

THE FARMER'S BRIDE

(A NEW EDITION WITH ELEVEN NEW POEMS)



By CHARLOTTE MEW

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The Original Edition of THE FARMER'S BRIDE, consisting of seventeen of the poems included in this volume, was first published in 1916.

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[A new Edition with eleven new Poems]

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THE FARMER'S BRIDE

THREE Summers since I chose a maid,
Too young maybe—but more's to do
At harvest-time than bide and woo.

When us was wed she turned afraid
Of love and me and all things human;
Like the shut of a winter's day.
Her smile went out, and 'twasn't a woman—
More like a little frightened fay.

One night, in the Fall, she runned away.

“Out 'mong the sheep, her be,” they said,
'Should properly have been abed;
But sure enough she wasn't there
Lying awake with her wide brown stare.
So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down
We chased her, flying like a hare
Before our lanterns. To Church-Town
All in a shiver and a scare
We caught her, fetched her home at last
And turned the key upon her, fast.

She does the work about the house
As well as most, but like a mouse:
Happy enough to chat and play
With birds and rabbits and such as they,
So long as men-folk keep away.
“Not near, not near!” her eyes beseech
When one of us comes within reach.

The women say that beasts in stall
Look round like children at her call.
I've hardly heard her speak at all.

Shy as a leveret, swift as he,
Straight and slight as a young larch tree,
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,
To her wild self. But what to me?
The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,
 The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,
One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,
 A magpie's spotted feathers lie
On the black earth spread white with rime,
The berries redden up to Christmas-time.
 What's Christmas-time without there be
 Some other in the house than we!

She sleeps up in the attic there
Alone, poor maid. 'Tis but a stair
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,
The soft young down of her, the brown,
The brown of her—her eyes, her hair, her hair!

FAME

SOMETIMES in the over-heated house, but not for long,
Smirking and speaking rather loud,
I see myself among the crowd,
Where no one fits the singer to his song,
Or sifts the unpainted from the painted faces
Of the people who are always on my stair;
They were not with me when I walked in heavenly places;
But could I spare
In the blind Earth's great silences and spaces,
The din, the scuffle, the long stare
If I went back and it was not there?
Back to the old known things that are the new,
The folded glory of the gorse, the sweet-briar air,
To the larks that cannot praise us, knowing nothing of what we do
And the divine, wise trees that do not care
Yet, to leave Fame, still with such eyes and that bright hair!
God! If I might! And before I go hence
Take in her stead
To our tossed bed,
One little dream, no matter how small, how wild.
Just now, I think I found it in a field, under a fence—
A frail, dead, new-born lamb, ghostly and pitiful and white.
A blot upon the night,
The moon's dropped child!

THE NARROW DOOR

THE narrow door, the narrow door
On the three steps of which the café children play
Mostly at shop with pebbles from the shore,
It is always shut this narrow door
But open for a little while to-day.

And round it, each with pebbles in his hand,
A silenced crowd the café children stand
To see the long box jerking down the bend
Of twisted stair; then set on end,
Quite filling up the narrow door
Till it comes out and does not go in any more.

Along the quay you see it wind,
The slow black line. Someone pulls up the blind
Of the small window just above the narrow door—
 “Tiens! que veux-tu acheter?” Rénée cries,
 “Mais, pour quat’sous, des oignons,” Jean replies
And one pays down with pebbles from the shore.

THE FÊTE

TO-NIGHT again the moon's white mat
Stretches across the dormitory floor
While outside, like an evil cat
The *pion* prowls down the dark corridor,
Planning, I know, to pounce on me, in spite
For getting leave to sleep in town last night.
But it was none of us who made that noise,
Only the old brown owl that hoots and flies
Out of the ivy—he will say it was us boys—
Seigneur mon Dieu! the *sacré* soul of spies!
He would like to catch each dream that lies
Hidden behind our sleepy eyes:
Their dream? But mine—it is the moon and the wood that sees;
All my long life how I shall hate the trees!

In the *Place d'Armes*, the dusty planes, all Summer through
Dozed with the market women in the sun and scarcely stirred
To see the quiet things that crossed the Square—,
A tiny funeral, the flying shadow of a bird,
The hump-backed barber Célestin Lemaire,
Old madame Michel in her three-wheeled chair,
And filing past to Vespers, two and two,
The *demoiselles* of the *pensionnat*.
Towed like a ship through the harbour bar,
Safe into port, where *le petit Jésus*
Perhaps makes nothing of the look they shot at you:
Si, c'est défendu, mais que voulez-vous?
It was the sun. The sunshine weaves

A pattern on dull stones: the sunshine leaves
The portraiture of dreams upon the eyes
Before it dies:
All Summer through
The dust hung white upon the drowsy planes
Till suddenly they woke with the Autumn rains.

It is not only the little boys
Who have hardly got away from toys,
But I, who am seventeen next year,
Some nights, in bed, have grown cold to hear
That lonely passion of the rain
Which makes you think of being dead,
And of somewhere living to lay your head
As if you were a child again,
Crying for one thing, known and near
Your empty heart, to still the hunger and the fear
That pelts and beats with it against the pane.

But I remember smiling too
At all the sun's soft tricks and those Autumn dreads
In winter time, when the grey light broke slowly through
The frosted window-lace to drag us shivering from our beds.
And when at dusk the singing wind swung down
Straight from the stars to the dark country roads
Beyond the twinkling town,
Striking the leafless poplar boughs as he went by,
Like some poor, stray dog by the wayside lying dead,
We left behind us the old world of dread,
I and the wind as we strode whistling on under the Winter sky.

