N late October, when
the failing year
But little pleasure more for men
might bear,
They sat within the city's great
guest-hall,
So near the sea that they might hear
the fall
Of the low haven-waves when night
was still.

But on that day wild wind and rain did fill
The earth and sea with clamour; and the street
 Held few who dared the driving scud\(^\text{22}\) to meet.
 But inside, as a little world it was,
 Peaceful amid the hubbub that did pass
 Its strong walls in untiring waves of rage,
 With the earth's intercourse wild war to wage.
 Bright glowed the fires, and cheerier their light
 Fell on the gold that made the fair place bright
 Of roof and wall, for all the outside din.
 Yet of the world's woe somewhat was within
 The noble compass of its walls; for there
 Were histories of great striving painted fair,
 Striving with love and hate, with life and death,
 With hope that lies, and fear that threateneth.
 AND so mid varied talk the day went by,
 As such days will, not quite unhappily,
 Not quite a burden, till the evening came
 With lulling of the storm: and little blame
 The dark had for the dull day's death, when now
 The good things of the hall were set aglow
 By the great tapers. Midmost of the board
 Sat Rolf, the captain, who took up the word,
 And said: Fair fellows, a strange tale is this,
 Heard and forgotten midst my childish bliss,
 Little remembered midst the change and strife,
 Come back again this latter end of life,
 I know not why; yet as a picture done
 For my delight, I see my father's son,

22scud: here, drenching wind.

My father with the white cloth on his knees,
Beaker in hand, amid the orange-trees
At Micklegarth,\(^\text{23}\) and the high-hatted man\(^\text{24}\)
Over against him, with his visage wan,
Black beard, bright eyes, and thin composed hands,
Telling this story of the fiery lands.

\(^{23}\)Micklegarth: Mikligarður was the old Norse name for Byzantium, as in "The Story of Harald the Hard-Red" and "The Story of Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer, Eystein, and Olaf" (Heimskringla, vol. 3, The Saga Library).

THE MAN WHO NEVER LAUGHED AGAIN.

The Argument.

A certain man, who from rich had become poor, having been taken by one of his former friends to a fair house, was shown strange things there, and dwelt there awhile among a company of doleful men; but these in the end dying, and he desiring above all things to know their story, so it happened, that he at last learned it to his own cost.

CITY was there nigh the Indian Sea,\(^1\)

As tells my tale, where folk for many an age
Had lived, perforce, such life as needs must be
Beneath the rule of priestly king and image,
Bearing with patient hearts the summer's rage,
Yea, even bowing foolish heads in vain
Before the mighty sun, their life and bane.

Now ere the hottest of the summer came,
While yet the rose shed perfume on the earth,
And still the grass was green despite the flame
Of that land's sun; while folk gave up to mirth
A little of their life, so little worth,
And the rich man forgot his fears awhile
Beneath the soft eve's still recurring smile;

Mid those sweet days, when e'en the burning land
Knew somewhat of the green north's summer rest,\(^2\)

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\(^1\)night the Indian sea: The Arabian Nights's Fifth Weezer identifies no specific geographical location for his tale.

\(^2\)green north's summer rest: This is a fairly accurate description of the Iceland Morris had not yet "first seen" ("Iceland First Seen," in Poems By the Way).
That e'en in giving thanks for unasked gift,
His dolorous voice their veil of joy would lift.

He asked for nought, nor did his weary eyes
Meet theirs at all, until there came at last,
On a white mule, and clad in noble guise,
A lonely man, who by the poor wretch passed,
And, passing, on his face a side-glance cast,
Then o'er his shoulder eyed him, then drew rein
And turned about, and came to him again;

And said: Thou hast the face of one I knew,
Men called the Golden One, in such a town,
Because they deemed his wealth for ever grew,
E'en in such times as beats the richest down;
What stroke of hapless fate, then, hast thou known
That thou hast come to such a state as this,
To which the poorest peasant's would be bliss?

The other raised his eyes, and stared awhile
Into the speaker's face, as one who draws
His soul from dreams; then with a bitter smile
He said: Firuz, thou askest of the cause
Of this my death? I knew not the world's laws,
But give to-day, and take to-morrow morn,
I needs must say, holding the wise in scorn.

For even as with gifts contempt I bought,
So knowledge buys disease, power loneliness,
And honour fear, and pleasure pains unsought,
And friendship anxious days of great distress,
And love the hate of what we used to bless.
Ah, I am wise, and wiser soon shall grow,
And know the most that wise dead men can know.

5A lonely man: He is "of comely countenance and apparel" in the Arabian Nights, but the tale makes no mention of his inner state.
6'one I knew, Men called the Golden One: No such claim of recognition occurs in Morris's source.
Friend, said he, in thine hand thy life thou hast,
If thou hast told me all that grieveth thee,
And unto thee the past may well be past,
And days not wholly bad thou yet mayst see;
And if indeed thy first felicity
Thou winnest not, yet something shalt thou have
Thy soul from death, or loathed life, to save.

And for thy thanks, something I deem I owe
To our old friendship, could I mind it aught,
And well it is that I should pay it now
While yet I have a little wavering thought
Of things without me: neither have I brought
A poisoned life to give to thee to-day,
Or such a life as I have cast away.

Nay, said he, let all be since I must live;
I will not think of how to play my part:
And now some food to me thou needs must give,
For wretched hunger gnaweth at my heart.
Take heed withal that old desires will start
Up to the light since first I heard thee speak,
Wretched as now I am, and pined and weak.

Firuz thenceforward scarcely seemed to heed
What words he said, but as a man well taught
To do some dull task, set himself to lead
That man unto an hostel, where they brought
Food unto him, and raiment richly wrought;
Then he being mounted on a mule, the twain
Set out thenceforth with some new abode to gain.

Now cheered by food, and hope at least of ease,
Perchance of something more, as on they went
Betwixt the thronged streets and the palaces,
No more did Bharam keep his head down bent,
Rather from right to left quick glances sent;

And though his old complaints he murmured still,
He scarcely thought his life so lost and ill.

But for his fellow, worse he seemed to be
Than e'en before; his thin face, pinched and grey,
Seemed sunk yet deeper into misery,
Nor did he lift his eyes from off the way,
Nor heed what things his friend to him might say.
But plodded on till they were past the town,
When now the fiery sun was falling down.

Then by the farms and fields they went, until
All tillage and smooth ways were left behind,
And half-way up a bare and rugged hill
They entered a rude forest, close and blind,
And many a tale perforce seized Bharam's mind
Of lonely men by fiends bewildered;
So like his fellow looked to one long dead.

But now, as careless what might hap to him,
He 'gan to sing' of roses and delight
Some snatch, until the wood that had been dim,
E'en in broad day, grew black with coming night;
Then lower sank his song, and dropped outright,
When on his rein he felt his guide's hand fall,
And still they pierced that blackness like a wall.

Thus on the little-beaten forest-soil
They went, with nought to see, and nought to hear
Except their mules' unceasing, patient toil:
But full the darkness seemed of forms of fear,
And like long histories passed the minutes drear
To Bharam's o'erwrought mind expecting death;
And like a challenge seemed his lowest breath.

7He 'gan to sing': Morris added this detail. Other singers in the fall tales included John of "The Land East" and Acontius of "Acontius and Cydippe," as well as Orpheus in the unpublished "Story of Orpheus and Eurydice," which Morris probably drafted during the same period (1869-70).
How long they went he knew not, but at last  
Upon his face he felt a doubtful breeze,  
Quickening his soul; and onward as they passed  
A feeble glimmer showed betwixt the trees,  
And his eyes, used to darkness, by degrees  
Could dimly see his fellow, and the way  
Whereon they rode to some unearthly day.

