

Meanwhile the pale lady grew white and whiter,
As the poplar pales when the keen winds smite her :

And, as the tree sways to the gust, and heaves

Quick ripples of white alarm up the leaves,

So did she seem to shrink and reel
From the casement—one quiver from head to heel

Of whitest fear. For she heard below,
On the creaking stairway loud and slow,
Like drops that plunge audibly down from the thunder

Into a sea that is groaning under,
The heavy foot of the Earl as he mounted
Step after step to the turret: she counted
Step after step, as he hastened or halted;
Now clashing shrill through the archways vaulted;

Now muffled and thick; now loud, and more

Loud as he came near the Chamber door.
Then there fell, with a rattle and shock,
An iron glove on the iron lock,
And the door burst open—the Earl burst through it—

But she saw him not. The window-pane,
Far off, grew large and small again;
The staggering light did wax and wane,
Till there came a snap of the heavy brain;
And a slow-subsiding pulse of pain;
And the whole world darkened into rest,
As the grim Earl pressed to his grausome breast

His white wife. She hung heavy there
On his shoulder without breath,
Darkly filled with sleepy death
From her heart up to her eyes;
Dead asleep: and ere he knew it
(How Death took her by surprise
Helpless in her great despair)
Smoothing back her yellow hair,
He kissed her icy brows; unwound
His rough arms, and she fell to the ground.

*"The woman was fairer than she was wise:
But the serpent was wiser than she was fair:*

*For the serpent was lord in Paradise
Or ever the woman came there.
But when Eden-gates were barred amain,
And the fiery sword on guard in the East,
The lion arose from a long repose,
And quoth he, as he shook out his royal mane,*

*'Now I am the strongest beast.'
Had the woman been wiser when she was queen*

*The lion had never been king, I ween.
But ever since storms began to lower
Beauty on earth hath been second to Power."*

And this is the song that the Minstrel sung,

With the silver hair and the golden tongue,

Who sung by night in the grim Earl's hall.

And they held him in reverence one and all.

And so she died,—the pale-faced girl.
And, for nine days after that, the Earl
Fumed and fret, and raved and swore,
Pacing up and down the chamber-floor,
And tearing his black beard as he went,
In the fit of his sullen discontent.
And the Seneschal said it was fearful to hear him;

And not even the weather-worn Warden went near him;

And the shock-headed Pages huddled anear,

And bit their white lips till they bled, for fear.

But at last he bade them lift her lightly,
And bury her by the gray sea-shore,
Where the winds that blew from her own land nightly

Might wail round her grave through the wild rocks hoar.

So they lifted her lightly at dead of night,
And bore her down by the long torch-light,—

Lank-haired faces, sallow and keen,
That burned out of the glassy pools between

The splashing sands which, as they plunged through,

The coffin-lead weighed them down into;
And their feet, as they plucked them up, left pits

Which the water oozed into and out of by fits—

—And so to the deep-mouthed bay's black brim,

Where the pale priests, all white-stoled and dim,

Lifted the cross and chanted the hymn,
That her soul might have peace when her bones were dust,

And her name be written among the Just.

The Warden walked after the Seneschal grim;

And the shock-headed Pages walked after him:

And with mattock and spade a grave was made,

Where they carved the cross, and they wrote her name,

And, returning each by the way that he came,

They left her under the bare black thorn.

The salt sea-wind sang shrill in the head of it;

And the bitter night grew chill with the dread of it;

When the great round moon rose up forlorn

From the reefs, and whitened towards the morn.

For the forked tree, as the bleak blast took it,

Howled through it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook it,

Like a living thing bewitched and bewilded.

Visibly shrunk, and shuddered and shrivelled.

And again the swallow, that false new-comer,

Fluttered over the sea in the front of the summer;

A careless singer, as he should be
That only skimmeth the mighty sea;

Dipped his wings as he came and went,
And chirruped and twittered for heart's content,

And built on the new-made grave. But when

The Summer was over he flew back again.