And then in Spring for three days came the Fair
Just as the planes were starting into bud

Above the caravans: you saw the dancing bear
Pass on his chain; and heard the jingle and the thud.
Only four days ago
They let you out of this dull show
To slither down the *montagne russe* and chaff the man *à la tête de veau*—
Hit, slick, the bull's eye at the *tir*,
Spin round and round till your head went queer
On the *porcs-roulants*. *Oh! là là! la fête!*
Va pour du vin, et le tête-a-tête
With the girl who sugars the *quafres! Pauvrette*,
How thin she was; but she smiled, you bet,
As she took your tip—"One does not forget
The good days, Monsieur." Said with a grace,
But *sacrébleu!* what a ghost of a face!
And no fun too for the *demoiselles*
Of the *pensionnat*, who were hurried past,
With their "*Oh, que c'est beau—Ah, qu'elle est belle!*"
A lap-dog's life from first to last!
The good nights are not made for sleep, nor the good days for dreaming in,
And at the end in the big Circus tent we sat and shook and stewed like sin!

Some children there had got—but where?
Sent from the south, perhaps—a red bouquet
Of roses, sweetening the fetid air
With scent from gardens by some far away blue bay.
They threw one at the dancing bear;
The white clown caught it. From St. Rémy's tower
The deep, slow bell tolled out the hour;
The black clown, with his dirty grin
Lay, sprawling in the dust, as She rode in.

She stood on a white horse—and suddenly you saw the bend

Of a far-off road at dawn, with knights riding by,
A field of spears—and then the gallant day
Go out in storm, with ragged clouds low down, sullen and grey
Against red heavens: wild and awful, such a sky
As witnesses against you at the end
Of a great battle; bugles blowing, blood and dust—
The old *Morte d'Arthur*, fight you must—.
It died in anger. But it was not death
That had you by the throat, stopping your breath.
She looked like Victory. She rode my way.

She laughed at the black clown and then she flew
A bird above us, on the wing
Of her white arms; and you saw through
A rent in the old tent, a patch of sky
With one dim star. She flew, but not so high—
And then she did not fly;
She stood in the bright moonlight at the door
Of a strange room, she threw her slippers on the floor—
Again, again
You heard the patter of the rain,
The starving rain—it was this Thing,
Summer was this, the gold mist in your eyes;—
Oh God! it dies,
But after death—,
To-night the splendour and the sting
Blows back and catches at your breath,
The smell of beasts, the smell of dust, the scent of all the roses in the world, the
sea, the Spring,
The beat of drums, the pad of hoofs, music, the dream, the dream, the Enchanted
Thing!

At first you scarcely saw her face,
You knew the maddening feet were there,
What called was that half-hidden, white unrest
To which now and then she pressed
Her finger tips; but as she slackened pace
And turned and looked at you it grew quite bare:
There was not anything you did not dare:—
Like trumpeters the hours passed until the last day of the Fair.

In the *Place d'Armes* all afternoon
The building birds had sung “Soon, soon,”
The shuttered streets slept sound that night,
It was full moon:
The path into the wood was almost white,
The trees were very still and seemed to stare:
Not far before your soul the Dream flits on,
But when you touch it, it is gone
And quite alone your soul stands there.

Mother of Christ, no one has seen your eyes: how can men pray
Even unto you?
There were only wolves' eyes in the wood—
My Mother is a woman too:
Nothing is true that is not good,
With that quick smile of hers, I have heard her say;—
I wish I had gone back home to-day;
I should have watched the light that so gently dies
From our high window, in the Paris skies,
The long, straight chain
Of lamps hung out along the Seine:
I would have turned to her and let the rain
Beat on her breast as it does against the pane;—

Nothing will be the same again;—
There is something strange in my little Mother's eyes,
There is something new in the old heavenly air of Spring—
The smell of beasts, the smell of dust—*The Enchanted Thing!*

All my life long I shall see moonlight on the fern
And the black trunks of trees. Only the hair
Of any woman can belong to God.
The stalks are cruelly broken where we trod,
 There had been violets there,
 I shall not care
As I used to do when I see the bracken burn.

BESIDE THE BED

SOMEONE has shut the shining eyes, straightened and folded
The wandering hands quietly covering the unquiet breast:
So, smoothed and silenced you lie, like a child, not again to be questioned or
scolded;
But, for you, not one of us believes that this is rest.

Not so to close the windows down can cloud and deaden
The blue beyond: or to screen the wavering flame subdue its breath:
Why, if I lay my cheek to your cheek, your grey lips, like dawn, would quiver
and redden,
Breaking into the old, odd smile at this fraud of death.

Because all night you have not turned to us or spoken
It is time for you to wake; your dreams were never very deep:
I, for one, have seen the thin, bright, twisted threads of them dimmed suddenly
and broken,
This is only a most piteous pretence of sleep!

IN NUNHEAD CEMETERY

IT is the clay that makes the earth stick to his spade;
He fills in holes like this year after year;
The others have gone; they were tired, and half afraid,
But I would rather be standing here;

There is nowhere else to go. I have seen this place
From the windows of the train that's going past
Against the sky. This is rain on my face—
It was raining here when I saw it last.

There is something horrible about a flower;
This, broken in my hand, is one of those
He threw in just now: it will not live another hour;
There are thousands more: you do not miss a rose.

One of the children hanging about
Pointed at the whole dreadful heap and smiled
This morning, after THAT was carried out;
There is something terrible about a child.

We were like children, last week, in the Strand;
That was the day you laughed at me
Because I tried to make you understand
The cheap, stale chap I used to be
Before I saw the things you made me see.

This is not a real place; perhaps by-and-by
I shall wake—I am getting drenched with all this rain:

To-morrow I will tell you about the eyes of the Crystal Palace train
Looking down on us, and you will laugh and I shall see what you see again.

Not here, not now. We said “Not yet
Across our low stone parapet
Will the quick shadows of the sparrows fall.”
But still it was a lovely thing
Through the grey months to wait for Spring
With the birds that go a-gypsying
In the parks till the blue seas call.
And next to these, you used to care
For the lions in Trafalgar Square,
Who’ll stand and speak for London when her bell of Judgment tolls—
And the gulls at Westminster there were
The old sea-captains’ souls.
To-day again the brown tide splashes, step by step, the river stair,
And the gulls are there!

