

DANAË.

Still, brilliant with bright brass, the tower derides  
The sun's gold shafts ; which strike and on all sides,  
Like ridicule-lit laughter, spread ; and some  
In bravery bend back whence they have come,  
And try their strength with those that come direct,  
With first impetuous potency unchecked,  
From the god's bow. For this the heat is great  
O'er all the land of Argolis of late.  
The king, Acrisius, hopes his tower may prove  
Impregnable to liquid light and love  
Rolled round it in a golden ocean-tide  
Whose ebb is a June night : and so all dried  
And dusty have the ways become ; the fields,  
They wind among, with grain a rich soil yields  
Should glow, not thus discover to the eye,  
Between scant straws, their crops, what black cracks lie  
And lengthen snake-like on baked brittle earth.  
Nor dewed nor girlish comes the Dawn, a birth  
Militant ; not a sole dwarfed hare-bell dares  
To laugh : Night's tearless glitter naught repairs.  
Old Inachus scarce finds the strength to stretch  
On his hot bed—stirs like a fevered wretch,  
And limps round stones—so feebly seaward creeps.  
While in the tower-top small Danaë sleeps,  
Unconscious how a god close, closer steals  
Across her painted prison-floor, nor feels  
His burning kiss the hand he reaches first.  
She sleeps half-swooned : with sweat her brow has burst ;  
Pale lips apart show teeth like maids in bower,  
Nor past them has her sweet breath stirred this hour.

Leaves lap and overlap, and trees ; the lily,  
Deep-delved and fragile, grows up very stilly,  
Decked with bead-bells adroop, yet so abashed,  
She sees but couch-moss by rill-frolic splashed.  
So silken shade and shawls of varied hue  
Hid Danaë's limbs which whiter daily grew ;  
And nothing saw she, save her room's few things,  
Beside the well-conned window-view ; and brings  
Each year no increase to her life's thin store  
Of sights—the only one not known before  
A larger loveliness, that might be found  
By searching the great mirror's polished round :  
Which had advent so imperceptible  
It dwelt unnoticed there ; although, whimful,  
She loved to see—no soil of levity

In her fresh silent mind—in nudity,  
No flush-faced shame dared hinder to enjoy,  
Her beauty—purely with no least alloy  
Of vanity, since she had never seen  
Eyes like to those which modest maidens screen  
Themselves from, neither knew that any girls  
There were less fair than she, or who wore curls  
Less copious or of poorer purple sheen  
On lustre-lacking black. Oft would she lean  
As through a thunder-rain, while combing it,  
Nor then alone before her mirror sit;  
For when—cool after washing with well-water,  
Nurse daily stooping up the steep stair brought her—  
She gravely sat to musingly commune  
With her companion-self a June forenoon,  
To gain a smile's return sometimes she smiled.  
Since off her nurse's knee at first, beguiled,  
When little, by the bright resemblance to  
Her young glad life, she tottered towards the new-  
Perceived child, whose fresh rosy limbs resembled  
Eros' own in deep-dimpled mould, and trembled  
Like cress-framed skies gladdened to recognise  
Another blue,—deception friendly-wise  
Lingered, though she no longer patted, pleased  
To meet a pud like hers, and, seized  
With love, put out her lips to join the lips  
Out-thrust to them: no Years' hand quite down-strips  
The veil with child-dreams broidered; in her head  
Still somewhat separate existence led  
The twin, and not so much more silent, sister  
With her up-grown. Not once had she yet missed her,  
As o'er their earliest chubby limbs had come  
A gradual change, a whimsical, winsome  
Awkwardness peeping out till plumpness went:  
O'er salient points a certain tightness lent  
A peevish pinched appearance; in sight too  
Their shoulder-blades moved looselier; a new  
Sly meagreness had crept o'er them; as shoots,  
They sprouted up to taller growth; like roots  
Sent down into dark mould, grew whiter daily.  
Strange inner effervescence sparkled gaily  
Out through their eyes. The undecided place  
Of budding breasts, dissimulating grace  
As March flakes feign the snowdrop's calm, shows forms  
Hazy like mushrooms when the night-time warms,  
That globe and gleam, yet leave the stars in doubt  
If on the dewy slopes they shift about.

