RE thine eyes weary? November
Is thy heart too sick
To struggle any more with
doubt and thought,
Whose formless veil draws darkening
now and thick
Across thee, e'en as smoke-tinged
mist-wreaths brought
Down a fair dale to make it
blind and nought?
Art thou so weary that no world there seems
Beyond these four walls, hung with pain and dreams?

Look out upon the real world, where the moon,
Half-way 'twixt root and crown of these high trees,
Turns the dead midnight into dreamy noon,
Silent and full of wonders, for the breeze
Died at the sunset, and no images,
No hopes of day, are left in sky or earth:
Is it not fair, and of most wondrous worth?

Yea, I have looked, and seen November there;
The changeless seal of change it seemed to be,
Fair death of things that, living once, were fair;
Bright sign of loneliness too great for me,
Strange image of the dread eternity,
In whose void patience how can these have part,
These outstretched feverish hands, this restless heart?

N a clear eve, when the November sky
Grew red with promise of
the hoar-frost nigh,
These ancient men turned from
the outside cold,
With something like content that
they, grown old,
Needed but little now to help
the ease
Of those last days before the final peace.
The empty month for them left no regret
For sweet things gained and lost, and longed for yet,
'Twixt spring-tide and this dying of the year.
Few things of small account the whole did bear,
Nor like a long lifetime of misery
Those few days seemed, as oft to such may be
As, seeing the patience of the world, whereby
Midst all its strife it falls not utterly
Into a wild, confused mass of pain,
Yet note it not, and have no will to gain,
Since they are young, a little time of rest,
Midst their vain raging for the hopeless best.
SUCH thought, perchance, was in his heart, who broke
The silence of the fireside now, and spoke:
This eve my tale tells of a fair maid born
Within a peaceful land, that peace to scorn,
In turn to scorn the deeds of mighty kings,
The counsel of the wise, and far-famed things,
And envied lives; so, born for discontent,
She through the eager world of base folk went,
Still gaining nought but heavier weariness.
God grant that somewhere now content may bless
Her yearning heart; that she may look and smile
On the strange earth that wearied her awhile,
And now forgets her! Yet so do not we,
Though some of us have lived full happily!
THE STORY OF RHODOPE.

The Argument.
THERE WAS IN A POOR LAND A CERTAIN MAID,
LOWLY BUT EXCEEDING BEAUTIFUL, WHO, BY A
STRANGE HAP, WAS DRAWN FROM HER LOW
ESTATE, AND BECAME A QUEEN AND THE WORLD'S
WONDER.

GRECIAN-Speaking folk
there dwelt of yore,
Whose name my tale
remembers not, between
The snow-topped mountains
and the sea-beat shore,
Upon a strip of plain, and
upland green,
Where seldom was the worst
of summer seen,
And seldom the last bond of winter's cold;
Easy was life 'twixt garden, field, and fold.

My tale says these dealt little with the sea,
But for the mullet's flushed vermillion,
And weight o' the tunny: and what things might be
Behind the snowy tops but moon and sun
They knew not, nor as yet had any one
Sunk shaft in hill-side there, or dried the stream
To see if 'neath its sand gold specks might gleam.

Yet rich enow they were; deep-uddered kine
Went lowing towards the pails at eventide;
The sheep cropped close unto the well-fenced vine,
Whose clusters hung upon the southering side
Of the fair hill; the brown plain far and wide
Changed year by year through green to hoary gold;
And the unherded, moaning bees untold,

Blind-eyed to aught but blossoms, ranged the land,
Working for others; and the clacking loom
Not long within the homestead still did stand;
The spindles twirled within the women's room,
And oft amidst the depth of winter's gloom
From off the poplar-block white chips would fly
'Neath some deaf hand, watched of the standers-by.

Sometimes too would the foreign chapmen come,
And beach their dromond in the sandy bay;
And then the women-folk from many a home,
With heavy-laden beasts would take their way,
And round the black-keeled ship expend the day,
And by the moon would come back, light enow,
With things soon told, for that rough wealth to show.

Therefore of delicate array, full oft
Small lack there was in coffers of that land,
And gold would shine on shoulders smooth and soft,
And sparklike gems glitter from many a hand,
And by the altar would the Goodman stand
Upon the solemn days of sacrifice,
Clad in attire of no such wretched price.

But the next morn the yellow-headed girls
Would be afield, or 'twixt the vine-rows green,
And on the Goodman's forehead would no pearls,
But rather sun-drawn beaded drops be seen,
As the bright share carved out the furrow clean,
Or the thick swath fell 'neath the sturdy stroke:
For all must labour midst that simple folk.

Now, in a land where few were poor, if none
Were lordly rich, a certain man abode,
Who poorer was perchance than any one
That ruled a house; yea, somewhat of a load
Of fears he bare adown life's latter road,

1mullet: The red mullet, a member of the family Mullidae, is a moderate-sized red fish with two barbels on its chin.
2tunny: a tuna, esp. a bluefin tuna.
3dromond: a large ship propelled by many oars, used for commerce and war.
4share: ploughshare.
The Classical Tale for November

For, touching now upon his sixtieth year,
His wealth still waned, and still his house grew bare.

Why this should be none knew, for he was deft
In all the simple craft of that fair land;
Plough-stilt, and spade, and sickle, and axe-heft,
As much as need be pressed his hardened hand,
And creeping wan hope still did he withstand;
Wedded he was, and his grey helpmate too
Was skilled in all, and ever wrought her due.

Yet did his goods decrease: at end of dry
He cut his hay, to lie long in the rain;
And timorous must he let the time go by
For vintaging; and August came in vain
To his thin wheat; his sheep of wolves were slain;
Lame went his horses, barren were his kine,
His slaughtering-stock before the knife would pine.

All this befell him more than most I say,
And yet he lived on; gifts were plenty there,
The rich man's wealth but seldom hoarded lay,
And at a close-fist would the people stare,
And point the finger as at something rare;
Yet ever giving is a burden still,
And fast our goodman trundled down the hill.

Not always though had fortune served him thus;
In earlier days rich had he been and great,
But had no chick or child to bless his house,
And much did it mislike him of his fate,
And early to the Gods he prayed and late,
To give him that if all they took besides,
As to fate's feet will blind men still be guides.

So on a day when more than twenty years
Of childless wedlock had oppressed his wife,
She spake to him with smiles and happy tears;
And said: Be glad, for ended is the strife
Betwixt us and the Gods, and our old life

The Story of Rhodope

Shall be renewed to us; the blossom clings
Unto the bough long barren; the waste sings.

Joyful he was at those glad words, and went
A changed man through his homestead on that morn,
And on fair things stored up he stared intent,
And hugged himself on things he erst did scorn,
When life seemed quickly ended and forlorn.
And so the days passed, till the time was come
When a new voice should wait on its cold home.

March was it, but a foretaste of the June
The earth had, and the budding linden-grove
About the homestead with the brown bird's tune
Was happy, and the faint blue sky above
The black-thorn blossoms made meet roof for love,
For though the south wind breathed a thought of rain,
No cloud as yet its golden breadth did stain.