By a month we have missed our Day:
The children would have hung about
Round the carriage and over the way
As you and I came out.

We should have stood on the gulls’ black cliffs and heard the sea
And seen the moon’s white track,
I would have called, you would have come to me
And kissed me back.

You have never done that: I do not know
Why I stood staring at your bed
And heard you, though you spoke so low,
But could not reach your hands, your little head.

There was nothing we could not do, you said,
And you went, and I let you go!

Now I will burn you back, I will burn you through,
Though I am damned for it we two will lie
And burn, here where the starlings fly
To these white stones from the wet sky—;
Dear, you will say this is not I—
It would not be you, it would not be you!

If for only a little while
You will think of it you will understand,
If you will touch my sleeve and smile
As you did that morning in the Strand
I can wait quietly with you
Or go away if you want me to—
God! What is God? but your face has gone and your hand!
Let me stay here too.

When I was quite a little lad
At Christmas time we went half mad
For joy of all the toys we had,
And then we used to sing about the sheep
The shepherds watched by night;
We used to pray to Christ to keep
Our small souls safe till morning light—;
I am scared, I am staying with you to-night—
Put me to sleep.

I shall stay here: here you can see the sky;
The houses in the streets are much too high;
There is no one left to speak to there;

Here they are everywhere,
And just above them fields and fields of roses lie—
If he would dig it all up again they would not die.

THE PEDLAR

LEND me, a little while, the key

That locks your heavy heart, and I'll give you back—
Rarer than books and ribbons and beads bright to see,
This little Key of Dreams out of my pack.

The road, the road, beyond men's bolted doors,
There shall I walk and you go free of me,
For yours lies North across the moors,
And mine South. To what sea?

How if we stopped and let our solemn selves go by,
While my gay ghost caught and kissed yours, as ghosts don't do,
And by the wayside this forgotten you and I
Sat, and were twenty-two?

Give me the key that locks your tired eyes,
And I will lend you this one from my pack,
Brighter than coloured beads and painted books that make men wise:
Take it. No, give it back!

PÉCHERESSE

DOWN the long quay the slow boats glide,
While here and there a house looms white
Against the gloom of the waterside,
And some high window throws a light
As they sail out into the night.

At dawn they will bring in again
To women knitting on the quay
Who wait for him, their man of men;
I stand with them, and watch the sea
Which may have taken mine from me.

Just so the long days come and go.
The nights, ma Doué! the nights are cold!
Our Lady's heart is as frozen snow,
Since this one sin I have not told;
And I shall die or perhaps grow old

Before he comes. The foreign ships
Bring many a one of face and name
As strange as his, to buy your lips,
A gold piece for a scarlet shame
Like mine. But mine was not the same.

One night was ours, one short grey day
Of sudden sin, unshrived, untold.
He found me, and I lost the way
To Paradise for him. I sold

My soul for love and not for gold.

He bought my soul, but even so,
My face is all that he has seen,
His is the only face I know,
And in the dark church, like a screen,
It shuts God out; it comes between;

While in some narrow foreign street
Or loitering on the crowded quay,
Who knows what others he may meet
To turn his eyes away from me?
Many are fair to such as he!

There is but one for such as I
To love, to hate, to hunger for;
I shall, perhaps, grow old and die,
With one short day to spend and store,
One night, in all my life, no more.

Just so the long days come and go,
Yet this one sin I will not tell
Though Mary's heart is as frozen snow
And all nights are cold for one warmed too well.
But, oh! ma Doué! *the nights of Hell!*

THE CHANGELING

TOLL no bell for me, dear Father, dear Mother,
Waste no sighs;
There are my sisters, there is my little brother
Who plays in the place called Paradise,
Your children all, your children for ever;
But I, so wild,
Your disgrace, with the queer brown face, was never,
Never, I know, but half your child!

In the garden at play, all day, last summer,
Far and away I heard
The sweet “tweet-tweet” of a strange new-comer,
The dearest, clearest call of a bird.
It lived down there in the deep green hollow,
My own old home, and the fairies say
The word of a bird is a thing to follow,
So I was away a night and a day.

One evening, too, by the nursery fire,
We snuggled close and sat round so still,
When suddenly as the wind blew higher,
Something scratched on the window-sill.
A pinched brown face peered in—I shivered;
No one listened or seemed to see;
The arms of it waved and the wings of it quivered,
Whoo—I knew it had come for me;
Some are as bad as bad can be!
All night long they danced in the rain,

Round and round in a dripping chain,
Threw their caps at the window-pane,
Tried to make me scream and shout
And fling the bedclothes all about:
I meant to stay in bed that night,
And if only you had left a light
They would never have got me out.
Sometimes I wouldn't speak, you see,
Or answer when you spoke to me,
Because in the long, still dusks of Spring
You can hear the whole world whispering;
The shy green grasses making love,
The feathers grow on the dear, grey dove,
The tiny heart of the redstart beat,
The patter of the squirrel's feet,
The pebbles pushing in the silver streams,
The rushes talking in their dreams,
The swish-swish of the bat's black wings,
The wild-wood bluebell's sweet ting-tings,
Humming and hammering at your ear,
Everything there is to hear
In the heart of hidden things,
But not in the midst of the nursery riot,
That's why I wanted to be quiet
Couldn't do my sums, or sing,
Or settle down to anything.
And when, for that, I was sent upstairs
I *did* kneel down to say my prayers;
But the King who sits on your high church steeple
Has nothing to do with us fairy people!

