

Behind the Arras eBook

Behind the Arras by Bliss Carman

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Page 1

I

O Life, dear Life, in this fair house
Long since did I, it seems to me,
In some mysterious doleful way
Fall out of love with thee.

For, Life, thou art become a ghost,
A memory of days gone by,
A poor forsaken thing between
A heartache and a sigh.

And now, with shadows from the hills
Thronging the twilight, wraith on wraith,
Unlock the door and let me go
To thy dark rival Death!

II

O Heart, dear Heart, in this fair house
Why hast thou wearied and grown tired,
Between a morning and a night,
Of all thy soul desired?

Fond one, who cannot understand
Even these shadows on the floor,
Yet must be dreaming of dark loves
And joys beyond my door!

But I am beautiful past all
The timid tumult of thy mood,
And thou returning not must still
Be mine in solitude.

The Crimson House

Love built a crimson house,
I know it well,
That he might have a home
Wherein to dwell.

Poor Love that roved so far
And fared so ill,



Between the morning star
And the Hollow Hill,

Before he found the vale
Where he could bide,
With memory and oblivion
Side by side.

He took the silver dew
And the dun red clay,
And behold when he was through
How fair were they!

The braces of the sky
Were in its girth,
That it should feel no jar
Of the swinging earth;

That sun and wind might bleach
But not destroy
The house that he had builded
For his joy.

"Here will I stay," he said,
"And roam no more,
And dust when I am dead
Shall keep the door."

There trooping dreams by night
Go by, go by.
The walls are rosy white
In the sun's eye.

The windows are more clear
Than sky or sea;
He made them after God's
Transparency.

It is a dearer place
Than kirk or inn;
Such joy on joy as there
Has never been.

There may my longed-for rest
And welcome be,
When Love himself unbars
The door for me!



[Illustration]

The Lodger

I cannot quite recall
When first he came,
So reticent and tall,
With his eyes of flame.

The neighbors used to say
(They know so much!)
He looked to them half way
Spanish or Dutch.

Outlandish certainly
He is—and queer!
He has been lodged with me
This thirty year;

All the while (it seems absurd!)
We hardly have
Exchanged a single word.
Mum as the grave!

Minds only his own affairs,
Goes out and in,
And keeps himself upstairs
With his violin.

Mum did I say? And yet
That talking smile
You never can forget,
Is all the while



Page 2

Full of such sweet reproofs
The darkest day,
Like morning on the roofs
In flush of May.

Like autumn on the hills;
At four o'clock
The sun like a herdsman spills
For drove and flock

Peace with their provender,
And they are fed.
The day without a stir
Lies warm and red.

Ah, sir, the summer land
For me! That is
Like living in God's hand,
Compared to this.

His smile so quiet and deep
Reminds me of it.
I see it in my sleep,
And so I love it.

An anarchist, say some;
But tush, say I,
When a man's heart is plumb,
Can his life be awry?

Better than charity
And bigger too,
That heart. You've seen the sea?
Of course. To you

'T is common enough, no doubt.
But here in town,
With God's world all shut out,
Save the leaden frown

Of the sky, a slant of rain,
And a straggling star,
Such memories remain
The wonders they are.



Once at the Isles of Shoals,
And it was June . . .
Now hear me dote! He strolls
Across my noon,

Like the sun that day, where sleeps
My soul; his gaze
Goes glimmering down my deeps
Of yesterdays,

Searching and searching, till
Its light consumes
The reluctant shapes that fill
Those purple glooms.

Let others applaud, defame,
And the noise die down;
His voice saying your name,
Is enough renown.

Too patient pitiful,
Too fierce at wrong,
To patronize the dull,
Or praise the strong.

And yet he has a soul
Of wrath, though pent
Even when that white ghoul
Comes for his rent.

The landlord? Hush! My God!
I think the walls
Take notes to help him prod
Us up. He galls

My very soul to strife,
With his death's-head face.
He is foul too in his life,
Some hid disgrace,

Some secret thing he does,
I warrant you,
For all his cheek to us
Is shaved so blue.