That afternoon within his well-hung hall,
Amidst many thoughts, the goodman lay,
Until a gentle sleep on him 'gan fall,
And he began to dream; but the sweet day
The dream forgot not, nor could wipe away
The pictures of his home, that seemed so good;
For midst his garden in his dream he stood;

Hand in hand with his wife he seemed to be,
And both their eyes were lovingly intent
Upon a little blossom fair to see
Before their feet, that through the fresh air sent
Sweet odours; but as over it they bent,
The day seemed changed to cloudiness and rain,
And the sweet flower, whereof they were so fain,

Was grown a goodly sapling, and they gazed
Wondering thereat, but loved it nothing less.
But as they looked a bright flame round it blazed,
And hid it for a space, and weariness
The souls of both the good folk did oppress,
And on the earth they lay down side by side,
And unto them it was as they had died.

Yet did they know that o'er them hung the tree
Grown mighty, thick-leaved; on each bough did hang
Crown, sword, or ship, or temple fair to see;
And therewithal a great wind through it sang,
And trumpet blast there was; and armour rang
Amid that leafy world, and now and then
Strange songs were sung in tongues of outland men.

Amid these sounds the goodman heard at last
A song in his own tongue, and sat upright
And blinking at the broad bright sun that cast
A straight beam through the window, making bright
The dusky hangings; till his gathering sight
Showed him outside two damsels, pail on head,
Who went by, singing, to the milking-shed.

And meeting them with jingling bit and trace
Came the grey team from field; a merry lad
Sat sideways on the foremost, broad of face,
Freckled and flaxen-haired, whose red lips had
A primrose 'twixt them, yet still blithe and glad,
With muffled whistle, swinging, did he mock
The maidens' song and the brown throstle-cock.

Then rose the goodman, happy, for his dream
Seemed nowise ill to think on; rather he
Some echo of his hopes the thing did deem,
If hardly any certain prophecy
Of happy things in time to come to be;
And into the March sun he wandered forth,
With life and wealth all grown of double worth.

From barn to well-stocked field he went that eve,
Smiling on all, and wondering how it was
That any one in such a world might grieve,
At least for long, at what might come to pass;
The soft south-wind, the flowers amid the grass,
The Classical Tale for November

Of hopeless longing for him, and his day
Mid restless yearning still must pass away.

O things went on, till June of that same year
Whereof I tell, when nineteen May-tides green
The maid had looked on, and
was grown so fair
That never yet the like of her had been
Within that land; and her divine soft mien,
Her eyes and her soft speech, now blessed alone
A house wherefrom all fair things else were gone.

Yet who's gloom'd thereat, not she it was,
Who, with her grave set face and heart unmoved,
Watched, wearied not, nor pleased, each new day pass;
Nor thought of change, she said. As well behaved,
By many men ere now was she beloved;
Wild words she oft had heard, and harder grown
At bitter tears about her fair feet strown.

For far apart from these she seemed to be,
Their joys and sorrows moved her not, and they
Looked upon her as some divinity,
And cursed her not, though whilsts she seemed to lay
A curse on them unwitting, and the day
Seemed grown unhappy, useless, as she came
With eyes fulfilled of thoughts of life and shame

Across their simple merriment. Meanwhile
She laboured as need was, nor heed'd aught
What thing she did, nor yet did aught seem vile
More than another that the long day brought
Unto her hands; and as her father fought
Against his bitter foe, she watched it all
As though in some strange play the thing did fall.

And he, who loved her yet amidst of fear,
Would look upon her, wondering, even as though
He, daring not her soul to draw anear,
Yet of her hopes and fears was fain to know;

The Story of Rhodope

Was fain to hope that she one day would show
In what wise he within her heart was borne;
Yea, if that day he found in her but scorn.

It fell then in the June-tide, mid these things,
That on an eve within the bare great hall,
When nigh the window the bat's flickering wings
Were brushing, and the soft dew fast did fall,
And o'er the ferry far away did call
The homeward-hastening traveller, that the three
Sat resting in that soft obscurity.

Some tale belike unto the other two
The goodman had been telling, for he said:
Well, in the end no more the thieves might do,
For when enough of them were hurt or dead
Needs must they cry for quarter; by Jove's head,
That parley as sweet music did I hear,
Who for three hours had seen grim death anear.

So then their tall ship did we take in tow,
And beached her in the bay with no small pain.
The painted dragon-head, that ye note now
Grin at Jove's temple-door with gapings vain,
And her steel beaks, the merchant-galley's bane,
We smote away; with every second oar
We roofed that house of refuge nigh the shore.

Then fell we unto ransacking her hold,
And left them store of meal, but took away
Armour, fair cloths, and silver things and gold,
Rich raiment, wine and honey; then we lay
Upon the beach that latter end of day,
And shared the spoil by drawing short and long;
That was before my fate 'gan do me wrong.

5beaks: sharpened metal-tipped beams that projected from the prow of ancient galleys, designed to pierce an enemy ship's hull.
And good things gat I; two such casks of wine,
And such a jar of honey, as would make
The very Gods smile, had they come to dine
E'en in this bare hall; ah! my heart doth ache,
Rhodope, O my daughter! for thy sake,
When of the gold-sewn purple robe I tell,
That certes now had matched thy beauty well.

What else? a crested helm all golden wrought,
A bow and sheaf of arrows; there they hang,
Since they with one thing else came not to nought
Of all the things o'er which the goodwife sang,
When on the threshold first my spear-butt rang,
And o'er the bay the terror of the sea
With clipped wings laboured slow and painfully.

Take down the bow, goodwife; a thing of price
Though undorned, therefore it yet bides here;
For trusty is it in the wood, and wise
The long shafts are to find the dappled deer
And mend our four days' fast with better cheer.
But for the other thing: the twilight fails
Amid these half-remembered woeful tales;

So light the taper for a little while
To see a marvel. Therewith speedily
The goodwife turned, the candle showed her smile,
And eyes upon Rhodope fixed, that she
Perchance in her some eagerness might see;
But on the brightening stars her wide eyes stared
E'en when the taper through the darkness glared.

Then to the great chest did the goodman go,
And turning o'er the coarser household gear
That lay therein, much stuff aside did throw
Ere from the lowest depths his hand did bear
A silken cloth of red, embroidered fair,
Wrapped about something; this upon the board
He laid, and 'gan unfold the precious hoard.

With languid eyes that hoped for little joy
Rhodope, as she turned, gazed down thereon,
Waiting the showing forth of that fair toy,
In days long past from fear and battle won;
But yet a strange light in her bright eyes shone
When now the goodman did the cloth unfold,
And showed the gleam of precious gems and gold.

And there upon the silken cloth now lay
Twin shoes, first made for some fair woman's feet,
Wrought like the meadows of an April day,
With gems amidst the sun of gold; most meet
To show in kings' halls, when the music sweet
Is at its softest, and, the dance grown slow,
Midst of white folds the feet of maids may show.

Now by these fair things did Rhodope stand,
And, blushing faintly, 'gan the latches' touch,
And daintily across them drew her hand,
Then let it fall, smiling, that overmuch
She thought of them; then turned away to such
Rude work as then the season asked of her,
With face firm set that weary life to bear.

