Flame and Shadow

by Sara Teasdale

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Flame and Shadow

By

Sara Teasdale

[Note on text: Italicized stanzas are indented 5 spaces. Italicized words or phrases are marked by tildes (~). Lines longer than 78 characters are broken according to

metre, and the continuation is indented two spaces. Also, some obvious errors may have been corrected.]

Flame and Shadow

By

Sara Teasdale

Author of "Rivers to the Sea", "Love Songs", etc.

To E.

"Recois la flamme ou l'ombre De tous mes jours."

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Flame and Shadow

I

Blue Squills

How many million Aprils came Before I ever knew How white a cherry bough could be, A bed of squills, how blue!

And many a dancing April When life is done with me, Will lift the blue flame of the flower And the white flame of the tree.

Oh burn me with your beauty, then, Oh hurt me, tree and flower, Lest in the end death try to take Even this glistening hour.

O shaken flowers, O shimmering trees, O sunlit white and blue, Wound me, that I, through endless sleep, May bear the scar of you.

Stars

Alone in the night On a dark hill With pines around me Spicy and still,

And a heaven full of stars Over my head, White and topaz And misty red;

Myriads with beating Hearts of fire That aeons Cannot vex or tire;

Up the dome of heaven Like a great hill, I watch them marching Stately and still,

And I know that I Am honored to be Witness Of so much majesty.

"What Do I Care?"

What do I care, in the dreams and the languor of spring, That my songs do not show me at all? For they are a fragrance, and I am a flint and a fire, I am an answer, they are only a call.

But what do I care, for love will be over so soon, Let my heart have its say and my mind stand idly by, For my mind is proud and strong enough to be silent, It is my heart that makes my songs, not I.

Meadowlarks

In the silver light after a storm, Under dripping boughs of bright new green, I take

the low path to hear the meadowlarks Alone and high-hearted as if I were a queen.

What have I to fear in life or death Who have known three things: the kiss in the night, The white flying joy when a song is born, And meadowlarks whistling in silver light.

Driftwood

My forefathers gave me My spirit's shaken flame, The shape of hands, the beat of heart, The letters of my name.

But it was my lovers, And not my sleeping sires, Who gave the flame its changeful And iridescent fires;

As the driftwood burning Learned its jewelled blaze From the sea's blue splendor Of colored nights and days.

"I Have Loved Hours at Sea"

I have loved hours at sea, gray cities, The fragile secret of a flower, Music, the making of a poem That gave me heaven for an hour;

First stars above a snowy hill, Voices of people kindly and wise, And the great look of love, long hidden, Found at last in meeting eyes.

I have loved much and been loved deeply— Oh when my spirit's fire burns low, Leave me the darkness and the stillness, I shall be tired and glad to go.

August Moonrise

The sun was gone, and the moon was coming Over the blue Connecticut hills; The west was rosy, the east was flushed, And over my head the swallows rushed This way and that, with changeful wills. I heard them twitter and watched them dart Now together and now apart Like dark petals blown from a tree; The maples stamped against the west Were black and stately and full of rest, And the hazy orange moon grew up And slowly changed to yellow gold While the hills were darkened, fold on fold To a deeper blue than a flower could hold. Down the hill I went, and then I

forgot the ways of men, For night-scents, heady, and damp and cool Wakened ecstasy in me On the brink of a shining pool.

O Beauty, out of many a cup You have made me drunk and wild Ever since I was a child, But when have I been sure as now That no bitterness can bend And no sorrow wholly bow One who loves you to the end? And though I must give my breath And my laughter all to death, And my eyes through which joy came, And my heart, a wavering flame; If all must leave me and go back Along a blind and fearful track So that you can make anew, Fusing with intenser fire, Something nearer your desire; If my soul must go alone Through a cold infinity, Or even if it vanish, too, Beauty, I have worshipped you.

Let this single hour atone For the theft of all of me.

Memories II

Places

Places I love come back to me like music, Hush me and heal me when I am very tired; I see the oak woods at Saxton's flaming In a flare of crimson by the frost newly fired; And I am thirsty for the spring in the valley As for a kiss ungiven and long desired.

I know a bright world of snowy hills at Boonton, A blue and white dazzling light on everything one sees, The ice-covered branches of the hemlocks sparkle Bending low and tinkling in the sharp thin breeze, And iridescent crystals fall and crackle on the snow-crust With the winter sun drawing cold blue shadows from the trees.

