Renascence, and Other Poems

by Edna St. Vincent Millay

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Edna St. Vincent Millay

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Renascence and Other Poems

Renascence

All I could see from where I stood Was three long mountains and a wood; I turned and looked another way, And saw three islands in a bay. So with my eyes I traced the line Of the horizon, thin and fine, Straight around till I was come Back to where I'd started from; And all I saw from where I stood Was three long mountains and a wood. Over these things I could not see; These were the things that bounded me; And I could touch them with my hand, Almost, I thought, from where I stand. And all at once things seemed so small My breath came short, and scarce at all. But, sure, the sky is big, I said; Miles and miles above my head; So here upon my back I'll lie And look my fill into the sky. And so I looked, and, after all, The sky was not so very tall. The sky, I said, must somewhere stop, And—sure enough!—I see the top! The sky, I thought, is not so grand; I 'most could touch it with my hand! And reaching up my hand to try, I screamed to feel it touch the sky. I screamed, and—lo!—Infinity Came down and settled over me; Forced back my scream into my chest, Bent back my arm upon my breast, And, pressing of the Undefined The definition on my mind, Held up before my eyes a glass Through which my shrinking sight did pass Until it seemed I must behold Immensity made manifold; Whispered to me a word whose sound Deafened the air for worlds around, And brought

unmuffled to my ears The gossiping of friendly spheres, The creaking of the tented sky, The ticking of Eternity. I saw and heard, and knew at last The How and Why of all things, past, And present, and forevermore. The Universe, cleft to the core, Lay open to my probing sense That, sick'ning, I would fain pluck thence But could not,—nay! But needs must suck At the great wound, and could not pluck My lips away till I had drawn All venom out.—Ah, fearful pawn! For my omniscience paid I toll In infinite remorse of soul. All sin was of my sinning, all Atoning mine, and mine the gall Of all regret. Mine was the weight Of every brooded wrong, the hate That stood behind each envious thrust, Mine every greed, mine every lust. And all the while for every grief, Each suffering, I craved relief With individual desire,—Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire About a thousand people crawl; Perished with each,—then mourned for all! A man was starving in Capri; He moved his eyes and looked at me; I felt his gaze, I heard his moan, And knew his hunger as my own. I saw at sea a great fog bank Between two ships that struck and sank; A thousand screams the heavens smote; And every scream tore through my throat. No hurt I did not feel, no death That was not mine; mine each last breath That, crying, met an answering cry From the compassion that was I. All suffering mine, and mine its rod; Mine, pity like the pity of God. Ah, awful weight! Infinity Pressed down upon the finite Me! My anguished spirit, like a bird, Beating against my lips I heard; Yet lay the weight so close about There was no room for it without. And so beneath the weight lay I And suffered death, but could not die.

Long had I lain thus, craving death, When quietly the earth beneath Gave way, and inch by inch, so great At last had grown the crushing weight, Into the earth I sank till I Full six feet under ground did lie, And sank no more,—there is no weight Can follow here, however great. From off my breast I felt it roll, And as it went my tortured soul Burst forth and fled in such a gust That all about me swirled the dust.

Deep in the earth I rested now; Cool is its hand upon the brow And soft its breast beneath the head Of one who is so gladly dead. And all at once, and over all The

pitying rain began to fall; I lay and heard each pattering hoof Upon my lowly, thatched roof, And seemed to love the sound far more Than ever I had done before. For rain it hath a friendly sound To one who's six feet underground; And scarce the friendly voice or face: A grave is such a quiet place.

The rain, I said, is kind to come And speak to me in my new home. I would I were alive again To kiss the fingers of the rain, To drink into my eyes the shine Of every slanting silver line, To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze From drenched and dripping apple-trees. For soon the shower will be done, And then the broad face of the sun Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth Until the world with answering mirth Shakes joyously, and each round drop Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top. How can I bear it; buried here, While overhead the sky grows clear And blue again after the storm? O, multi-colored, multiform, Beloved beauty over me, That I shall never, never see Again! Spring-silver, autumn-gold, That I shall never more behold! Sleeping your myriad magics through, Close-sepulchred away from you! O God, I cried, give me new birth, And put me back upon the earth! Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd And let the heavy rain, down-poured In one big torrent, set me free, Washing my grave away from me!