He takes good care (by the shade
Of seven wives!)



That the undertaker's trade
He lives by thrives.

Nor chick nor child has he.
So servile smug,
With that cringe in his knee,—
God curse his lug!

But him, you should have seen
Him yesterday;
The landlord's smirk turned green
At his smile. The way

He served that bloodless fish,
Were like to freeze him.
But meeting elsewhere, pish!
He never sees him.

Yet such a gentleman,
So sure and slow.
The vilest harridan
Is not too low,

If there is pity's need;
And no man born,
For cruelty or greed
Escapes that scorn.

Most of all things, it seems,
He loves the town.
Watching the bright-faced streams
Go up and down,

I have surprised him often
On Tremont street,
And marked the grave face soften,
The mouth grow sweet,



Page 3

In a brown study over
The men and women.
An unsuspected rover
That, for our Common.

When the first jonquils come,
And spring is sold
On the street corners, some
Of the pretty gold

Is sure to find its way
Home in his hand.
And many a winter day
At some cab-stand,

He'll watch the cabmen feed
The pigeon flocks,
Or bid some liner speed
From the icy docks.

His rooms? I much regret
You cannot see
His rooms, but they were let
With guarantee

Of his seclusion there—
Except myself.
Each morning, table, chair,
Lamp, hearth, and shelf,

I rearrange, refreshen,
Put all to rights,
Then leave him in possession.
Ah, but the nights,

The nights! Sir, if I dared
But once set eye
To keyhole, nor be scared,
From playing Paul Pry,

I doubt not I should learn
A wondrous thing
Or two; and in return
Go blind till spring.



The light under his door
Is glory enough,
It outshines any star
That I know of.

Wirrah, my lad, my lad,
'T is fearsome strange,
The hints we all have had
Passing the range

Of science, knowledge, law,
Or what you will,
Whose intangible touch of awe
Makes reason nil.

Many a night I start,
Sudden awake,
Feeling my smothered heart
Flutter and quake;

Like an aspen at dead of noon,
When not a breath
Is stirring to trouble the boon
Valley. A wraith

Or a fetch, it must be, shivers
The soul of the tree
Till every leaf of it quivers.
And so with me.

Was it the shuffle of feet
I heard go by,
With muffled drums in the street?
Was it the cry

Of a rider riding the night
Into ashes and dawn,
With news in his nostrils and fright
Where his hoof-beats had gone?

Did the pipes, at "Bonny Dundee,"
Bid regiments form?
Did a renegade's soul get free
On a wail of the storm?

Did a flock of wild geese honk
As they cleared the hill?



Or only a bittern cronk,
Then all was still?

Was it a night stampede
Of a thousand head?
I know I shook like a reed
There on my bed.

Nameless and void and wild
Was the fear before me,
Ere I bethought me and smiled
As the truth flashed o'er me.

Of course, it was only his hand
Freeing the bass
Of his old Amati, grand
In the silence' face.

Rummaging up and down,
From string to string,
Bidding the discords drown,
The harmonies spring,

Where tides and tide-winds rove
Far out from land,
On the ocean of music a-move
At the will of his hand.

Sobbing and grieving now,
Now glad as a bird,
Thou, thou, thou
Of the joys unheard,

Luminous radiant sea
Of the sounds and time,
Surely, surely by thee
Is eternal prime.



Page 4

Holy and beautiful deep,
Spread down before
The imperial coming of sleep,
Endure, endure!

And sleep, be thou the ranger
Over it wan.
And dream, be thou no stranger
There with the dawn.

Then wings of the sun, go abroad
As a scarlet desire,
Unwearied, unwaning, unawed,
To quest and aspire,

Till the drench of the dusk you drink
In the poppy-field west;
Then veer and settle and sink
As a gull to her nest.

Wind,
Away, away!
And hurry your phantom kind
Through the gates of day,

Or ever the king's dark cup
With its studs and spars
Be inverted, and earth look up
To the shuddering stars.

