd soul lost her reckoning on that sea
 She sailed, and yet the voyage was nigh done.

This God was not the God I had known; this Christ
 Was other. O, a gentler God, a Christ —
 By a mother and a Father infinite —
 In distance each from each made kin to me.
 Blest Sufferer on the rood; but yet, I say
 Other. Far gentler, and I cannot tell,
 Father, if you, or she, my golden girl,
 Or I, or any aright those mysteries read.

I cannot fathom them. There is not time,
 So quickly men condemned me to this cell.
 I quarrell'd not so much with Holy Church
 For that she taught, as that my love she burned.
 I die because I hid her enemies,
 And read the Book.

But O, forgiving God,
 I do elect to trust Thee. I have thought,
 What! are there set between us and the sun
 Millions of miles, and did He like a tent
 Rear up yon vasty sky? Is heaven less wide?
 And dwells He there, but for His wingèd host,
 Almost alone? Truly I think not so;
 He has had trouble enough with this poor world
 To make Him as an earthly father would,
 Love it and value it more.

He did not give
 So much to have us with Him, and yet fail.
 And now He knows I would believe e'en so
 As pleaseth Him, an there was time to learn
 Or certitude of heart; but time fails, time.
 He knoweth also 'twere a piteous thing
 Not to be sure of my love's welfare — not
 To see her happy and good in that new home.
 Most piteous. I could all forego but this.
 O let me see her, Lord.

What, also I!
 White ashes and a waft of vapor — I
 To flutter on before the winds. No, no.
 And yet forever ay — my flesh shall hiss
 And I shall hear 't. Dreadful, unbearable!
 Is it to-morrow?

Ay, indeed, indeed,

To-morrow. But my moods are as great waves
That rise and break and thunder down on me,
And then fall'n back sink low.

I have waked long
And cannot hold my thoughts upon the event;
They slip, they wander forth.

How the dusk grows.
This is the last moonrising we shall see.
Methought till morn to pray, and cannot pray.
Where is mine Advocate? let Him say all
And more was in my mind to say this night,
Because to-morrow — Ah! no more of that.

The tale is told. Father, I fain would sleep,
Truly my soul is silent unto God.

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A VINE-ARBOR IN THE FAR WEST.

I.

“LAURA, my Laura!” “Yes, mother!” “I want
you, Laura; come down.”

“What is it, mother — what, dearest? O your
loved face how it pales!

You tremble, alas and alas — you heard bad news
from the town?”

“Only one short half hour to tell it. My poor
courage fails —

II.

Laura.” “Where’s Ronald? — O anything else but
Ronald!” “No, no,
Not Ronald, if all beside, my Laura, disaster and
tears;

But you, it is yours to send them away, for you
they will go,
One short half hour, and must it decide, it must for
the years.

III.

Laura, you think of your father sometimes?”

“Sometimes!” “Ah, but how?”

“I think — that we need not think, sweet mother —
the time is not yet,

He is as the wraith of a wraith, and a far-off
shadow now

— But if you have heard he is dead?” “Not that.”

“Then let me forget.”

IV.

“The sun is off the south window, draw back the
curtain, my child.”

“But tell it, mother.” “Answer you first what it
is that you see.”

“The lambs on the mountain slope, and the crevice
with blue ice piled.”

“Nearer.” — “But, mother!” “Nearer!” “My
heifer she’s lowing to me.”

V.

“Nearer.” “Nothing, sweet mother, O yes, for one
sits in the bower.

Black the clusters hang out from the vine about his
snow-white head,

And the scarlet leaves, where my Ronald leaned.”

“Only one half hour —

Laura” — “O mother, my mother dear, all known
though nothing said.