I ceased; and through the breathless hush That answered me, the far-off rush Of herald wings came whispering Like music down the vibrant string Of my ascending prayer, and—crash! Before the wild wind's whistling lash The startled storm-clouds reared on high And plunged in terror down the sky, And the big rain in one black wave Fell from the sky and struck my grave. I know not how such things can be; I only know there came to me A fragrance such as never clings To aught save happy living things; A sound as of some joyous elf Singing sweet songs to please himself, And, through and over everything, A sense of glad awakening. The grass, a-tiptoe at my ear, Whispering to me I could hear; I felt the rain's cool finger-tips Brushed tenderly across my lips, Laid gently on my sealed sight, And all at once the heavy night Fell from my eyes and I could see,— A drenched and dripping apple-tree, A

last long line of silver rain, A sky grown clear and blue again. And as I looked a quickening gust Of wind blew up to me and thrust Into my face a miracle Of orchard-breath, and with the smell,— I know not how such things can be!— I breathed my soul back into me. Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I And hailed the earth with such a cry As is not heard save from a man Who has been dead, and lives again. About the trees my arms I wound; Like one gone mad I hugged the ground; I raised my quivering arms on high; I laughed and laughed into the sky, Till at my throat a strangling sob Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb Sent instant tears into my eyes; O God, I cried, no dark disguise Can e'er hereafter hide from me Thy radiant identity! Thou canst not move across the grass But my quick eyes will see Thee pass, Nor speak, however silently, But my hushed voice will answer Thee. I know the path that tells Thy way Through the cool eve of every day; God, I can push the grass apart And lay my finger on Thy heart!

The world stands out on either side No wider than the heart is wide; Above the world is stretched the sky,— No higher than the soul is high. The heart can push the sea and land Farther away on either hand; The soul can split the sky in two, And let the face of God shine through. But East and West will pinch the heart That can not keep them pushed apart; And he whose soul is flat—the sky Will cave in on him by and by.

Interim

The room is full of you!—As I came in And closed the door behind me, all at once A something in the air, intangible, Yet stiff with meaning, struck my senses sick!—

Sharp, unfamiliar odors have destroyed Each other room's dear personality. The heavy scent of damp, funereal flowers,— The very essence, hush-distilled, of Death— Has strangled that habitual breath of home Whose expiration leaves all houses dead; And wheresoe'er I look is hideous change. Save here. Here 'twas as if a weed-choked gate Had opened at my touch, and I had stepped Into some

long-forgot, enchanted, strange, Sweet garden of a thousand years ago And suddenly thought, "I have been here before!"

You are not here. I know that you are gone, And will not ever enter here again. And yet it seems to me, if I should speak, Your silent step must wake across the hall; If I should turn my head, that your sweet eyes Would kiss me from the door.—So short a time To teach my life its transposition to This difficult and unaccustomed key!— The room is as you left it; your last touch— A thoughtless pressure, knowing not itself As saintly—hallows now each simple thing; Hallows and glorifies, and glows between The dust's grey fingers like a shielded light.

There is your book, just as you laid it down, Face to the table,—I cannot believe That you are gone!—Just then it seemed to me You must be here. I almost laughed to think How like reality the dream had been; Yet knew before I laughed, and so was still. That book, outspread, just as you laid it down! Perhaps you thought, "I wonder what comes next, And whether this or this will be the end"; So rose, and left it, thinking to return.

Perhaps that chair, when you arose and passed Out of the room, rocked silently a while Ere it again was still. When you were gone Forever from the room, perhaps that chair, Stirred by your movement, rocked a little while, Silently, to and fro...