Then as the boughs grew thinner overhead,  
That glimmer widened into moonlit night,  
And 'twixt the trees grown sparse their pathway led  
Unto a wide bare plain, that 'neath that light  
'Against the black trunks showed all stark and white;  
Then Bharam, more at ease thereat, began  
His fellow's visage in that light to scan.

No change was in his face, and if he knew  
Who rode beside him, 'twas but as some hook  
Within an engine knows what it must do;  
His hand indeed from his friend's rein he took,  
But never cast on him one slightest look;  
Then, shuddering, Bharam 'gan to sing again  
To make him turn, but spent his breath in vain.

But when the trees were wholly past, afar  
Across the plain they saw a watch-tower high,  
That 'neath the moonlight, like an angry star,  
Shone over a white palace, and thereby  
Within white walls did black-treed gardens lie:  
And Firuz smote his mule, and hastened on  
To where that distant sign of trouble shone.

And as they went, thereon did Bharam stare,  
Nor turned his eyes at all unto the plain,  
Nor heeded when from out her form the hare  
Started beneath the mule's feet, and in vain  
The owl called from the wood; for he drew rein  
Within a little while before the gate,  
 Casting his soul into the hands of fate.

Then Firuz blew the horn, nor waited long  
Ere the gate, opened by a man scarce seen,  
Gave entry to a garden, where the song  
Of May's brown bird had hardly left the green  
Sweet-blossomed tree-tops lonely, and between  
The whispering glades the fountain leaped on high,  
And the rose waited, till morn came, to die.

But when the first wave of that soft delight  
Swept o'er the spendthrift's sense, he smiled and turned  
Unto his guide throughout the wondrous night,  
And while his heart with hope and wonder burned,  
He said: Indeed a fair thing have I learned  
With thee for master; yet is this the end?  
Will they not now bring forth the bride, O friend?

Drunk with the sweetness of that place he spoke,  
And hoped to see the mask fall suddenly  
From his friend's face; from whose thin lips there broke  
A dreadful cry of helpless misery,  
Scaring the birds from flowery bush and tree.  
O fool! he said, say such things in the day,  
When noise and light take memory more away!

Bharam shrank back abashed, nor had a word  
To say thereto, and 'twixt the trees they rode,  
Noted of nothing but some wakeful bird,  
Until they reached a fair and great abode  
Whereon the red gold e'en in moonlight glowed.  
There silently they lighted down before  
Smooth marble stairs, and through the open door

They entered a great, dimly-lighted hall;  
Yet through the dimness well our man could see  
How fair the hangings were that clad the wall,  
And what a wealth of beast and flower and tree  
Was spent wherever carving there might be,  
And what a floor was 'neath his wearied feet,  
Not made for men who call death rest and sweet.
Now he, though fain to linger and to ask
What was the manner of their living there,
And what thenceforth should be his proper task,
And who his fellows were, did nowise dare
To meet that cry again that seemed to bare
A wretched life of every softening veil,
A dreadful prelude to a dreadful tale.

So silently whereas the other led
He followed, and through corridors they passed,
Dim lit, but worthy of a king new wed,
Till to a chamber did they come at last,
O'er which a little light a taper cast,
And showed a fair bed by the window-side;
Therewith at last turned round the dreary guide,

And said: O thou to whom night still is night
And day is day, bide here until the morn,
And take some little of that dear delight,
That we for many a long day have outrivn.
Sleep, and forget awhile that thou wast born,
And on the morrow will I come to thee
To show thee what thy life with us must be.

And with that word he went, and though at first
The other thought that he should never sleep
For wondering what had made that house accursed,
And sunk that seeming bliss in woe so deep.
Yet o'er his soul forgetfulness did creep,
And in a dreamless slumber long he lay,
Not knowing when the sun brought back the day.

But in broad daylight of the following morn
He woke, and o'er him saw his fellow stand,
Who seemed, if it could be, yet more forlorn
Than when he last reached out to him his hand.
But now he said: Come thou and see the band
Of folk that thou shalt dwell with, and the home
Whereeto, fate leading thee, thou now hast come.

He rose without a word, and went with him,
Who led the way through pillared passages,
Dainty with marble walls, made cool and dim
By the o'erhanging boughs of thick-leaved trees
That brushed against their windows in the breeze;
And still the work of one all seemed to be
Who had a mind to mock eternity.

Too lovely seemed that place for any one
But youths and damsels, who, not growing old,
Should dwell there, knowing not the scorching sun,
Without a name for misery or for cold,
Without a use for glittering steel or gold
Except adornment; and content withal,
Though change or passion there should ne'er befall.

And still, despite his fellow's woeful face,
And that sad cry that smote him yeasternight,
The strange luxurious perfume of that place,
Where everything seemed wrought for mere delight,
Still made his heart beat, and his eyes wax bright
With delicate desires new-born again,
In that sweet rest from poverty and pain.

And, looking through the windows there askance,
He yet had something like a hope to see
The garden blossom into feast and dance,
Or, turning round a corner, suddenly,
Mid voices sweet, and perfumed gowns to be,
Bewildered by white limbs and glittering eyes,
Striving to learn love's inmost mysteries.

But as they went, unto a door they came
That Firuz opened, showing a great hall
Whose walls with wealth of strange-wrought gold did flame
Through a cool twilight, for the light did fall
From windows in the dome high up and small,
And Bharum's lustful hope was quenched in fear,
As he low moaning and faint sobs could hear.
He stopped and shut his eyes, oppressed with awe,
Thinking the rites of some sad god to see,
The secrets of some blood-stained hidden law;
But Firuz grasped his arm impatiently,
And drew him in. O friend, look up! said he,
Nought dwelleth here but man's accursed race,
And thou art far the mightiest in this place.

Then he, though trembling still, looked up, and there
Beheld six men clad even as his guide,
Who sat upon a bench of marble fair
Against the wall, and some their eyes must hide
When they met his, and some rose up and cried
Words inarticulate, then sank again
Into their places, as outworn with pain.

But one against the wall, with head back thrown,
Was leaning, and his eyes wide open stared,
And by his side his nerveless hands hung down,
Nor showed his face a glimmer of surprise;
Deaf was he to the wisest of the wise,
Speechless though open-mouthed; for there sat he,
Dead midst the living slaves of misery.

Bharam stared at him, wondering, still in dread;
But no heed took his fellows of his case,
Till Firuz, with a side-glance at him, said:
Why mourn ye more that yet another face
Must see our shame and sorrow in this place?
Do ye not know this worldly man is come
To lay the last one of us in his home?

And now in turn another soul is gone,
Get ready then to bear him forth straightway.
Be patient, for the heavy days crawl on!
But thou, O friend, I pray thee from this day
Help thou us helpless men, who cannot pray
Even to die; no long time will it be
Ere we shall leave this countless wealth to thee.

Behold, a master, not a slave, we need,
For we, I say, have neither will to die
Nor yet to live, yet will we pay good heed
To thy commands, still doing patiently
Our daily tasks, as the dull time goes by;
Drive us like beasts, yea, slay us if thou wilt,
Nor will our souls impute to thee the guilt.

Yet ask us not to tell thee of our tale,
Why we are brought unto this sad estate,
Nor for the rest will any words avail
To make us flee from this lone house, where fate
With all its cruel sport will we await;
Lo, now thy task, O fellow! in return
A mighty kingdom's wealth thou soon shalt earn.

Now as he spoke, a hard forgetfulness
Of his own lot, the rich man's cruel pride,
Smote Bharam's heart; he thought: What dire distress
Could make me cast all hope of life aside?
Could aught but death my life and will divide?
Surely this mood of theirs will pass away
And these walls yet may see a merry day.