Blaring and triumphing now,
Now quailing and lone,
Thou, thou, thou
Of the joys unknown!

Unknown and wild, wild,
Where the merry men be,
Sink to sleep, soul of a child,
Slumber, thou sea!

All this his fiddle plays,
And many a thing
As strange, when his mood so lays
The bow to the string.



Sleepless! He never sleeps
That I can find.
I marvel how he keeps
A bit of his mind.

There is neither sight nor sound
In the world of sense,
But he has fathomed and found
In the silvery tense

Keen cords on the amber wood.
As he wrings them thence,
Death smiles at his hardihood
For recompense.

Oh fair they are, so fair!
No tongue can tell
How he sets them chiming there
Clear as a bell.

An orchard of birds in June,
The winds that stream,
The cold sea-brooks that croon,
The storms that scream,

The planets that float and swing
Like buoys on the tide,
The north-going legions in spring,
The hills that abide,

The frigate-bird clouds that range,
The vagabond moon—
That wilful lover of change—
And the workaday sun,

Dying summer and fall,
Seasons and men
And herds, he has them all
In his shadowy ken.

He calls and they come, leaving strife,
Leaving discord and death,
Out of oblivion to life,
Though its span be a breath.

There they are, all the beautiful things
I loved and lost sight of



Long since in the far-away springs,
Come back for a night of

New being as good as their old,
Aye, better in fact,
For somehow he gilds their fine gold,—
Gives the one thing they lacked,

The breath, aspiration, desire,
Core, kindle, control,
Memory and rapture and fire,—
The touch of man's soul.

How know the true master? I know
By my joys and my fears,
For my heart crumbles down like the snow
With spring rain into tears.

Now I am a precious one!
With nothing to do
But idle here in the sun
And gossip with you

Of a stranger you have not seen,
As like never will.
I would every soul had a screen,
When the wind sets ill



Page 5

In the world's bleak house, like this
Strange lodger of mine.
His presence is worse to miss
Than sun's best shine.

I put no thought at all
Upon the end,
If only I may call
Such a man friend.

And a friend he is, heart light
With love for heft,
Proud as silence, whose right
Hand ignores his left.

Yes, odd! he gives his name
As Spiritus.
But that is vague as a flame
In the wind to us.

And then (but not a breath
Of this!) you see,
All his effects, my faith!
Are marked D.V.

His cape-coat has a rip,
But for all that,
(Folk smile, suggest a dip
In the dyer's vat,—

Those purple aldermen
Who roll about
In coaches, drive till ten,
And die of gout),

I think he finely shows
How learning's crumbs
At least can rival those
Of— 'st, here he comes!

Beyond the Gamut

Softly, softly, Niccolo Amati!
What can put such fancies in your head?



There, go dream of your blue-skied Cremona,
While I ponder something you have said.

Something in that last low lovely cadence
Piercing the green dusk alone and far,
Named a new room in the house of knowledge,
Waiting unfrequented, door ajar.

While you dream then, let me unmolested
Pass in childish wonder through that door,—
Breathless, touch and marvel at the beauties
Soon my wiser elders must explore.

Ah, my Niccolo, it's no great science
We shall ever conquer, you and I.
Yet, when you are nestled at my shoulder,
Others guess not half that we descry.

As all sight is but a finer hearing,
And all color but a finer sound,
Beauty, but the reach of lyric freedom,
Caught and quivering past all music's bound;

Life, that faint sigh whispered from oblivion,
Harks and wonders if we may not be
Five small wits to carry one great rhythmus,
The vast theme of God's new symphony.

As fine sand spread on a disc of silver,
At some chord which bids the motes combine,
Heeding the hidden and reverberant impulse,
Shifts and dances into curve and line,

The round earth, too, haply, like a dust-mote,
Was set whirling her assigned sure way,
Round this little orb of her ecliptic
To some harmony she must obey.