Then said the goodman, with a rueful smile
Turned on her: Chick or child I had not then,
But riches, wherewith fortune did beguile
My heart to ask for more; and now again
That thou grow'st fairer than the seed of men,
All goes from me, and let these go withal,
Since I am thrust so rudely to the wall!

Long have I kept them; first, for this indeed,
That few men of our land have will therefor
To pay me duly; and the coming need
Still did I fear would make the past less sore;
And then withal a man well skilled in lore

6latches: narrow leather laces or thongs, used to fasten a sandal or shoe.
Drew dreamy o'er them once, and said that they
Bore with them promise of a changing day.

Yet bread is life, and while we live we yet
May turn a corner of this barren lane,
And Jove's high-priest hath ever prayed to get
These fair things, and prayed hitherto in vain:
Belike a yoke of oxen might I gain
To turn the home-field deeper, when the corn,
Such as it is, to barn and stack is borne.

The meal-ark' growth empty too, and thou,
'O fairest daughter, worthy to be clad
In weed like this, shalt feel November blow
No blessing to thee; cask-staves must be had
Against the vintage, seeing that men wax glad
Already o'er the bunches, and the year
Folk deem great wealth to all men's sons will bear.

So, daughter, unto thee this charge I give,
To take these things to-morrow morn with thee
Unto Jove's priest, and say, we needs must live;
Therefore these fair shoes do I let him see,
That he may say what he will give to me,
That they may shine upon his daughter's feet,
When she goes forth the sacrifice to meet.

Now as he spake again a light flush came
Into her cheek, and died away again;
Then cried the goodwife: Ah, thou bearest shame,
That we are fallen 'neath the feet of men,
That thou goest like a slave! what didst thou then
So coldly e'en on this man's son to look,
That he thy scornful eyes no more might brook?

Still sat Rhodope, e'en as though of stone
Her face was, and the goodman spake and said:
Nay, mother, nay, she is not such an one

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\[7\text{meal-ark: hutch for storing food.}\]

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The Story of Rhodope

As lightly to our highest to be wed
Before the crown of love has touched her head:
Be patient; hast thou ne'er heard stories tell
What things to such as her of old befell?

Kindly he smiled at her, as half he meant
The words he said; but now her changeless eye
Cast on him one hard glance, and then she bent
Over her work, and with a half-choked sigh
The goodman rose, and from a corner nigh
Took up some willow-withes, and so began
To shape the handle of a winnowing fan.\[8\]

UT with the new day's sun might you behold
The maiden's feet firm planted on the way
Which led unto the vale, where field and fold
About the temple of the Thunderer\[9\] ay,
And the priest wrought, a sturdy carle to-day,
Within the hay-field or behind the plough,
To-morrow dealing with high things enow.

First betwixt sunny meads the highway ran
With homesteads set therein, and vineyards green,
Now merry with the voice of maid and man,
Who shouted greetings the tall rows between,
Where to she answered softly, as a queen
Who feels herself of other make to be
Than those who worship her divinity.

The dark-eyed shepherd slowly by her passed,
And from his face faded the merry smile,
And down upon the road his eyes he cast,
And strove with other names his heart to wile
From thought of her; so coarse he seemed and vile
Before her smileless face, o'er which there shone
Some glory, as of a bright secret sun.

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\[8\text{winnowing fan: fan or sieve used to separate chaff.}\]
\[9\text{the Thunderer: Jove.}\]
That was for her alone. The mother stood
Within her door, and as the gown of grey
Fluttered about her, and the coarse white hood
Flashed from the oak-shade o'er the sunlit way,
She muttered after her: Ah, have thy day!
If thou wert set high up as thou art low,
On many a neck those feet of thine should go!

But heeding little of the hearts of these
She went upon her way, and walking fast
Soon left the tilled fields and the cottages,
For toward the mountain-slopes the highway passed,
And turned unto the south, and 'gan at last
To mount aloft 'twixt heathery slopes set o'er
With red-trunked pines, and mossy rocks and hoar.

Still fast she went, though high the sun was grown,
For on strange thoughts and wild her heart was set;
Those things held in the bosom of her gown
Seemed teaching hopes she might not soon forget:
She clenched her hands harder and harder yet,
And cried aloud: So small, so quickly done,
O idle, timorous life beneath the sun!

And here amid these fields and mountains grey,
Drop after drop slowly it ebbs from me,
And leaves no new thing gained; day like to day,
Face like to face, as waves in some calm sea!
With memory of our sad mortality
Pipes the dull tune of earth; nought comes anigh
To give us some bright dream before we die.

What say'st thou? beautiful thou art and livest,
And men there are, strong, young and fair now,
To take with thankful heart e'en what thou givest;
Love and be loved then! Nay, heart, dost thou know
How through thin flame of love thou still wilt show
The long years set with mocking images,
Ready to trap me if I think of these?

Ah, love they say, and love! Shall not love fade
And turn a prison, barred with vain regret
And vain remorse that we so lightly weighed
The woes wherein our stumbling feet were set,
Stifling with thoughts we never may forget;
Because life waneth, while we strive to turn
And seek another thing for which to yearn?

So deem I of the life that holds me here,
As though I were the shade of one long dead,
Come back a while from Pluto's region drear
To mine own land, where unremembered
My fathers are. Lo, now, these words just said,
This heathery slope my feet are passing o'er,
Yon grey-winged dove, has it not been before?

Would then that I were gone, and lived again
Another life; if it must still be so,
That life on life passes, forgotten, vain
To still our longings, that no soul can know
By what has been how this and this shall go;
Because methinks I yet have heard men tell
How lives there were wherein great things befell.

How mid such life had I forgot the past,
Nor thought about the future! but been glad
While round my head a dreamy veil I cast,
And seemed to strive with seeming good or bad;
Till at the last some dream I might have had
That nigh a god I was become to be,
And, dying, yet should keep all memory;

Know what I was, nor change my hope and fear
All utterly, but learn why I was born,
Nor come to loathe the what once to me was dear,
Nor dwell amidst a world of ghosts forlorn,
Nor see kind eyes, and hear kind words, with scorn.
But ye, O fields, and hills, and steads of men,
Why are ye fair to mock my longings then?
And therewithal panting she turned, and stood
High up the hillside; a light fitful wind
Sung mournful ditties through the pine-tree wood
That edged the borders of the pass behind,
And made most fitting music to her mind;
But clear and hot the day of June did grow,
And a fair picture spread out down below.

The green hill-slopes, besprinkled o'er with kine,
And a grey neat-herd10 wandering here and there,
And then the greener squares of well-propped vine,
The changing cornfields, and the homesteads fair,
"The white road winding on, that yet did bear
Specks as of men and horses; the grey sea
Meeting the dim horizon dreamily.

A little while she gazed, then, with a sigh,
She turned again, and went on toward the pass,
But slowly now, and somewhat wearily,
And murmuring as she met the coarser grass
Within the shade: What, something moved I was,
By hope, and pity of myself! Well then,
I shall not have that joy so oft again.