So thought he; yet, beholding them again,
And seeing them so swallowed up with woe
That they scarce heeded him, a pang of pain
Like pleasure's death throughout his heart did go;
And therewithal a strong desire to know
The utmost of their tale possessed his mind,
And made him scorn an easy life and blind.

So midst his silence neither spoke they aught:
Firuz himself, as one, who having laid
His charge upon another, may take thought
Of his own miseries, sat with head down-weighed,
With tears that would not flow; then Bharam said:

8made him scorn: The hero in the Arabian Nights tale, by comparison, acts
from idle curiosity.
Masters, I bid you rise and do your best
To give your fellow's body its due rest!

They rose up at his words and straight began,
As men who oft had had such things to do,
To dress the body of the just-dead man
For his last resting-place, then two and two
They bore it forth, passing the chambers through,
Where Bharam on that morn had hoped to see
Fair folk that had no name for misery.

Then through the sunny pleasance slow they passed,
That sweet with flowers behind the palace lay,
Until they reached a thick, black wood at last,
Bounding the garden as the night bounds day;
And through a narrow path they took their way,
Less like to men than shadows in a dream,
Till the wood ended at a swift broad stream;

Beneath the boughs dark green it ran, and deep,
Well-nigh awash with the wood's tangled grass;
But on the other side, wall-like and steep,
Straight from the gurgling eddies rose a mass
Of dark grey cliff no man unhelped could pass;
But a low door e'en in the very base
Was set, above the water's hurrying race.

Of iron seemed that door to Bharam's eyes,
Heavily wrought, and closely locked it seemed;
But as he stared thereon strange thoughts would rise
Within his heart, until he well-nigh deemed
That he in morning sleep of such things dreamed,
And dreamed that he had seen all this before,
Wood and deep river, cliff, and close-shut door.

But in the stream, and close unto his feet,
A boat there lay, as though for waiting o'er
Whoso had will such doubtful things to meet
As that strange door might hide; and on the shore,
About the path, a rod of ground or more

Was cleared of wood, in which space here and there
Low changing mounds told of dead men anear.

So there that doleful company made stay,
And 'twixt the trees and swift stream hurrying by,
Their brother's body in the earth did lay.
Nor ever to the cliff would raise an eye,
But trembling, as with added agony,
Did their dull task as swiftly as they could,
Then went their way again amidst the wood.

OW with these dreary folk must Bharam live
Henceforward, doing even as he would;
And many a joy the palace had to give
To such a man as e'en could find life good
So prisoned, and with nought to stir the blood,
And seeing still from weary day to day
These wretched mourners cast their lives away.

Yet came deliverance: one by one they died,
E'en as new-come he saw that man die first,
And so were buried by the river-side.
And ever as he saw these men accurs
Vanish from life, he grew the more athirst
To know what evil deed had been their bane,
But still were all his prayers therefor in vain.

His utmost will in all things else they did,
Serving as slaves if he demanded aught,
But in grim silence still their story hid;
Nor did he fare the better when he sought
In the fair parchments that scribes' hands had wrought
Within that house. Of many a tale they told;
But none the tale of that sad life did hold.

Therefore in silence he consumed his days
Until a weary year had clean gone by

slow changing mounds: The freshly-dug graves are Morris's addition.
be sought/ in the fair parchments: The Arabian Nights-hero reads nothing.
Since first upon that palace he did gaze,
And all that doleful band had he seen die,
Except Firuz; and ever eagerly
Did Bharam watch him, lest he too should go
And make an end of all he longed to know.

At last a day came when the mourner said:
Beneath the ground my woe thou soon shalt lay,
And all our foolish sorrow shall be dead;
Come then, I fain would show thee the straight way
Through which we came the night of that past day
When first I brought thee here. This knowledge thine,
Guard thou this house, and use it as a mine,

While safe thou dwellest in some city fair;
Hasten, for little strength is in me now!
But Bharam thought: Yet will he not lay bare
His story to me utterly, and show
What thing it was that brought these men so low.
Yet said he nought, but from the house they went,
While painfully the mourner on him leant.

So, the wood gained, by many glades they passed
That Firuz heeded not, though they were wide,
Until they reached a certain one at last,
Whereon he said: Here did we come that tide;
I counsel thee no longer to abide
When I am dead, but mount my mule and go,
Nor doubt the beast the doubtful way shall know.

She too shall serve thee when thou com'st again,
With many men, and sumpter mules\textsuperscript{11} enow
To gather up the wealth we held in vain.
Turn me, I would depart! fainter I grow!
And thou the road to happy life dost know.
Alas, my feet are heavy! nor can I
Go any further. Lay me down to die!

\textsuperscript{11}sumpter mules: pack mules.

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Then 'gainst a tree-root Bharam laid his head,
Saying: Fear not, thou hast been good to me,
And by the river-side, when thou art dead,
I will not fail to lay thee certainly!
Nay, nay, he said, what matter; let it be!
I bring the dismal rite unto an end.
Hide my bones here, and toward thy city wend!

Better perchance that thou beholdest not
That place once more, our misery and our bane!
Then at that word did Bharam's heart wax hot;
He seemed at point his whole desire to gain.
He cried aloud: Nay, surely all in vain
Thy secret hast thou hidden till this day,
Since to the mystic road thou show'st the way!

My will is weak, his friend said, thine is strong;
Draw near, and I will tell thee all the tale,
If this my feebler voice will last so long.
Perchance my dying words may yet avail
To make thee wise. This pouch of golden scale,
Open thou it. The gold key hid therein
Opens the story of our foolish sin.

How thy face flushes, holding it! Just so,
As by that door I stood, did my face burn
That summer morning past so long ago.
Draw nigher still if thou the tale wouldst learn.
I scarce can speak now, and withal I yearn
To die at last, and leave the thing unsaid.
Raise thou me up, or I shall soon be dead!

His fellow raised him trembling, nor durst speak
Lest he should scare his feeble life away;
Then from his mouth came wailing words, and weak:
Where art thou then, O loveliest one, to-day?
Beneath the odorous boughs that gladden May,
Laid in the thorny hollow of some hill,
Dost thou remember me a little still?
Can kindness such as thine was, vanish quite
And be forgotten? Ah, if I forget,
Canst thou forget the love and fresh delight
That held thee then? my love that even yet
Midst other love² must make thy sweet eyes wet,
At least sometimes, at least when heaven and earth
In some fair eve are grown too fair for mirth?

O joy departed, know'st thou how at first
I prayed in vain, and strove with hope to dull
My ravening hunger, mock my quenchless thirst?
And know'st thou not how, when my life was full
Of nought but pain, I strove asleep to lull
My longing for the eyeless, hopeless rest,
Lest even yet strange chance should bring the best?

Farewell, farewell, belovèd! I depart,
But hope, once dead, now liveth though I die,¹³
Whispering of marvels to my fainting heart;
Perchance the memory of some written lie,
Perchance the music of the rest anigh;
I know not; but farewell, be no more sad!
For life and love that has been, I am glad.¹⁴

He ceased, and his friend, trembling, faintly said:
Wilt thou not speak to me? what hast thou done?
But even as he spoke, the mourner's head
Fell backward, and his troubled soul was gone;
And Bharam, in the forest left alone,
Durst scarcely move at first for very fear,
And longing for the tale he was to hear.

But in a while the body down he laid,
And swiftly 'gat him o'er the hot dry plain,
And through the garden, as a man afraid,
Went softly, and the golden porch did gain,
And from the wealth those men had held in vain,
Most precious things he did not spare to take
For his new life and joyous freedom's sake.

