CTOBER drew our elders to a house,
That mid the tangled vines, and
clamorous
Glad vintagers, stood calm, slim-
pillared, white,
As though it fain would hide away
from sight
The joy that through the sad lost
autumn rung.
As hot the day was, as when summer
hung,
With worn feet, on the last step of July,
Ashamed to cast its flowery raiment by:
Round the old men the white porch-pillars stood,
Gold-stained, as with the sun, streaked as with blood,
Blood of the earth, at least; and to and fro
Before them did the high-girt maidens go,
Eager, bright-eyed, and careless of to-morn;
And young men with them, nowise made forlorn
By love and autumn-tide; and in nowise
Content to pray for love with hopeless eyes,
Close lips, and timid hands; rather, indeed,
Lest youth and life should fail them at their need,
At what light joyous semblance of him ran
Amidst the vines, 'twixt eyes of maid and man,
Wilfully blind they caught. But now at last,
As in the apple-gathering tide late past,
So would the elders do now; in a while,
He who should tell the tale, with a grave smile,
And eyes fixed on the fairest damsel there,
Began to say: Ye blithe folk well might bear
To hearken to a sad tale; yet to-day
No heart I have to cast all hope away
From out my history: so be warned hereby,
Nor wait unto the end, deliciously
To nurse your pity; for the end is good
And peaceful, howso buffeting and rude
Winds, waves, and men were, ere the end was done.
The sweet eyes that his eyes were set upon
Were hid by shamefast lids as he did speak,
And redder colour burned on her fresh cheek,
And her lips smiled, as, with a half-sad sigh,
He 'gan to tell this lovesome history.
THE STORY OF ACONTIUS AND CYDIPPE.

The Argument.
A CERTAIN MAN COMING TO DELOS BEHELD A NOBLE DAMSEL THERE, AND WAS SMitten WITH THE LOVE OF HER, AND MADE ALL THINGS OF NO ACCOUNT BUT THE WINNING OF HER; WHICH AT LAST HE BROUGHT ABOUT IN STRANGE WISE.

CERTAIN island-man of old,
Well fashioned, young, and wise and bold,
Voyaged awhile in Grecian seas,
Till Delos of the Cyclades.1
His keel made, and ashore he went; 5
And, wandering with no fixed intent,2
With others of the shipmen there,
They came into a garden fair,
Too sweet for sea-tossed men, I deem,
If they would 'scape the lovesome dream
That youth and May cast o'er the earth;
If they would keep their careless mirth
For hands of old to deal withal.
So in that close did it befall
That 'neath the trees well wrought of May
These sat amidstmost of the day
Not dry-lipped, and belike a-strain
All gifts of that sweet time to gain,

1Delos of the Cyclades: Delos, a small Mediterranean island regarded as the center of a larger cluster called the Cyclades, was the legendary birthplace of Apollo and Diana. Lemprière's Acontius visited Delos "to see the sacrifices of Diana." Other major temples to Diana came into existence in Aricia, near present-day Nemi in Italy, and in the Avertein in Rome. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century excavations strongly suggested that ancient Mycenaean ceremonies may already have been devoted to Artemis (Diana), and uncovered a later temple site containing gold, ivory, and bronze near the "Sacred Harbor" in 1929. According to Morris's descriptions of the island (ll. 8-34), its ambiance awakened readiness for love.

2with no fixed intent: As mentioned in the last note, Lemprière's Acontius visited the island with the express intent to offer worship.

And yet not finding all enow
That at their feet the May did throw;
But longing, half-expecting still
Some new delight their cup to fill,
Yea, overfill, to make all strange
Their lazy joy with piercing change.
Therewith their youngest, even he
I told of first, all suddenly
'Gan sing a song' that fitted well
The thoughts that each man's heart did tell
Unto itself, and as his throat
Moved with the music, did he note
Through half-shut eyes a company
Of white-armed maidens drawing nigh,
Well marshalled, as if there they went
Upon some serious work intent.

Song.

AIR is the night and fair the day,
Now April is forgot of May,
Now into June May falls away;
Fair day, fair night, 0 give me back
The tide that all fair things did lack
Except my love, except my sweet!
Blow back, 0 wind! thou art not kind,
Though thou art sweet; thou hast no mind
Her hair about my sweet to wind;
0 flowery swan, though thou art bright,
I praise thee not for thy delight,
Thou hast not kissed her silver feet.

Thou know'st her not, 0 rustling tree,
What dost thou then to shadow me,
Whose shade her breast did never see?
0 flowers, in vain ye bow adown!
Ye have not felt her odorous gown
Brush past your heads my lips to meet.

3'Gan sing a song: There were only three other "internal singers" in all the published tales and preliminary drafts of The Earthly Paradise: John, in "The Land East of the Sun"; Bharāīm, in "The Man Who Never Laughed Again"; and Orpheus, in the completed but unpublished "Story of Orpheus and Eurydice."
Flow on, great river; thou mayst deem
That far away, a summer stream,
Thou sawest her limbs amidst thee gleam,
And kissed her foot, and kissed her knee,
Yet get thee swift unto the sea!
With nought of true thou wilt me greet.

And thou that men call by my name,
O helpless one, hast thou no shame
That thou must ever look the same
As while agone, as while agone,
When thou and she were left alone,
And hands, and lips, and tears did meet?