Violet now, in veil on veil of evening The hills across from Cromwell grow dreamy and far; A wood-thrush is singing soft as a viol In the heart of the hollow where the dark pools are; The primrose has opened her pale yellow flowers And heaven is lighting star after star.

Places I love come back to me like music— Mid-ocean, midnight, the waves buzz drowsily; In the ship's deep churning the eerie phosphorescence Is like the souls of

people who were drowned at sea, And I can hear a man's voice, speaking, hushed, insistent, At midnight, in mid-ocean, hour on hour to me.

Old Tunes

As the waves of perfume, heliotrope, rose, Float in the garden when no wind blows, Come to us, go from us, whence no one knows;

So the old tunes float in my mind, And go from me leaving no trace behind, Like fragrance borne on the hush of the wind.

But in the instant the airs remain I know the laughter and the pain Of times that will not come again.

I try to catch at many a tune Like petals of light fallen from the moon, Broken and bright on a dark lagoon,

But they float away—for who can hold Youth, or perfume or the moon's gold?

"Only in Sleep"

Only in sleep I see their faces, Children I played with when I was a child, Louise comes back with her brown hair braided, Annie with ringlets warm and wild.

Only in sleep Time is forgotten— What may have come to them, who can know? Yet we played last night as long ago, And the doll-house stood at the turn of the stair.

The years had not sharpened their smooth round faces, I met their eyes and found them mild— Do they, too, dream of me, I wonder, And for them am I too a child?

Redbirds

Redbirds, redbirds, Long and long ago, What a honey-call you had In hills I used to know;

Redbud, buckberry, Wild plum-tree And proud river sweeping Southward to the sea,

Brown and gold in the sun Sparkling far below, Trailing stately round her bluffs Where the poplars grow—

Redbirds, redbirds, Are you singing still As you sang one May day On Saxton's Hill?

Sunset: St. Louis

Hushed in the smoky haze of summer sunset, When I came home again from far-off places, How many times I saw my western city Dream by her river.

Then for an hour the water wore a mantle Of tawny gold and mauve and misted turquoise Under the tall and darkened arches bearing Gray, high-flung bridges.

Against the sunset, water-towers and steeples Flickered with fire up the slope to westward, And old warehouses poured their purple shadows Across the levee.

High over them the black train swept with thunder, Cleaving the city, leaving far beneath it Wharf-boats moored beside the old side-wheelers Resting in twilight.

The Coin

Into my heart's treasury I slipped a coin That time cannot take Nor a thief purloin,— Oh better than the minting Of a gold-crowned king Is the safe-kept memory Of a lovely thing.

The Voice

Atoms as old as stars, Mutation on mutation, Millions and millions of cells Dividing yet still the same, From air and changing earth, From ancient Eastern rivers, From turquoise tropic seas, Unto myself I came.

My spirit like my flesh Sprang from a thousand sources, From cave-man, hunter and shepherd, From Karnak, Cyprus, Rome; The living thoughts in me Spring from dead men and women, Forgotten time out of mind And many as bubbles of foam.

Here for a moment's space Into the light out of darkness, I come and they come with me Finding words with my breath; From the wisdom of many life-times I hear them cry: "Forever Seek for Beauty, she only Fights with man against Death!"

III

Day and Night

In Warsaw in Poland Half the world away, The one I love best of all Thought of me to-day;

I know, for I went Winged as a bird, In the wide flowing wind His own voice I heard;

His arms were round me In a ferny place, I looked in the pool And there was his face—

But now it is night And the cold stars say: "Warsaw in Poland Is half the world away."

Compensation

I should be glad of loneliness And hours that go on broken wings, A thirsty body, a tired heart And the unchanging ache of things, If I could make a single song As lovely and as full of light, As hushed and brief as a falling star On a winter night.

I Remembered

There never was a mood of mine, Gay or heart-broken, luminous or dull, But you could ease me of its fever And give it back to me more beautiful.

In many another soul I broke the bread, And drank the wine and played the happy guest, But I was lonely, I remembered you; The heart belongs to him who knew it best.

"Oh You Are Coming"

Oh you are coming, coming, coming, How will hungry Time put by the hours till then?— But why does it anger my heart to long so For one man out of the world of men?

Oh I would live in myself only And build my life lightly and still as a dream— Are

not my thoughts clearer than your thoughts And colored like stones in a running stream?