And here are the last words your fingers wrote, Scrawled in broad characters across a page In this brown book I gave you. Here your hand, Guiding your rapid pen, moved up and down. Here with a looping knot you crossed a "t", And here another like it, just beyond These two eccentric "e's". You were so small, And wrote so brave a hand! How strange it seems That of all words these are the words you chose! And yet a simple choice; you did not know You would not write again. If you had known— But then, it does not matter,—and indeed If you had known there was so little time You would have dropped your pen and come to me And this page would be empty, and some phrase Other than this would hold my wonder now. Yet, since

you could not know, and it befell That these are the last words your fingers wrote, There is a dignity some might not see In this, "I picked the first sweet-pea to-day." To-day! Was there an opening bud beside it You left until to-morrow?—O my love, The things that withered,—and you came not back! That day you filled this circle of my arms That now is empty. (O my empty life!) That day—that day you picked the first sweet-pea,— And brought it in to show me! I recall With terrible distinctness how the smell Of your cool gardens drifted in with you. I know, you held it up for me to see And flushed because I looked not at the flower, But at your face; and when behind my look You saw such unmistakable intent You laughed and brushed your flower against my lips. (You were the fairest thing God ever made, I think.) And then your hands above my heart Drew down its stem into a fastening, And while your head was bent I kissed your hair. I wonder if you knew. (Beloved hands! Somehow I cannot seem to see them still. Somehow I cannot seem to see the dust In your bright hair.) What is the need of Heaven When earth can be so sweet?—If only God Had let us love,—and show the world the way! Strange cancellings must ink th' eternal books When love-crossed-out will bring the answer right! That first sweet-pea! I wonder where it is. It seems to me I laid it down somewhere, And yet,—I am not sure. I am not sure, Even, if it was white or pink; for then 'Twas much like any other flower to me, Save that it was the first. I did not know, Then, that it was the last. If I had known— But then, it does not matter. Strange how few, After all's said and done, the things that are Of moment. Few indeed! When I can make Of ten small words a rope to hang the world! "I had you and I have you now no more." There, there it dangles,—where's the little truth That can for long keep footing under that When its slack syllables tighten to a thought? Here, let me write it down! I wish to see Just how a thing like that will look on paper!

"*I had you and I have you now no more*."

O little words, how can you run so straight Across the page, beneath the weight you bear? How can you fall apart, whom such a theme Has bound together, and hereafter

aid In trivial expression, that have been So hideously dignified?—Would God That tearing you apart would tear the thread I strung you on! Would God—O God, my mind Stretches asunder on this merciless rack Of imagery! O, let me sleep a while! Would I could sleep, and wake to find me back In that sweet summer afternoon with you. Summer? 'Tis summer still by the calendar! How easily could God, if He so willed, Set back the world a little turn or two! Correct its griefs, and bring its joys again!

We were so wholly one I had not thought That we could die apart. I had not thought That I could move,—and you be stiff and still! That I could speak,—and you perforce be dumb! I think our heart-strings were, like warp and woof In some firm fabric, woven in and out; Your golden filaments in fair design Across my duller fibre. And to-day The shining strip is rent; the exquisite Fine pattern is destroyed; part of your heart Aches in my breast; part of my heart lies chilled In the damp earth with you. I have been torn In two, and suffer for the rest of me. What is my life to me? And what am I To life,—a ship whose star has guttered out? A Fear that in the deep night starts awake Perpetually, to find its senses strained Against the taut strings of the quivering air, Awaiting the return of some dread chord?

Dark, Dark, is all I find for metaphor; All else were contrast,—save that contrast's wall Is down, and all opposed things flow together Into a vast monotony, where night And day, and frost and thaw, and death and life, Are synonyms. What now—what now to me Are all the jabbering birds and foolish flowers That clutter up the world? You were my song! Now, let discord scream! You were my flower! Now let the world grow weeds! For I shall not Plant things above your grave—(the common balm Of the conventional woe for its own wound!) Amid sensations rendered negative By your elimination stands to-day, Certain, unmixed, the element of grief; I sorrow; and I shall not mock my truth With travesties of suffering, nor seek To effigy its incorporeal bulk In little wry-faced images of woe.