So doing he came round unto the door
That led out to the passage through the wood,
Wherethrough the mourners erst their dead ones bore
Down to the river; but as there he stood
He felt a new fire kindling in his blood;
His sack he laid aside, and touched the key
That could unlock that dreadful history;

And his friend's words, that loving tender voice
He sent forth ere he died, smote on his heart:
How could he leave those dead men and rejoice
With folk who in their story had no part?¹⁵
Yea, as he lingered did the hot tears start
Into his eyes; he wept, and knew not why;
Some pleasure seemed within his grasp to lie

He could not grasp or name, and none the less
He muttered to himself: I must be gone
Or I shall die in this fair wilderness,
That every minute seems to grow more lone;
Why do I stand here like a man of stone?
And with that very word he moved indeed,
But took the path that toward the stream did lead.

Quickly he walked with pale face downward bent,
As 'twixt the trembling tulip-beds he passed,
Until a horror seized him as he went,
And, turning toward the house, he ran full fast,

¹²Midst other love: The Arabian Nights's princess seems content enough with her partner, for "he resided with her seven years, passing the most delightful and most comfortable and most agreeable and most sweet life." His decision to seek more treasure brings about his eviction from her kingdom.
¹³hope, once dead, now liveth: Compare Morris's lyric "Hope Dieth, Love Liveth," from Poems By the Way, also included in "A Book of Verse."
¹⁴I am glad: Firis's affirmation anticipates Walter's refusal despite threats of hell-fire to deny that "my body and soul I gave her" in the Hill of Venus, which "henceforth... shall be my home."
¹⁵who in their story: Communities of story-telling saints formed a recurring motif in Morris's work.
Nor, till he reached it, one look backward cast;
And by the gathered treasure, left behind
Awhile ago, he stood confused, half blind.

Then slowly did he lift the precious weight,
Yet lingered still. Ah, must I go? he said;
Have I no heart to meet that unknown fate?
And must I lead the life that once I led,
Midst folk who will rejoice when I am dead;"n
Even as if they had not shared with me
The fear and longing of felicity?

'And yet indeed if I must live alone,
If fellowship be but an empty dream,
Is there not left a world that is mine own?
Am I not real, if all else doth but seem?
Yea, rather, with what wealth the world doth teem,
When we are once content from us to cast
The dreadful future and remorseful past.

A little while he lingered yet, and then,
As fearful what he might be tempted to,
He hurried on until he reached again
The outer door, and, sighing, passed therethrough,
But still made haste to do what he must do,
And found the mule and cast on her the sack,
And took his way to that lone forest-track.

Mattock and spade with him too did he bear,
And dug a grave beneath the spreading tree
Whereby Firuz had died, and laid him there,
Thinking the while of all his misery,
And muttering still: How could it hap to me?
Unless I died within a day or two
Surely some deed I soon should find to do.

But when the earth on him he gan to throw,
He said: And shall I cast the key herein?
What need have I this woeful tale to know,
To vex me midst the fair life I shall win?
Why do I seek to probe my fellow's sin,
Who, living, saved my life from misery,
And dying, gave this fresh life unto me?

He kept the key, his words he answered not,
But smoothed the earth above the mourner's head;
Then mounting, turned away from that sad spot,
Feverish with hope and change, bewildered,
And ever more oppressed with growing dread,
As through the dark and silent wood he rode,
And drew the higher unto man's abode.

But when at last he met the broad sweet light
Upon the hill's brow where that wood had end,
And saw the open upland fresh and bright,
A thrill of joy that sight through him must send,
And with good heart he 'twixt the fields did wend,
And not so much of that sad house he thought
As of the wealthy life he thence had brought;

So amidst thoughts of pleasant life and ease,
Seemed all things fair that eve; the peasant's door,
The mother with the child upon her knees
Sitting within upon the shaded floor;
While 'neath the trellised gourd some maid sung o'er
Her lover to the rude lute's trembling strings,
Her brown breast heaving 'neath the silver rings;

The slender damsel coming from the well,"n
Smiling beneath the flashing brazen jar,
Her fellows left behind thereat, to tell
How weary of her smiles her lovers are;
While the small children round wage watery war

16 who will rejoice when I am dead: A similar dread of alienation appears in "The Land East of the Sun."

17 The slender damsel coming from the well: The descriptions of pleasant scenes from everyday life are Morris's additions.
Till the thin linen more transparent grows,
And ruddy brown the flesh beneath it glows;

The trooper drinking at the homestead gate,
Telling wild lies about the sword and spear,
Unto the farmer striving to abate
The pedlar's price; the village drawing near,
The smoke that, scenting the fresh eve and clear,
Tells of the feast; the thisty's dying spark;
The barn's wealth dimly showing through the dark.

How sweet was all! how easy it should be
'Amid such life one's self-made woes to bear!
He felt as one who, waked up suddenly
To life's delight, knows not of grief or care.
How kind, how lovesome, all the people were!
Why should he think of aught but love and bliss
With many years of such-like life as this?

Night came at last, and darker and more still
The world was, and the stars hung in the sky;
And as the road o'ertopped a sunburnt hill
He saw before him the great city lie,
The glimmering lights about grey towers and high,
Rising from gardens dark; the guarded wall,
The gleaming dykes, the great sea, bounding all.

As one who at the trumpet's sound casts by
The tender thought of rest, of wife and child,
And fear of death for hope of victory,
So at that sight those sweet vague hopes and wild
Did he cast by, and in the darkness smiled
For pleasure of the beauty of the earth,
For foretaste of the coming days of mirth.

SURELY if any man was blithe and glad
Within that city, when the morrow's sun
Beheld it, he at least the first place had,
And midst of glad folk was the happiest one:
So much to do, that was not e'en begun;
So much to hope for, that he could not see;
So much to win, so many things to be!

Yea, so much, he could turn himself to nought
For many days, but wandered aimlessly
Wherever men together might be brought;
That he once more their daily life might see,
That to his new-born life new seemed to be,
And starving thought off, he awhile must shrink
From touching that sweet cup he had to drink.

Yet when this mood was passed by, what was this,
That in the draught he was about to drain,
That new victorious life, all seemed amiss?
If, thinking of the pleasure and the pain
Men find in struggling life, he turned to gain
The godlike joy he hoped to find therein,
All turned to cloud, and nought seemed left to win.

Love moved him not, yea, something in his heart
There was that made him shudder at its name;
He could not rouse himself to take his part
In ruling worlds and winning praise and blame;
And if vague hope of glory o'er him came,
Why should he cast himself against the spears
To make vain stories for the unpitying years?

The thing that men call knowledge helped him not;
And if he thought of the world's varying face,
And changing manners, then his heart waxed hot
For thinking of his journey to that place,
And how 'twixt him and it was little space.
Then back to listlessness once more he turned,
Quenching the flame that in his sick heart burned.
What thing was left him now, but only this,
A life of aimless ease and luxury,
That he must strive to think the promised bliss,
Where hoping not for aught that was not nigh,
Midst vain pretence he should but have to die,
But every minute longing to confess
That this was nought but utter weariness.

So to the foolish image of delight
That rich men worship, now he needs must cling
Despite himself, and pass by day and night
As friendless and unloved as any king;
'Till he began to doubt of everything
Amidst that world of lies; till he began
To think of pain as very friend of man.

So passed the time, and though he felt the chain
That round about his wasting life was cast,
He still must think the labour all in vain
To strive to free himself while life should last;
And so, midst all, two weary years went past,
Nought done, save death a little brought anear,
The hard deliverance that he needs must fear.

At last one dawn, when all the place was still,
He took that key, and e'en as one might gaze
Upon the record of some little ill
That happed in past days, now grown happy days,
He eyed it, sighing, 'neath the young sun's rays;
And silently he passed his palace through,
Nor told himself what deed he had to do.