Did the Master try the taut string merely,
Give a touch, and she must throb to time?
Think you how his bow must rouse the echoes,
Quailing triumphing on, secure, sublime!

Ah, thought cannot far without the symbol!
Help me, little brother, hold the trend.
Dear good flesh, that keeps the spirit steady,
Lest it faint, grown dizzy at thought's end!

Waves of sound (Is this your thought, Amati?),
Climbing into treble thin and clear,
Past the silence, change to waves of color,
We must say, when eye takes place of ear?

Page 6

Not a bird-song, but it has for fellow
Some-wood-flower, its speechless counterpart,
Form and color moulded to one cadence,
To voice something of the wild mute heart.

Thrushes, we'll suppose, have for their tune-mates
The gold languorous lilies of the glade;
And the whippoorwill, that plaintive dreamer,
Some dark purple flower that loves the shade.

The song-sparrow tells me what the clover
Nods about beneath the gorgeous blue;
While the snowballs tell me old love-stories
Thistle-birds half hinted as they flew.

April's faith, in robin at his vespers,
Breathes a prayer too in my lilac blooms.
What the cloudy asters told the hillside,
My lone rainbird in the dusk resumes.

Bobolink is voice for apple blossom,
Breezy, abundant, good for human joys;
Oriole has touched the burning secret
Poppies hide with their deliberate poise.

Tiny twin-flowers, what are they but fancies,
Subtler than a field-lark can express?
Swallows make the low contented twitter
Lying just beyond the pansies' guess.

Yellowbird, the hot noon's warbler, pierces
Sense where tiger-lilies may not pass.
Are not crickets and all field-wise creatures
Brahmins of the universal grass?

Saffron butterflies and mute ephemera,
Doubt not, have their songs too, could we hear.
Every raindrop is a sea sonorous
As the great worlds thundering sphere to sphere.

There's no silence and no dark forever,
Clangoring suns to us are placid stars;
Swift-foot lightning with his henchman thunder
Lags behind these gnomes in Leyden jars.



Peal and flash and thrill and scent and savour
Pulse through rhythm to rapture, and control,—
Who shall say how far along or finely?—
The infinite tectonics of the soul.

Low-bred peoples, Hottentots, Basutos,
Have a taste for scarlet and brass bands.
Our friend Monet, feeling red repulsive,
Sees blue shadows in pale purple lands.

Sees not only, but instructs our seeing;
Taught by him a twelvemonth, we confess
Earth once robed in crude barbaric splendor,
Has put on a softer lovelier dress.

Feast my eyes on some old Indian fabric,
Centuries of culture went to weave,
And I grow the fine fastidious artist,
No mere shop-made textile can deceive.

Red the bass and violet the treble,
Soul may pass out where all color ends.
Ends? So we say, meaning where the eyesight
With some yet unborn perception blends.

You, Amati, never saw a sunset,—
Hear tornadoes in a spider's loom;
I, at my wits' end, may still develop
Unknown senses in life's larger room.

Superhuman is not supernatural.
How shall half-way judge of journey done?
Shall this germ and protoplast of being
Rest mid-life and say his race is run?

Softly there, my Niccolo, a moment!
Shall I then discard my simpler joys?
No, for look you, every sense's impulse
Is a means the master soul employs.



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Test and use of all things, lowest, highest,
Are alone of import to the soul;
Joys of earth are journey-aids to heaven,
Garb of the new sainthood sane and whole.

Earth one habitat of spirit merely,
I must use as richly as I may,—
Touch environment with every sense-tip,
Drink the well and pass my wander way.

Ah, drink deep and let the parching morrow
Quench what thirst its newer need may bring!
Slake the senses now, that soul hereafter
Go not forth a starved defrauded thing.

Not for sense sake only, but for soul sake;
That when soul must shed the leaves of sense,
Sun and sap may solace and support her,
Stored in those green hours for her defence.

Shall the grub deny himself the rose-leaf
That he may be moth before his time?
Shall the grasshopper repress his drumbeats
For small envy of the kingbird's chime?