Then with bent head, 'twixt rocky wall and wall,
Slowly she went, and scarce knew what she thought,
So many a picture on her heart did fall,
Nor would she let one wish to her be brought
Of good or better. Going so, distraught,
The long rough road was nothing to her feet,
Nor took she heed of what her eyes might meet.

But so far through the pass at last she came,
That the road fell unto the temple-vale,
And there she stopped and started, for her name
She heard called out. She thought of many a tale
Of gods who brought to mortals joy or bale,
The Classical Tale for November

He seemed to swallow something in his throat:
These two nights, maiden, hath he been afloat,

Watching the tunnies; if thou turn'st again
Thou well mayst meet him coming from the sea.
Nay, said she, neither wholly shall be vain
My coming so far, since I have with me
Poor offerings meet for the divinity
From poor folk, which my mother bade me bear
To bless this midmost month of the glad year.

In a good hour, he said, for I have done
Little against the roes whereof to tell,
So I will fare with thee; and till the sun
Is getting low, in our house shalt thou dwell,
And in the evening, if it like thee well,
With helmet on the head, and well-strung bow,
Beside thee to thine own home will I go.

Nought spake she for a while, and his heart beat
Quicker with hope of some small happiness;
But at the last her eyes his eyes did meet.
She spake: Few hearts this heart of mine will bless,
And yet for thee will I do nothing less
Than save thee from the anguish of the strife
Wherewith thou faint wouldst make my life thy life.

Thou art unhappy now, but we may part,
And to us both is left long lapse of time
To gain new bliss. What wouldst thou? To my heart
Cold now and alien are this folk and clime,
And while I dwell with them no woe or crime,
If so I may, shall stain my garments' hem;
Thou art an image like the rest of them:

Yea, but an image unto me alone,
For unto thee this world is wide enow,
Full of warm hearts enow, so get thee gone
Upon thy way. I am not fallen so low
As unto thee dreams of false love to show,

The Story of Rhodope

Or for my very heart's own weariness
To give thee clinging life-long sharp distress.

Now fain I would unto the temple—stead;
And, if thou mayst, do thou go otherwhere,
For good it were that all thy hopes were dead,
Since nought but bitter fruit they now can bear.
He gazed at her as one who doth not hear,
Or hears an outland tongue ill understood;
While love and hate made wild-fire of his blood.

Yea, she belike was nigher unto death
Than she might know; yet did he turn at last,
And, clutching tight his short-sword's gold-wrought sheath,
Slowly along the seaward way he passed,
Nor backward at her any look he cast,
For fate would not that his blind eyes should see
How on the way her tears fell plenteously.

Yet not long there she stayed, but set her face
Unto the downward road, but had not fared
A many yards from that their meeting-place,
Before upon the wind a sound she heard,
As though some poor wretch a great sorrow bared
Unto the eyes of heaven, and then her feet
With quicker steps the stony way did meet.

And soon she said: O fate, all left behind,
I follow thee adown the bitter road
With weary feet, and heavy eyes and blind,
That leadeth to thy far unknown abode;
No need, then, with thy stings my flesh to goad,
Keep them for those that strive with thee in vain,
And leave me to my constant weary pain.

Now the pass, widening, to her eyes did show
The little vale, hemmed in by hills around,
Wherein was Jove's house, fair and great enow,
Some three miles thence, but on a rising ground,
And with fair fields as a green girdle bound,
And guarded well by long low houses white,
Orchards for fruit, and gardens for delight.

Far off, like little spots of white, she saw
The long-winged circling pigeons glittering
Above the roofs; the noise of rook and dawnt
Came sweet upon the wind from the dark ring
Of elms that edged the cornfields; with wide wing
The fork-tailed restless kitez sailed over her,
Hushing the twitter of the linnetsn near.

She stayed now, gazing downward; at her feet
A dark wood clad the hollow of the hill,
And its black shade a little lake did meet,
Whose waters smooth a babbling stream did still,
Then toward the temple-stead stretched on, until
Green meads with oaks beset 'gan hem it in,
And from its nether end the stream did win.

She gazed and saw not, heard and did not hear,
But said: Once more have I been vehement,
Have spoken out, as if I knew from where
Come good and ill, and whither they are sent,
As though I knew whereon I was intent;
So, knowing that I know not, e'en as these
Who think themselves as gods and goddesses,

To know both good and evil must I do.
Now ne'er again in this wise shall it be
While here I dwell, nor shall false hope shine through
My prison bars, false passion jeer at me
With what might hap if I were changed and free;
The end shall come at last, and find me here,
Desiring nought, and free from hope or fear.

So saying, but with face cleared not at all,
Rather with trembling lips, upon her way
Once more she went. Short now did shadows fall,
It grew unto the hottest of the day,
And round the mountain-tops the sky waxed grey
For very heat; June's sceptre o'er the earth,
If rest it gave, kept back some little mirth.

At last upon the bridge the stream that crossed
Just ere it met the lake she set her feet,
And walked on swiftly, e'en as one clean lost
In thought, till at its end her skirt did meet
A bough of briar-rose, whose blossoms sweet
Were draggled in the dust; she stooped thereto,
And from her hem its hooked green thorns she drew.

Then heaving a deep breath, she cast aside
The broken bough; and from the dusty road
She turned, and o'er the parapet she eyed
The broad blue lake, the basking pike's abode,
And the dark oak-wood where the pigeons cooed;
And as she gazed, some little touch of bliss
Came over her amidst her loneliness.

Drowsy she felt, and weary with the way,
And mid such listlessness that brought no pain,
She drew her arms from off the coping grey,
And o'er the bridge went slowly back again,
As though no whit of purpose did remain
Within her mind; but when the other end
She passed, along the stream she 'gan to wend.

She watched its eddies till it widened out
Into the breezy lake, and even there
Began the wood; so then she turned about,
And shading her grave eyes with fingers fair,
Beneath the sun beheld the temple glare

11daw: The jackdaw (corvus monedula) is a common dark Eurasian bird, somewhat smaller than a crow.
12kite: The kite is a hawk with long narrow wings and a deeply forked tail.
13linnet: a European finch (carduelis cannabina), a common small Old World finch whose plumage varies greatly with the seasons.
14briar-rose: Morris had used a briar-rose motif in his 1862 wallpaper design "Trellis."
O'er the far tree-tops; then she cast her down
Within the shade on last year's oak-leaves brown.

There as she lay, at last her fingers stole
Unto the things that on her bosom lay;
She drew them forth, and slowly 'gan unroll
The silken cloth, until a wandering ray
Upon the shoes' bright 'broderies 'gan to play
Through the thick leaves; and with a flickering smile
She 'gan her mind with stories to beguile,

Pondering for whom those dainty things were wrought,
And in what land; and in what wondrous wise
She missed the gift of them; and what things brought
The sea-thieves to her land; until her eyes
Fell on her own gear wrought in homely guise,
And with a half smile she let fall the gold
And glistening gems her listless hand did hold.

Then long she lay there, gazing at the sky
Between the thick leaves, growing drowsier,
While slowly the grey rabbit hobbled by,
And the slim squirrel twisted over her
As one to heed not; as if none were near
The woodpecker slipped up the smooth-barked tree,
The water-hen15 clucked nigh her fearlessly.