When moulds the potter on his whirling wheel  
Dumb clay, a hint of final curves will steal  
From clever hands in sapience sure ; just so  
Quaint querulous suggestions of a flow  
Of contour simpler, more capacious, slips  
From God's thumb when he moulds a woman's hips.  
Her thighs will lengthen faster than they round,  
Till their delightful devious line be found.  
The heels, too narrow, of the little feet  
Will give her steps a wayward wav'ring sweet.  
As when, unpropped, the heavy dahlias lean,  
Her head nods, nods. A mere caged white-mouse, seen  
Through close-strung wires, will writhe its sleek length high,  
And hold with pinky paws, and seem to sigh  
As, sniffing tainted air, it seeks a vent  
From prison ; and then scurries back, as bent  
On finding in the oft-searched farther end  
Some small escape ; and, since its birth there penned,  
Yet lives on, never losing childish hope  
Somehow eventually its sense may cope  
With most perplexing life-imprisonment:  
Thus Danaë, with like hopeful discontent,  
Led to and fro her white shape in her life's  
Wall-hampered home ; and still this useless strife's  
Fatigue can barely disappoint a mind  
So scantly versed in freedom, or unblind  
To fate's fell force eyes closed by charity  
To real and might-be sights' disparity.

Now, like whole fallen statues on old lawns,  
Deep puzzles for the country-minded fauns  
Who peep, the sisters sleep. While mimic sun  
Up one outstretched arm, cautious, crawls, up one  
Real sun-lips yearn, aquiver yet to scare,  
So lose, their prize ; who Zeus is well aware  
Lies not apurpose in his path. From fear,  
He e'en forbids the swallows twitter near.  
For daily—when, bold grown, some hour entered  
In at her casement high, he has e'en dared  
Come close up to the tall embroid'ring frame—  
Just as his fingers set her wools aflame,  
She started up to move more in the shade ;  
Still on he crept, and still she was afraid  
To feel his touch ; so his light widened, till  
Was left, except beneath the window-sill,  
No shade ; there crouched she in the broad'ning belt  
And watched the crimson of his last rays melt.

She

She liked to see and dodge him round the room,  
Which was great fun ; he gone, all grew to gloom.

'Twas then of old her nurse would lift her where  
She might well watch old darkness overbear  
The youthful light whom all things plead for—sheep  
Who bleat and lowing herds and, half asleep,  
Birds, ever loath to note how day's cup fills  
With joy ; and stables, then, and woods and hills  
Hush up ; nymphs, centaurs, folk with tails and horns,  
Settle themselves in nooks near lulling bourns.  
Then, floated to her head, came children's chatter,  
And she, it may be, startled by such clatter,  
Would let her eyes droop down to dark'ning earth,  
And watch them playing in their noisy mirth.  
Perchance they, quarrelling, fell by the ears  
For some small sudden play-chance ; then her tears  
Ran fast, and such upheaving sobs would rend  
Her slight frail frame as would not know an end,  
Till she was tucked up in her neat white bed;  
When would commence a coursing through her head  
Of wond'ring queries, how their love and hate  
Were roused, till stunned by sleep importunate.

So tall and slender later on she grew  
That, planted on a footstool, she could view  
The many lanes that led up through the fields,  
In which—towards where a deeper shadow shields  
First-fallen leaves, while the withdrawing sky  
Pities feet slow in dust—two wandered by  
Who late, in most reposeful country life,  
Have found unrest and something of the strife  
Of hearts, which cruel Eros loves to see.  
What balm was theirs to soothe? as peacefully  
They went, arm-linked, what made them so content  
In silence thus to walk, together leant?  
Boundless and vague, deep wishes welled in her;  
Wide grew her eyes ; and through the echoing air  
A memory—sad, single, precious scrap  
Of love-lore—sang,—while round her eyes she'd wrap  
Her hair to blind them,—what she once had heard  
A poor girl sing:—so sorrow's tide recurred.  
“ Haste thee, haste thee to my arms;  
Emptily  
Hang they, voided of thy charms.  
Marry me ! ”