And the Earl, as years went by, and his life

Grew listless, took him another wife:

And the Seneschal grim and the Warden gray

Walked about in their wonted way:

And the lean-jawed shock-haired Pages too

Sung and swilled as they used to do.

And the grooms and the squires gamed and swore

And quarrelled again as they quarrelled before;

And the flowers decayed in their dismal beds,

And dropped off from their lean shanks one by one,

Till nothing was left but the stalks and the heads,

Clumped into heaps, or ripped into shreds,

To steam into salt in the sickly sun.

And the cattle lowed late up the glimmering plain,

Or dipped knee-deep, and splashed themselves

In the pools spat out by the spiteful main,
Wallowing in sandy dikes and delves:

And the blear-eyed filmy sea did boom
With his old mysterious hungering sound:

And the wet wind wailed in the chinks of the tomb,

Till the weeds in the surf were drenched and drowned.

But once a stranger came over the wave,
And paused by the pale-faced Lady's grave.

It was when, just about to set,
A sadness held the sinking sun.

The moon delayed to shine as yet:
The Ave-Mary chime was done:

And from the bell-tower leaned the ringers;

And in the chancel paused the singers,
With lingering looks, and clasped fingers:

And the day reluctantly turned to his rest,
Like some untold life, that leaves exprest

But the half of its hungering love ere it close:

So he went sadly toward his repose
Deep in the heart of the slumbrous waves

Kindled far off in the desolate West.
And the breeze sprang up in the cool sea-caves,

The castle stood with its courts in shade,
And all its toothed towers imprest

On the sorrowful light that sunset made,—

Such a light as sleeps shut up in the breast

Of some pining crimson-hearted rose,
Which, as you gaze at it, grows and grows

And all the warm leaves overflows;
Leaving its sweet source still to be guest.

The crumpled shadow of the thorn
Crawled over the sand-heaps raggedly,

And over the gray stone cross forlorn,
And on to that one man musing there

Moveless, while o'er him the night crept on,

And the hot yellow stars, slowly, one
after one,
Mounted into the dark blue air
And brightened, and brightened. Then
suddenly,
And sadly and silently,
Down the dim breezy brink of the sea
sank the sun.

Ere the moon was abroad, the owl
Made himself heard in the echoing tower
Three times, four times. The bat with
his cowl

Came and went round the lonely Bower
Where dwelt of yore the Earl's lost Lady.
There night after night, for years, in vain
The lingering moon had looked through
the pane,

And missed the face she used to find
there,

White and wan like some mountain flower
In its rocky nook, as it paled and pined
there,

Only known to the moon and the wind
there.

Lights flitted faint in the halls down
lower

From lattice to lattice, and then glowed
steady.

The dipping gull: and the long gray
pool:

And the reed that shows which way the
breeze blows cool,

From the wide warm sea to the low black
land:

And the wave makes no sound on the
soft yellow sand:

But the inland shallows sharp and small
Are swarmed about with the sultry
midge.

And the land is still, and the ocean still:

And the weeds in the rifted rocks at will
Move on the tide, and float or glide.

And into the silent western side
Of the heaven the moon begins to fall.

But is it the fall of a plover's call
That is answered warily, low yet shrill,

From the sand-heapt mound and the
rocky ridge?

And now o'er the dark plain so wild and
wide

Falls the note of a horn from the old
drawbridge.

Who is it that waits at the castle-gates?
Call in the minstrel, and fill the bowl.

Bid him loose the great music and let
the song roll.

Fill the bowl.

And first, as was due, to the Earl he
bowed:

Next to all the Sea-chieftains, blithe
friends of the Earl's:

Then advanced through the praise of the
murmuring crowd,

And sat down, as they bade him, and
all his black curls

Bowed over his harp, as in doubt which
to choose

From the melodies coiled at his heart.
For a man

O'er some Beauty asleep for one moment
might muse,

Half in love, ere he woke her. So ere
he began,

He paused over his song. And they
brought him, the Squires,

A heavy gold cup with the red wine ripe
in it,

Then wave over wave of the sweet silver
wires

'Gan ripple, and the minstrel took heart
to begin it.