But in a little while she woke, and still
Felt as if dreaming; all seemed far away
Save present rest, both hope and fear and ill;
The sun was past the middle of the day,
But bathed in flood of light the world still lay,
And all was quiet, but for faint sounds made
By the wood-creatures wild and unafraid.

From out her wallet now coarse food she drew,
And ate with dainty mouth, then o'er the strip

Of dazzling sunlight where the daisies grew
Unto the babbling streamlet's rushy lip
She went, and kneeling down thereby did dip
Her hollow hand into the water grey
And drank, then back again she went her way.

There 'neath the tree-bole lay the glittering shoes,
And over them she stood awhile and gazed,
Then stooped down as though one might not choose;
And from the grass one by the latchet raised,
And with the eyes of one by slumber dazed
Did off her own foot-gear, and one by one
Set the bright things her shapey feet upon.

Then to the thick wood slowly did she turn,
And through its cool shade wandered till once more
Thinner it grew, and spots of light did burn
Upon her jewelled feet, till lay before
Her upraised eyes a bay with sandy shore;
And 'twixt the waves and birds' abiding-place
Was stretched a treeless, sunlit, grassy space.

Friendly the sun, the bright flowers, and the grass
Seemed after the dark wood; with upraised gown
Slowly unto the water did she pass,
And on the grassy edge she sat her down;
And since right swift these latter hours had flown,
Less did the sun burn; there awhile she lay,
Watching a little breeze sweep up the bay.

Shallow it was; a shore of hard white sand
Met the green herbage, and as clear as glass
The water ran in ripples o'er that strand,
Until it well-nigh touched the flowery grass;
A dainty bath for weary limbs it was,
And so the maiden thought belike, for she
'Gan put her raiment from her languidly,
Until at last from out her poor array
Pure did she rise, e'en as that other One* 730
Rose up from out the ragged billows grey,
For earth's dull days and heavy to atone.
How like another sun her gold hair shone 735
In the green place, as down she knelt, and raised
The glittering shoes, and long time on them gazed,
As on strange guides that thus had brought her there,
Then put them by, so that apart they fell,
And in the sunlight glittering lay and fair,
Like the elves' blossoms, hard and lacking smell;
Then to the sward she stooped, and bud and bell 740
Of the June's children got into her hand,
And left the grass for the scarce-covered sand.

She stood to watch the thin waves mount her feet
Before she tried the deep, then toward the wide,
Sun-litten space she turned, and 'gan to meet
The freshness of the water cool, and sighed
For pleasure as the little rippling tide
Lapped her about; and slow she wandered on,
Till many a foot from shore she now had won.

There, as she played, she heard a bird's harsh cry,
And looking to the steep hill-side could see
A broad-winged eagle hovering anigh,
And stood to watch his sweeping flight and free
Dark 'gainst the sky, then turned round leisurely.
Unto the bank, and saw a bright red ray
Shoot from a great gem on the sea-thieves' prey.

Then slowly through the water did she move,
Down on the changing ripple gazing still,
As loth to leave it, and once more above
Her golden head rang out the erns's note shrill,
Grown nigher now; she turned unto the hill,
And saw him not, and once again her eyes
Fell on the strange shoes' jewelled 'broideries.

And even therewithal a noise of wings
Flapping, and close at hand; again the cry,
And then the glitter of those dainty things
Was gone, as a great mass fell suddenly,
And rose again, ere Rhodope could try
To raise her voice, for now might she behold
Within his claws the gleam of gems and gold.

Awhile she gazed at him as, circling wide,
He soared aloft, and for a space could see
The gold shoe glitter, till the rock-crowned side
Of the great mountain hid him presently,
And she 'gan laugh that such a thing should be
So wrought of fate, for little did she fear
The lack of their poor wealth, or pinching cheer.

But when she was aland again and clad,
And turned back through the wood, a sudden thought
Shot through her heart, and made her somewhat glad.
Small things, she said, my feet have thither brought:
Perchance this strange hap shall not be for nought.
And therewithal stories she 'gan to tell
Unto her heart how such things once befell;

How as it had been it might be again.
Then from her fragrant breast she took the shoe
Yet left, and turned it o'er and o'er in vain,
If yet she might therein find aught of new
To tell her what all meant; and thus she drew
Unto the wood's edge, and once more sat down
Upon the fresh grass and the oak-leaves brown.

And there beneath the quickly sinking sun
She took again her foot-gear cast aside,
And, now scarce seeing them, she did them on;

*that other One: Venus.
17ern: eagle, esp. a long-winged sea-eagle.
And while the pie from out the oak-boughs cried
Over her head, arose and slowly hied
Unto the road again, and backward turned
Up through the pass. Blood-red behind her burned

The sunless sky, and scarce awake she seemed,
As 'gainst the hill she toiled; and when at last
Beneath the moon far off the grey sea gleamed,
And all the rugged mountain road was passed,
Back from her eyes the wandering locks she cast,
And o'er her cheeks warm ran the tears, as she
Told herself tales of what she yet might be.

But cold awakening had she when she came
Unto the half-deserted homestead gate,
And she must think how she would take the blame
That from her mother did her deed await,
Without a slave-like frightened frown at fate;
Must harden yet her heart once more to face
Her father's wondering sigh at his hard case.

So when within the dimly-lighted hall
Her mother's wrath brake out, as she did hear
Her cold words, and her father's knife did fall
Clattering adown; then seemed all life so drear,
Hapless and loveless, and so hard to bear,
So little worth the bearing, that a pang
Of very hate from out her heart up-sprang.

With cold eyes, but a smile on her red lips,
She watched them; how her father stooped again
And took his knife, and how once more the chips
Flew from the bowl half finished,19 but in vain,

Because he saw it not; she watched the rain
Of tears wherewith her mother did bewail
That all her joy in her one child should fail.

But when her mother's tears to sobs were turned,
The goodman rose and took her hand in his,
And then, with sunken eyes for love that yearned,
Gazed hard at her, and said: Nay, child, some bliss
Awaits thee surely yet; enough it is;
Trouble and hunger shall not chase me long,
The walls of one abiding-place are strong.

And thither now I go space, my child.
Askance she looked at him with steady eyes;
But when she saw that midst his words he smiled
With trembling lips, then in her heart 'gan rise
Strange thoughts that troubled her like memories,
And changed her face; she drew her hands from him,
And yet before her eyes his face waxed dim.

Then down the old man sat, and now began
To talk of how their life went, and their needs,
In cheerful strain; and, even as a man
Unbeaten yet by fortune's spiteful deeds,
Spoke of the troublous twisted way that leads
To peace and happiness, till to a smile
The goodwife's tearful face he did beguile.