Grow weak and pine, lie down to die,
O body in thy misery,
Because short time and sweet goes by;
O foolish heart, how weak thou art!
Break, break, because thou needs must part
From thine own love, from thine own sweet!

HAT was it that through half-shut eyes
Pierced to his heart, and made him rise
As one the July storm awakes
When through the dawn the thunder breaks?
What was it that the languor clove,
Wherewith unhurt he sang of love?

How was it that his eyes had caught
Her eyes alone of all; that nought
The others were but images,
While she, while she amidst these
Not first or last, when she was gone,
Why must he feel so left alone?
An image in his heart there was
Of how amidst them one did pass
Kind-eyed and soft, and looked at him;
And now the world was waxen dim
About him, and of little worth
Seemed all the wondrous things of earth,

And fain would he be all alone,
To wonder why his mirth was gone;
To wonder why it seemed so strange
That in nought else was any change,
When his old life seemed passed away,
And joy in narrow compass lay,
He scarce knew where. With laugh and song
His fellows mocked the dim world's wrong,
Nor noted him as changed o'ermuch;
Or if their jests his mood did touch,
To his great wonder lightly they
By stammering word were turned away.
WELL, from the close they went at last,
And through the noble town they passed,
And saw the wonders wrought of old
Therein, and heard famed stories told
Of many a thing; and as a dream
Did all things to Acontius seem.
But when night's wings came o'er that place,
And men slept, piteous seemed his case
And wonderful, that therewithal
Night helped him not. From wall to wall
Night-long his weary eyes he turned,
Till in the east the daylight burned.
And then the pang he would not name,
Stung by the world's change, fiercer came
Across him, and in haste he rose,
Driven unto that flowery close
By restless longing, knowing not
What part therein his heart had got,
Nor why he thitherward must wend.

4wonders wrought of old: Delos's known prehistory dates from Neolithic pre-Hellenic inhabitants, and it later became the headquarters of the maritime Delian league, a center of the Aegean corn- and slave trade, and the target of pirate raids, in one of which the island was sacked in the first century B.C. Morris may have intended Acontius's passing remark that he is fleeing impression (l. 502) as an allusion to such an incursion. Among the "wonders" Acontius might have seen were its temple of Apollo (mentioned by Virgil in *Aenid* III, trans. Morris, ll. 83ff.), and a palm tree, near Artemis's sanctuary, which the goddess was said to have grasped when she gave birth to Apollo (*Odyssey* VI, trans. Morris, ll. 161-62), and (in some versions) Artemis.
AND now had night's last hope an end,
When to the garden-gate he came.
In grey light did the tulip flame
Over the sward made grey with dew;
And as unto the place he drew
Where yesterday he sang that song,
The ouzel-cock sang sweet and strong,
Though almost ere the sky grew grey
Had he begun to greet the day.
There now, as by some strong spell bound,
Acontius paced, that spot of ground,
Restless, with wild thoughts in his head;
While round about the white-thorn shed
Sweet fragrance, and the lovely place,
Lonely of mankind, lacked no grace
That Love for his own home would have.
Well sang the birds, the light wind drave
Through the fresh leaves, untouched as yet
By summer and its vain regret;
Well piped the wind, and as it swept
The garden through, no sweet thing slept,
Nor might the scent of blossoms hide
The fresh smell of the country-side
Borne on its breath; and the green bay,
Whose breast it kissed so far away,
Spake sometimes yet amid the noise
Of rustling leaves and song-birds' voice.
So there awhile our man did pace,
Still wondering at his piteous case
That, certes, not to anyone
Had happed before; awhile agone
So pleased to watch the world pass by
With all its changing imagery;
So hot to play his part therein,
From each day's death good life to win;
And now, with a great sigh, he saw
The yellow level sunbeams draw
Across the wet grass, as the sun
First smote the trees, and day begun
Smiled on the world, whose summer bliss
As from the daisies of the grass  
She raised her eyes, and looked around  
Till the astonished eyes she found  
That saw not aught but even her.  
THERE in a silence hard to bear,  
Impossible to break, they stood,  
With faces changed by love, and blood  
So stirred, that many a year of life  
Had been made eager with that strife  
Of minutes; and so nigh she was  
He saw the little blue veins pass  
Over her heaving breast; and she  
The trembling of his lips might see,  
The rising tears within his eyes.  
THEN standing there in mazed wise  
He saw the black-heart tulips bow  
Before her knees, as wavering now  
A half-step unto him she made.  
With a glad cry, though half afraid,  
He stretched his arms out, and the twain,  
E’en at the birth of love’s great pain,  
Each unto each so nigh were grown,  
That little lacked to make them one;  
That little lacked but they should be  
Wedded that hour; knee touching knee,  
Cheek laid to cheek. So seldom fare  
Love’s tales, that men are wise to dare;  
Rather, dull hours must pass away,  
And heavy day succeed to day,  
And much be changed by misery,  
Ere two that love may draw anigh;  
And so with these. What fear or shame  
Twixt longing heart and body came  
’Twere hard to tell; they lingered yet.  
Well-nigh they deemed that they had met,  
And that the worst was o’er; e’en then  
There drew anigh the sound of men,  
Loud laugh, harsh talk. With ill surprise  
He saw fear change her lovesome eyes;  
He knew her heart was thinking now