'Times I pleased you, dear Father, dear Mother,

Learned all my lessons and liked to play,
And dearly I loved the little pale brother
Whom some other bird must have called away.
Why did They bring me here to make me
Not quite bad and not quite good,
Why, unless They're wicked, do They want, in spite, to take me
Back to their wet, wild wood?
Now, every night I shall see the windows shining,
The gold lamp's glow, and the fire's red gleam,
While the best of us are twining twigs and the rest of us are whining
In the hollow by the stream.
Black and chill are Their nights on the wold;
And They live so long and They feel no pain:
I shall grow up, but never grow old,
I shall always, always be very cold,
I shall never come back again!

KEN

THE town is old and very steep,
A place of bells and cloisters and grey towers,
And black clad people walking in their sleep—
A nun, a priest, a woman taking flowers
To her new grave; and watched from end to end
By the great Church above, through the still hours:
But in the morning and the early dark
The children wake to dart from doors and call
Down the wide, crooked street, where, at the bend,
Before it climbs up to the park,
Ken's is the gabled house facing the Castle wall.

When first I came upon him there
Suddenly, on the half-lit stair,
I think I hardly found a trace
Of likeness to a human face
In his. And I said then
If in His image God made men,
Some other must have made poor Ken—
But for his eyes which looked at you
As two red, wounded stars might do.

He scarcely spoke, you scarcely heard,
His voice broke off in little jars
To tears sometimes. An uncouth bird
He seemed as he ploughed up the street,
Groping, with knarred, high-lifted feet
And arms thrust out as if to beat

Always against a threat of bars.

And oftener than not there'd be
A child just higher than his knee
Trotting beside him. Through his dim
Long twilight this, at least, shone clear,
That all the children and the deer,
Whom every day he went to see
Out in the park, belonged to him.

“God help the folk that next him sits
He fidgets so, with his poor wits.”
The neighbours said on Sunday nights
When he would go to Church to “see the lights!”
Although for these he used to fix
His eyes upon a crucifix
In a dark corner, staring on
Till everybody else had gone.
And sometimes, in his evil fits,
You could not move him from his chair—
You did not look at him as he sat there,
Biting his rosary to bits.
While pointing to the Christ he tried to say
“Take it away.”

Nothing was dead:
He said “a bird” if he picked up a broken wing,
A perished leaf or any such thing
Was just “a rose”; and once when I had said
He must not stand and knock there any more,
He left a twig on the mat outside my door.

Not long ago
The last thrush stiffened in the snow,
While black against a sullen sky
The sighing pines stood by.
But now the wind has left our rattled pane
To flutter the hedge-sparrow's wing,
The birches in the wood are red again
And only yesterday
The larks went up a little way to sing
What lovers say
Who loiter in the lanes to-day;
The buds begin to talk of May
With learned rooks on city trees,
And if God please
With all of these
We too, shall see another Spring.

But in that red brick barn upon the hill
I wonder—can one own the deer,
And does one walk with children still
As one did here—
Do roses grow
Beneath those twenty windows in a row—
And if some night
When you have not seen any light
They cannot move you from your chair
What happens there?
I do not know.

So, when they took
Ken to that place, I did not look
After he called and turned on me

His eyes. These I shall see—

À QUOI BON DIRE

SEVENTEEN years ago you said

Something that sounded like Good-bye;
And everybody thinks that you are dead,
But I.

So I, as I grow stiff and cold
To this and that say Good-bye too;
And everybody sees that I am old
But you.

And one fine morning in a sunny lane
Some boy and girl will meet and kiss and swear
That nobody can love their way again
While over there
You will have smiled, I shall have tossed your hair.

THE QUIET HOUSE

WHEN we were children old Nurse used to say,
The house was like an auction or a fair
Until the lot of us were safe in bed.
It has been quiet as the country-side
Since Ted and Janey and then Mother died
And Tom crossed Father and was sent away.
After the lawsuit he could not hold up his head,
Poor Father, and he does not care
For people here, or to go anywhere.

To get away to Aunt's for that week-end
Was hard enough; (since then, a year ago,
He scarcely lets me slip out of his sight—)
At first I did not like my cousin's friend,
I did not think I should remember him:
His voice has gone, his face is growing dim
And if I like him now I do not know.
He frightened me before he smiled—
He did not ask me if he might—
He said that he would come one Sunday night,
He spoke to me as if I were a child.

No year has been like this that has just gone by;
It may be that what Father says is true,
If things are so it does not matter why:
But everything has burned and not quite through.
The colours of the world have turned
To flame, the blue, the gold has burned

In what used to be such a leaden sky.
When you are burned quite through you die.

Red is the strangest pain to bear;
In Spring the leaves on the budding trees;
In Summer the roses are worse than these,
More terrible than they are sweet:
A rose can stab you across the street
Deeper than any knife:
And the crimson haunts you everywhere—
Thin shafts of sunlight, like the ghosts of reddened swords have struck our stair
As if, coming down, you had spilt your life.

I think that my soul is red
Like the soul of a sword or a scarlet flower:
But when these are dead
They have had their hour.

I shall have had mine, too,
For from head to feet,
I am burned and stabbed half through,
And the pain is deadly sweet.

The things that kill us seem
Blind to the death they give:
It is only in our dream
The things that kill us live.

The room is shut where Mother died,
The other rooms are as they were,
The world goes on the same outside,
The sparrows fly across the Square,

The children play as we four did there,
The trees grow green and brown and bare,
The sun shines on the dead Church spire,
And nothing lives here but the fire,
While Father watches from his chair
 Day follows day
The same, or now and then, a different grey,
 Till, like his hair,
Which Mother said was wavy once and bright,
 They will all turn white.

To-night I heard a bell again—
Outside it was the same mist of fine rain,
The lamps just lighted down the long, dim street,
 No one for me—
I think it is myself I go to meet:
I do not care; some day I *shall* not think; I shall not *be*!

ON THE ASYLUM ROAD

THEIRS is the house whose windows—every pane—
Are made of darkly stained or clouded glass:
Sometimes you come upon them in the lane,
The saddest crowd that you will ever pass.