He reached the stable where his steeds were kept,
And midst the delicate-limbed beasts he found
The mule that o'er the forest grass had stepped;
Then, having on her back the saddle bound,

19. As friendless and unloved as any king: Notice the tacit judgment in this comparison. In Love Is Enough (1873), a sense of emotional aridity drives King Pharamond from his throne.

Entered the house again, and, looking round
The darkened banquet-chamber, caught away
What simple food the nighest to him lay.

Then, with the hand that rich men fawned upon,
The wicket he unlocked, and forth he led
His beast, and mounted when the street was won,
Wherein already folk for daily bread
Began to labour, who now turned the head
To whisper as the rich man passed them by
Betwixt the frail's of fresh-plucked greenery.

He passed the wall where Firuz first he saw,
The hostel where the dead man gave him food;
He passed the gate and 'gan at last to draw
Unto the country bordering on the wood,
And still he took no thought of bad or good,
Or named his journey, nay, if he had met
A face he knew, he might have turned back yet.

But all the folk he saw were strange to him,
And, for all heed that unto them he gave,
Might have been nought; the reaper's bare brown limb,
The rich man's train with litter and armed slave,
The girl bare-footed in the stream's white wave,
Like empty shadows by his eyes they passed;
The world was narrowed to his heart at last.

He reached the hill, which e'en in that strange mood
Seemed grown familiar to him; with no pain
He found the path that pierced the tangled wood,
And midst its dusk he gave his mule the rein,
And in no long time reached the little plain,
And then indeed the world seemed left behind,
And no more now he felt confused and blind.

He cried aloud to see the white house rise
O'er the green garden and the long white wall,
Which erst the pale moon showed unto his eyes;  
But on the stillness, strange his voice did fall,  
For in the nook now woodland creatures all  
Weren't 'neath the shadow of the trees,  
Patient, unvexed by any memories.

How should he rest, who might have come too late?  
O'er the burnt plain he hurried, and laid hand  
Upon the rusted handle of the gate,  
Not touched since he himself thereby did stand:  
The warm and scented air his visage fanned,  
And on his head down rained the blossoms' dust,  
As back the heavy grass-choked door he thrust.

But ere upon the path grown green with weed  
He set his foot, he paused a little while,  
And of her gear his patient beast he freed,  
And muttered, as he smiled a doubtful smile:  
Behold now if my troubles make me vile,  
And I once more have will to herd with man,  
Let me get back, then, even as I can.

There 'neath the tangled boughs he went aspace,  
Remembering him awhile of that sad cry  
That erst had been his welcome to that place,  
That showed him first it might be good to die,  
When he but thought of new delights anigh;  
Threat he shuddered now, bethinking him  
In what a sea he cast himself to swim.

But his fate lay before him; on he went,  
And through the gilded doors, now open wide,  
He passed, and found the flowery hangings rent,  
And past his feet did hissing serpents glide,  
While from the hall wherein the mourners died  
A grey wolf glared, and o'er his head the bat  
Hung, and the paddock on the hearth-stone sat.

21his fate lay before him: Note the preordination the tale ascribes to Bharam's actions.  
22paddock: here a frog or toad.
Slowly, as one who thinks not of his deed,
He gat into the boat, and loosed from shore
And 'gan to row the ready shallot freed
Unto the landing cut beneath the door,
And in a little minute stood before
Its rusty leaves with beating heart, and hand
His wavering troubled will could scarce command.

But almost ere he willed it, was the key
Within the lock, and the great bolt sprang back;
The iron door swung open heavily,
And cold the wind rushed from a cavern black:
Then with one look upon the woodland track,
He stepped from out the fair light of the day,
Casting all hope of common life away.

For at his back the heavy door swung to;”
Before him was thick darkness palpable;
And as he struggled further on to go,
With dizzied head upon the ground he fell,
And if he lived on yet, he scarce could tell,
Amid the phantoms new-born in that place
That past his eyes 'gan flit in endless race.

Fair women changing into shapeless things,
His own sad face mirrored, he knew not bow,
And heavy wingless birds, and beasts with wings,
Strange stars, huge swirling seas, whose ebb and flow
Now seemed too swift for thought, now dull and slow:
Such things enmeshed his dying troubled thought,
Until his soul to sightless sleep was brought.

But when he woke to languid consciousness,
Too well content he was therewith at first
To ope his eyes, or seek what things might bless
His soul with rest from thought of good and worst,

And still his faint incurious ease he nursed,
Till nigh him rang a bird's note sweet and clear,
And stirred in him the seeds of hope and fear.

Withal the murmur of a quiet sea
He heard, and mingled sounds far off and sweet,
And o'er his head some rustling summer tree;
Slowly thereon he gat unto his feet,
And therewithal his sleep-dazed eyes did meet
The westering golden splendour of the sun,
For on that fair shore day was well-nigh done.

Then from the flashing sea and gleaming sky
Unto the green earth did he turn him round,
And saw a fair land sloping lazily
Up to a ridge of green with grey rocks crowned,
And on those slopes did fruitful trees abound,
And, cleaving them, came downward from the hill
In many a tinkling fall a little rill.

Now with his wakening senses, hunger too
Must needs awake; parched did his dry throat feel,
And hurrying, toward the little stream he drew,
And by a clear and sandy pool did kneel
And quenched his thirst, the while his hand did steal
Unto his wallet, where he thought to find
The bread he snatched from vain wealth left behind.

But when within his hand he held that bread,
Mouldy and perished as with many days,
He wondered much that he had not been dead,
And fell to think with measureless amaze
By what unheard-of, unimagined ways
Unto that lonely land he had been brought;
Until, bewildered in the maze of thought
That needs could lead nowhither, he arose,
And from the fairest of those fruit-hung trees
The rippest and most luscious seeds he chose.
And staved his hunger off awhile with these;
Then 'twixt their trunks got back to where the breeze
Blew cool from off the calm sea, thinking still
That thence his fate must come for good or ill.

Thus, looking unto right and left, he passed
Over the greensward, till he reached the strand,
And nought was 'twixt the sea and him at last,
Except a lessening belt of yellow sand.

There, looking seaward, he awhile did stand,
Until at last the great sun's nether rim,
Red with the sea-mist, in the sea 'gan swim.

But 'gainst it now a spot did he behold,
Nor knew if he were dazzled with the light,
Till as the orb sank and the sea grew cold,
Greater that grew beneath the gathering night;

And when all red was gone, and clear and bright

The high moon was, beneath its light he saw
A ship unto him o'er the waters draw.

Quickly his heart 'gan beat at sight of it,
But what that he could do could change his fate?
So calmly on the turf's edge did he sit
The coming of that unknown keel to wait,

That o'er the moonlight sea kept growing great,
Until at last the dashing oars he heard,

The creaking yard, the master's shouted word.

Then as the black hull 'neath the moonlight lay,
In the long swell, bright against side and oar,
A little shallop* therefrom took its way
Unto the low line of the breakers hoar;

And when its keel was firm upon the shore
Two women stepped out thence, and 'gan to go
To Bharam's place with gentle steps and slow.

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24 went aboard the shallop: A shallop is a sloop or small sailing vessel. Similar settings appear in Tennyson's "Le Morte D' Arthur" and section 103 of his "In Memoriam."
The Medieval Tale for October

But when the shadow of their well-shaved mast
Had shortened that it no more touched the sea,
And well-nigh all the windy waste was past
That kept them from the land where they would be,
They turned about a ness, and 'neath their lee
A sandy-beached and green-banked haven lay,
For there a river cleft the mountains grey.