Of other folk, and ills that grow  
From overmuch of love; but he  
Cried out amidst his agony,  
Yet stood there helpless, and withal  
A mist across his eyes did fall,  
And all seemed lost indeed, as now  
Slim tulip-stem and hawthorn-bough  
Slipped rustling back into their place,  
And all the glory of her face  
Had left the world, at least awhile,  
And once more all was base and vile.  
AND yet indeed, when that sharp pain  
Was something dulled, and once again  
Thought helped him, then to him it seemed  
That she had dreamed as he had dreamed,  
And, hoping not for any sight  
Of love, had come made soft by night,  
Made kind by longings unconfessed,  
To give him good hope of the best.  
Then pity came to help his love,  
For now, indeed, he knew whereof  
He sickened; pity came, and then  
The fear of the rough sons of men;  
Sore hate of things that needs must part  
The loving heart from loving heart;  
And at each turn it seemed as though  
Fate some huge net round both did throw  
To stay their feet and dim their sight  
Till they were clutched by endless night;  
And then he fain had torn his hair,  
And cried aloud in his despair,  
But stayed himself as still he thought  
How even that should help him nought,  
That helpless patience needs must be  
His loathed fellow. Warily  
He got him then from out the place,  
Made lovely by her scarce-seen face,  
And knew that day what longing meant.  
BUT when the restless daylight went  
From earth’s face, through the weary night
He lay again in just such plight
As on the last night he had lain;
But deemed that he would go again
At daylight to that place of flowers.
So passed the night through all its hours;
But ere the dawn came, weak and worn,
He fell asleep, nor woke that morn
Till all the city was astir;
And waking must he think of her
Stolen to that place to find him not;
Her parted lips, her face flushed hot,
Her panting breast and girt-up gown,
Her sleeve ill-fastened, fallen adown
From one white shoulder, her grey eyes
Fixed in their misery of surprise,
As nought they saw but birds and trees;
Her woeful lingering, as the breeze
Died 'neath the growing sun, and folk
Fresh silence of the morning broke;
And then, the death of hope confessed,
The quivering lip and heaving breast,
The burst of tears, the homeward way
Made hateful by joy past away;
The dreary day made dull and long
By hope deferred and gathering wrong.
All this for him! and thinking thus,
Their twin life seemed so piteous
That all his manhood from him fled,
And cast adown upon the bed
He sobbed and wept full sore, until,
When he of grief had had his fill,
He 'gan to think that he might see
His love, and cure her misery
If she should be in that same place
At that same hour when first her face
Shone on him. So time wore away
Till on the world the high noon lay,
And then at the due place he stood,
Wondering amid his love-sick mood
Which blades of grass her foot had bent;

And there, as to and fro he went,
A certain man who seemed to be
A fisher on the troubled sea, 7
An old man and a poor, came nigh
And greeted him, and said: Hereby
Thou dost well to stand, my son,
Since thy stay here will soon be done,
If of that ship of Crete thou be,
As well I deem. Here shalt thou see
Each day at noon a company
Of all our fairest maids draw nigh;
To such an one each day they go
As best can tell them how to do
In serving of the dreadful queen, 8
Whose servant long years hath she been,
And dwelleth by her chapel fair
Within this close; they shall be here,
E'en while I speak. Wot well, fair son,
Good need it is this should be done,
For whatso hasty word is said
That day unto the moon-crowned maid, 9
For such an oath is held, as though
The whole heart into it did go. 10
Behold, they come! A goodly sight
Shalt thou have seen, e'en if to-night
Thou diest! Grew Acontius wan
As the sea-cliffs, for the old man
Now pointed to the gate, wherethrough
The company of maidens drew
Toward where they stood; Acontius,
With trembling lips, and piteous
Drawn brow, turned toward them, and afar

7 A fisher on the troubled sea: This figure is absent from Morris's sources.
8 the dreadful Queen: Diana, who has held Cydippe in her service for "long years."
9 moon-crowned maid: Diana was also the goddess of the moon.
10 For such an oath is held, as though/ The whole heart into it did go: In Aristaenetus's account of the legend, Cupid, "god of strategem and art," taught Acontius "with wiles the fair to win." Morris's fisher tells Acontius what he most needs to know: that oaths sworn in Diana's temple bind those who utter them.
Beheld her like the morning-star
Amid the weary stars of night.
Midmost the band went his delight,
Clad in a gown of blue, whereon
Were wrought fresh flowers, as newly won
From the May fields; with one hand she
Touched a fair fellow lovingly,
The other, hung adown, did hold
An ivory harp well strung with gold;
Gaily she went, nor seemed as though
One troublous thought her heart did know.
Acontius sickened as she came
'Anigh him, and with heart aflame
For very rage of jealousy,
He heard her talking merrily
Unto her fellow, the first word
From those sweet lips he yet had heard,
Nor might he know what thing she said;
Yet presently she turned her head
And saw him, and her talk she stopped
E'en therewith, and her lids down dropped,
And trembling amid love and shame
Over her face a bright flush came;
Nathless without another look
She passed him by, whose whole frame shook
With passion as an aspen leaf.
BUT she being gone, all blind with grief,
He stood there long, and muttered: Why
Would she not note my misery?
Had it been then so hard to turn
And show me that her heart did yearn
For something nigher like mine own?
O well content to leave me lone,
O well content to stand apart,
And nurse a pleasure in thine heart,
The joy of being so well beloved,
Still taking care thou art not moved
By aught like trouble yet beware,
For thou mayst fall for all thy care!
SO from the place he turned away;