A harper that harps thorough mountain
and glen,

Wandering, wandering the wide world
over,

Sweetest of singers, yet saddest of men,
His soul's lost Lady in vain to discover.

Most fair and most frail of the daughters
of men,

O blest and O curst, the man that should
love her!

Who has not loved? and who has not
lost?

Wherever he wander, the wide world over,
Singing by city, and castle, and plain,

Abiding never, forever a rover,
Each man that shall hear him will swear

almost
In the minstrel's song that his heart can
discover

The self-same lady by whom it was crost,
For love is love the wide world over.

What shall he liken his love unto?
Have you seen some cloud the sun sets
through,

When the lingering night is close at
hand?

Have you seen some rose lie on the
snow?

Or a summer bird in a winter land?
Or a lily dying for dearth of dew?

Or a pearl sea-cast on a barren strand?
Some garden never sunshine warms

Nor any tend? some lonely tree
That stretches bleak its barren arms

Turned inland from the blighting sea?
Her cheek was pale: her face was fair:

Her heart, he sung, was weak and warm;
All golden was the sleepy hair

That floated round about her form,
And hid the sweetness breathing there.

Her eyes were wild, like stars that shine
Far off in summer nights divine:

But her smile — it was like the golden
wine

Poured into the spirit, as into a cup,
With passion brimming it up and up,

And marvellous fancies fair and fine.
He took her hair to make sweet strings:

He hid her smile deep in his song.
This makes so rich the tune he sings

That o'er the world 't will linger long.

There is a land far, far away from yours.
And there the stars are thrice as bright

as these.
And there the nightingale strange music
pours

All day out of the hearts of myrtle-trees.
There the voice of the cuckoo sounds

never forlorn
As you hear it far off through the deep
purple valleys.

And the fire-fly dances by night in the
corn.

And the little round owls in the long
cypress alleys

Whoop for joy when the moon is born.
There ripen the olive and the tulip tree,

And in the sun broadens the green prickly
pear;

And the bright galingales in the grass
you may see;

And the vine, with her royal blue globes,
dwelleth there,

Climbing and hanging deliciously
By every doorway and lone latticed cham-

ber,
Where the damsel-fly flits, and the heavy
brown bee

Hums alone, and the quick lizards rustle
and clamber.

And all things, there, live and rejoice
together,

From the frail peach-blossom that first
appears

When birds are about in the blue sum-
mer weather,

To the oak that has lived through his
eight hundred years.

And the castles are built on the hills,
not the plains.

(And the wild wind-flowers burn about
in the courts there)

They are white and undrenched by the
gray winter rains.

And the swallows, and all things, are
blithe at their sports there.

O for one moment, at sunset, to stand
Far, far away, in that dear distant land

Whence they bore her, — the loveliest
lady that ever

Crost the bleak ocean. O, nevermore,
never,

Shall she stand with her feet in the
warm dry grasses

Where the faint balm-heaving breeze
heavily passes

And the white lotus-flower leans lone on
the river.

Rare were the gems which she had for
her dower.

But all the wild-flowers she left behind
her.

— A broken heart and a rose-roofed
bower.

O oft, and in many a desolate hour,
The cold strange faces she sees shall re-

mind her
Of hearts that were warmer, and smiles
that were kinder,

Lost, like the roses they plucked from
her bower!

Lonely and far from her own land they
laid her!

— A swallow flew over the sea to find
her.

Ah cold, cold and narrow, the bed that
they made her!

The swallow went forth with the summer
to find her.

The summer and the swallow came back
o'er the sea,

And strange were the tidings the bird
brought to me.

And the minstrel sung, and they praised
and listened, —

Gazed and praised while the minstrel
sung.