975

Thither they steered with no delay, and then
Upon the green slopes Bharam could behold
The white tents and the spears of many men,
And on the o'erhanging height a castle old,
And up the bay a ship o'erlaid with gold,
With golden sails and fluttering banners bright,
And silken awnings 'gainst the hot sun sight.

980

But underneath the tents, anigh that ship,
A space there was amidst of shadowing trees,
Well clad with turf down to the haven's lip;
And there, amongst the pasture of the bees,
Fanned by the long-drawn sweet-breathed ocean-breeze,
Well canopied, was set a wondrous throne,
Amidst whose cushions sat a maid alone.

985

Crowned as a queen was she, and round her seat
Were damsel's gathered, clad just in such guise
As those who on the sands did Bharam meet,
And stood beside him now, with lovesome eyes.
All this saw Bharam in no other wise
Than one might see a dream becoming true,
Nor had he thought of what he next should do.

990

Only those longings, vague and aimless erst,
Now quickened tenfold, found a cause and aim,
And on his soul a flood of light outburst,
That swallowed up in brightness of its flame
Strange thoughts of death, and hopes without a name,
For now he knew that love had led him on,
Until, until, perchance, the end was won.

995

The Man Who Never Laughed Again

Unto that presence straight the shipmen steered,
And as the white foam from the oars did fly,
And the black prow the daisied greensward neared,
Uprose a song from that fair company,
Which those two damsel's echoed murmuringly,
Bearing love-laden words unto his ears
On tender music, mother of sweet tears.

1000

Song.
O THOU who drawest nigh across the sea,
O heart that seekest Love perpetually,
Nor know'st his name, come now at last to me!

1005

Come, thirst of love thy lips too long have borne,
Hunger of love thy heart hath long outworn,
Speech hadst thou but to call thyself forlorn.

1010

The seeker finds now, the parched lips are led
To sweet full streams, the hungry heart is fed,
And song springs up from moans of sorrow dead.

1015

Draw nigh, draw nigh, and tell me all thy tale;
In words grown sweet since all the woe doth fail,
Show me wherewith thou didst thy woe bewail.

1020

Draw nigh, draw nigh, beloved! think of these
That stand around as well-wrought images,
Earless and eyeless as these trembling trees.

1025

I think the sky calls living none but three:
The God that looketh thence and thee and me;
And He made us, but we made Love to be.

1030

Think not of time, then, for thou shalt not die
How soon soever shall the world go by,
And nought be left but God and thou and I.

1035

And yet, O love, why maketh thou delay?
Life comes not till thou comest, and the day
That knows no end may yet be cast away.
UCH words the summer air swept
past his ears,
Such words the lovesome maidens
murmured,
With unabashed soft eyes made
wet with tears,
As though for them the world were really dead,
As though indeed those tender words they said
Each to her love, and each her fingers moved,
As though she thought to meet the hands she loved.

But Bharam heeded not their lovesomeness,
As through his heart there shot one bitter thought
Of those dead mourners and their dead distress
That his own feet to such a land had brought;
But ever ere the fear had come to nought,
The thought that made it, yea, all memory
Of what had been, had utterly passed by.

But when the song was done, and on the strand
The bark's prow grated, and the maidens twain
In low word bade him follow them aland,
Still, mid the certain hope of boundless gain,
About him clung the seeming-causeless pain
Of that past thought, that love had driven away,
The dreary teaching of a hopeless day.

And as unto the throne he drew anigh
He tried to say unto himself: Alas!
Why am I full of such felicity?
How know I that for me the music was?
How know I yet what thing will come to pass?
How know I that my heart can bear the best,
Vain foolish heart that knew but little rest?

A moment more and toward that golden ship
His face was turned, a hand was holding his;
His eyes with happy tears were wet, his lip
Still thrilled with memory of a loving kiss,
His eager ears drank in melodic bliss

Past words to tell of; joy was born at last;
Surely the bitterness of death was past.

How can I give her image unto you,
Clad in that raiment wonderful and fair?
What need? Be sure that love's eye pierceth through
What web soever hides the beauty there.
To tell her fairness? Measure forth the air,
And weigh the wind, and portion out the sun!
This still is left, less easy to be done.

Into the golden ship now passed the twain,
The maidens followed, and the soldiers moved
Their ordered ranks, the shoreward road to gain;
The minstrels played what tunes the best behoved,
While in the stern the lover and beloved
Had nought to do but each on each to gaze,
Without a thought of past or coming days.

Up stream the gold prow pointed, the long oars
Broke into curves of white the swirling green,
On each side opened out the changing shores;
So lovely there were all things to be seen,
That in the golden age they might have been;
But rather had he gaze upon those eyes
Than see the whole world freed from miseries.

Sometimes she said: And this, O love, is thine
As thou art mine. Look forth thy land to see!
But he looked not, but rather would entwine
His fingers in her fingers amorously,
And answer: Yea, and that one day shall be
When thou shalt go upon the blossoms sweet,
And I must look thereon to see thy feet!

Now the stream narrowed, and the country girls
Thronged on the banks to see the Queen go by,
And cast fresh flowers upon the weedy swirls.
Look forth! they sing to our felicity!
The Queen said, and the city draweth nigh.
Nay, nay, said Bharam, I will look on them
When they shall kneel to kiss thy garment's hem.

Now far ahead, above dark banks of trees,
Could they behold the city's high white wall,
And, as they neared it, on the summer breeze
Was borne the tumult of the festival;
And when that sound on Bharam's ears did fall,
He cried: Ah, will they lengthen out the day,
E'en when kind night has drawn the sun away?

She sighed and said: Nay now, be glad, O king,
That thou art coming to thy very own;
Nay one day shalt thou think it a small thing
That thou therein mayst wear the royal crown,
When somewhat weary thou at last art grown,
Through lapse of days, of this, and this, and this,
That something more is left thee than a kiss.

He stared at her wide eyes as one who heard,
Yet knew not what the words might signify,
Then said: And think'st thou I shall be afraid
To slay myself before our love goes by,
That changed by death, if we indeed can die,
Unwearied by this anxious, earthy frame,
I still may think of thee, and know no shame?

She gazed upon his flushed face tenderly,
Reddening herself for love, but said not aught,
Only her bosom heaved with one soft sigh,
And some unravelled maze of troublous thought
Unbowed tears unto her sweet eyes brought;
And he forgot that shade of bitterness
When such a look his yearning heart did bless.

Thereat the silver trumpet's tuneful blare
Made music strange unto his lovesome dream,
For now before them lay the city fair,
With high white bridges spanning the swift stream,
And bridge and shore with wealth of gold did gleam.

From a great multitude shout followed shout,
And high in air the sound of bells leapt out.

And then the shipmen furled the golden sail,
Slowly the red oars o'er the stream did skim,
As 'twixt the houses the light wind 'gan fail,
Till by a palace on the river's brim,
Whose towering height made half the bells grow dim,
The golden ship was stayed, for they had come
Unto the happy seeker's wondrous home.

Look up and wonder, well-beloved, she said,
As now they rose to go unto the shore,
At what the men did for us who are dead,
And praise them for the depth of their past lore,
And thank them though their life is long past o'er.
If they had known that all these things should be,
How better had they wrought for thee and me?

Gravely she looked into his eager eyes,
That turned unto the house a little while,
But took small heed of all the phantasies
Wherewith those men their trouble did beguile;
Though calmly did the vast front seem to smile,
From all its breadth of beauty looking down
Upon the tumult of the joyous town.

Again she sighed, but passed on silently,
And o'er the golden gangway went the twain
Unto the gold shade of the doorway high,
Treading on golden cloths, betwixt a lane
Of girls who each had been a kingdom's bane
In toiling, troubled lands, where loveliness
In scanty measure longing men doth bless.