Some secret spell he deemed there lay,
Some bar unseen, athwart that grass,
O'er which his feet might never pass
Whatso his heart bade. Hour by hour
Passed of the day, and ever slower
They seemed to drag, and ever he
Thought of her last look wearily;
Now meant it that, now meant it this;
Now bliss, and now the death of bliss.
But O, if once again, he thought,
Face unto face we might be brought,
Then doubt I not but I should read
What at her hands would be my meed,
And in such wise my life would guide;
Either the weary end to bide
E'en as I might, or strengthen me
To take the sweet felicity,
Casting by thought of fear or death:
But now when I must hold my breath,
Who knows how long, while scale mocks scale
With trembling joy, and trembling bale;
O hard to bear! O hard to bear!
So spake he, knowing bitter fear
And hopeful longing's sharp distress,
But not the weight of hopelessness.
AND now there passed by three days more,
And to the flowery place that bore
The sharp and sweet of his desire
Each day he went, his heart afire
With foolish hope. Each day he saw
The band of damsels toward him draw,
And trembling said: Now, now at last
Surely her white arms will be cast
About my neck before them all;
Or at the worst her eyes will call
My feet to follow, Can it be
That she can bear my misery,
When of my heart she surely knows?
AND every day midmost the close
They met, and on the first day she
Did look upon him furtively
In loving wise; and through his heart
Love sent a pleasure-pointed dart:
A minute, and away she went,
And left him new wise more content
Than erst he had been. The next day
Needs must she flush and turn away
Before their eyes met, and he stood
When she was gone in wretched mood,
Faint with desire. The third day came,
And then his hungry eyes, a flame
With longing wild, beheld her pass
As though amidst a dream she was;
Then e'en ere she had left the place
With his clenched hand he smote his face,
And void of everything but pain,
Through the thronged streets the sea did gain,
Not recking aught, and there at last
His body on the sand he cast,
Nigh the green waves, till in the end
Some thought the crushing cloud did rend,
And down the tears rushed from his eyes
For ruth of his own miseries;
And with the tears came thought again
To mingle with his formless pain
And hope withal; but yet more fear,
For he bethought him now that near
The time drew for his ship to sail.
Yet was the thought of some avail
To heal the unreason of his heart,
For now he needs must play a part
Wherein was something to be done,
If he would not be left alone
Life-long, with love unsatisfied.
So now he rose, and looking wide
Along the edges of the bay,
Saw where his fellows' tall ship lay
Anigh the haven, and a boat
Twixt shore and ship-side did there float
With balanced oars; but on the shroud

A shipman stood, and shouted loud
Unto the boat; words lost, in sooth,
But which no less the trembling youth
Deemed certainly of him must be
And where he was; then suddenly
He turned, though none pursued, and fled
Along the sands, nor turned his head
Till round a headland he did reach
A long cove within a sandy beach;
Then looking landward he saw where
A streamlet left the sea-cliffs bare,
Making a little valley green,
Beset with thorn-trees; and between
The yellow strand and cliff's grey brow
Was built a cottage white and low
Within a little close, upon
The green slope that the stream had won
From rock and sea; and thereby stood
A fisher, whose grey homespun hood
Covered white locks: so presently
Acontius to that man drew nigh,
Because he seemed the man to be
Who told of that fair company,
Deeming that more might there be learned
About the flame wherewith he burned.
WITHELV he found it even so,
And that the old man him did know,
And greeted him, and fell to talk,
As such folk will of things that balk
The poor man's fortune, waves and winds,
And changing days and great men's minds;
And at the last it so betell
That this Acontius came to tell
A tale unto the man, how he
Was fain to 'scape the uneasy sea,
And those his fellows, and would give
Gold unto him, that he might live
In hiding there, till they had sailed.
Not strange it was if he prevailed
In few words, though the elder smiled
As not all utterly beguiled,  
Nor curious therewithal to know 
Such things as he cared not to show.  
SO there alone a while he dwelt,  
And lonely there, all torment felt,  
As still his longing grew and grew;  
And ever as hot noontide drew  
From dewy dusk and sunny morn,  
He felt himself the most forlorn;  
For then the best he pictured her:  
Now the noon wind, the scent-bearer,  
Is busy midst her gown, he said;  
'The fresh-plucked flowers about her head  
Are drooping now with their desire;  
The grass with unconsuming fire  
Faints 'neath the pressure of her feet;  
The honey-bees her lips would meet,  
But fail for fear; the swift's bright eyes  
Are eager round the mysteries  
Of the fair hidden fragrant breast,  
Where now alone may I know rest.

Ah pity me, thou pitiless!  
Bless me, who know'st not how to bless;  
Fall from thy height, thou highest of all,  
On me a very wretch to call!  
Thou, to whom all things fate doth give,  
Find without me thou canst not live!  
Desire me, O thou world's desire.  
Light thy pure heart at this base fire!  
Save me, of whom thou knowest nought,  
Of whom thou never hadst a thought!  
O queen of all the world, stoop down!  
Before my feet cast thou thy crown!  
Speak to me, as I speak to thee!  
HE walked beside the summer sea  
As thus he spake, at eventide;

11swift: Swifts are small birds of the family Apodidae, which superficially resemble swallows, but are more closely related to hummingbirds.

12world's desire: In the unpublished Earthly Paradise tale “The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice,” Morris described Eurydice as “the desire of all the World” (CW 24:241); cf. also note 81, p. 119 above.