Certain half-men, never touched by worship,
Soil the goodly feast they cannot use;
Others, maimed too, holding flesh a hindrance,
Vilify the bounty they refuse.

He's most man who loves the purple shadows,
Yet must love the flaring autumn too,—
Follow when the skrieling pipes bid forward,
Lie and gaze for hours into the blue.

He would have gone down with Alexander,
Quelling unknown lands beneath the sun;
Watched where Buddha in the Bo tree shadows
Saw this life's web woven and undone;

Freed his stifled heart in Shakespeare's people,
Sweet and elemental and serene;
Dared the unknown with Blake and Galileo;
Fronted death with Daulac's seventeen.



So shall mighty peace possess his spirit
Whom the noonday leads alone apart,
Through the wind-clear early Indian summer,
Where no yearning more shall move his heart.

Wise and foot-free, of the tranquil tenor,
He shall wayfare with the homeless tides;
Time enough, when life allures no longer,
To frequent the tavern death provides.

Life be neither hermitage nor revel;
Lent or carnival alone were vain;
Sin and sainthood—Help me, little brother,
With your largo finder-thought again!

Lift, uplift me, higher still and higher!
Climb and pause and tremble and plunge on,
Till I, toiling after you, come breathless
Where the mountain tops are touched with dawn!

Dark this valley world; and drenched with slumber
We have kept the centuries of night.
Cry, Amati, pierce the waiting stillness
Tremulous with forecast of the light!

Cry, Amati! Melt the twilight dirges
In "Te Deums" fit for marching men!
"Good," the days are chorusing, "shall triumph;"
Though the far-off morrows whisper, "When?"

What is good? I hear your soft string answer,
"I am that whereon the round world leans,
I am every man's poor guess at wisdom;
Evil is the soul's misuse of means.



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"Up through me, with melody and meaning,
Well the floods of being or subside,
The first dim desire of self for selfhood,
The last smile that puts all self aside.

"Hate is discord lessening through the ages;
Anger a false note, fear a slackened string.
Key thy soul up to the wiser manhood,
Gentler lovelier joy from spring to spring!"

Here in turn I help you, little brother,
Half surmise what you have half explained.
Store it by to ripen, and repeat it
Long hereafter as a glimpse you gained,

When the nineteenth century was dying,
From a strolling hand that held you dear,—
Appanage of time put in your keeping
For my far-off heritor to hear.

I imagine how his eye will kindle
When he fondles you as I do now,—
Bends above you wooing like a lover,
While you yield him all your heart knows how.

I shall have been dust a thousand summers,
But my dear unprofitable dreams
Shall be part of all the good that thrills you
In the oversoul's orchestral themes.

What is good? While God's unfinished opus
Multitudinous harmony obeys,
Evil is a dissonance not a discord,
Soon to be resolved to happier phrase,—

From time immemorial permitted,
Lest the too sweet melody grow tame,
And, untouched of pathos or of daring,
Hearts should never know what hearts proclaim:

The unstained unconquerable valor,
The unflinching loyalties of love.
Or if evil be at worst a blunder
No musician ever could approve,



The mere bungling of a hand that faltered,—
Mine or his who bade the planets poise,—
What a thing unthinkable for smallness
Is your frayed E string one touch destroys.

How that sea-gull out across the bay there
Rows himself at leisure up the blue!
Evil the mere eddy from his wing-sweep,
Good the morning path he must pursue.

Good, you think, and evil live together,
Both persisting on from change to change
Through interminable conservation,—
Primal powers no ruin can derange?

Deed and accident alike unending
By eternal consequence of cause?
No. For good is impetus to Godward;
Evil, but our ignorance of laws.

Say I let you, spite of all endeavor,
Mar some nocturne by a single note;
Is there immortality of discord
In your failure to preserve the rote?

When the sound shall pass my sense's confines,
Melt away to color or thin flame,
Does it still malingering in the prism,
Falsify the crucible with shame?

Hardly. For the melody and marring,
When they put the dear oblivion on,
Are become as fresh clay for the potter,
Neither good nor bad, for use anon.