But still we merry town or village folk
Throw to their scattered stare a kindly grin,
And think no shame to stop and crack a joke
With the incarnate wages of man's sin.

None but ourselves in our long gallery we meet,
The moor-hen stepping from her reeds with dainty feet,
The hare-bell bowing on his stem,
Dance not with us; their pulses beat
To fainter music; nor do we to them
Make their life sweet.

The gayest crowd that they will ever pass
Are we to brother-shadows in the lane:
Our windows, too, are clouded glass
To them, yes, every pane!

JOUR DES MORTS (CIMETIERE MONTPARNASSE)

SWEETHEART, is this the last of all our posies

And little festivals, my flowers are they

But white and wistful ghosts of gayer roses

Shut with you in this grim garden? Not to-day,

Ah! no! come out with me before the grey gate closes

It is your fête and here is your bouquet!

THE FOREST ROAD

THE forest road,

The infinite straight road stretching away
World without end: the breathless road between the walls
Of the black listening trees: the hushed, grey road
Beyond the window that you shut to-night
Crying that you would look at it by day—
There is a shadow there that sings and calls
But not for you. Oh! hidden eyes that plead in sleep
Against the lonely dark, if I could touch the fear
And leave it kissed away on quiet lids—
If I could hush these hands that are half-awake,
Groping for me in sleep I could go free.
I wish that God would take them out of mine
And fold them like the wings of frightened birds
Shot cruelly down, but fluttering into quietness so soon,
Broken, forgotten things; there is not grief for them in the green Spring
When the new birds fly back to the old trees.
But it shall not be so with you. I will look back. I wish I knew that God would
stand
Smiling and looking down on you when morning comes,
To hold you, when you wake, closer than I,
So gently though: and not with famished lips or hungry arms:
He does not hurt the frailest, dearest things
As we do in the dark. See, dear, your hair—
I must unloose this hair that sleeps and dreams
About my face, and clings like the brown weed
To drowned, delivered things, tossed by the tired sea
Back to the beaches. Oh! your hair! If you had lain

A long time dead on the rough, glistening ledge
Of some black cliff, forgotten by the tide,
The raving winds would tear, the dripping brine would rust away
Fold after fold of all the loveliness
That wraps you round, and makes you, lying here,
The passionate fragrance that the roses are.
But death would spare the glory of your head
In the long sweetness of the hair that does not die:
The spray would leap to it in every storm,
The scent of the unsilenced sea would linger on
In these dark waves, and round the silence that was you—
Only the nesting gulls would hear—but there would still be whispers in your
hair;

Keep them for me; keep them for me. What *is* this singing on the road
That makes all other music like the music in a dream—
Dumb to the dancing and the marching feet; you know, in dreams, you see
Old pipers playing that you cannot hear,
And ghostly drums that only seem to beat. This seems to climb:
Is it the music of a larger place? It makes our room too small: it is like a stair,
A calling stair that climbs up to a smile you scarcely see,
Dim, but so waited for; and *you* know what a smile is, how it calls,
How if I smiled you always ran to me.
Now you must sleep forgetfully, as children do.
There is a Spirit sits by us in sleep
Nearer than those who walk with us in the bright day.
I think he has a tranquil, saving face: I think he came
Straight from the hills: he may have suffered there in time gone by,
And once, from those forsaken heights, looked down,
Lonely himself, on all the lonely sorrows of the earth.
It is his kingdom—Sleep. If I could leave you there—
If, without waking you, I could get up and reach the door—!
We used to go together.—Shut, scared eyes,

Poor, desolate, desperate hands, it is not I
Who thrust you off. No, take your hands away—
I cannot strike your lonely hands. Yes, I have struck your heart,
It did not come so near. Then lie you there
Dear and wild heart behind this quivering snow
With two red stains on it: and I will strike and tear
Mine out, and scatter it to yours. Oh! throbbing dust,
You that were life, our little wind-blown hearts!

The road! the road!

There is a shadow there: I see my soul,
I hear my soul, singing among the trees!

MADELEINE IN CHURCH

HERE, in the darkness, where this plaster saint
 Stands nearer than God stands to our distress,
And one small candle shines, but not so faint
 As the far lights of everlastingness
I'd rather kneel than over there, in open day
 Where Christ is hanging, rather pray
 To something more like my own clay,
 Not too divine;
 For, once, perhaps my little saint
 Before he got his niche and crown,
Had one short stroll about the town;
It brings him closer, just that taint
 And anyone can wash the paint
Off our poor faces, his and mine!

Is that why I see Monty now? equal to any saint, poor boy, as good as gold,
But still, with just the proper trace
Of earthliness on his shining wedding face;
And then gone suddenly blank and old
The hateful day of the divorce:
Stuart got his, hands down, of course
Crowing like twenty cocks and grinning like a horse:
But Monty took it hard. All said and done I liked him best,—
He was the first, he stands out clearer than the rest.

 It seems too funny all we other rips
Should have immortal souls; Monty and Redge quite damnably
Keep theirs afloat while we go down like scuttled ships.—
 It's funny too, how easily we sink,

One might put up a monument, I think
To half the world and cut across it "Lost at Sea!"
I should drown Jim, poor little sparrow, if I netted him to-night—
No, it's no use this penny light—
Or my poor saint with his tin-pot crown—
The trees of Calvary are where they were,
When we are sure that we can spare
The tallest, let us go and strike it down
And leave the other two still standing there.
I, too, would ask Him to remember me
If there were any Paradise beyond this earth that I could see.

Oh! quiet Christ who never knew
The poisonous fangs that bite us through
And make us do the things we do,
See how we suffer and fight and die,
How helpless and how low we lie,
God holds You, and You hang so high,
Though no one looking long at You,
Can think You do not suffer too,
But, up there, from your still, star-lighted tree
What can You know, what can You really see
Of this dark ditch, the soul of me!