Across the waste of waters wide  
The dead sun's light a wonder cast,  
That into grey night faded fast;  
And ever as the shadows fell,  
More formless grew the unbreaking swell  
Far out to sea; more strange and white,  
More vocal through the hushing night,  
The narrow line of changing foam,  
That 'twixt the sand and fishes' home  
Writhe, driven onward by the tide:  
So slowly by the ocean's side  
He paced, till dreamy passion grew;  
The soft wind o'er the sea that blew,  
Dried the cold tears upon his face;  
Kindly if sad seemed that lone place,  
Yea, in a while it scarce seemed lone,  
When now at last the white moon shone  
Upon the sea, and showed that still  
It quivered, though a moveless hill  
A little while ago it seemed.  
SO, turning homeward now, he dreamed  
Of many a help and miracle,  
That in the olden time befell  
Unto love's servants; e'en when he  
Had clomb the hill anigh the sea,  
And reached the hut now litten bright,  
Not utterly with food and light  
And common talk his dream passed by.  
Yea, and with all this, presently  
'Gan tell the old man when it was  
That the great feast should come to pass  
Unto Diana: yea, and then  
He, among all the sons of men,  
E'en of that very love must speak;  
Then grew Acontius faint and weak,  
And his mouth twitched, and tears began

13the great feast: On August 13th, Diana's feast-day, women carried torches in honor of Diana's role as fertility goddess. A more detailed sketch of these appears in 'Bellerophon in Lycia," ll. 863-92, where three maidens are "redeemed" by animal sacrifices and gifts of clothing.
To pain his eyes; for the old man,
As one possessed, went on to tell
Of all the loveliness that well
Acontius wotted of; and now
For the first time he came to know
What name among her folk she had,
And, half in cruel pain, half glad,
He heard the old man say: Indeed
This sweet Cydippe hath great need
Of one to save her life from woe. 14
Because or ere the brook shall flow
Narrow with August 'twixt its banks,
Her folk, to win Diana's thanks,
Shall make her hers, and she shall be
Honoured of all folk certainly,
But unwed, shrunk as time goes on
Into a sour-hearted crone.
Acontius 'gan the room to pace
Ere he had done; with curious face
The old man gazed, but uttered nought;
Then in his heart Acontius thought:
Ah when her image passeth by
Like a sweet breath, the blinded eye
Gains sight, the deaf man heareth well,
The dumb man lovesome tales can tell,
Hopes dead for long rise from their tombs,
The barren like a garden bloom; 15
And I alone, I sit and wait,
With deedless hands, on black-winged fate.
AND so, when men had done with day,
Sleepless upon his bed he lay,

14 'sweet Cydippe hath great need/ Of one to save her life from woe: Aristaenetus does not clarify why Cydippe "join'd the maiden train" (457), but other ancient versions of the tale explain that the "train" offered provisional refuge from another suitor. This motive gives a more concrete sense, for example, to Cydippe's rhetorical question in the Herodis, whether "any place [could] be safer than [Diana's temple]" (299, 301). Cydippe's mother, by contrast, forces her vocation in Morris's tale, and her principal motivation is pride, not concern for her daughter's wishes or her safety.

15 'barren like a garden bloom: compare "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1), and "He will make her . . . desert like the garden of the Lord" (Isaiah 51:3).

Striving to think if aught might move
Hard fate to give him his own love;
And thought of what would do belike,
And said: To-morrow will I strike
Before the iron groweth dull.
And so, with mind of strange things full,
Just at the dawn he fell asleep,
Yet as the shadows 'gan to creep
Up the long slope before the sun,
His blinking, troubled sleep was done;
And with a start he sat upright,
Now deeming that the glowing light
Was autumn's very sun; that all
Of ill had happed that could befall.
Yet fully waked up at the last,
From out the cottage-door he passed,
And saw how the old fisherman
His colb 6 through the low surf ran
And shouted greeting from the sea;
Then 'neath an ancient apple-tree,
That on the little grassy slope
Stood speckled with the autumn's hope,
He cast him down, and slept again;
And sleeping dreamed about his pain,
Yet in the same place seemed to be,
Beneath the ancient apple-tree.
So in his dream he heard a sound
Of singing fill the air around,
And yet saw nought; till in a while
The twinkling sea's uncounted smile
Was hidden by a rosy cloud,
That seemed some wondrous thing to shroud,
For in its midst a bright spot grew
Brighter and brighter, and still drew
Unto Acontius, till at last
A woman from amidst it passed,
And, wonderful in nakedness,
With rosy feet the grass did press,

6 'colb: a flat-bottomed fishing boat with a lug-sail on a raking mast, and a rudder that extended below the keel.
And drew anigh; he durst not move
Or speak, because the Queen of Love
He deemed he knew; she smiled on him,
And, even as his dream waxed dim,
Upon the tree trunk gnarled and grey
A slim hand for a while did lay;
Then all waxed dark, and then once more
He lay there as he lay before,
But all burnt up the greensward was,
And songless did the throstle pass
'Twixt dark green leaf and golden fruit;”
And at the old tree’s knotted root
The basket of the gatherer
Lay, as though autumn-tide were there.
Then in his dream he thought he strove
To speak that sweet name of his love
Late learned, but could not; for away
Sleep passed, and now in sooth he lay
Awake within the shadow sweet,
The sunlight creeping o’er his feet.
THEN he arose to think upon
The plans that he from night had won,
And still in each day found a flaw,
That night’s half-dreaming eyes ne’er saw,
And far away all good hope seemed,
And the strange dream he late had dreamed
Of no account he made, but thought
That it had come and gone for nought.
AND now the time went by till he
Knew that his keel had put to sea,
Yet after that a day or two
He waited, ere he dared to do
The thing he longed for most, and meet
His love within the garden sweet.
He saw her there, he saw a smile
The paleness of her face beguile