Now the slow moon brightens in heaven, The stars are ready, the night is here— Oh why must I lose myself to love you, My dear?

The Return

He has come, he is here, My love has come home, The minutes are lighter Than flying foam, The hours are like dancers On gold-slippered feet, The days are young runners Naked and fleet— For my love has returned, He is home, he is here, In the whole world no other Is dear as my dear!

Gray Eyes

It was April when you came The first time to me, And my first look in your eyes Was like my first look at the sea.

We have been together Four Aprils now Watching for the green On the swaying willow bough;

Yet whenever I turn To your gray eyes over me, It is as though I looked For the first time at the sea.

The Net

I made you many and many a song, Yet never one told all you are— It was as though a net of words Were flung to catch a star;

It was as though I curved my hand And dipped sea-water eagerly, Only to find it lost the blue Dark splendor of the sea.

The Mystery

Your eyes drink of me, Love makes them shine, Your eyes that lean So close to mine.

We have long been lovers, We know the range Of each other's moods And how they change;

But when we look At each other so Then we feel How little we know;

The spirit eludes us, Timid and free— Can I ever know you Or you know me?

In a Hospital IV

Open Windows

Out of the window a sea of green trees Lift their soft boughs like the arms of a dancer, They beckon and call me, "Come out in the sun!" But I cannot answer.

I am alone with Weakness and Pain, Sick abed and June is going, I cannot keep her, she hurries by With the silver-green of her garments blowing.

Men and women pass in the street Glad of the shining sapphire weather, But we know more of it than they, Pain and I together.

They are the runners in the sun, Breathless and blinded by the race, But we are watchers in the shade Who speak with Wonder face to face.

The New Moon

Day, you have bruised and beaten me, As rain beats down the bright, proud sea, Beaten my body, bruised my soul, Left me nothing lovely or whole— Yet I have wrested a gift from you, Day that dies in dusky blue:

For suddenly over the factories I saw a moon in the cloudy seas— A wisp of beauty all alone In a world as hard and gray as stone— Oh who could be bitter and want to die When a maiden moon wakes up in the sky?

Eight O'Clock

Supper comes at five o'clock, At six, the evening star, My lover comes at eight o'clock— But eight o'clock is far.

How could I bear my pain all day Unless I watched to see The clock-hands laboring to bring Eight o'clock to me.

Lost Things

Oh, I could let the world go by, Its loud new wonders and its wars, But how will I give up the sky When winter dusk is set with stars?

And I could let the cities go, Their changing customs and their creeds,— But oh, the summer rains that blow In silver on the jewel-weeds!

Pain

Waves are the sea's white daughters, And raindrops the children of rain, But why for my shimmering body Have I a mother like Pain?

Night is the mother of stars, And wind the mother of foam— The world is brimming with beauty, But I must stay at home.

The Broken Field

My soul is a dark ploughed field In the cold rain; My soul is a broken field Ploughed by pain.

Where grass and bending flowers Were growing, The field lies broken now For another sowing.

Great Sower when you tread My field again, Scatter the furrows there With better grain.

The Unseen

Death went up the hall Unseen by every one, Trailing twilight robes Past the nurse and the nun.

He paused at every door And listened to the breath Of those who did not know How near they were to Death.

Death went up the hall Unseen by nurse and nun; He passed by many a door— But he entered one.

A Prayer

When I am dying, let me know That I loved the blowing snow Although it stung like whips; That I loved all lovely things And I tried to take their stings With gay

unembittered lips; That I loved with all my strength, To my soul's full depth and length, Careless if my heart must break, That I sang as children sing Fitting tunes to everything, Loving life for its own sake.

V

Spring Torrents

Will it always be like this until I am dead, Every spring must I bear it all again With the first red haze of the budding maple boughs, And the first sweet-smelling rain?

Oh I am like a rock in the rising river Where the flooded water breaks with a low call— Like a rock that knows the cry of the waters And cannot answer at all.

"I Know the Stars"

I know the stars by their names, Aldebaran, Altair, And I know the path they take Up heaven's broad blue stair.

I know the secrets of men By the look of their eyes, Their gray thoughts, their strange thoughts Have made me sad and wise.

But your eyes are dark to me Though they seem to call and call— I cannot tell if you love me Or do not love me at all.

I know many things, But the years come and go, I shall die not knowing The thing I long to know.