Blighted rose and perfect shall commingle
In one excellence of garden mould.
Soul transfusing comeliness or blemish
Can alone lend beauty to the old.



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While the streams go down among the mountains,
Gathering rills and leaving sand behind,
Till at last the ocean sea receives them,
And they lose themselves among their kind,

Man, the joy-born and the sorrow-nurtured,
(One with nothingness though all things be,—
Great lord Sirius and the moving planets
Fleet as fire-germs in the torn-up sea,—)

Linked to all his half-accomplished fellows,
Through unfrontiered provinces to range,
Man is but the morning dream of nature
Roused by some wild cadence weird and strange.

Slowly therefore, Niccolo, and softly,
With more memories than tongue can tell,
Lower me down the slope of life, and leave me
Knowing the hereafter will be well.

Close with, "Love is but the perfect knowledge,
The one thing no failure can befall;
Lovingkindness betters loving credence;
Love and only love is best of all."

Beauty, beauty, beauty, sense and seeming,
With the soul of truth she calls her lord!
Stars and men the dust upon her garment;
Hope and fear the echoes of her word.

How escape we then, the rainbow's brothers,
Endless being with each blade and sod?
Dust and shadow between whence and whither,
Part of the tranquillity of God.

[Illustration: THE JUGGLER]

The Juggler

Look how he throws them up and up,
The beautiful golden balls!
They hang aloft in the purple air,
And there never is one that falls.



He sends them hot from his steady hand,
He teaches them all their curves;
And whether the reach be little or long,
There never is one that swerves.

Some, like the tiny red one there,
He never lets go far;
And some he has sent to the roof of the tent
To swim without a jar.

So white and still they seem to hang,
You wonder if he forgot
To reckon the time of their return
And measure their golden lot.

Can it be that, hurried or tired out,
The hand of the juggler shook?
O never you fear, his eye is clear,
He knows them all like a book.

And they will home to his hand at last,
For he pulls them by a cord
Finer than silk and strong as fate,
That is just the bid of his word.

Was ever there such a sight in the world?
Like a wonderful winding skein,—
The way he tangles them up together
And ravel them out again!

He has so many moving now,
You can hardly believe your eyes;
And yet they say he can handle twice
The number when he tries.

You take your choice and give me mine,
I know the one for me,
It's that great bluish one low down
Like a ship's light out at sea.

It has not moved for a minute or more.
The marvel that it can keep
As if it had been set there to spin
For a thousand years asleep!

If I could have him at the inn
All by myself some night,—

Inquire his country, and where in the world
He came by that cunning sleight!

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Where do you guess he learned the trick
To hold us gaping here,
Till our minds in the spell of his maze almost
Have forgotten the time of year?

One never could have the least idea.
Yet why be disposed to twit
A fellow who does such wonderful things
With the merest lack of wit?

Likely enough, when the show is done
And the balls all back in his hand,
He'll tell us why he is smiling so,
And we shall understand.

Hack and Hew

Hack and Hew were the sons of God
In the earlier earth than now;
One at his right hand, one at his left,
To obey as he taught them how.

And Hack was blind and Hew was dumb,
But both had the wild, wild heart;
And God's calm will was their burning will,
And the gist of their toil was art.

They made the moon and the belted stars,
They set the sun to ride;
They loosed the girdle and veil of the sea,
The wind and the purple tide.

Both flower and beast beneath their hands
To beauty and speed outgrew,—
The furious fumbling hand of Hack,
And the glorying hand of Hew.

Then, fire and clay, they fashioned a man,
And painted him rosy brown;
And God himself blew hard in his eyes:
"Let them burn till they smoulder down!"

And "There!" said Hack, and "There!" thought Hew,
"We'll rest, for our toil is done."



But "Nay," the Master Workman said,
"For your toil is just begun.

"And ye who served me of old as God
Shall serve me anew as man,
Till I compass the dream that is in my heart,
And perfect the vaster plan."