Before she saw him; then his heart
With pity and remorse ’gan smart;
But when at last she turned her head,
And he beheld the bright flush spread
Over her face, and once again
The pallor come, ’twixt joy and pain
His heart was torn; he turned away,
Thinking: Long time ere that worst day
That unto her a misery
Will be, yea even as unto me,
And many a thing ere then may fall,
Or peaceful death may end it all.
THE host that night his heart did bless
With praises of her loveliness
Once more, and said: Yea, fools men are
Who work themselves such bitter care
That they may live when they are dead;
Her mother’s stern cold hardihead
Shall make this sweet but dead-alone;
For who in all the world shall strive
With such an oath as she shall make?
ACONTIUS, for self-pity’s sake,
Must steal forth to the night to cry
Some wordless prayer of agony;
And yet, when he was come again,
Of more of such-like speech was fain,
And needs must stammer forth some word,
That once more the old fisher stirred
To speech; who now began to tell
Tales of that oath as things known well
To wise men from the days of old,
Of how a mere chance-word would hold
Some poor wretch as a life-long slave;
Nay, or the very wind that drave
Some garment’s hem, some lock of hair
Against the dreadful altar there,
Had turned a whole sweet life to ill;
So heedfully must all fulfill
Their vows unto the dreadful maid.
Acontius heard the words he said

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17 and golden fruit: apples, ancient fertility-symbols, also evoked the fruit of the Hesperides, the apple of discord thrown by Eris and awarded by Paris to Venus, and the fruit of the Golden Bough at Diana’s temple at Aricia.
Acontius’s use of Venus’s apple also recalls Milanion’s throwing of three of Venus’s apples in front of Atalanta in “Atalanta’s Race.”
As through a thin sleep fraught with dreams,
Yet afterward would fleeting gleams
Of what the old man said confuse
His weary heart, that ne'er was loose
A minute from the bonds of love,
And still of all, strange dreams he wove.
SO the time passed; a brooding life,
That with his love might hold no strife.
Acontius led; he did not spare
With torment vain his soul to tear
By meeting her in that same place:
No fickle hope now changed her face,
No hot desire therein did burn,
Rather it seemed her heart did yearn
With constant sorrow, and such love
As surely might the hard world move.
Ah! shall it? Love shall go its ways,
And sometimes gather useless praise
From joyful hearts, when now at rest
The lover lies, but oftentimes
To hate thereby the world is moved;
But oftentimes the well-beloved
Shall pay the kiss back with a blow,
Shall smile to see the hot tears flow,
Shall answer with scarce-hidden scorn
The bitter words by anguish torn
From such a heart, as fain would rest
Silent until death brings the best.
SO drew the time on to the day
When all hope must be cast away;
Late summer now was come, and still
As heeding neither good or ill
Of living men, the stream ran down
The green slope to the sea-side brown,
Singing its changeless song; still there
Acontius dwelt 'twixt slope-side fair
And changing murmur of the sea.
THE night before all misery
Should be accomplished, red-eyed wan,
He gave unto the ancient man

What wealth he had, and bade farewell
In such a voice as tale doth tell
Unto the wise; then to his bed
He crept, and still his weary head
Tossed on the pillow, till the dawn
The fruitful mist from earth had drawn.
Once more with coming light he slept,
Once more from out his bed he leapt,
Thinking that he had slept too fast,
And that all hope was overpast;
And with that thought he knew indeed
How good is hope to man at need,
Yea, even the least ray thereof.
Then dizzy with the pain of love
He went from out the door, and stood
Silent within the fruitful rood.
Still was the sunny morn and fair,
A scented haze was in the air;
So soft it was, it seemed as spring
Had come once more her arms to fling
About the dying year, and kiss
The lost world into dreams of bliss.
NOW 'neath the tree he sank adown,
Parched was the sward thereby and brown,
Save where about the knotted root
A green place spread. The golden fruit
Hung on the boughs, lay on the ground;
The spring-born thrushes lurked around,
But sang not; yet the stream sang well,
And gentle tales the sea could tell.
Ere sunrise was the fisher gone,
And now his brown-sailed boat alone,
Some league or so from off the shore,
Moved slowly 'neath the sweeping oar.
So soothed by sights and sounds that day,
Sore weary, soon Acontius lay
In deep sleep as he erst had done,
And dreamed once more, nor yet had gone
E'en this time from that spot of ground;
And once more dreaming heard the sound--
Of unseen singers, and once more
A pink-tinged cloud spread thwart the shore,
And a vague memory touched him now
Amidst his sleep; his knitted brow
'Gan to unfold, a happy smile
His long love-languor did beguile
As from the cloud the naked one
Came smiling forth, but not alone;
For now the image of his love,
Clad like the murmuring summer dove,
She held by the slim trembling hand,
And soon he deemed the twain did stand
'Anigh his head. Round Venus' feet"
Outbroke the changing spring-flowers sweet
From the parched earth of autumn-tide;
The long locks round her naked side
The sea-wind drave; lily and rose,
Plucked from the heart of her own close,
Were girdle to her, and did cling,
Mixed with some marvellous golden thing,
About her neck and bosom white,
Sweeter than their shortlived delight.
And all the while, with eyes that bliss
Changed not, her doves brushed past to kiss
The marvel of her limbs; yet strange,
With loveliness that knows no change,
Fair beyond words as she might be,
So fell it by love's mystery
That open-mouthed Acontius lay
In that sweet dream, nor drew away
His eyes from his love's pitying eyes;
And at the last he strove to rise,

