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This etext was produced by Catherine Daly.

Marjorie Allen Seiffert

A WOMAN OF THIRTY

New York  
1919

To O.H.S.

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Night

I. The Old Woman

(A Morality Play)

The Old Woman

(A Morality Play)

Characters:

The Woman

The House

The Doctor

The Deacon

The Landlady

Doctor:

There is an old woman

Who ought to die--

Deacon:

And nobody knows

But what she's dead--

Doctor:

The air will be cleaner  
When she's gone--

Deacon:

But we dare not bury her  
Till she's dead--

Landlady:

Come, young doctor  
From the first floor front,  
Come, dusty deacon,  
From the fourth floor back,  
You take her heels  
And I'll take her head--

Doctor and Deacon:

We'll carry her  
And bury her  
If she's dead!

House:

They roll her up  
In her old, red quilt,  
They carry her down  
At a horizontal tilt,  
She doesn't say "Yes"  
And she doesn't say "No,"  
She doesn't say, "Gentlemen,  
Where do we go?"

Doctor:

Out in the lot  
Where ash-cans die,  
There, old woman,  
There shall you lie!

Deacon:

Let's hurry away  
And never look behind  
To see if her eyes  
Are dead and blind,  
To see if the quilt  
Lies over her face--  
Perhaps she'll groan  
Or move in her place!

House:

The room is empty  
Where the old woman lay,  
And I no longer

Smell like a tomb--

Landlady:

Doctor, deacon,  
Can you say  
Who'll pay rent  
For the old woman's room?

\* \* \* \* \*

House:

The room is empty  
Down the hall,  
There are mice in the closet,  
Ghosts in the wall--  
A pretty little lady  
Comes to see--

Woman:

Oh, what a dark room,  
Not for me!

Landlady:

The room is large  
And the rent is low,  
There's a deacon above  
And a doctor below--

Deacon:

When the little mice squeak  
I shall pray--

Doctor:

I'll psycho-analyse  
The ghosts away--

Landlady:

The bed is large  
And the mattress deep,  
Wrapped in a feather-bed  
You shall sleep--

Woman:

But here's the door  
Without a key!  
An unlocked room  
Won't do for me!

Doctor:

Here's a bolt--

Deacon:

And here's a bar--

Landlady:  
You'll sleep soundly  
Where you are!

Woman:  
Good night, gentlemen,  
It's growing late,  
Good night, landlady,  
Pray don't wait!  
I'm going to bed,  
I'll bolt the door  
And sleep more soundly  
Than ever before!

Deacon:  
Good night, madam,  
I'll steal away--

Doctor:  
Glad a pretty lady  
Has come to stay!

House:  
She lights a candle--  
What do I see!  
That cloak looks like  
A quilt to me!  
She climbs into bed  
Where long she's lain,  
She's come back home,  
She won't leave again.  
She's found once more  
Her rightful place,  
Same old lady  
With a pretty new face.  
Let the deacon pray  
And the doctor talk,  
The mice will squeak  
And the ghosts will walk.  
There's a crafty smile  
On the landlady's face,  
The old woman's gone,  
But she's filled her place!

Landlady:  
It's nothing to me  
If the old woman's dead,  
There's somebody sleeping  
In every bed!

II. Love Poems in Summer

## Singalese Love Songs

I

Your eyes are beautiful beggars,  
Careless singing minstrels,  
Who will not starve  
Nor sleep cold under the sky  
If they receive no largess  
Of mine.

Once lived a woman  
Of great charity--

At last  
Her own children  
Begged for bread.

II

I would make you love me  
That you might possess  
Desire--

For to your heart  
Beauty is a burned-out torch,  
And Faith, a blind pigeon,  
Friendship, a curious Persian myth,  
And Love, blank emptiness,  
Bearing no significance  
Nor any reality.

Only Weariness is yours:  
I would make you love me  
That you might possess  
Desire.

III

Is my love  
Of flesh or spirit?  
I only know to me  
Your eyes are wholly you.

Our glances dart  
Like the flash of a bird  
Gone, before the colour of his wing  
Is seen.

I have not bathed my soul  
In your eyes,  
My soul would drown.

IV

I have starved to know your lips  
Yet my soul  
Does not die of want.

For only dreams are real,  
And fulfilment is an illusion,  
There is but one fulfilment,  
Blind Nature's way--

My arms reach toward illusion,  
And I would carry mist against my heart,  
Not the warm, heavy head  
Of a sleeping child.

Starving, I hold my dream.

V

What do you seek,  
Beloved?

When you have had  
All of me  
There will remain for you  
One beautiful desire the less.

You think you seek my love  
But you seek  
My denial.