Understanding

I understood the rest too well, And all their thoughts have come to be Clear as grey sea-weed in the swell Of a sunny shallow sea.

But you I never understood, Your spirit's secret hides like gold Sunk in a Spanish galleon Ages ago in waters cold.

Nightfall

We will never walk again As we used to walk at night, Watching our shadows lengthen Under the gold street-light When the snow was new and white.

We will never walk again Slowly, we two, In spring when the park is sweet With midnight and with dew, And the passers-by are few.

I sit and think of it all, And the blue June twilight dies,— Down in the clanging square A street-piano cries And stars come out in the skies.

"It Is Not a Word"

It is not a word spoken, Few words are said; Nor even a look of the eyes Nor a bend of the head, But only a hush of the heart That has too much to keep, Only memories waking That sleep so light a sleep.

"My Heart Is Heavy"

My heart is heavy with many a song Like ripe fruit bearing down the tree, But I can never give you one— My songs do not belong to me.

Yet in the evening, in the dusk When moths go to and fro, In the gray hour if the fruit has fallen, Take it, no one will know.

The Nights Remember

The days remember and the nights remember The kingly hours that once you made so great, Deep in my heart they lie, hidden in their splendor, Buried like sovereigns in their robes of state.

Let them not wake again, better to lie there, Wrapped in memories, jewelled and arrayed— Many a ghostly king has waked from death-sleep And found his crown stolen and his throne decayed.

"Let It Be Forgotten"

Let it be forgotten, as a flower is forgotten, Forgotten as a fire that once was singing gold, Let it be forgotten for ever and ever, Time is a kind friend, he will make us old.

If anyone asks, say it was forgotten Long and long ago, As a flower, as a fire, as a hushed footfall In a long forgotten snow.

The Dark Cup VI

May Day

A delicate fabric of bird song Floats in the air, The smell of wet wild earth Is everywhere.

Red small leaves of the maple Are clenched like a hand, Like girls at their first communion The pear trees stand.

Oh I must pass nothing by Without loving it much, The raindrop try with my lips, The grass with my touch;

For how can I be sure I shall see again The world on the first of May Shining after the rain?

"Since There Is No Escape"

Since there is no escape, since at the end My body will be utterly destroyed, This hand I love as I have loved a friend, This body I tended, wept with and enjoyed; Since there is no escape even for me Who love life with a love too sharp to bear: The scent of orchards in the rain, the sea And hours alone too still and sure for prayer— Since darkness waits for me, then all the more Let me go down as waves sweep to the shore In pride; and let me sing with my last breath; In these few hours of light I lift my head; Life is my lover—I shall leave the dead If there is any way to baffle death.

"The Dreams of My Heart"

The dreams of my heart and my mind pass, Nothing stays with me long, But I have had from a child The deep solace of song;

If that should ever leave me, Let me find death and stay With things whose tunes are played out and forgotten Like the rain of yesterday.

"A Little While"

A little while when I am gone My life will live in music after me, As spun foam lifted and borne on After the wave is lost in the full sea.

A while these nights and days will burn In song with the bright frailty of foam, Living in light before they turn Back to the nothingness that is their home.

The Garden

My heart is a garden tired with autumn, Heaped with bending asters and dahlias heavy and dark, In the hazy sunshine, the garden remembers April, The drench of rains and a snow-drop quick and clear as a spark;

Daffodils blowing in the cold wind of morning, And golden tulips, goblets holding the rain— The garden will be hushed with snow, forgotten soon, forgotten— After the stillness, will spring come again?

The Wine

I cannot die, who drank delight From the cup of the crescent moon, And hungrily as men eat bread, Loved the scented nights of June.

The rest may die—but is there not Some shining strange escape for me Who sought in Beauty the bright wine Of immortality?

In a Cuban Garden

Hibiscus flowers are cups of fire, (Love me, my lover, life will not stay) The bright poinsettia shakes in the wind, A scarlet leaf is blowing away.

A lizard lifts his head and listens— Kiss me before the noon goes by, Here in the shade of the ceiba hide me From the great black vulture circling the sky.

"If I Must Go"

If I must go to heaven's end Climbing the ages like a stair, Be near me and forever bend With the same eyes above me there; Time will fly past us like leaves flying, We shall not heed, for we shall be Beyond living, beyond dying, Knowing and

known unchangeably.