And dreamed that touch of hand in hand
Made his heart faint; alas! the band
Of soft sleep, overstrained therewith,
Snapped short, and left him there to writhe
In helpless woe. Yet in a while
Strange thoughts anew did him beguile;
Well-nigh he dreamed again, and saw
The naked goddess toward him draw,
Until the sunshine touched his face,
And stark awake in that same place
He sighed, and rose unto his knee,
And saw beneath the ancient tree,
Close by his hand, an apple lie,
Great, smooth, and golden. Dreamily
He turned it o'er, and in like mood
A long sharp thorn, as red as blood,
He took into his hand, and then,
In language of the Grecian men,
Slowly upon its side he wrote,
As one who thereof took no note,
Acontius will I wed to-day;
Then stealthily across the bay
He glanced, and trembling got him down
With hurried steps unto the town,
Where for the high-tide folk were dight,
And all looked joyous there and bright,
As toward the fane their steps they bent.
And thither, too, Acontius went,
Scarce knowing if on earth or air
His feet were set; he coming there,
Gat nigh the altar standing-place,
And there with haggard eyes 'gan gaze
Upon the image of the maid
Whose wrath makes man and beast afraid.
SO in a while the rites began,
And many a warrior and great man
Served the hard-hearted one, until
Of everything she had her fill
That Gods desire; and, trembling now,
Acontius heard the curved horns blow

18Round Venus' feet: Morris seems to have modelled this scene in part on the well-known image of a flower-decked Venus rising from a shell in Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus," which his lifelong friend Edward Burne-Jones particularly admired, and in part on the clothed figure of Venus in Botticelli's "Primavera," but a description of Venus's birth appeared in Hesiod. Morris painted a representation of Venus in the early 1870's that now hangs at Kelmscott Manor (William Morris: Art and Kelmscott, ed. Linda Parry, 35-36 and col. pl. II), and kept a print of "Primavera" in his study at Kelmscott House.
That heralded the damsels' band;  
And scarce for faintness might he stand,  
When now, the minstrels' gowns of gold  
Being past, he could withal behold  
White raiment fluttering, and he saw  
The fellows of his own love draw  
Unto the altar; here and there  
The mothers of those maidens fair  
Went by them, proud belike, and fain  
To note the honour they should gain.

Now scarce with hungry eyes might he  
Gaze on those fair folk steadily,  
As one by one they passed by him;  
His limbs shook, and his eyes did swim,  
And if he heard the words they said,  
As outstretched hand and humble head  
Strengthened the trembling maiden's vow,  
Nought of their meaning did he know;  
And still she came not; what was this?  
Had the dull death of hope of bliss  
Been her death too: ah, was she dead?  
Or did she lie upon her bed,  
With panting mouth and fixed bright eyes,  
Waiting the new life's great surprise,  
All longings past, amid the hush  
Of life departing? A great rush  
Of fearful pain stopped all his blood  
As thus he thought; a while he stood  
Blinded and tottering, then the air  
A great change on it seemed to bear,  
A heavenly scent; and fear was gone,  
Hope but a name; as if alone  
Mid images of men he was,  
Alone with her who now did pass  
With fluttering hem and light footfall  
The corner of the precinct wall.  
Time passed, she drew nigh to the place  
Where he was standing, and her face  
Turned to him, and her steadfast eyes  
Met his, with no more of surprise
Her sweet face erst half-dead and wan;
Then went a sound from man to man,
So fair she seemed, and some withal
Failed not to note the apple fall
Into her breast. Now while with fear
And hope Acontius trembled there
And to her side her mother came,
She cast aside both fear and shame
From out her noble heart, and laid
Upon the altar of the Maid
Her fair right hand, clasped firm around
The golden fruit, and with no sound
Her lips moved, and her eyes upraised
Upon the marble image gazed,
With such a fervour as if she
Would give the thing humanity
And love and pity; then a space
Unto her love she turned her face
All full of love, as if to say,
So ends our trouble from to-day,
Either with happy life or death.
Yet anxious still, with held-back breath,
He saw her mother come to her
With troubled eyes. What hast thou there?
He heard her say. Is the vow made?
I heard no word that thou hast said.
Then through him did her sweet voice thrill:
No word I spake for good or ill;
But this spake for me; so say ye
What oath in written words may be;
Although, indeed, I wrote them nought,
And in my heart had got no thought,
When first I came hereto this morn,
But here to swear myself forlorn
Of love and hope, because the days
Of life seemed but a weary maze,
Begun without leave asked of me,
Whose ending I might never see,
Or what came after them; but now
Backward my life I will not throw