I cannot call you back; and I desire No utterance of my immaterial voice. I cannot even turn my face this way Or that, and say, "My face is turned to you"; I know not where you are, I do not know If Heaven hold you or if earth transmute, Body and soul, you into earth again; But this I know:—not for one second's space Shall I insult my sight with visionings Such as the credulous crowd so eager-eyed Beholds, self-conjured, in the empty air. Let the world wail! Let drip its easy tears! My sorrow shall be dumb!

—What do I say? God! God!—God pity me! Am I gone mad That I should spit upon a rosary? Am I become so shrunken? Would to God I too might feel that frenzied faith whose touch Makes temporal the most enduring grief; Though it must walk a while, as is its wont, With wild lamenting! Would I too might weep Where weeps the world and hangs its piteous wreaths For its new dead! Not Truth, but Faith, it is That keeps the world alive. If all at once Faith were to slacken,—that unconscious faith Which must, I know, yet be the corner-stone Of all believing,—birds now flying fearless Across would drop in terror to the earth; Fishes would drown; and the all-governing reins Would tangle in the frantic hands of God And the worlds gallop headlong to destruction!

O God, I see it now, and my sick brain Staggers and swoons! How often over me Flashes this breathlessness of sudden sight In which I see the universe unrolled Before me like a scroll and read thereon Chaos and Doom, where helpless planets whirl Dizzily round and round and round and round, Like tops across a table, gathering speed With every spin, to waver on the edge One instant—looking over—and the next To shudder and lurch forward out of sight—

*****

Ah, I am worn out—I am wearied out— It is too much—I am but flesh and blood, And I must sleep. Though you were dead again, I am but flesh and blood and I must sleep.

The Suicide

"Curse thee, Life, I will live with thee no more! Thou hast mocked me, starved me, beat my body sore! And all for a pledge that was not pledged by me, I have kissed thy crust and eaten sparingly That I might eat again, and met thy sneers With deprecations, and thy blows with tears,— Aye, from thy glutted lash, glad, crawled away, As if spent passion were a holiday! And now I go. Nor threat, nor easy vow Of tardy kindness can avail thee now With me, whence fear and faith alike are flown; Lonely I came, and I depart alone, And know not where nor unto whom I go; But that thou canst not follow me I know."

Thus I to Life, and ceased; but through my brain My thought ran still, until I spake again:

"Ah, but I go not as I came,—no trace Is mine to bear away of that old grace I brought! I have been heated in thy fires, Bent by thy hands, fashioned to thy desires, Thy mark is on me! I am not the same Nor ever more shall be, as when I came. Ashes am I of all that once I seemed. In me all's sunk that leapt, and all that dreamed Is wakeful for alarm,—oh, shame to thee, For the ill change that thou hast wrought in me, Who laugh no more nor lift my throat to sing! Ah, Life, I would have been a pleasant thing To have about the house when I was grown If thou hadst left my little joys alone! I asked of thee no favor save this one: That thou wouldst leave me playing in the sun! And this thou didst deny, calling my name Insistently, until I rose and came. I saw the sun no more.—It were not well So long on these unpleasant thoughts to dwell, Need I arise to-morrow and renew Again my hated tasks, but I am through With all things save my thoughts and this one night, So that in truth I seem already quite Free and remote from thee,—I feel no haste And no reluctance to depart; I taste Merely, with thoughtful mien, an unknown draught, That in a little while I shall have quaffed."

Thus I to Life, and ceased, and slightly smiled, Looking at nothing; and my thin

dreams filed Before me one by one till once again I set new words unto an old refrain:

"Treasures thou hast that never have been mine! Warm lights in many a secret chamber shine Of thy gaunt house, and gusts of song have blown Like blossoms out to me that sat alone! And I have waited well for thee to show If any share were mine,—and now I go! Nothing I leave, and if I naught attain I shall but come into mine own again!" Thus I to Life, and ceased, and spake no more, But turning, straightway, sought a certain door In the rear wall. Heavy it was, and low And dark,—a way by which none e'er would go That other exit had, and never knock Was heard thereat,—bearing a curious lock Some chance had shown me fashioned faultily, Whereof Life held content the useless key, And great coarse hinges, thick and rough with rust, Whose sudden voice across a silence must, I knew, be harsh and horrible to hear,— A strange door, ugly like a dwarf.—So near I came I felt upon my feet the chill Of acid wind creeping across the sill. So stood longtime, till over me at last Came weariness, and all things other passed To make it room; the still night drifted deep Like snow about me, and I longed for sleep.