Flusht was each cheek, and each fixt
eye glistened,

And hush! was each voice to the minstrel's tongue.
 But the Earl grew paler more and more
 As the song of the Singer grew louder and clearer,
 And so dumb was the hall, you might hear the roar
 Of the sea in its pauses grow nearer and drearer.
 And . . . hush! hush! hush!
 O was it the wind? or was it the rush
 Of the restless waters that tumble and splash.
 On the wild sea-rocks? or was it the crash
 Of stones on the old wet bridge up there?
 Or the sound of the tempest come over the main?
 — Nay, but just now the night was fair.
 Was it the march of the midnight rain
 Clattering down in the courts? or the crash
 Of armor yonder? . . . Listen again!
 Can it be lightning?—can it be thunder?
 For a light is all round the lurid hall
 That reddens and reddens the windows all,
 And far away you may hear the fall
 As of rafter and boulder splitting asunder.
 It is not the thunder, and it is not the lightning
 To which the castle is sounding and brightening,
 But something worse than lightning or thunder;
 For what is this that is coming yonder?
 Which way? Here! Where?
 Call the men! . . . Is it there?
 Call them out! Ring the bell!
 Ring the Fiend back to Hell!
 Ring, ring the alarum for mercy! . . .
 Too late!
 It has crawled up the walls—it has burst in the gate—
 It looks through the windows—it creeps near the hall—
 Near, more near—red and clear—
 It is here!
 Now the saints save us all!
 And little, in truth, boots it ringing the bell.
 For the fire is loose on its way one may tell

By the hot simmering whispers and humming up there
 In the oak-beams and rafters. Now one of the Squires
 His elbow hath thrust through the half-smouldered door,—
 Such a hole as some rat for his brown wife might bore,—
 And straightway in snaky, white, wavering spires
 The thin smoke twirls through, and spreads eddying in gyres
 Here and there toucht with vanishing tints from the glare
 That has swathed in its rose-light the sharp turret stair.
 Soon the door ruined through: and in tumbled a cloud
 Of black vapor. And first 't was all blackness, and then
 The quick forked fires leapt out from their shroud
 In the blackness: and through it rushed in the armed men
 From the court-yard. And then there was flying and fighting,
 And praying and cursing,—confusion confounded.
 Each man, at wild hazard, through smoke ramparts smiting,
 Has struck . . . is it friend? is it foe?
 Who is wounded?
 But the Earl,—who last saw him? Who cares? who knows?
 Some one, no doubt, by the weight of his blows.
 And they all, at times, heard his oath,—so they swore:—
 Such a cry as some speared wild beast might give vent to
 When the lean dogs are on him, and forth with that roar
 Of desolate wrath, the life is sent too.
 If he die, he will die with the dying about him,
 And his red wet sword in his hand, never doubt him:
 If he live, perchance he will bear his new bride
 Through them all, past the bridge, to the wild seaside.
 And there, whether he leave, or keep his wife still,
 There's the free sea round him, new lands, and new life still.