Into your deep-dug, spice-strewn grave,
But either all things will I save
This day, or make an end of all.
Then silence on the place did fall;
With frowning face, yet hand that shook,
The fated fruit her mother took
From out her hand, and pale she grew,
When the few written words she knew,
And what they meant; but speedily
She brushed the holy altar by,
Unto the wondering priests to tell
What things there in their midst befell.
There, in low words, they spoke awhile,
How they must deal with such a guile,
Cast by the goddess of desire
Into the holy maiden's fire.
And to the priests it seemed withal,
That a full oath they needs must call
That writing on the altar laid:
Then, wroth and fearful, some there bade
To seek a death for these to die,
If even so they might put by
The Maid's dread anger;
They grew as still they gathered fear,
And shameful things the dusk fane heard,
As grey beard wagged against grey beard,
And fiercer grew the ancient eyes.
But from the crowd, meanwhile, did rise
Great murmuring;
For from man to man
The rumour of the story ran,
I know not how; and therewithal
Some god-sent lovesome joy did fall
On all hearts there, until it seemed
That each one of his own soul dreamed,
Beloved, and loving well; and when
Some cried out that the ancient men

19The Maid's dread anger: Morris transfers the hostility of Ovid's wrathful goddess from Cydippe to the temple's priggish elders.
20from the crowd: Great murmuring: A similar wave of popular sentiment rises at the end of "The Love of Alcestis," whose protagonist's "fame . . . / lived, in the hearts of far-off men enshrined."
Had mind to slay the lovers there,
A fierce shout rent the autumn air:
Nay, wed the twain; love willeth it!
But silent did the elders sit,
With death and fear on either hand,
Till one said: Fear not, the whole land,
Not we, take back what they did give;
With many scarce can one man strive;
Let be, themselves shall make amends.
YEA, let be, said the next; all ends,
Despite the talk of mortal men,
Who deem themselves undying, when,
Urged by some unknown God's commands,
They snatch at love with eager hands,
And gather death that grows thereby,
Yet swear that love shall never die.
Let be; in their own hearts they hear
The seeds of pangs to pierce and tear.
What need, white-armed, to follow them,
With well-strung bow and fluttering hem,
Adown the tangle of life's wood?
Thou knowest what the fates deem good
For wretches that love overmuch:
One mad desire for sight and touch;
One spot alone of all the earth
That seems to them of any worth;
One sound alone that they may bear
Amidst earth's joyful sounds to hear;
And sight, and sound, and dwelling-place,
And soft caressing of one face,
Forbidden, and forbidden still,
Or granted e'en for greater ill,
But for a while, that they may be
Sunk deeper into misery.
Great things are granted unto those
That love not; far-off things brought close,
Things of great seeming brought to nought,
And miracles for them are wrought;
All earth and heaven lie underneath
The hand of him who wastes not breath

In striving for another's love,
In hoping one more heart to move.
A light thing and a little thing,
Ye deem it, that two hearts should cling
Each unto each, till two are one,
And neither now can be alone?
O fools, who know not all has sworn
That those shall ever be forlorn
Who strive to bring this thing to pass.
So is it now, as so it was,
And so it shall be evermore,
Till the world's fashion is passed o'er.
WHITE-BEARED was the ancient man
Who spoke, with wrinkled face and wan;
But as unto the porch he turned
A red spot in his cheek there burned,
And his eyes glittered, for, behold!
Close by the altar's horns of gold
There stood the weary ones at last,
Their arms about each other cast,
Twain no more now, they said, no more,
What things soe'er fate had in store.
Careless of life, careless of death;
Now, when each felt the other's breath
On lip and cheek, and many a word
By all the world beside unheard,
Or heard and little understood,
Each spake to each, and all seemed good;
Yea, though amid the world's great wrong,
Their space of life should not be long;
O bitter-sweet if they must die!
O sweet, too sweet, if time passed by,
If time made nought for them, should find
Their arms in such wise intertwined
Years hence, with no change drawing near!
NOR says the tale, nor might I hear,
That aught of evil on them fell.
Few folk there were but thought it well,
When saffron-robed, fair-wreathed, loose-haired,
Cydippe through the city fared,
Well won at last; when lingering shame
Somewhat upon the lovers came,
Now that all fear was quite bygone,
And yet they were not all alone;
Because from men the sun was fain
A little more of toil to gain,
Awhile in prison of his light
To hold aback the close-lipped night.

ILENCE a little when the
tale was told,
Soon broken by the merry-voiced
and bold
Among the youths, though some
belike were fain
For more of silence yet, that their sweet pain
Might be made sweeter still by hope and thought
Amid the words of the old story caught;
Might be made keener by the pensive eyes
That half-confessed love made so kind and wise;
Yet these two, midst the others, went their way,
To get them through the short October day
'Twixt toil and toilsome love, e'en as they might;
If so, perchance, the kind and silent night
Might yet reward their reverent love with dreams
Less full of care. But round the must's red streams, 21
'Twixt the stripped vines the elders wandered slow.
And unto them e'en as a soothing show
Was the hid longing, wild desire, blithe hope,
That seethed there on the tangled sun-worn slope
'Twixt noon and moonrise. Resolute were they
To let no pang of memory mar their day,
And long had fear, before the coming rest,
Been set aside. And so the changed west,
Forgotten of the sun, was grey with haze;
The moon was high and bright, when through the maze
Of drogled tendrils back at last they turned,
And red the lights within the fair house burned
Through the grey night; strained string, and measured voice
Of minstrels, mingled with the varying noise
Of those who through the deep-cut misty roads
Went slowly homeward now to their abodes.
A short space more of that short space was gone,
Wherein each deemed himself not quite alone.

21must: the juice of grapes used for wine.