And still the craftsman over his craft,
In the vague white light of dawn,
With God's calm will for his burning will,
While the mounting day comes on.

Yearning, wind-swift, indolent, wild,
Toils with those shadowy two,—
The faltering restless hand of Hack,
And the tireless hand of Hew.

[Illustration]

The Night Express

Out through the hills of midnight,
Hurling and thundering on,
The night express from the outer world
Speeds for the open of dawn.

Out of the past and gloom-wrack,
Out of the dim and yore,
Freighted as train or caravan
Was never freighted before;

Built when the Sphinx's query
Was new on the lips of peace;
Hurled through the aching and hollow years
Till time shall have release;

Stealing and swift as a shadow,
Sinuous, urging, and blind,
Unpent as a joy or the flight of a bird,
With oblivion behind;

Down to the morrow country
Into the unknown land!
And the Driver grips the throttle-bar;
Our lives are in his hand.



The sleeping hills awake;
A tremor, a dread, a roar;
The terror is flying, is come, is past;
The hills can sleep once more.

A moment the silence throbs,
The dark has a pulse of fire;
And then the wonder of time is gone,
A wraith and a desire.



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Demonish, toiling, grim,
In the ruddy furnace flare,
While the Driver fingers the throttle-bar,
Who stands at his elbow there?

Can it be, this thing like a shred
Of the firmament torn away,
Is a boarded train that Death and his crew
Consorted to waylay?

His wreckers, grinning and lean,
Are lurking at every curve;
But the Driver plays with the throttle-bar;
He has the iron nerve.

We are travelling safe and warm,
With our little baggage of cares;
Why tease the peril that yet would come
Unbidden and unawares?

The lonely are lonely still;
And the friend has another friend;
Only the idle heart inquires
The distance and the end.

We pant up the climbing grade,
And coast on the tangent mile,
While the Driver toys with the throttle-bar,
And gathers the track in his smile.

The dreamer weary of dreams,
The lover by love released,
Stricken and whole, and eager and sad,
Beauty and waif and priest,

All these adventure forth,
Strangers though side by side,
With the tramp of time in the roaring wheels,
And haste in their shadowy stride.

The star that races the hills
Shows yet the night is deep;
But the Driver humors the throttle-bar;
So, you and I may sleep.



For He of the sleepless hand
Will drive till the night is done—
Will watch till morning springs from the sea,
And the rails stand gold in the sun;

Then he will slow to a stop
The tread of the driving-rod,
When the night express rolls into the dawn;
For the Driver's name is God.

[Illustration]

The Dustman

"Dustman, dustman!"
Through the deserted square he cries,
And babies put their rosy fists
Into their eyes.

There's nothing out of No-man's-land
So drowsy since the world began,
As "Dustman, dustman,
Dustman."

He goes his village round at dusk
From door to door, from day to day;
And when the children hear his step
They stop their play.

"Dustman, dustman!"
Far up the street he is descried,
And soberly the twilight games
Are laid aside.

"Dustman, dustman!"
There, Drowsyhead, the old refrain,
"Dustman, dustman!"
It goes again.

Dustman, dustman,
Hurry by and let me sleep.
When most I wish for you to come,
You always creep.

Dustman, dustman,
And when I want to play some more,
You never then are further off
Than the next door.



“Dustman, dustman!”

He heckles down the echoing curb,
A step that neither hopes nor hates
Ever disturb.

“Dustman, dustman!”

He never varies from one pace,
And the monotony of time
Is in his face.

And some day, with more potent dust,
Brought from his home beyond the deep,
And gently scattered on our eyes,
We, too, shall sleep,—



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Hearing the call we know so well
Fade softly out as it began,
“Dustman, dustman,
Dustman!”

The Sleepers

The tall carnations down the garden walks
Bowed on their stalks.

Said Jock-a-dreams to John-a-nods,
“What are the odds
That we shall wake up here within the sun,
When time is done,
And pick up all the treasures one by one
Our hands let fall in sleep?” “You have begun
To mutter in your dreams,”
Said John-a-nods to Jock-a-dreams,
And they both slept again.