And . . . but ah, the red light there!
 And high up and higher
 The soft, warm, vivid sparkles crowd
 kindling, and wander
 Far away down the breathless blue cone of the night.
 Saints! can it be that the ships are on fire,
 Those fierce hot clots of crimson light,
 Brightening, whitening in the distance yonder?
 Slowly over the slumbrous dark
 Up from those fountains of fire spark on spark
 (You might count them almost) floats
 silent: and clear
 In the steadfast glow the great cross-beams,
 And the sharp and delicate masts show black;
 While wider and higher the red light streams,
 And oozes and overflows at the back.
 Then faint through the distance a sound you hear,
 And the bare poles totter and disappear.
 Of the Earl, in truth, the Seneschal swore
 (And over the ocean this tale he bore)
 That when, as he fled on that last wild night,
 He had gained the other side of the moat,
 Dripping, he shook off his wet leathern coat,
 And turning round beheld, from basement
 To cope, the castle swathed in light,
 And, revealed in the glare through My Lady's casement,
 He saw, or dreamed he saw, this sight—
 Two forms (and one for the Earl's he knew,
 By the long shaggy beard and the broad back too)
 Struggling, grappling, like things half human.
 The other, he said, he but vaguely distinguished,
 When a sound like the shriek of an agonized woman
 Made him shudder, and lo, all the vision was gone!
 Ceiling and floor had fallen through,
 In a glut of vomited flame extinguished;
 And the still fire rose and broadened on.
 How fearful a thing is fire!
 You might make up your mind to die by water
 A slow cool death,—nay, at times, when weary
 Of pains that pass not, and pleasures that pall,
 When the temples throb, and the heart is dreary
 And life is dried up, you could even desire
 Through the flat green weeds to fall and fall
 Half asleep down the green light under them all,
 As in a dream, while all things seem
 Wavering, wavering, to feel the stream
 Wind, and gurgle, and sound and gleam.
 And who would very much fear to expire
 By steel, in the front of victorious slaughter,
 The blithe battle about him, and comrades in call?
 But to die by fire—
 O that night in the hall!
 And the castle burned from base to top.
 You had thought that the fire would never stop,
 For it roared like the great north-wind in the pines,
 And shone as the boreal meteor shines
 Watched by wild hunters in shuddering bands,
 When wolves are about in the icy lands.
 From the sea you might mark for a space of three days,
 Or fainter or fiercer, the dull red blaze.
 And when this ceased, the smoke above it
 Hung so heavy not even the wind seemed to move it;
 So it glared and groaned, and night after night
 Smouldered,—a terrible beacon-light.
 Now the Earl's old minstrel,—he that had sung
 His youth out in those halls,—the man beloved,
 With the silver hair and the golden tongue,
 They bore him out from the fire; but he roved
 Back to the stifled courts; and there
 They watched him hovering, day after day,
 To and fro, with his long white hair

And his gold harp, chanting a lonely lay;
 Chanting and changing it o'er and o'er,
 Like the mournful mad melodious breath
 Of some wild swan singing himself to death,
 As he floats down a strange land leagues away.
 One day the song ceased. They heard it no more.

Did you ever an Alpine eagle see
 Come down from flying near the sun
 To find his eyrie all undone
 On lonely cliffs where chance hath led
 Some spying thief the brood to plunder?
 How hangs he desolate overhead,
 And circling now aloft, now under,
 His ruined home screams round and round,
 Then drops flat fluttering to the ground.
 So moaning round the roofs they saw him,
 With his gleaming harp and his vesture white:
 Going, and coming, and ever returning
 To those chambers, emptied of beauty and state
 And choked with blackness and ruin and burning;

Then, as some instinct seemed to draw him,
 Like hidden hands, down to his fate,
 He paused, plunged, dropped forever from sight;
 And a cone of smoke and sparkles rolled up,
 As out of some troubled crater-cup.
 As for the rest, some died; some fled
 Over the sea, nor ever returned.
 But until to the living return the dead,
 And they each shall stand and take their station
 Again at the last great conflagration,
 Never more will be seen the Earl or the stranger.
 No doubt there is much here that's fit to be burned.
 Christ save us all in that day from the danger!
 And this is why these fishermen say,
 Sitting alone in their boats on the bay,
 When the moon is low in the wild windy nights,
 They hear strange sounds, and see strange sights.
 Spectres gathering all forlorn
 Under the boughs of this bare black thorn.

A SOUL'S LOSS.

"If Beauty have a soul this is not she." — TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

'TWIXT the Future and the Past
 There's a moment. It is o'er.
 Kiss sad hands! we part at last.
 I am on the other shore.
 Fly, stern Hour! and hasten fast.
 Nobler things are gone before.
 From the dark of dying years
 Grows a face with violet eyes,
 Tremulous through tender tears, —
 Warm lips heavy with rich sighs, —
 Ah, they fade! it disappears,
 And with it my whole heart dies!
 Dies . . . and this choked world is sickening;
 Truth has nowhere room for breath.