But, suddenly, marking the morning hour, Bayed the deep-throated bell within the tower! Startled, I raised my head,—and with a shout Laid hold upon the latch,—and was without.

*****

Ah, long-forgotten, well-remembered road, Leading me back unto my old abode, My father's house! There in the night I came, And found them feasting, and all things the same As they had been before. A splendour hung Upon the walls, and such sweet songs were sung As, echoing out of very long ago, Had called me from the house of Life, I know. So fair their raiment shone I looked in shame On the unlovely garb in which I came; Then straightway at my hesitancy mocked: "It is my father's house!" I said and knocked; And the door opened. To the shining crowd

Tattered and dark I entered, like a cloud, Seeing no face but his; to him I crept, And "Father!" I cried, and clasped his knees, and wept. Ah, days of joy that followed! All alone I wandered through the house. My own, my own, My own to touch, my own to taste and smell, All I had lacked so long and loved so well! None shook me out of sleep, nor hushed my song, Nor called me in from the sunlight all day long.

I know not when the wonder came to me Of what my father's business might be, And whither fared and on what errands bent The tall and gracious messengers he sent. Yet one day with no song from dawn till night Wondering, I sat, and watched them out of sight. And the next day I called; and on the third Asked them if I might go,—but no one heard. Then, sick with longing, I arose at last And went unto my father,—in that vast Chamber wherein he for so many years Has sat, surrounded by his charts and spheres. "Father," I said, "Father, I cannot play The harp that thou didst give me, and all day I sit in idleness, while to and fro About me thy serene, grave servants go; And I am weary of my lonely ease. Better a perilous journey overseas Away from thee, than this, the life I lead, To sit all day in the sunshine like a weed That grows to naught,—I love thee more than they Who serve thee most; yet serve thee in no way. Father, I beg of thee a little task To dignify my days,—'tis all I ask Forever, but forever, this denied, I perish." "Child," my father's voice replied, "All things thy fancy hath desired of me Thou hast received. I have prepared for thee Within my house a spacious chamber, where Are delicate things to handle and to wear, And all these things are thine. Dost thou love song? My minstrels shall attend thee all day long. Or sigh for flowers? My fairest gardens stand Open as fields to thee on every hand. And all thy days this word shall hold the same: No pleasure shalt thou lack that thou shalt name. But as for tasks—" he smiled, and shook his head; "Thou hadst thy task, and laidst it by", he said.

God's World

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough! Thy winds, thy wide grey skies! Thy

mists, that roll and rise! Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff! World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all, But never knew I this; Here such a passion is As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year; My soul is all but out of me,—let fall No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

Afternoon on a Hill

I will be the gladdest thing Under the sun! I will touch a hundred flowers And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds With quiet eyes, Watch the wind bow down the grass, And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show Up from the town, I will mark which must be mine, And then start down!

Sorrow

Sorrow like a ceaseless rain Beats upon my heart. People twist and scream in pain,— Dawn will find them still again; This has neither wax nor wane, Neither stop nor start.

People dress and go to town; I sit in my chair. All my thoughts are slow and brown: Standing up or sitting down Little matters, or what gown Or what shoes I wear.

Tavern

I'll keep a little tavern Below the high hill's crest, Wherein all grey-eyed people May set them down and rest.

There shall be plates a-plenty, And mugs to melt the chill Of all the grey-eyed people Who happen up the hill.

There sound will sleep the traveller, And dream his journey's end, But I will rouse at midnight The falling fire to tend.

Aye, 'tis a curious fancy— But all the good I know Was taught me out of two grey eyes A long time ago.

Ashes of Life

Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike; Eat I must, and sleep I will,—and would that night were here! But ah!—to lie awake and hear the slow hours strike! Would that it were day again!—with twilight near!