VII

In Spring, Santa Barbara

I have been happy two weeks together, My love is coming home to me, Gold and silver is the weather And smooth as lapis is the sea.

The earth has turned its brown to green After three nights of humming rain, And in the valleys peck and preen Linnets with a scarlet stain.

High in the mountains all alone The wild swans whistle on the lakes, But I have been as still as stone, My heart sings only when it breaks.

White Fog

Heaven-invading hills are drowned In wide moving waves of mist, Phlox before my door are wound In dripping wreaths of amethyst.

Ten feet away the solid earth Changes into melting cloud, There is a hush of pain and mirth, No bird has heart to speak aloud.

Here in a world without a sky, Without the ground, without the sea, The one unchanging thing is I, Myself remains to comfort me.

Arcturus

Arcturus brings the spring back As surely now as when He rose on eastern islands For Grecian girls and men;

The twilight is as clear a blue, The star as shaken and as bright, And the same thought he gave to them He gives to me to-night.

Moonlight

It will not hurt me when I am old, A running tide where moonlight burned Will not sting me like silver snakes; The years will make me sad and cold, It is the happy

heart that breaks.

The heart asks more than life can give, When that is learned, then all is learned; The waves break fold on jewelled fold, But beauty itself is fugitive, It will not hurt me when I am old.

Morning Song

A diamond of a morning Waked me an hour too soon; Dawn had taken in the stars And left the faint white moon.

O white moon, you are lonely, It is the same with me, But we have the world to roam over, Only the lonely are free.

Gray Fog

A fog drifts in, the heavy laden Cold white ghost of the sea— One by one the hills go out, The road and the pepper-tree.

I watch the fog float in at the window With the whole world gone blind, Everything, even my longing, drowses, Even the thoughts in my mind.

I put my head on my hands before me, There is nothing left to be done or said, There is nothing to hope for, I am tired, And heavy as the dead.

Bells

At six o'clock of an autumn dusk With the sky in the west a rusty red, The bells of the mission down in the valley Cry out that the day is dead.

The first star pricks as sharp as steel— Why am I suddenly so cold? Three bells, each with a separate sound Clang in the valley, wearily tolled.

Bells in Venice, bells at sea, Bells in the valley heavy and slow— There is no place over the crowded world Where I can forget that the days go.

Lovely Chance

O lovely chance, what can I do To give my gratefulness to you? You rise between myself and me With a wise persistency; I would have broken body and soul, But by

your grace, still I am whole. Many a thing you did to save me, Many a holy gift you gave me, Music and friends and happy love More than my dearest dreaming of; And now in this wide twilight hour With earth and heaven a dark, blue flower, In a humble mood I bless Your wisdom—and your waywardness. You brought me even here, where I Live on a hill against the sky And look on mountains and the sea And a thin white moon in the pepper tree.

VIII

"There Will Come Soft Rains"

(War Time)

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground, And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night, And wild plum-trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn, Would scarcely know that we were gone.

In a Garden

The world is resting without sound or motion, Behind the apple tree the sun goes down Painting with fire the spires and the windows In the elm-shaded town.

Beyond the calm Connecticut the hills lie Silvered with haze as fruits still fresh with bloom, The swallows weave in flight across the zenith On an aerial loom.

Into the garden peace comes back with twilight, Peace that since noon had left the purple phlox, The heavy-headed asters, the late roses And swaying hollyhocks.

For at high-noon I heard from this same garden The far-off murmur as when many come; Up from the village surged the blind and beating Red music of a drum;

And the hysterical sharp fife that shattered The brittle autumn air, While they came, the young men marching Past the village square. . . .

Across the calm Connecticut the hills change To violet, the veils of dusk are deep— Earth takes her children's many sorrows calmly And stills herself to sleep.

Nahant

Bowed as an elm under the weight of its beauty, So earth is bowed, under her weight of splendor, Molten sea, richness of leaves and the burnished Bronze of sea-grasses.

Clefts in the cliff shelter the purple sand-peas And chicory flowers bluer than the ocean Flinging its foam high, white fire in sunshine, Jewels of water.

Joyous thunder of blown waves on the ledges, Make me forget war and the dark war-sorrow— Against the sky a sentry paces the sea-cliff Slim in his khaki.

Winter Stars

I went out at night alone; The young blood flowing beyond the sea Seemed to have drenched my spirit's wings— I bore my sorrow heavily.