We are what we are: when I was half a child I could not sit
Watching black shadows on green lawns and red carnations burning in the sun,
Without paying so heavily for it
That joy and pain, like any mother and her unborn child were almost one.
I could hardly bear
The dreams upon the eyes of white geraniums in the dusk,
The thick, close voice of musk,
The jessamine music on the thin night air,

Or, sometimes, my own hands about me anywhere—
The sight of my own face (for it was lovely then) even the scent of my own hair,
Oh! there was nothing, nothing that did not sweep to the high seat
Of laughing gods, and then blow down and beat
My soul into the highway dust, as hoofs do the dropped roses of the street.

I think my body was my soul,
And when we are made thus
Who shall control
Our hands, our eyes, the wandering passion of our feet,
Who shall teach us
To thrust the world out of our heart; to say, till perhaps in death,
When the race is run,
And it is forced from us with our last breath
“Thy will be done”?

If it is Your will that we should be content with the tame, bloodless things.

As pale as angels smirking by, with folded wings.

Oh! I know Virtue, and the peace it brings!

The temperate, well-worn smile

The one man gives you, when you are evermore his own:

And afterwards the child's, for a little while,

With its unknowing and all-seeing eyes

So soon to change, and make you feel how quick

The clock goes round. If one had learned the trick—

(How does one though?) quite early on,

Of long green pastures under placid skies,

One might be walking now with patient truth.

What did we ever care for it, who have asked for youth,

When, oh! my God! this is going or has gone?

There is a portrait of my mother, at nineteen,
With the black spaniel, standing by the garden seat,
The dainty head held high against the painted green

And throwing out the youngest smile, shy, but half haughty and half sweet.
Her picture then: but simply Youth, or simply Spring
To me to-day: a radiance on the wall,
So exquisite, so heart-breaking a thing
Beside the mask that I remember, shrunk and small,
Sapless and lined like a dead leaf,
All that was left of oh! the loveliest face, by time and grief!

And in the glass, last night, I saw a ghost behind my chair—
Yet why remember it, when one can still go moderately gay—?
Or could—with any one of the old crew,
But oh! these boys! the solemn way
They take you and the things they say—
This “I have only as long as you”
When you remind them you are not precisely twenty-two—
Although at heart perhaps—God! if it were
Only the face, only the hair!
If Jim had written to me as he did to-day
A year ago—and now it leaves me cold—
I know what this means, old, old, *old*!
Et avec ça—mais on a vécu, tout se paie.

That is not always true: there was my Mother—(we at least the dead are free!)
Yoked to the man that Father was; yoked to the woman I am, Monty too;
The little portress at the Convent School, stewing in hell so patiently;
The poor, fair boy who shot himself at Aix. And what of me—and what of me?
But I, I paid for what I had, and they for nothing. No, one cannot see
How it shall be made up to them in some serene eternity.
If there were fifty heavens God could not give us back the child who went or
never came;
Here, on our little patch of this great earth, the sun of any darkened day,
Not one of all the starry buds hung on the hawthorn trees of last year’s May,

No shadow from the sloping fields of yesterday;
For every hour they slant across the hedge a different way,
The shadows are never the same.

“Find rest in Him” One knows the parsons’ tags—
Back to the fold, across the evening fields, like any flock of baa-ing sheep:
Yes, it may be, when He has shorn, led us to slaughter, torn the bleating soul in
us to rags,
For so He giveth His beloved sleep.
Oh! He will take us stripped and done,
Driven into His heart. So we are won:
Then safe, safe are we? in the shelter of His everlasting wings—
I do not envy Him his victories, His arms are full of broken things.

But I shall not be in them. Let Him take
The finer ones, the easier to break.
And they are not gone, yet, for me, the lights, the colours, the perfumes,
Though now they speak rather in sumptuous rooms,
In silks and in gem-like wines;
Here, even, in this corner where my little candle shines
And overhead the lancet-window glows
With golds and crimsons you could almost drink
To know how jewels taste, just as I used to think
There was the scent in every red and yellow rose
Of all the sunsets. But this place is grey,
And much too quiet. No one here,
Why, this is awful, this is fear!
Nothing to see, no face.
Nothing to hear except your heart beating in space
As if the world was ended. Dead at last!
Dead soul, dead body, tied together fast.
These to go on with and alone, to the slow end:

No one to sit with, really, or to speak to, friend to friend:
Out of the long procession, black or white or red
Not one left now to say “Still I am here, then see you, dear, lay here your head.”
Only the doll’s house looking on the Park
To-night, all nights, I know, when the man puts the lights out, very dark.
With, upstairs, in the blue and gold box of a room, just the maids’ footsteps
overhead,
Then utter silence and the empty world—the room—the bed—

The corpse! No, not quite dead, while this cries out in me,
But nearly: very soon to be
A handful of forgotten dust—
There must be someone. Christ! there must,
Tell me there *will* be someone. Who?
If there were no one else, could it be You?

How old was Mary out of whom you cast
So many devils? Was she young or perhaps for years
She had sat staring, with dry eyes, at this and that man going past
Till suddenly she saw You on the steps of Simon’s house
And stood and looked at You through tears.
I think she must have known by those
The thing, for what it was that had come to her.
For some of us there is a passion, I suppose
So far from earthly cares and earthly fears
That in its stillness you can hardly stir
Or in its nearness, lift your hand,
So great that you have simply got to stand
Looking at it through tears, through tears
Then straight from these there broke the kiss,
I think You must have known by this
The thing, for what it was, that had come to You:

She did not love You like the rest,
It was in her own way, but at the worst, the best,
She gave you something altogether new.
And through it all, from her, no word,
She scarcely saw You, scarcely heard:
Surely You knew when she so touched You with her hair,
Or by the wet cheek lying there,
And while her perfume clung to You from head to feet all through the day
That You can change the things for which we care,
But even You, unless You kill us, not the way.