So slipped the night away, and the June sun
Rose the next morn as though no woe there were
Upon the earth, and never any one
Was blind with love or bent by hopeless care;
But small content was in the homestead there,
Despite the bright-eyed June, for unto two
That dwelt there, life still held too much to do;

While to the third, empty of deeds it seemed,
A dragging dullness changed by here a pain,
And there a hope, waking or sleeping, dreamed;
But, waking still or sleeping, dreamed in vain;

18pie: magpie, a common European bird (Pica caudata), of the family Corvidae, having a long, pointed tail and black and white plumage, and known for its loud chatter and hoarding propensities.
19bowl half finished: Morris described carefully-wrought Scandinavian examples of such wood-carving in his later prose romances.
For how could anything be loss or gain
When still the order of the world went round,
And still the wall of death all hopes did bound?

So said she oft, and fell to hating men;
Nevertheless with hope still beat her heart,
And changing thoughts that rose and fell again
Would stir within her as she sat apart,
And to her brow the unbidden blood would start,
And she would rise, nor know wherein she trod,
And forth she walked as one who walks with God.

'Oftener indeed that dull and heavy mood
Oppressed her, and when any were anigh,
Little she spake, either of bad or good;
Nor would she heed the folk that were thereby
So much as thereon to look scornfully;
Unless perchance her father stood anear,
And then her set hard face she strove to clear.

And if he, fearful, answered with no smile
Unto the softening eyes, yet when he went
About his labour, would he so beguile
His heart with thought of her, that right content
He 'gan to feel with what the Gods had sent;
The little flame of love in him burned
Hard things and ill to part of pleasure turned.

Withal his worldly things went not so ill
As for a luckless man; the bounteous year
More than before his barn and vats did fill
With the earth's fruit, and bettered was his cheer;
So that he watched the winter draw anear
Calmly this tide, and deemed he yet might live
Some joy unto his daughter's heart to give.

But for the one shoe that the ern had left,
The goodwife's word was: Take the cursed thing,
And when the gems from out of it are reft,
Into the fire the weaver's rag go fling;

Would in like wise the fond desires that cling
Unto Rhodope's pride we thus might burn,
That she to some good life at last might turn!

I think some poison with a double curse
Hath smitten her, and double wilfulness;
For surely now the growth worse and worse,
Since the bright rag her wayworn foot did press.
Well then, and surely thou wilt do no less
Than as I bid; a many things we need,
More than this waif of cast-off royal weed.

With querulous voice she spake, because she saw
Her husband eye Rhodope's face as she
Still through her fingers did the grey thread draw
From out the rock, and, sitting quietly,
Seemed not to heed what all the talk might be;
But for the goodman's self he answered not,
Until at last the goodwife waxed o'er hot,

And laid hard word on word, till she began
To say: Alas, and wherefore was I wed
To such an one as is a foredoomed man?
Lo, all this grief hast thou brought on my head,
So wander forth, and dream as do the dead
When to the shadowy land they first are brought!
Surely thou knowest that we lack for nought!

Then blind with rage from out the place she went;
But still the goodman stood awhile, and gazed
Upon Rhodope, sitting as intent
Upon her work, nor aught her fair head raised.
At last he spake: Well, never was I praised
For wisdom overmuch before this day,
And can I now be certain of the way?

True is it that our needs are much and sore,
And that those gems would help us plenteously,
Yet do I grudge now more than heretofore
The very last of that strange gift to see.
What sayest thou? how dost thou counsel me,
O daughter? didst thou ever hear folk tell
Of the strange dream that at thy birth befell?

Blood-red her face grew as she looked on him,
And with her foot the twirling spindle stayed.
Yea, said she, something have I heard, but dim
My memory is, and little have I weighed.
The worth thereof: The goodman smiled and said:
Nay, child, as little wise as I may be,
Yet know I that thou liest certainly,

And so no need there is to tell the tale,
Or ask thee more what thou wouldst have me do;
Have thou thy will, for fate shall yet prevail,
Though oft we deem we lead her thereunto
Where lies our good. Daughter, keep thou the shoe,
And let the wise men with their wisdom play,
While we go dream about a happier day.

While he was speaking had she laid adown
The rock, and risen to her feet, and now
Upon her bosom lay his visage brown,
As round him both her fair arms did she throw;
Softly she said: Somewhat thy need I know;
Remember this whatever happeneth;
Let it make sweet the space 'twixt this and death!

Hard is the world; I, loved ere I was born,
This once alone perchance thy heart shall feel,
And thou shalt go about, of love forlorn,
And little move my heart of stone and steel:
Ah, if another life our life might heal,
And love become no more the sport of time,
Chained upon either hand to pain and crime!

A little time she hung about him thus,
And then her arms from round his neck unwound,
And went her ways; his mouth grew piteous
When he had lost her fluttering gown's light sound,
The elm-tree shade that flickered o'er her feet,
Though thronged beyond its wont the white way was
With folk well clad, who toward the town did pass.

Swiftly she went, till come half-way belike,
Then stayed her feet and looked up suddenly;
There by the way-side the hot sun did strike
Upon a patch of grass, whereon did lie
A grey old hound, and 'gainst an elm thereby
His master leaned, a shepherd older yet,
Whose deep-sunk eyes her eyes unwitting met.

Therewith a knot of folk she had just passed
Passed her in turn; maidens and youths they were,
Blithe with their life and youth; on her they cast
Such looks as if they had a mind to jeer,
Yet held back, some by wonder, some by fear,
Went on a space until they deemed them free,
Then through the summer day outburst their glee.

Her deep eyes followed them, and yet, indeed,
As images she saw them; there a space
Musing she stood, then turned, and at slow speed
Went back again to her abiding-place,
Just as the old man moved his puckered face
To speak some word to her; and so at last,
O'er her own threshold inward her feet passed.

Then to her sleeping-room she went, and knelt
Beside a chest, and raised the lid, and drew
From out the dark where year-long it had dwelt,
Remembered yet the while, the precious shoe,
And dreamy over it awhile she grew,
Then set it in her bosom, and went forth,
Pondering o'er what her fond desires were worth.

Still folk thronged on the highway; as she went
Some fragment of their talk would reach her ear,
Howso upon her dreams she was intent;
Of new-come men they spake, their ways and gear,

How glorious of array, how great they were,
How huge and fair their galley, that last eve
The little black-quayed haven did receive.

That talk of strange and great things raised at last
New and wild hopes in her, but none the less
Straightway unto her journey's end she passed,
And did what she must do, nor cared to guess
Why in the market-place all folk did press
Around a glitter as of steel and gold
That in the midst thereof she did behold.

Yet, her work done, she gat her back again
Unto the market-place, and curiously
'Gan eye the concourse, yea, at last, was fain
Unto the core thereof to draw anigh;
Her heart beat; strange she felt and knew not why,
As on she went, and still the wondering folk
To right and left before her beauty broke.

A temple midmost of the market-place,
Raised to the Mother of the Gods,20 here stood,
An ancient house in guise of other days,
And e'en amid that simple folk deemed rude;
Such as it was the country-folk thought good
To meet and talk there, o'er such things as they
Found hard to deal with as day passed by day.

So when she drew anigh its steps, thereon
She saw indeed a goodly company,
For there sat strange men, young and old, who shone
In such attire as scarce she thought could be;
And by these glittering folk from over sea
Were the land's fathers, and the chief-priest dight
To do a solemn sacrifice aright.