But when I lifted up my head From shadows shaken on the snow, I saw Orion in the east Burn steadily as long ago.

From windows in my father's house, Dreaming my dreams on winter nights, I watched Orion as a girl Above another city's lights.

Years go, dreams go, and youth goes too, The world's heart breaks beneath its wars, All things are changed, save in the east The faithful beauty of the stars.

A Boy

Out of the noise of tired people working, Harried with thoughts of war and lists of dead, His beauty met me like a fresh wind blowing, Clean boyish beauty and high-held head.

Eyes that told secrets, lips that would not tell them, Fearless and shy the young unwearied eyes— Men die by millions now, because God blunders, Yet to have made this boy he must be wise.

Winter Dusk

I watch the great clear twilight Veiling the ice-bowed trees; Their branches tinkle faintly With crystal melodies.

The larches bend their silver Over the hush of snow; One star is lighted in the west, Two in the zenith glow.

For a moment I have forgotten Wars and women who mourn— I think of the mother who bore me And thank her that I was born.

By the Sea IX

The Unchanging

Sun-swept beaches with a light wind blowing From the immense blue circle of the sea, And the soft thunder where long waves whiten— These were the same for Sappho as for me.

Two thousand years—much has gone by forever, Change takes the gods and ships and speech of men— But here on the beaches that time passes over The heart aches now as then.

June Night

Oh Earth, you are too dear to-night, How can I sleep while all around Floats rainy fragrance and the far Deep voice of the ocean that talks to the ground?

Oh Earth, you gave me all I have, I love you, I love you,—oh what have I That I can give you in return— Except my body after I die?

"Like Barley Bending"

Like barley bending In low fields by the sea, Singing in hard wind Ceaselessly;

Like barley bending And rising again, So would I, unbroken, Rise from pain;

So would I softly, Day long, night long, Change my sorrow Into song.

"Oh Day of Fire and Sun"

Oh day of fire and sun, Pure as a naked flame, Blue sea, blue sky and dun Sands where he spoke my name;

Laughter and hearts so high That the spirit flew off free, Lifting into the sky Diving into the sea;

Oh day of fire and sun Like a crystal burning, Slow days go one by one, But you have no returning.

"I Thought of You"

I thought of you and how you love this beauty, And walking up the long beach all alone I heard the waves breaking in measured thunder As you and I once heard their monotone.

Around me were the echoing dunes, beyond me The cold and sparkling silver of the sea— We two will pass through death and ages lengthen Before you hear that sound again with me.

On the Dunes

If there is any life when death is over, These tawny beaches will know much of me, I shall come back, as constant and as changeful As the unchanging, many-colored sea.

If life was small, if it has made me scornful, Forgive me; I shall straighten like a flame In the great calm of death, and if you want me Stand on the sea-ward dunes and call my name.

Spray

I knew you thought of me all night, I knew, though you were far away; I felt your love blow over me As if a dark wind-riven sea Drenched me with quivering spray.

There are so many ways to love And each way has its own delight— Then be

content to come to me Only as spray the beating sea Drives inland through the night.

If Death Is Kind

Perhaps if Death is kind, and there can be returning, We will come back to earth some fragrant night, And take these lanes to find the sea, and bending Breathe the same honeysuckle, low and white.

We will come down at night to these resounding beaches And the long gentle thunder of the sea, Here for a single hour in the wide starlight We shall be happy, for the dead are free.

X

Thoughts

When I am all alone Envy me most, Then my thoughts flutter round me In a glimmering host;

Some dressed in silver, Some dressed in white, Each like a taper Blossoming light;

Most of them merry, Some of them grave, Each of them lithe As willows that wave;

Some bearing violets, Some bearing bay, One with a burning rose Hidden away—

When I am all alone Envy me then, For I have better friends Than women and men.

Faces

People that I meet and pass In the city's broken roar, Faces that I lose so soon And have never found before,

Do you know how much you tell In the meeting of our eyes, How ashamed I am, and sad To have pierced your poor disguise?

Secrets rushing without sound Crying from your hiding places— Let me go, I cannot bear The sorrow of the passing faces.

—People in the restless street, Can it be, oh can it be In the meeting of our eyes That

you know as much of me?

Evening: New York

Blue dust of evening over my city, Over the ocean of roofs and the tall towers Where the window-lights, myriads and myriads, Bloom from the walls like climbing flowers.