The tall carnations in the sunset glow
Burned row on row.

Said John-a-nods to Jock-a-dreams,
“To me it seems
A thousand years since last you stirred and spoke,
And I awoke.
Was that the wind then trying to provoke
His brothers in their blessed sleep?” “They choke,
Who mutter in their nods,”
Said Jock-a-dreams to John-a-nods.
And they both slept again.

The tall carnations only heard a sigh
Of dusk go by.

[Illustration]

At the Granite Gate

There paused to shut the door
A fellow called the Wind.
With mystery before,
And reticence behind,



A portal waits me too
In the glad house of spring,
One day I shall pass through
And leave you wondering.

It lies beyond the marge
Of evening or of prime,
Silent and dim and large,
The gateway of all time.

There troop by night and day
My brothers of the field;
And I shall know the way
Their woodsongs have revealed.

The dusk will hold some trace
Of all my radiant crew
Who vanished to that place,
Ephemeral as dew.

Into the twilight dun,
Blue moth and dragon-fly
Adventuring alone,—
Shall be more brave than I?

There innocents shall bloom
And the white cherry tree,
With birch and willow plume
To strew the road for me.

The wilding orioles then
Shall make the golden air
Heavy with joy again,
And the dark heart shall dare

Resume the old desire,
The exigence of spring
To be the orange fire
That tips the world's gray wing.

And the lone wood-bird—Hark,
The whippoorwill night long
Threshing the summer dark
With his dim flail of song!—

Shall be the lyric lift,
When all my senses creep,



To bear me through the rift
In the blue range of sleep.

And so I pass beyond
The solace of your hand.
But ah, so brave and fond!
Within that morrow land,

Where deed and daring fail,
But joy forevermore
Shall tremble and prevail
Against the narrow door,

Where sorrow knocks too late,
And grief is overdue,
Beyond the granite gate
There will be thoughts of you.

[Illustration]

Exit Anima

“Hospes comesque corporis,
Quae nunc abitis in loca?”



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Cease, Wind, to blow
And drive the peopled snow,
And move the haunted arras to and fro,
And moan of things I fear to know
Yet would rend from thee, Wind, before I go
On the blind pilgrimage.
Cease, Wind, to blow.

Thy brother too,
I leave no print of shoe
In all these vasty rooms I rummage through,
No word at threshold, and no clue
Of whence I come and whither I pursue
The search of treasures lost
When time was new.

Thou janitor
Of the dim curtained door,
Stir thy old bones along the dusty floor
Of this unlighted corridor.
Open! I have been this dark way before;
Thy hollow face shall peer
In mine no more. . . .

Sky, the dear sky!
Ah, ghostly house, good-by!
I leave thee as the gauzy dragon-fly
Leaves the green pool to try
His vast ambition on the vaster sky,—
Such valor against death
Is deity.

What, thou too here,
Thou haunting whisperer?
Spirit of beauty immanent and sheer,
Art thou that crooked servitor,
Done with disguise, from whose malignant leer
Out of the ghostly house
I fled in fear?

O Beauty, how
I do repent me now,
Of all the doubt I ever could allow
To shake me like the aspen bough;



Nor once imagine that unsullied brow
Could wear the evil mask
And still be thou!

Bone of thy bone,
Breath of thy breath alone,
I dare resume the silence of a stone,
Or explore still the vast unknown,
Like a bright sea-bird through the morning blown,
With all his heart one joy,
From zone to zone.

Scituate, June, 1895.

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Transcriber's Note:

One block of ten lines from the title poem was printed without break:

Yet while they last how actual they seem!
Their faces beam;
I give them all their names,
Bertram and Gilbert, Louis, Frank and James,
Each with his aims;
One thinks he is a poet, and writes verse
His friends rehearse;
Another is full of law;
A third sees pictures which his hand can draw
Without a flaw.

This may be a typographical error.