One moment, and the threshold Bharam passed
And that desire his heart was set upon.

25they wrought for thee and me: The 'historiastic' meditation in this stanza recurs in various forms throughout Morris's work.
Yet would not name, his heart hath won at last.
Ah, if the end of all thereby were won!
For though, indeed, the noontide sun hath shone
And all the clouds are scattered, who can say
What clouds shall curse the latter end of day?

The days passed, growing sweeter as the year
Declined through autumn into winter-tide;
Perchance: for though no day could be so dear
As that whereon he first had seen his bride,
Yet still no less did love with him abide,
Tempered with quiet days and restfulness;
Desire fulfilled, renewed, his life did bless.

And thereto now were added other joys,
Her gifts indeed, unmeet for him to scorn:
The judgment-seat, the tourney's glorious noise,
The council wherein were the wise laws born;
Sweet tales of lovers vanquished and forlorn,
To make bliss greater when these lovers met,
Silent, alone, all troubles to forget,

All troubles to forget. The winter went,
Spring came, and love seemed worthier therewith weighed;
The summer came, and brought no discontent,
Nor yet with autumn's fading did love fade;
And the cold winter love the warmer made.
So Bharam said, when round his love he clung,
And lonely, still such words were on his tongue.

At last from this and that (it boots not now
To tell the why and wherefore of the thing),
Great war and strife with other lands did grow, &c
And weeping she around his neck must cling.
Bidding him look for such a welcoming

26war and strife with other lands: Compare Ogier the Dane, who fought for France during both his earthly sojourns.
Of one whose will I dare not disobey,
Must leave thee lonely till the hundredth day.

Nay, now, forbear to ask me why I go!
Thou know'st all things are thine that I have got,
Nathless this one thing never shalt thou know,
Unless the love grow cold that once was hot,
And thou art grown aweary of thy lot.
Ah, love, forgive me! for thy kiss is sweet,
As cool fresh streams to bruised and weary feet.

Yet one more word: the room where thou and I
Were left alone that day of all sweet days,
Enter it not, till that time is passed by
I told thee of, and many weary ways
My feet have worn, to meet thy loving gaze;
For surely as thy foot therein shall tread,
Thou unto me, as I to thee, art dead.

And yet, for fear of base and prying folk,
Needs must thou bear about that chamber's key.
Ah, love, farewell! no hard or troubous yoke
Thou hast to bear, nor have I doubt of thee.
For all the stream of tears that thou dost see,
They are love's offspring only; for my heart
Yet more than heretofore in thine has part.

Thus did she go, and he so left behind,
Mourned for her and desired her very sore;
Yet, with a pang, he felt that he was blind,
Despite of words; that yet there was a store
Of some undreamed-of and victorious lore
He might not touch: frowning he turned away,
And seemed a troubled, gloomy man that day.

Yet loyally for many days he dwelt
Within that house, or from his golden throne
Good justice to the thronging people dealt;
But when night came, and he was left alone,
Then all that splendour scarcely seemed his own;

And when he fell to thinking of his love,
He 'gan to wish that he his heart might prove.

In agony he strove to cast from him
Fresh doubts of what she was, and all his tale
Rose up once more, now vague indeed and dim,
Yet worse therefor perchance, if he should fail,
And in some half-remembered hell go wail
His happy lot, the days that might have been!
Was she his bane? his life, his love, his queen.

Then would he image forth her body fair,
And limb by limb would set before his eyes
Her loveliness as he had seen it there;
Then cry: Why think of these vain mysteries
When still ahead such happy life there lies?
And yet, and yet, this that doth so outshine
All other beauty, is it wholly mine?

How can it change, that throne of loveliness?
How can it change, but I grow old and die?
Perchance some other heart those eyes shall bless,
Some other head upon that bosom lie,
When all that once I was is long gone by:
And now, what memory through my mind has passed
Of men from some strange heaven of love outcast?

Who knows but in that chamber I may find
The clue unto this tangled, weary maze,
And vision clear, whereas I now am blind,
And endless love instead of anxious days,
A glorious end to all these dark strange ways?
Perchance those words she did but say to me
To try my heart; did she not give the key?

So passed the days; and sometimes would he strive
To think of nothing but her dear return,
And midst of kindly deeds would think to live;
But then again full oft his heart would burn
The uttermost of all the thing to learn:
Love failed him not, but baneful jealousy
HAD scaled his golden throne and sat thereby.

Now he began to wander nigh the door,
And draw from out its place the golden key,
And curse the gift, and wish the days passed o'er,
1315
Till in his arms his love once more should be;
Yet still he dreaded what his eyes should see
In those familiar and beloved eyes,
Changed now perchance in some unlooked-for wise.

At last a day came: on the morn of it
Did he arise from haggard dreamful sleep,
And on the throne of justice did he sit,
1320
In troublous outward things his soul to steep;
Then, armed, upon his war-horse did he leap,
And in the lists right eagerly did play,
As one who every care hath cast away.

Then came the evening banquet, and he sat
To watch the dancers' gold-adorned feet,
And with his great men talked of this and that,
1330
Then rose, with gold a minstrel-man to greet,
Then listened to his pensive song and sweet
With serious eyes, and still in everything
He seemed an unrebuked and glorious king.

But at the dead of night was he alone
Once more, once more within his wavering heart
Strange thought against confused thought was thrown,
1335
Nor knew he how real life from dreams to part;
All seemed to him a picture made by art,
Except the overwhelming strong desire
To know the end, that set his heart afire.

Dawn found him thus; then he arose from bed;
He kissed her picture hanging on the wall,
The linen things that veiled her goodlyhead
From all but him, and still, like bitterest gall,
1340
A thought rose up within him therewithal,

And strangely was his heart confused with fears
That checked the rise of tender, loving tears.

He gat the golden key into his hand,
And once more had a glimmering memory
Of how just so he once before did stand,
1350
Ready another golden key to try;
Then murmured he: Gat I not bliss thereby?
Unless all this is such a gleam of thought,
That to a man's mind sometimes will be brought,

Of how he lived before, he knows not where.
So saying, from the chamber did he pass,
And went a long way down a cloister fair,
1355
And o'er a little pleasance of green grass,
Until anigh the very door he was
That hid that mystery from him; there he stayed,
And in his hand the golden key he weighed.

There stood he, trying hard to think thereof,
The better and the worse, how all would be
If he should do the deed; but thought would move
From this thing unto that confusedly,
1360
And neither past nor future could he see,
Nay, scarce could say of what thing then he thought,
Such fever now the fierce desire had wrought.

Not long he lingered; in the lock he set
The golden key, as one constrained thereto,
And thrust the door back, and with scared eyes met
The lovely chamber that so well he knew,
1365
And therein still was all in order due;
No deathlike image seared his wondering eyes,
No strange sound smote his ears with ill surprise.

He sighed, and smiled, as one would say: Ah, why
Have I feared this, wherein was nought to fear,
Wrapping familiar things in mystery?
And even therewithal did he draw near
1370
To well-remembered things his soul held dear,
Gazing at all those matters one by one, 
That told of sweet things there in past days done.

There in the grey light were the hangings fair, 
No figure in them changed now any whit; 
The marble floor half hid with carpets rare, 
E'en as when first he saw her feet on it; 
A grey moth's whirring wings indeed did flit 
Across the fair bed's gleaming canopy, 
But yet no other change had passed thereby.

And by the bed upon the floor there lay 
Soft raiment of his love, as though that she 
Had there unclad her, ere she went away. 
He stopped and touched the fair things tenderly, 
And love swept over him as some grey sea 
Sweeps o'er the dry shells of a sandy bank, 
And with dry lips his own salt tears he drank.