Love has gone and left me and I don't know what to do; This or that or what you will is all the same to me; But all the things that I begin I leave before I'm through,— There's little use in anything as far as I can see.

Love has gone and left me,—and the neighbors knock and borrow, And life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse,— And to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow There's this little street and this little house.

The Little Ghost

I knew her for a little ghost That in my garden walked; The wall is high—higher than most— And the green gate was locked.

And yet I did not think of that Till after she was gone— I knew her by the broad white hat, All ruffled, she had on.

By the dear ruffles round her feet, By her small hands that hung In their lace mitts, austere and sweet, Her gown's white folds among.

I watched to see if she would stay, What she would do—and oh! She looked as if she liked the way I let my garden grow!

She bent above my favourite mint With conscious garden grace, She smiled and smiled—there was no hint Of sadness in her face.

She held her gown on either side To let her slippers show, And up the walk she went with pride, The way great ladies go.

And where the wall is built in new And is of ivy bare She paused—then opened and passed through A gate that once was there.

Kin to Sorrow

Am I kin to Sorrow, That so oft Falls the knocker of my door— Neither loud nor soft, But as long accustomed, Under Sorrow's hand? Marigolds around the step And rosemary stand, And then comes Sorrow— And what does Sorrow care For the rosemary Or the marigolds there? Am I kin to Sorrow? Are we kin? That so oft upon my door— *Oh, come in*!

Three Songs of Shattering

I

The first rose on my rose-tree Budded, bloomed, and shattered, During sad days when to me Nothing mattered.

Grief of grief has drained me clean; Still it seems a pity No one saw,—it must have been Very pretty.

II

Let the little birds sing; Let the little lambs play; Spring is here; and so 'tis spring;— But not in the old way!

I recall a place Where a plum-tree grew; There you lifted up your face, And blossoms covered you.

If the little birds sing, And the little lambs play, Spring is here; and so 'tis spring— But not in the old way!

III

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree! Ere spring was going—ah, spring is gone! And there comes no summer to the like of you and me,— Blossom time is early, but no fruit sets on.

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree, Browned at the edges, turned in a day; And I would with all my heart they trimmed a mound for me, And weeds were tall on all the paths that led that way!

The Shroud

Death, I say, my heart is bowed Unto thine,—O mother! This red gown will make a shroud Good as any other!

(I, that would not wait to wear My own bridal things, In a dress dark as my hair Made my answerings.

I, to-night, that till he came Could not, could not wait, In a gown as bright as flame Held for them the gate.)

Death, I say, my heart is bowed Unto thine,—O mother! This red gown will make a shroud Good as any other!

The Dream

Love, if I weep it will not matter, And if you laugh I shall not care; Foolish am I to think about it, But it is good to feel you there.

Love, in my sleep I dreamed of waking,— White and awful the moonlight reached Over the floor, and somewhere, somewhere, There was a shutter loose,—it screeched!

Swung in the wind,—and no wind blowing!— I was afraid, and turned to you, Put out my hand to you for comfort,— And you were gone! Cold, cold as dew,

Under my hand the moonlight lay! Love, if you laugh I shall not care, But if I weep

it will not matter,— Ah, it is good to feel you there!

Indifference

I said,—for Love was laggard, O, Love was slow to come,— "I'll hear his step and know his step when I am warm in bed; But I'll never leave my pillow, though there be some As would let him in—and take him in with tears!" I said. I lay,—for Love was laggard, O, he came not until dawn,— I lay and listened for his step and could not get to sleep; And he found me at my window with my big cloak on, All sorry with the tears some folks might weep!

Witch-Wife

She is neither pink nor pale, And she never will be all mine; She learned her hands in a fairy-tale, And her mouth on a valentine.

She has more hair than she needs; In the sun 'tis a woe to me! And her voice is a string of colored beads, Or steps leading into the sea.

She loves me all that she can, And her ways to my ways resign; But she was not made for any man, And she never will be all mine.

Blight

Hard seeds of hate I planted That should by now be grown,— Rough stalks, and from thick stamens A poisonous pollen blown, And odors rank, unbreathable, From dark corollas thrown!