Crusts of falsehood, slowly thickening
 From the rottenness beneath
 These rank social forms, are quickening
 To a loathsome life-in-death.
 O those devil's market-places!
 Knowing, nightly, she was there,
 Can I marvel that the traces
 On her spirit are not fair?
 I forgot that air debases
 When I knew she breathed such air.
 This a fair immortal spirit
 For which God prepared his spheres?
 What! shall this the stars inherit?
 And the worth of honest tears?
 A fool's fancy all its merit!
 A fool's judgment all its fears!

No, she loves no other! No,
 That is lost which she gave me.
 Is this comfort, — that I know
 All her spirit's poverty?
 When that dry soul is drained low,
 His who wills the dregs may be!

Peace! I trust a heart forlorn
 Weakly upon boisterous speech.
 Pity were more fit than scorn.
 Fingering moth, and bloomless peach!
 Gathered rose without a thorn,
 Set to flee in all men's reach!

I am clothed with her disgrace.
 O her shame is made my own!
 O I reel from my high place!
 All belief is overthrown.
 What! This whirligig of lace,
 This the Queen that I have known?

Starry Queen that did confer
 Beauty on the barren earth!
 Woodlands, wandered oft with her
 In her sadness and her mirth,
 Feeling her ripe influence stir
 Brought the violets to birth.

The great golden clouds of even,
 They, too, knew her, and the host
 Of the eternal stars in heaven;
 And I deemed I knew her most.
 I, to whom the Word was given
 How archangels have been lost!

Given in vain! . . . But all is over!
 Every spell that bound me broken!
 In her eyes I can discover
 Of that perished soul no token.
 I can neither hate nor love her.
 All my loss must be unspoken.

Mourn I may, that from her features
 All the angel light is gone.
 But I chide not. Human creatures
 Are not angels. She was none.
 Women have so many natures!
 I think she loved me well with one.

All is not with love departed.
 Life remains, though toucht with scorn.
 Lonely, but not broken-hearted.
 Nature changes not. The morn
 Breathes not sadder. Buds have started
 To white clusters on the thorn.

And to-morrow I shall see
 How the leaves their green silk sheath
 Have burst upon the chestnut-tree.
 And the white rose-bush beneath
 My lattice which, once tending, she
 Made thrice sweeter with her breath,

Its black buds through moss and glue
 Will swell greener. And at eve
 Winking bats will waver through
 The gray warmth from eave to eave,
 While the daisy gathers dew.
 These things grieve not, though I grieve.

What of that? Deep Nature's gladness
 Does not help this grief to less.
 And the stars will show no sadness,
 And the flowers no heaviness,
 Though each thought should turn to madness
 'Neath the strain of its distress!

No, if life seem lone to me,
 'Tis scarce lonelier than at first.
 Lonely natures there must be.
 Eagles are so. I was nurst
 Far from love in infancy:
 I have sought to slake my thirst

At high founts; to fly alone,
 Haunt the heaven, and soar, and sing.
 Earth's warm joys I have not known.
 This one heart held everything.
 Now my eyrie is o'erthrown!
 As of old, I spread the wing,

And rise up to meet my fate
 With a yet unbroken will.
 When Heaven shut up Eden-gate,
 Man was given the earth to till.
 There's a world to cultivate,
 And a solitude to fill.

Welcome man's old helpmate, Toil!
 How may this heart's hurt be healed?
 Crush the olive into oil;
 Turn the ploughshare; sow the field.
 All are tillers of the soil.
 Each some harvest hopes to yield.

Shall I perish with the whole
 Of the coming years in view
 Unattempted? To the soul
 Every hour brings something new.
 Still suns rise: still ages roll.
 Still some deed is left to do.