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Renaissance and Other Poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay

February, 1994 [Etext #109]

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# *Renascence and Other Poems*

*by 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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