At dawn from my damp garden I shook the chilly dew; The thin boughs locked behind me That sprang to let me through; The blossoms slept,—I sought a place Where nothing lovely grew.

And there, when day was breaking, I knelt and looked around: The light was near, the silence Was palpitant with sound; I drew my hate from out my breast And thrust it in the ground.

Oh, ye so fiercely tended, Ye little seeds of hate! I bent above your growing Early and noon and late, Yet are ye drooped and pitiful,— I cannot rear ye straight!

The sun seeks out my garden, No nook is left in shade, No mist nor mold nor mildew Endures on any blade, Sweet rain slants under every bough: Ye falter, and ye fade.

When the Year Grows Old

I cannot but remember When the year grows old— October—November— How she disliked the cold!

She used to watch the swallows Go down across the sky, And turn from the window With a little sharp sigh.

And often when the brown leaves Were brittle on the ground, And the wind in the chimney Made a melancholy sound,

She had a look about her That I wish I could forget— The look of a scared thing Sitting in a net!

Oh, beautiful at nightfall The soft spitting snow! And beautiful the bare boughs Rubbing to and fro!

But the roaring of the fire, And the warmth of fur, And the boiling of the kettle Were beautiful to her!

I cannot but remember When the year grows old— October—November— How she disliked the cold!

Sonnets

I

Thou art not lovelier than lilacs,—no, Nor honeysuckle; thou art not more fair Than small white single poppies,—I can bear Thy beauty; though I bend before thee,

though From left to right, not knowing where to go, I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there Find any refuge from thee, yet I swear So has it been with mist,—with moonlight so.

Like him who day by day unto his draught Of delicate poison adds him one drop more Till he may drink unharmed the death of ten, Even so, inured to beauty, who have quaffed Each hour more deeply than the hour before, I drink—and live—what has destroyed some men.

II

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied Who told me time would ease me of my pain! I miss him in the weeping of the rain; I want him at the shrinking of the tide; The old snows melt from every mountain-side, And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane; But last year's bitter loving must remain Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide!

There are a hundred places where I fear To go,—so with his memory they brim! And entering with relief some quiet place Where never fell his foot or shone his face I say, "There is no memory of him here!" And so stand stricken, so remembering him!

III

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring, And all the flowers that in the springtime grow, And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow Rising of the round moon, all throats that sing The summer through, and each departing wing, And all the nests that the bared branches show, And all winds that in any weather blow, And all the storms that the four seasons bring.

You go no more on your exultant feet Up paths that only mist and morning knew, Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,— But you were something more than young and sweet And fair,—and the long year

remembers you.

IV

Not in this chamber only at my birth— When the long hours of that mysterious night Were over, and the morning was in sight— I cried, but in strange places, steppe and firth I have not seen, through alien grief and mirth; And never shall one room contain me quite Who in so many rooms first saw the light, Child of all mothers, native of the earth.

So is no warmth for me at any fire To-day, when the world's fire has burned so low; I kneel, spending my breath in vain desire, At that cold hearth which one time roared so strong, And straighten back in weariness, and long To gather up my little gods and go.

V

If I should learn, in some quite casual way, That you were gone, not to return again— Read from the back-page of a paper, say, Held by a neighbor in a subway train, How at the corner of this avenue And such a street (so are the papers filled) A hurrying man—who happened to be you— At noon to-day had happened to be killed, I should not cry aloud—I could not cry Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place— I should but watch the station lights rush by With a more careful interest on my face, Or raise my eyes and read with greater care Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

VI Bluebeard

This door you might not open, and you did; So enter now, and see for what slight thing You are betrayed.... Here is no treasure hid, No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring The sought-for truth, no heads of women slain For greed like yours, no writhings of distress, But only what you see.... Look yet again— An empty room,

cobwebbed and comfortless. Yet this alone out of my life I kept Unto myself, lest any know me quite; And you did so profane me when you crept Unto the threshold of this room to-night That I must never more behold your face. This now is yours. I seek another place.

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