20Mother of the Gods: Probably Cybele or Rhea, wife of Saturn, from whom all the Olympians were descended.
E'en as she came into the foremost rank,
Bright gleamed the slayer's falchion\(^{21}\) in the sun,
And silently the rose-crowned heifer sank
Upon the time-worn pavement; yet not one
Of all the sea-farers might gaze upon
Victim or priest, for forth stood Rhodope
Lone on the steps, a glorious thing to see.

For on a tripod\(^{22}\) by the altar's side,
Gleaming, as that day year agone it gleamed,
The shoe her foot had pressed she now espied,
And o'er her soul a sudden light there streamed,
While from her eager eyes such glory beamed,
That all folk stared astonished; all must wait
For her first word as for the stroke of fate.

Yea, there she stood, that all fair things did lack,
Clad in a gown of dark grey woollen stuff,
The wares she had just dealt for at her back,
And all about her homely, coarse, and rough,
Yet, since her beauty blessed them, good enough;
For, as a goddess wandering on the earth,
How might she deem earth's richest gauds of worth?

Gently, yet with no flush on her smooth cheek,
She mounted up the steps, and spake out clear:
Perchance a match for you fair thing ye seek
Ye seem to prize so much; it lieth here,
And both of them on this day was a year
Were on my feet. My father will be glad,
Because great joy in them the old man had.

Then went a great shout up into the sky,
And in despite herself the blood would rise
Unto her cheek and brow, as quietly
From her white fragrant bosom, a world's prize,
She drew the mass of blazing 'broderies,'

\(^{21}\)falchion: a curved broadsword sharpened on the convex side.
\(^{22}\)tripod: a three-legged vessel used in temple services.
As he was wont, and still from that day forth
T ook little heed of things once held of worth.

Silent and pale, and strange-eyed still he grew,
And yet said nought hereon for many days,
Until at last he bade us take this shoe
And diligently search in every place
That we might come to, till we saw the face
Of her whose foot had touched it. Certainly,
Whereso she is, she hath been wrought for me;

Whereso she is, and by what name men name
Her loveliness and love unknown: lo now,
Young am I, and have heretofore had shame
To bend to love, e'en as my folk bend low
Before my throne, but now my pride doth grow
As a quenched candle in a golden house,
And through the dark I wander timorous.

We marvelled at his word, but deemed some God
Possessed his heart; but thenceforth constantly
Have we gone over the wide world, and trod
Rough ways snow, been tossed o'er many a sea,
And dealt with many a lie, until to thee
The Gods have brought us, O thou wondrous one!
That we might see thee ere our days are done.

Ah me! she said, what thing do ye demand?
Is it a little thing that I should go,
Leaving my people and my father's land,
To wed some proud great man I do not know?
I look for no glad life; yea, it is so,
That if a grain of love were left in me
In vain your keel had cleft our girdling sea.

No need to speak; I know what ye would say,
That where I go, still I and love shall rule;
That where I go, I bear about the day
Made golden by my beauty; base and dull,
Mid hollow shows to strive with knave and fool,

With death, and nothing done, to end it all!
Yet fear ye not! for surely I shall fall

Where the Gods cast me, nor turn round about
To gaze on bygone time; so it shall be
E'en as ye will. They stared at her, in doubt
If her sweet lips had spoken; yea, and she
Flushed 'neath their eyes fixed on her wonderfully,
Wondering herself at the new fear, new scorn,
That with beginning of new days was born.

But they, abased before the rough-clad maid,
Now led her to an empty ivory chair,
And each man knee unto the pavement laid,
And, unashamed, did reverence to her there;
And ever did she seem to grow more fair
Before their eyes, till fear arose in them
As they bent down to her rude garment's hem.

And then the rites unto the Gods went on,
While she sat musing on the wondrous tale;
And when all these at last were duly done,
They prayed her give command when they should sail;
She raised her face, grown quiet now and pale,
And said in a low voice: To-day were best,
For here at least may I have nought of rest.

The old is gone, the new is not yet come,
Familiar things with strange eyes I behold,
And nowhere now I seem to have a home.
But when I go from homespun unto gold,
My father and mother, poor folk bent and old,
Beaten by fortune, needs must go with me,
And share my proud new life beyond the sea.

And since the old man loveth me too well,
And hitherto small joy from me hath gained,
Meet is it that my lips alone should tell
How all is changed, and weal that long hath waned
Is wakened now, and the cold rain that rained
Upon his life's grey day hath met the sun,
And blossoms spring from the dull earth and dun.

And, O ye folk, midst whom my feet have dwelt,
And whom I leave now, if so be that I
Hard anger in my heart at whiles have felt
'Gainst things that pressed upon me wearily,
Yet now the kindness of time past draws nigh,
And ye be my folk still, when I go
Unto a land where e'en your name none know.

Then, midst their marvelling silence, she arose,
And took her cast down fardel up again,
And went her ways; and they, by whom all close
Her body passed, must tremble, and be fain
To think of common things to dull the pain
Of longings, as her lovely majesty,
Too sweet and strange for earth, brushed swiftly by.

And yet of earth she was, and as she went
Through the shrunk shadow to her old abode,
Fresh hope a new joy through her body sent,
The clear cold vision of her soul to cloud;
And less the striving world seemed like a load
To weary her, than a strange curious toy,
To solace life with foolish grief and joy.

Still grew that hope in her, and when she came
Unto the homestead, and her father met
Anigh the byre, then doubt, and fear, and shame,
Amid the joy of change did she forget,
As firm feet mid the loitering kine she set,
And cried aloud: O father, turn and gaze
On Fortune's friend, the Queen of glorious days!

He turned and stared upon her glittering eyes
And godlike mien, and 'gan to speak, but she
Cried out: The very Gods may call us wise,

For great days have they given to thee and me;
Things stranger than these meadows shall we see,
And thou shalt wonder that thou e'er didst keep
These kine, as Phoebus erst Admetus' sheep!

Then did she pour the whole tale out on him;
Eager at first, but faltered to behold
How he fell trembling in his every limb;
Through the new fever that her heart did fold
Again shame thrust its steely point and cold:
Alas, she thought, when all the tale is done,
Why go we thus alone beneath the sun?

He tried to speak, and the words came at last:
If thou art glad, then surely I am glad;
And yet, we thought our evil time had passed;
Surely the days grew not so wholly bad!
Ah me, a growing hope of late I had
Of quiet days and sweet; yet shame of me,
That I should dulle the joy that gladdeth thee!

Daughter, thy bidding I will surely do,
And go with thee; nameless bethink thee yet,
How yesterday shall seem full long ago,
When with to-morrow's dew the grass is wet.
Child, I will pray thee never to forget
This face of mine, this heart that loves thee well;
Let distance though, and time that sweet tale tell!

She cried: Ah, wilt thou have me lonelier
Than the Gods made me? As day passes day,
The life of fear and hope that happened here
Most oft, no doubt, shall seem full far away:
Yet be thou nigh, to be a scarce-felt stay

24as Phoebus erst Admetus' sheep: When (Phoebus) Apollo murdered the Cyclopes, Zeus sentenced him to serve a mortal master for a year, and Apollo became a herdsman to Admetus and brought prosperity to his household. The story appears in Euripides's Alcestis, and in "The Story of Alcestis," the Earthly Paradise's June classical tale.