This, then was peace for her, but passion too.
I wonder was it like a kiss that once I knew,
The only one that I would care to take
Into the grave with me, to which if there were afterwards, to wake.
Almost as happy as the carved dead
In some dim chancel lying head by head
We slept with it, but face to face, the whole night through—
One breath, one throbbing quietness, as if the thing behind our lips was endless
life,
Lost, as I woke, to hear in the strange earthly dawn, his “Are you there?”
And lie still, listening to the wind outside, among the firs.

So Mary chose the dream of Him for what was left to her of night and day,
It is the only truth: it is the dream in us that neither life nor death nor any other
thing can take away:
But if she had not touched Him in the doorway of the dream could she have
cared so much?
She was a sinner, we are what we are: the spirit afterwards, but first, the touch.

And He has never shared with me my haunted house beneath the trees
Of Eden and Calvary, with its ghosts that have not any eyes for tears,

And the happier guests who would not see, or if they did, remember these,
 Though they lived there a thousand years.
Outside, too gravely looking at me, He seems to stand,
 And looking at Him, if my forgotten spirit came
 Unwillingly back, what could it claim
 Of those calm eyes, that quiet speech,
 Breaking like a slow tide upon the beach,
 The scarred, not quite human hand?—
Unwillingly back to the burden of old imaginings
 When it has learned so long not to think, not to be,
Again, again it would speak as it has spoken to me of things
 That I shall not see!

I cannot bear to look at this divinely bent and gracious head:
 When I was small I never quite believed that He was dead:
 And at the Convent school I used to lie awake in bed
Thinking about His hands. It did not matter what they said,
He was alive to me, so hurt, so hurt! And most of all in Holy Week
 When there was no one else to see
I used to think it would not hurt me too, so terribly,
 If He had ever seemed to notice me
 Or, if, for once, He would only speak.

EXSPECTO RESURRECTIONEM

OH! King who hast the key
Of that dark room,
The last which prisons us but held not Thee,
Thou know'st its gloom.
Dost Thou a little love this one
Shut in to-night,
Young and so piteously alone,
Cold—out of sight?
Thou know'st how hard and bare
The pillow of that new-made narrow bed,
Then leave not there
So dear a head!

ON THE ROAD TO THE SEA

WE passed each other, turned and stopped for half an hour, then went our way,
I who make other women smile did not make you—
But no man can move mountains in a day.
So this hard thing is yet to do.

But first I want your life:—before I die I want to see
The world that lies behind the strangeness of your eyes,
There is nothing gay or green there for my gathering, it may be,
Yet on brown fields there lies
A haunting purple bloom: is there not something in grey skies
And in grey sea?
I want what world there is behind your eyes,
I want your life and you will not give it to me.

Now, if I look, I see you walking down the years,
Young, and through August fields—a face, a thought, a swinging dream
perched on a stile—;
I would have liked (so vile we are!) to have taught you tears
But most to have made you smile.

To-day is not enough or yesterday: God sees it all—
Your length on sunny lawns, the wakeful rainy nights—; tell me—; (how vain to
ask),
but it is not a question—just a call—;
Show me then, only your notched inches climbing up the garden wall,
I like you best when you were small.

Is this a stupid thing to say

Not having spent with you one day?
No matter; I shall never touch your hair
Or hear the little tick behind your breast.
Still it is there,
And as a flying bird
Brushes the branches where it may not rest
I have brushed your hand and heard
The child in you: I like that best

So small, so dark, so sweet; and were you also then too grave and wise?
Always I think. Then put your far off little hand in mine;—Oh! let it rest;
I will not stare into the early world beyond the opening eyes,
Or vex or scare what I love best.

But I want your life before mine bleeds away—
Here—not in heavenly hereafters—soon,—
I want your smile this very afternoon,
(The last of all my vices, pleasant people used to say,
I wanted and I sometimes got—the Moon!)

You know, at dusk, the last bird's cry,
And round the house the flap of the bat's low flight,
Trees that go black against the sky
And then—how soon the night!

No shadow of you on any bright road again,
And at the darkening end of this—what voice? whose kiss? As if you'd say!
It is not I who have walked with you, it will not be I who take away
Peace, peace, my little handful of the gleaner's grain
From your reaped fields at the shut of day.

Peace! Would you not rather die
Reeling,—with all the cannons at your ear?

So, at least, would I,
And I may not be here
To-night, to-morrow morning or next year.
Still I will let you keep your life a little while,
See dear?
I have made you smile.

THE SUNLIT HOUSE

WHITE through the gate it gleamed and slept
In shuttered sunshine: the parched garden flowers
Their fallen petals from the beds unswept,
Like children unloved and ill-kept
Dreamed through the hours.
Two blue hydrangeas by the blistered door, burned brown,
Watched there and no one in the town
Cared to go past it night or day,
Though why this was they wouldn't say.
But, I the stranger, knew that I must stay,
Pace up the weed-grown paths and down,
Till one afternoon—there is just a doubt—
But I fancy I heard a tiny shout—
From an upper window a bird flew out—
And I went my way.

THE SHADE-CATCHERS

I THINK they were about as high

As haycocks are. They went running by
Catching bits of shade in the sunny street:
“I’ve got one,” cried sister to brother.

“I’ve got two.” “Now I’ve got another.”
But scudding away on their little bare feet,
They left the shade in the sunny street.

LE SACRÉ-CŒUR (*Montmartre*)

IT is dark up here on the heights,
Between the dome and the stars it is quiet too,
While down there under the crowded lights
Flares the importunate face of you,
Dear Paris of the hot white hands, the scarlet lips, the scented hair,
Une jolie fille à vendre, très cher;
A thing of gaiety, a thing of sorrow,
Bought to-night, possessed, and tossed
Back to the mart again to-morrow,
Worth and over, what you cost;
While half your charm is that you are
Withal, like some unpurchasable star,
So old, so young and infinite and lost.