Like some sick leaf, a fierce wind hunts alone  
Proving its gold rings false on stem and stone,  
This feather from Love's wing to Danaë blew.  
Ignorant of his name was she, nor knew  
Aught of his antic gambols with the maids,  
As, when she questions, her old nurse upbraids.  
For the crook'd crone has had instruction strict,  
To see how 'tis she lets herself be tricked  
To talk of love, men's manners, women's wiles;  
Therefore, well-taught how innocence beguiles  
The weak lips to unwise discovery,  
Has bound her tongue to stay most silently  
Within her mouth, till grown so taciturn  
Her gossip's-heart has learnt to never yearn  
For converse, though she truly loves the child—  
Who, the song sung, let loose her hair and smiled.  
Soon lifted eyes were tempted off anew  
Among the stars, those eyes most simply true,  
Thought but small holes drilled through a roof, the sky:  
What should she know of gods or destiny,  
Of Zeus, sky-king, or Kypris and her doves?  
What was to tell of them except their loves?  
No prayer she said ; nor had she learnt to muse  
How life's a dream, or of the soul that sues  
For speech from out the frigid lips of fate ;  
Nor knew she aught of the omniscience great,  
Or how her small mind some would father so.  
Yet there of mystery was what she might know,  
Who had found tokens in her tiny round,  
That little limit of her life was ground  
Sufficient for a larger lovelier growth,  
Attaching meanings to the light: how loath  
It was to shine, she thought, by such small holes,  
When the vast void, through which the day's sun rolls,  
It could flood, driving forth the sad dark sea  
Of night ; yet could not clothe her sweet fancy  
In words. Since her vocabulary small,  
Drafted from out her nurse's, could not call  
Her thoughts by name, she smiled them to her side,  
A mind's eye-harvest sweeter, not more wide,  
Than filled a miser barrel's critic-round  
Of sky-blue. Disentangled and unwound,  
Her idea of the home of blessedness,  
Whence stars shone, could not bind such vague distress  
As bosky gardens feed in glow-worm eyes,  
Peering through gloom, whence if a tuft arise,  
'Tis shown by light which haunts them like a ghost,

Those

Those few tufts just the things her life loves most,  
Her swoon's dream is, that she, transported thither,  
Loves, wanders, close-companioned, near a river;  
Un-characterized the friend, whose arms embrace her  
Slow pacing down a path star-daisies trace there.  
Meanwhile, at home and far from such a place,  
The sun, stretched o'er her, showers on her face  
Kisses, that meet no blush, nor dint the snow:  
Thus summer wastes, for all the high peaks know.

Her life, love-stinted over-much,—for, save  
Her nurse, no one to love, or that could crave  
Her love, she knew—had let heart-worship fall  
Portioned to dead things—as some silken shawl,  
That she would hold against her cheek, kiss it,  
Space out, and bid its folds her fancy fit;  
Till thus an afternoon was whiled away,  
Fondling its foolish yards. Another day  
Brought flowers that came in pitchers, or a load  
Plumping an apron, or else singly stowed  
In with the butter, sprinkled o'er the fruit,  
Or making dewy nests for eggs. First mute  
For gladness, next with clapping hands on feet  
That totter with impatience, see her greet  
With airy kisses little friends—small eyes  
Glorious with gazing on the liberal skies,  
Sent by the open-hearted folk who wonder  
“How fares small prisoner princess penned up yonder?”  
Next in her favour stood some exile shells—  
Large lips, agape with wonder-working spells  
Which the ear hearing, vainly the mind strove  
To dredge a meaning from. So, oft she wove  
With nets and toils of hair one to her ear,  
Deep in that cushion sunk she found most dear,  
Her feet out-thrust on th' mat most to her mind  
Because, 'mid green waved lines, it showed a kind  
Of ready needle-pictured likeness to  
Her whole bare body, over which there flew  
Much smaller portraits of herself, as she  
Is to her mind brought back by memory.  
As thus she sits, her treasures piled about,  
Words foil her ears that, in a sailor's, shout—  
“Aphrodite,  
Each wave mothers  
Thine almighty  
Form; uncovers  
It each breeze,

Thee to please,  
And to tease  
All thy lovers."

Sun down, the thick swoon from her body lifted:  
So, with trailed wings, is some slow eagle shifted  
By fed uneasiness. A vivid grey  
Blinded her; night's cold coming drove away  
Her sense once more: she slept, while pain did drum  
With muffled hands her temples dull and numb.  
Confusedly capricious dreams have wrung  
Those tones from her with which that girl had sung,  
While, like sea-chants climb twisted stairs to bed,  
Male words through dainty doors have reached her head.

And from that night, as some fond woman sits  
Beside her love, she with the sun, when its  
First matin wealth plunged on her shoulder, till,  
Having bathed and blessed her, it slipped o'er the sill.  
So changed she was, life wholly seemed becalmed.  
All summer-wonts, too, lingered unalarmed;  
For the fierce forest-fires of autumn sped  
Slower, glowed larger with less hectic red,  
To equal the great glow of July gold.  
It seemed that ne'er, they fallen low, their cold  
White ashes would be huddling round the farms  
And choking in at doors. On false alarms  
Birds flew to sea: still the bland weather stayed;  
Oft, too, the roof of clouds, rent through or frayed,  
On winter's lap let warm boons drop, to cheer  
Men's hearts. Such fondling had the tower dear,  
Where each and all those gleams are welcomed like  
A lover's letter.