He rose within a while, and turned about 
Unto the door, and said: Three days it is 
Before she comes to take away all doubt 
And wrap my soul again in utter bliss; 
I will depart, that she may smile at this, 
Giving the pity and forgiveness due 
Unto a heart whose feebleness she knew.

Therewith he turned to go, but even then, 
Upon a little table nigh his hand, 
Beheld a cup, the work of cunning men 
For many a long year vanished from the land, 
And up against it did a tablet stand, 
Whereon were gleaming letters writ in gold; 
Then breathlessly these things did he behold;

For never had his eyes beheld them erst, 
And well he deemed the secret lay therein; 
Trembling, he said: This cup may quench my thirst; 
Fair rest from this strange tablet may I win, 
And if I sin she will forgive my sin;

Nay, rather since her word I disobey 
In entering here, no heavier this will weigh.

Withal he took the tablet, and he read: 
O thou who, venturing much, hast gained so much, 
Drink of this cup, and be remembered 
When all are gone whose feet the green earth touch: 
Dull is the labouring world, nor holdeth such 
As think and yet are happy; then be bold, 
And things unthought of shall thine eyes behold!

Yes, thou must drink, for if thou drinkest not 
Nor soundest all the depths of this hid thing, 
Think'st thou that these my words can be forgot, 
How close soever thou to love mayst cling, 
How much soever thou art still a king? 
Drink then, and take what thou hast fairly won, 
For make no doubt that thine old life is done.

He took the cup, and round about the bowl 
Beheld strange figures carved, strange letters writ, 
But mid the hurryng tumult of his soul 
He of their meaning then could make no whit, 
Though afterwards their smallest lines would flit 
Before his eyes, in times that came to him 
When many a greater matter had grown dim.

So with closed eyes he drank, and once again, 
While on his quivering lip the sweet draught hung, 
Did he think dimly of those mourning men, 
And saw them windig the dark trees among, 
And in his ears their doleful wailing rung; 
His love and all the glories of his home 
E'en in that minute shadows had become.

E'en in that minute; though at first indeed, 
In one quick flash of pain unbearable, 
His love, his queen, made bare of any weed,

27tablet: Morris added this cup and engraved tablet.
Seemed standing there, as though some tale to tell
From opened lips; and then a dark veil fell
O'er all things there, a chill and restless breeze
Seemed moaning through innumerable trees.

Yet still he staggered onwards to the door
With arms outspread, as one who in dark night
Wanders through places he has known before;
Wide open were his eyes that had no sight,
And with a feverish flush his cheeks were bright;
His lips moved, some unspoken words to say,
As, sinking down, across the door he lay.

What strange confused dreams swept through his sleep!
What fights he fought, nor knew with whom or why!
How piteously for nothing must he weep,
For what inane rewards he still must try
To pierce the inner earth or scale the sky!
What faces long forgot rose up to him!
On what a sea of unrest did he swim!

He woke; the wind blew cold upon his face,
The sound of swirling waters smote his ear
Through the deep quiet of some lonely place;
Shuddering with horror at what might be near,
He closed his dazzled eyes again for fear,
Ere they had seen aught but the light of day
And formless things against it, black and grey.

Trembling awhile he lay, and scarcely knew
Why he was sick with fear; but when at last
His wretched soul unto his body drew,
And somewhat he could think about the past,
As one might wake to hell, around he cast
A haggard glance, and saw before him there
A grey cliff rising high into the air
Across a deep-swift river, and the door

Shut fast against him, did he see therein,
Wherethrough with trembling steps he passed before,
That happy life above all lives to win;
And round about him the sharp grass and thin
Covered low mounds that here and there arose,
For to his head his forerunners* were close.

Then with changed voice he moaned, and to his feet
Slowly he got, and 'twixt the tree-boles grey
He 'gan to go, and tender words and sweet
Were in his ears, the promise of a day
When he should cast all troubous thoughts away.
He stopped, and turned his face unto the trees
To hearken to the moaning of the breeze;

Because it seemed well-nigh articulate;
He cried aloud: Come back, come back to me!
If yet the echo of the fearful gate
Had any sound to help his misery;
He shut his eyes, lest he perchance might be
Caught by some fearful dream within a dream,
That he might wake up to his gold bed's gleam.

Voiceless the wind was, the grey cliff was dumb,
His eyes could show him not what that same place
Where to in days of hope his feet had come;
He cast himself adown, and hid his face
Within the grass, and heeding no disgrace,
Howled beastlike, till his voice grew hoarse and dim,
And little life indeed seemed left in him.

Then in a while he rose and tottered on
Adown that path, scarce knowing what had been
Or why his woe was such, until he won
To where had been of old the plesance green,
Whose beauty, whose decay he erst had seen,
That now indeed a tangled waste had grown,
Whose first estate scarce any man had known.

28forerunners: Firuz and his companions, now dead.
Roofless above it then he saw the house,\textsuperscript{29}
Whose vanished loveliness his heart had filled
With fresh luxurious longings amorous,
And thitherward, though thus he scarcely willed,
His feet must stray to see the wild bird build
Her nest within the chambers, once made bright
To house the delicate givers of delight.

And now the first rage of his grief being o'er,
Madness was past, though pain was greater still,
And he remembered well the days of yore,
And how his great desire made all things ill,
And aye with restlessness his life did fill;
Too hard to bear that he must cast away
Honour and wealth, to reach e'en such a day!

Now in the hall upon that bench of stone,
Where erst the mourners used to sit, he sat,
Striving to think of all that he had done
Before his heart's unnamed desire he gat,
Striving to hope that still in this or that
He might take pleasure yet before he died,
That the hard days a little joy might hide.

He moaned to think that he had cast away
All hope of quiet life then, when his hand
Was on the key 'neath that high cliff and grey,
And looking backward he awhile did stand;
Needs must he deem him worse than that sad band
Who therein erst their wretched lives outwore,
However great the burden that they bore.

For they, he said, had somewhat left of rest,
Since in that place indeed they could abide,
But on his heart the weight of woe so pressed
That he his wretched head could never hide,

\textsuperscript{29}Roofless. \ldots he saw the house: Morris added the description of the ruined palace.
And when they saw his dreamy eyes distraught,
His changeless face drawn with that hidden pain,
They said: THE MAN WHO NE’ER SHALL
LAUGH AGAIN.

H, these, with life so done
with now, might deem
That better is it resting in a
dream,
Yea, e’en a dull dream, than
with outstretched hand,
And wild eyes, face to face with
life to stand
No more the master now of
anything,

Through striving of all things to be the king;
Than waking in a hard taskmaster’s grasp
Because we strove the unsullied joy to clasp;
Than just to find our hearts the world, as we
Still thought we were and ever longed to be,
To find nought real except ourselves, and find
All care for all things scattered to the wind,
Scarce in our hearts the very pain alive.
Compelled to breathe indeed, compelled to strive,
Compelled to fear, yet not allowed to hope;
For e’en as men laid on a flowery slope
Twixt inaccessible cliffs and unsailed sea,
Painless, and waiting for eternity
That will not harm, were these old men now grown.
The seed of unrest, that their hearts had sown,
Sprung up, and garnered, and consumed, had left
Nought that from out their treasure might be rest;
All was a picture in these latter days,
That had been once, and they might sit and praise
The calm, wise heart that knoweth how to rest,
The man too kind to snatch out at the best,
Since he is part of all, each thing a part,
Beloved alike of his wide-loving heart.
AH, how the night-wind raved and wind and sea
Clashed wildly in their useless agony,
But dulled not or made weak the minstrel's song
That through the hall bemocked the lost year's wrong.

End of Vol.V.

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