It is dark on the dome-capped hill,
Serenely dark, divinely still,
Yet here is the Man who bought you first
Dying of his immortal smart,
Your Lover, the King with the broken heart,
Who while you, feasting, drink your fill,
Pass round the cup
Not looking up,
Calls down to you, "I thirst."

"A king with a broken heart! *Mon Dieu!*
One breaks so many, *cela peut se croire,*
To remember all *c'est la mer à boire,*
And the first, *mais comme c'est vieux.*

Perhaps there is still some keepsake—or

One has possibly sold it for a song:

On ne peut pas toujours pleurer les morts,

And this One—He has been dead so long!”

SONG

Love, Love to-day, my dear,
Love is not always here;
Wise maids know how soon grows sere
The greenest leaf of Spring;
But no man knoweth
Whither it goeth
When the wind bloweth
So frail a thing.

Love, Love, my dear, to-day,
If the ship's in the bay,
If the bird has come your way
That sings on summer trees;
When his song faileth
And the ship saileth
No voice availeth
To call back these.

SATURDAY MARKET

BURY your heart in some deep green hollow
Or hide it up in a kind old tree
Better still, give it the swallow
When she goes over the sea.

In Saturday Market there's eggs a'plenty
And dead-alive ducks with their legs tied down,
Grey old gaffers and boys of twenty—
Girls and the women of the town—
Pitchers and sugar-sticks, ribbons and laces,
Posies and whips and dicky-birds' seed,
Silver pieces and smiling faces,
In Saturday Market they've all they need.

What were you showing in Saturday Market
That set it grinning from end to end
Girls and gaffers and boys of twenty—?
Cover it close with your shawl, my friend—
Hasten you home with the laugh behind you,
Over the down—, out of sight,
Fasten your door, though no one will find you
No one will look on a Market night.

See, you, the shawl is wet, take out from under
The red dead thing—. In the white of the moon
On the flags does it stir again? Well, and no wonder!
Best make an end of it; bury it soon.
If there is blood on the hearth who'll know it?

Or blood on the stairs,
When a murder is over and done why show it?
In Saturday Market nobody cares.

Then lie you straight on your bed for a short, short weeping
And still, for a long, long rest,
There's never a one in the town so sure of sleeping
As you, in the house on the down with a hole in your breast.

Think no more of the swallow,
Forget, you, the sea,
Never again remember the deep green hollow
Or the top of the kind old tree!

ARRACOMBE WOOD

SOME said, because he wud'n spaik
Any words to women but Yes and No,
Nor put out his hand for Parson to shake
He mun be bird-witted. But I do go
By the lie of the barley that he did sow,
And I wish no better thing than to hold a rake
Like Dave, in his time, or to see him mow.

Put up in churchyard a month ago,
"A bitter old soul," they said, but it wadn't so.
His heart were in Arracombe Wood where he'd used to go
To sit and talk wi' his shadder till sun went low,
Though what it was all about us'll never know.
And there baint no mem'ry in the place
Of th' old man's footmark, nor his face;
Arracombe Wood do think more of a crow—
'Will be violets there in the Spring: in Summer time the spider's lace;
And come the Fall, the whizzle and race
Of the dry, dead leaves when the wind gies chase;
And on the Eve of Christmas, fallin' snow.

SEA LOVE

TIDE be runnin' the great world over:

T'was only last June month I mind that we
Was thinkin' the toss and the call in the breast of the lover
So everlastin' as the sea.

Heer's the same little fishes that sputter and swim,
Wi' the moon's old glim on the grey, wet sand;
An' him no more to me nor me to him
Than the wind goin' over my hand.

THE ROAD TO KÉRITY

Do you remember the two old people we passed on the road to Kérity,
Resting their sack on the stones, by the drenched wayside,
Looking at us with their lightless eyes through the driving rain, and then out
again
To the rocks, and the long white line of the tide:
Frozen ghosts that were children once, husband and wife, father, and mother,
Looking at us with those frozen eyes; have you ever seen anything quite so
chilled or so old?
But we—with our arms about each other,
We did not feel the cold!

I HAVE BEEN THROUGH THE GATES

HIS heart, to me, was a place of palaces and pinnacles and shining towers;

I saw it then as we see things in dreams,—I do not remember how long I
slept;

I remember the trees, and the high, white walls, and how the sun was always on
the towers;

The walls are standing to-day, and the gates: I have been through the gates, I
have groped, I have crept

Back, back. There is dust in the streets, and blood; they are empty; darkness is
over them;

His heart is a place with the lights gone out, forsaken by great winds and the
heavenly rain, unclean and unswept,

Like the heart of the holy city, old, blind, beautiful Jerusalem,
Over which Christ wept.

THE CENOTAPH

NOT yet will those measureless fields be green again

Where only yesterday the wild, sweet, blood of wonderful youth was shed;
There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too deep a stain,
Though for ever over it we may speak as proudly as we may tread.

But here, where the watchers by lonely hearths from the thrust of an inward
sword have more slowly bled,

We shall build the Cenotaph: Victory, winged, with Peace, winged too, at the
column's head.

And over the stairway, at the foot—oh! here, leave desolate, passionate hands to
spread

Violets, roses, and laurel, with the small, sweet, twinkling country things

Speaking so wistfully of other Springs,

From the little gardens of little places where son or sweetheart was born and
bred.

In splendid sleep, with a thousand brothers

To lovers—to mothers

Here, too, lies he:

Under the purple, the green, the red,

It is all young life: it must break some women's hearts to see

Such a brave, gay coverlet to such a bed!

Only, when all is done and said,

God is not mocked and neither are the dead.

For this will stand in our Market-place—

Who'll sell, who'll buy

(Will you or I

Lie each to each with the better grace)?

While looking into every busy whore's and huckster's face

As they drive their bargains, is the Face

Of God: and some young, piteous, murdered face.