When young breezes strike  
A tune, and Spring, spry wanton, comes, her nurse  
Looks puzzled, makes her pinched up lips to purse  
And her eyes blink, bewildered, at the maid,  
Who goldly glimmers in the gleam,—afraid  
They have not told her of the thing aright.  
She falls to rubbing them with all her might;  
For, what! a woman with child, no maid, she saw  
Sit where the maid had sat a year before.  
She fain had got to scolding but delayed,  
So clear the eyes she met; and then she prayed  
She might be much mistaken, and still knew  
She was not; such a queer knot how undo?  
For she had ne'er an instant left the tower,

Scarcely

Scarcely the room for much more than an hour.  
Who could have done this thing? O ye great gods!  
Walls, locks, and all man's cares make little odds  
To you, when once ye have a mind a thing  
Shall be: well may a man stare, whistle, sing,  
And blow upon his nails, if ye have entered  
With him a race on which perhaps had centered  
Dozens of spangled hopes—or life; 'tis one,  
And the race won before 'tis ever run.

So, when a boy-child came to light, her father  
Had to be told he was grandsire; though rather  
His ears had heard his daughter, pined away  
In prison lone, was gone to swell, that day,  
The dim ranks of his dead, who wait in earth's  
Strongholds, all kings, or issue by their births  
Of kings, or queens, or queenly-motherèd.  
He felt as though an ire-forged bolt o'erhead  
Was hurtling with intention, like the disc  
Young men in rivalry hurl, whereby great risk  
Is run by such as watch: so, all at once,  
Fear, worst midwife for action, did ensconce  
Herself within the unheroic head  
Of king Acrisius. Thus, straightway, from bed  
They drag poor Danaë, waked to foreign sights:—  
The dead night bruised and wounded by torch-lights;  
Rooms loud with jest, where girls dance wagers bare,  
Where wine-cups crashing wound no thrifty care;  
Close-huddled houses, lanes whence unfed howls  
Of unowned dogs disturb. All, which befouls  
A town, behind at length is left; the heels  
Of the guard, arm-weighted, clog in clay; she feels  
A fresh wet wind, and hears the weltering wash  
Of waters; then is lifted up, feet splash,  
And, when, set down again, she raised her eyes,  
She saw the simple stars, that in surprise  
Were crowded close together, and she, dazed,  
Lay like a fallen wing'd-thing; while the raised  
Male voices dwindled till the dipping oars  
Could make their rhythm felt. Then low-banked shores  
Parade black blotted groups of ilex-trees  
(The chest was hewn from such stout trunks as these,  
She floats in)—pyramids processional  
Of night-obliterated leaves, ranged tall  
Like mutes; while, like white lines of silent tombs,  
On either side behind the night-mist glooms;  
And like some broken-hearted woman bent,  
That heaves her hair with sobs,—as on she went—

A willow kneels among them here and there.  
The water wakes and louder wails to her—  
Nay, wails with old choked sorrows now no more :  
Triumphant shouts, borne from a sonorous shore,  
Break on her ears ; and happy hurried airs  
Make haste—lest she, when shaken unawares  
On Aphrodite's cradle-rockers, fear—  
To whisper good-will tidings in her ear.  
A boat had laboured with the chest in tow:  
Dull wooden sounds faint; homeward it does go.  
All this long time she held her baby tight,  
And stared the poor stars out with all her might:  
Now, looking down, she sees his waking eyes  
Claim—as his curled gold locks the sun—the skies  
In parentage. She dandles in the air  
The pretty wanton; who then clips her hair  
In fist-fulls, crows, and o'er her shoulder spies  
Hermes with Zephyrs wing'd like dragon-flies,  
Who, watchful how such frolic crew behaves,  
Pilots them o'er blue inly-varied waves.  
So many blues, yet each unlike the other,  
Grow all greens, when a Zephyr flies his brother.  
In vain the gallant Hermes doffs his hat;  
For jealous Zeus gave strict commandment, that  
His messenger should do his duty, dight  
In form impalpable to mortal sight :  
Yet, well seen of the baby demi-god,  
He from the merry knave receives a nod  
Now and again. The far grey tower stands  
Against the north, as left by Night's rash hands  
On brilliant-breasted Dawn a bruise of blue,  
To fade as her hale pulse revives anew.  
This god-freed, god-loved woman hail aloud,  
Breezes ! your king the sun mounts o'er a cloud.  
Swell your big-chested conchs, strain trumpet-throats ;  
He hears and knows you, though she little notes.  
Still the sad silent home, that distance veils,  
Each moment bears behind, as on she sails  
To new life, lit with large affinities ;  
And for her son Perseus what destinies  
Await, beyond the sounding straits that sunder  
Dead past from future life ! Still sailing under  
The blood-thick blue, at length Seriphos, reared  
Above a million moving waves, appeared.

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