Snowfall

"She can't be unhappy," you said, "The smiles are like stars in her eyes, And her laugh is thistledown Around her low replies." "Is she unhappy?" you said— But who has ever known Another's heartbreak— All he can know is his own; And she seems hushed to me, As hushed as though Her heart were a hunter's fire Smothered in snow.

The Silent Battle

(In Memory of J. W. T. Jr.)

He was a soldier in that fight Where there is neither flag nor drum, And without sound of musketry The stealthy foemen come.

Year in, year out, by day and night They forced him to a slow retreat, And for his gallant fight alone No fife was blown, and no drum beat.

In winter fog, in gathering mist The gray grim battle had its end— And at the very last we knew His enemy had turned his friend.

The Sanctuary

If I could keep my innermost Me Fearless, aloof and free Of the least breath of love or hate, And not disconsolate At the sick load of sorrow laid on men; If I could keep a sanctuary there Free even of prayer, If I could do this, then, With quiet candor as I grew more wise I could look even at God with grave forgiving eyes.

At Sea

In the pull of the wind I stand, lonely, On the deck of a ship, rising, falling, Wild

night around me, wild water under me, Whipped by the storm, screaming and calling.

Earth is hostile and the sea hostile, Why do I look for a place to rest? I must fight always and die fighting With fear an unhealing wound in my breast.

Dust

When I went to look at what had long been hidden, A jewel laid long ago in a secret place, I trembled, for I thought to see its dark deep fire— But only a pinch of dust blew up in my face.

I almost gave my life long ago for a thing That has gone to dust now, stinging my eyes— It is strange how often a heart must be broken Before the years can make it wise.

The Long Hill

I must have passed the crest a while ago And now I am going down— Strange to have crossed the crest and not to know, But the brambles were always catching the hem of my gown.

All the morning I thought how proud I should be To stand there straight as a queen, Wrapped in the wind and the sun with the world under me— But the air was dull, there was little I could have seen.

It was nearly level along the beaten track And the brambles caught in my gown— But it's no use now to think of turning back, The rest of the way will be only going down.

XI

Summer Storm

The panther wind Leaps out of the night, The snake of lightning Is twisting and white, The lion of thunder Roars—and we Sit still and content Under a tree— We

have met fate together And love and pain, Why should we fear The wrath of the rain!

In the End

All that could never be said, All that could never be done, Wait for us at last Somewhere back of the sun;

All the heart broke to forego Shall be ours without pain, We shall take them as lightly as girls Pluck flowers after rain.

And when they are ours in the end Perhaps after all The skies will not open for us Nor heaven be there at our call.

"It Will Not Change"

It will not change now After so many years; Life has not broken it With parting or tears; Death will not alter it, It will live on In all my songs for you When I am gone.

Change

Remember me as I was then; Turn from me now, but always see The laughing shadowy girl who stood At midnight by the flowering tree, With eyes that love had made as bright As the trembling stars of the summer night.

Turn from me now, but always hear The muted laughter in the dew Of that one year of youth we had, The only youth we ever knew— Turn from me now, or you will see What other years have done to me.

Water Lilies

If you have forgotten water lilies floating On a dark lake among mountains in the afternoon shade, If you have forgotten their wet, sleepy fragrance, Then you can return and not be afraid.

But if you remember, then turn away forever To the plains and the prairies where pools are far apart, There you will not come at dusk on closing water lilies, And the shadow of mountains will not fall on your heart.

"Did You Never Know?"

Did you never know, long ago, how much you loved me— That your love would never lessen and never go? You were young then, proud and fresh-hearted, You were too young to know.

Fate is a wind, and red leaves fly before it Far apart, far away in the gusty time of year— Seldom we meet now, but when I hear you speaking, I know your secret, my dear, my dear.

The Treasure

When they see my songs They will sigh and say, "Poor soul, wistful soul, Lonely night and day."

They will never know All your love for me Surer than the spring, Stronger than the sea;

Hidden out of sight Like a miser's gold In forsaken fields Where the wind is cold.

The Storm

I thought of you when I was wakened By a wind that made me glad and afraid Of the rushing, pouring sound of the sea That the great trees made.

One thought in my mind went over and over While the darkness shook and the leaves were thinned— I thought it was you who had come to find me, You were the wind.