23fardel: bundle or burden.
To my mazed steps, a green close fresh and sweet,  
On life’s hard way, to cool my weary feet.

I will not take my bidding back; go thou,  
And get thee ready swiftly to be gone;  
The sails are flapping in the haven now,  
And we depart before the day is done.  
O be thou glad, thou shalt not be alone!  
Canst thou not see e’en now how this my face  
Is softened to thee by the happy days?

He said no more, but eyed her lovingly,  
Upon his worn old face a trembling smile;  
Then turned him toward the house with one great sigh,  
And she was left alone a little while,  
Her restlessness with strange dreams to beguile,  
And though bright things those dreams did nowise lack,  
Yet oft oft-conquered cold fear would come back.

But midst her thoughts from out the house there came  
Her father and her mother, and she gazed  
Upon the twain with something more than shame,  
As she beheld what timid eyes and mazed  
The goodwill to her queenly beauty raised,  
And how with patient mien her father went,  
On all her motions lovingly intent.

Then to the market-place passed on the three,  
And though her grey gown only covered her,  
Her mother bore some shreds of bravery;  
And clad her father was in scarlet gear,  
Worn now and wretched, that he once did bear  
When long ago at his rich board he sat,  
And all that land’s best cheer the glad guests gat.

And as they stood there now, the simple folk,  
Grown used unto the wonder of the tale,  
Warmed with new joy, and into shouts outbroke;  
The goodwill flushed, but the old man turned pale,  
And gazed round helpless, his limbs seemed to fail.

As though age pressed him sore; Rhodope, she  
Grew softer-eyed, and spake majestically:

Fain am I, lords, that we depart straightway;  
For if a dream this is, I long full sore  
E’en in my dream to feel the wind-blown spray,  
And hear the well-timed rolling of the oar,  
And ere dark night behold the lessening shore  
From your dreamed dromond’s deck; so pass we on,  
If e’en so far as this my dream hath won.

Then said they: All is ready in due wise,  
E’en as thou bad’st; the ship has been warped round  
And rideth toward the sea, and sacrifice  
Has there been done, and goodly gifts been found  
For this land’s folk: but wilt thou not be crowned  
And clad in fair array of gold, that we  
May show thy beauty meetly to the sea?

Nay, said she, in this lowly guise of mine  
Let the king first behold me standing there,  
The Gods’ gift, that his heart may more incline  
Towards mine, if thus he note me strange and fair,  
Grown up a queen, yet with no wondrous care  
For what I should be. Make no more delay,  
Low looks the sun upon the watery way.

So seaward now with these all people moved  
Rejoicing, though belike they scarce knew why,  
And now Rhodope felt herself beloved;  
And as the south wind breathed deliciously  
O’er flowers and sweet things, and the sun did die  
Amid soft golden haze, her loveliness  
She gan to feel, and all the world to bless.

In her slim hand her father’s hand she took,  
Her red lips trembled, and her eyes were wet  
With tears that fell not; but the old man shook  
As one who sees death; then a hand she set  
Upon his shoulder, and said: Long years yet,
With loving eyes these eyes shalt thou behold
Among the glimmer of fair things and gold.

But nought he answered, and they came full soon
To where the gangway ran from out the ship
On to the black pier; white yet was the moon,
And the sun's rim nigh in the sea did dip,
And from the place where sky met ocean's lip
Ran a great road of gold across the sea,
Where played the unquiet waves impatiently.

Now was her foot upon the gangway plank;
Now over the green depths and oars blood-red
Fluttered her gown, and from the low green bank
Above the sea a cry came, as her head
Gleamed golden in the way that westward led,
And on the deck her feet were, but no more
She looked back then unto the peopled shore.

But with one hand held back as if to take
Her father's hand, she went on toward the prow;
And there she stood, and watched the billows break,
Nor noted when men back the ropes did throw,
And scarce knew when the sea fell from the bow
And the ship moved; nor turned, till, cold and grey,
And darkling fast, the waste before her lay.

But at the last she turned on well-poised feet,
And gazed adown the twilight decks, and heard
The freshening wind about the cordage beat,
The master's and rough helmsman's answering word;
And all alone she felt now, and afeard,
In spite of all the folk who stood around,
Unto her lightest service straightly bound.

A terror seized her; down the deck she passed,
Her gown driven close against her, and her hair
Loosed by the driving wind; till at the mast
She stayed, and muttered: Ah, he is not there.
And I, where am I? the dream seemed so fair.

When it began; but now am I alone,
Waiting, I know not what, till life be done.

Trembling, she drew her hand across her brow
As one who wakes; and then, grown calm once more,
She went with steady feet unto the prow,
And ran the line of reverent faces o'er
With anxious eyes, and stayed at last before
The ancient grey-haired man, the chief of these,
And spoke amid the washing of the seas:

Where is my father? I am fain to speak
Of many things with him, we two alone;
For mid these winds and waves my heart grows weak
With memory of the days for ever gone.
The moon was bright, the swaying lanterns shone
On her pale face and fluttering garment's hem;
Each stared on each, and silence was on them.

And midst that silence a new lonely pain,
Like sundering death, smote on her, till he spoke:
O queen, what sayest thou? the old man was fain,
He told us, still to dwell among his folk;
He said, thou knew'st he might not bear the yoke
Of strange eyes watching him: what say I more,
Surely thou knowest he never left the shore?

I deemed him wise and true: but give command
If so thou wilt'st; certes no great thing
It is, in two hours' space to make the land,
Though much the land-wind now is freshening.
One slender hand to the rough shroud did cling,
As her limbs failed; she raised the other one,
And moved her lips to bid the thing be done,

Yet no words came; she stood upright again,
And dropped her hand and said: I strive with change,
I strive with death the Gods' toy, but in vain:
No otherwise than thus might all be strange.
Therewith she turned; her unseeing eyes did range.
Wide o'er the tumbling waste of waters grey,
As swift the black ship went upon her way.

ARK night upon the cold still eve did fall
Amidst the tale, and now the fair guest-hall
Was lit with nought but firelight, as they sat,
Silent, soft-hearted, and compassionate
Midst their own flickering shadows; yet too old
They were to talk about the story told;
Too old, and knew too well what each man thought,
And feared in any pleasure to be caught
That hid a snare of sadness at its end.
So slowly did the tale's sweet sorrow blend
With their own quenched desires, and past regret,
And dear-loved follies they might scarce forget;
That in these latter days, indeed, were grown
Nought but a tale, for others to bemoan,
Who had not learned with sorrow's self to deal;
Who had no need an hour of bliss to steal,
With trembling hands, from the dark treasury
Of time long unregarded, long gone by,
Where cobwebbed o'er amid the dust it lay.
BUT these stole not, nor strove; from day to day
Enough of pleasure to their lot did fall
To stay them, that on death they should not call
With change or rest to end the weary tide;
Though careless now, his coming did they bide.