Songs For Myself XII

The Tree

Oh to be free of myself, With nothing left to remember, To have my heart as bare As a tree in December;

Resting, as a tree rests After its leaves are gone, Waiting no more for a rain at night Nor for the red at dawn;

But still, oh so still While the winds come and go, With no more fear of the hard

frost Or the bright burden of snow;

And heedless, heedless If anyone pass and see On the white page of the sky Its thin black tracery.

At Midnight

Now at last I have come to see what life is, Nothing is ever ended, everything only begun, And the brave victories that seem so splendid Are never really won.

Even love that I built my spirit's house for, Comes like a brooding and a baffled guest, And music and men's praise and even laughter Are not so good as rest.

Song Making

My heart cried like a beaten child Ceaselessly all night long; I had to take my own cries And thread them into a song.

One was a cry at black midnight And one when the first cock crew— My heart was like a beaten child, But no one ever knew.

Life, you have put me in your debt And I must serve you long— But oh, the debt is terrible That must be paid in song.

Alone

I am alone, in spite of love, In spite of all I take and give— In spite of all your tenderness, Sometimes I am not glad to live.

I am alone, as though I stood On the highest peak of the tired gray world, About me only swirling snow, Above me, endless space unfurled;

With earth hidden and heaven hidden, And only my own spirit's pride To keep me from the peace of those Who are not lonely, having died.

Red Maples

In the last year I have learned How few men are worth my trust; I have seen the friend I loved Struck by death into the dust, And fears I never knew before Have knocked and knocked upon my door— "I shall hope little and ask for less," I said,

"There is no happiness."

I have grown wise at last—but how Can I hide the gleam on the willow-bough, Or keep the fragrance out of the rain Now that April is here again? When maples stand in a haze of fire What can I say to the old desire, What shall I do with the joy in me That is born out of agony?

Debtor

So long as my spirit still Is glad of breath And lifts its plumes of pride In the dark face of death; While I am curious still Of love and fame, Keeping my heart too high For the years to tame, How can I quarrel with fate Since I can see I am a debtor to life, Not life to me?

The Wind in the Hemlock

Steely stars and moon of brass, How mockingly you watch me pass! You know as well as I how soon I shall be blind to stars and moon, Deaf to the wind in the hemlock tree, Dumb when the brown earth weighs on me.

With envious dark rage I bear, Stars, your cold complacent stare; Heart-broken in my hate look up, Moon, at your clear immortal cup, Changing to gold from dusky red— Age after age when I am dead To be filled up with light, and then Emptied, to be refilled again.

What has man done that only he Is slave to death—so brutally Beaten back into the earth Impatient for him since his birth?

Oh let me shut my eyes, close out The sight of stars and earth and be Sheltered a minute by this tree. Hemlock, through your fragrant boughs There moves no anger and no doubt, No envy of immortal things. The night-wind murmurs of the sea With veiled music ceaselessly, That to my shaken spirit sings. From their frail nest the robins rouse, In your pungent darkness stirred, Twittering a low drowsy word— And me you shelter, even me. In your quietness you house The wind, the woman and the bird. You speak to me and I have heard:

If I am peaceful, I shall see Beauty's face continually; Feeding on her wine and bread I shall be wholly comforted, For she can make one day for me Rich as my lost eternity.

[End of original text.]

Biographical Note:

Sara Teasdale (1884-1933):

Teasdale was born in St. Louis, Missouri, where she attended a school that was founded by the grandfather of another great poet from St. Louis— T. S. Eliot. She later associated herself more with New York City. Her first book of poems was "Sonnets to Duse" (1907), but "Helen of Troy" (1911) was the true launch of her career, followed by "Rivers to the Sea" (1915), "Love Songs" (1917), "Flame and Shadow" (1920) and more. Her final volume, "Strange Victory", is considered by many to be predictive of her suicide in 1933.

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From an anthology of verse by Jessie B. Rittenhouse (1913, 1917):

"Teasdale, Sara (Mrs. Ernst B. Filsinger). Born in St. Louis, Missouri, August 10, 1884. Educated at private schools. She is the author of "Sonnets to Duse", 1907; "Helen of Troy, and Other Poems", 1911; "Rivers to the Sea", 1915; "Love Songs", 1917. Editor of "The Answering Voice: A Hundred Love Lyrics by Women", 1917. Miss Teasdale is a lyric poet of an unusually pure and spontaneous gift."

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