Hunger, Want,  
Is the only pain  
I would not spare you--  
Alas, that too  
Will die!

The Silent Pool

Your smile is a heron, flying  
Over waters cool,  
My thoughts of you are blue Iris!  
Today is the silent pool  
Which shining heron and Iris blue  
Are mirrored on.

Tomorrow  
Will still reflect the Iris--  
My thoughts of you;  
But the heron will be gone.

Nocturne

It is enough  
To feel your beauty  
With the lingers  
Of my heart,

Your beauty, like the starlight,  
Filling night so gently, that it dreams  
Unwakened.

I should feel your beauty against my face  
Though I were blind.

Theme Arranged for Organ

### I. PRELUDE

What would you have of me, my friend, in truth,  
A breath of understanding, or a glance  
Into your soul's dark places? Can a word  
Aid in your brave attempt to smother youth?  
Of what avail that trifling circumstance,  
In such a tumult could my voice be heard?

Before your bitter need my lips are dumb  
So little can I give you. Should I come  
To feed a starving Titan with a crumb?

### II. INTERLUDE

Alas, I am too foolish or too wise,  
Too soon am blinded or I see too far!  
How can I follow with expectant feet,  
What is the beacon light that holds your eyes,  
Can this blind alley lead to any star  
And through this dark confusion, what retreat?

For heaven is awed when comets crash to earth,  
But we, who grope and question our soul's worth,  
Stumbling, awaken only bitter mirth.

### III. POSTLUDE

A breath, a glance, a word,--no more, my friend,  
This is the sum of what I have to give  
Leaving the tale for ever incomplete.  
No perfect moment, and no tragic end,  
Within your heart those images shall live  
And die like footsteps down an empty street.

Yet all the while a stifled instinct saith:  
"Spend your souls vigour to the utmost breath  
And let the hounds come baying at the death!"

## The Moonlight Sonata

My soul storm-beaten as an ancient pier  
Stands forth into the sea; wave on slow wave  
Of shining music, luminous and grave,  
Lifting against me, pouring through me, here  
Find wafts of unforgotten chords, which rise  
And droop like clinging sea-weed. You, so white,  
So still, so helpless on this fathomless night  
Float like a corpse with living, tortured eyes.  
Deep waves wash you against me; you impart  
No comfort to my spirit, give no sign  
Your inarticulate lips can taste the brine  
Drowning the secret timbers of my heart.

## Possession

I hold you fast, your hurrying breath,  
Your wandering feet, your restless heart,  
Are mine alone, for only death  
You vowed today, can make us part.

Your eager lips, athirst to drain  
Life's goblet of its golden wine  
Shall drink tonight or thirst in vain--  
I hold you fast for you are mine.

And when I search your soul until  
I see too deeply and divine  
That you can never love me--Still  
I hold you fast for you are mine!

## Evening: the Taj Mahal (A Lover Speaks)

Beloved!...

India and you  
Breathe through my soul tonight,  
You in your gown, impossibly white--  
I marvel greatly that it fail  
To glow and pale  
With iridescent light--  
How can it hang in silent nun-like folds?  
Think of the flaming mystery it holds,  
You... You...

We stand in that wide place  
Where love is frozen in marble, spire on spire,  
A snow-white nightingale with a heart of fire  
Soaring in space.  
We gaze, together, into the shining pool



To catch the soul of beauty unaware  
Finding only the peaceful body there  
Of beauty drowned and still in waters cool.

Burning so luminously in these pure white things  
Somehow akin, are palpitating fires,

Intangible, yet visible as spires  
Or wings.  
And close at hand, an unseen Moslem sings  
Blind, haunting chants, which speak  
Of mystery, forevermore unguessed.  
O shining ones, I seek  
No farther, for my soul, content,  
Divines the secret of the Taj Mahal and you--  
Beauty and desire, possessed  
In white tranquillity, in flaming peace,  
Find rest.

#### The Gift

What is this wine you have poured for me?  
You have offered up  
Your face in its pure transparency  
Like a crystal cup  
Which trembling fingers slowly lift--  
It is faintly masked  
With a tremulous smile. You have brought me a gift,  
Your love, unasked.

Could you trust my reckless hands so much?  
With no vow spoken,  
You gave me a goblet, which at a touch  
Were utterly broken!  
Your smile replied: "Since the glass was filled  
It little mattered  
Whether the wine were drunk or spilled  
Or the goblet shattered."

#### The Bridge

I walk the bridge of hours from dawn till night  
My heart beating so loud in joyous wonder  
To know your love, that I can scarcely breathe;  
But in the lonely darkness, with affright  
I faintly hear, like ominous, distant thunder  
The unseen ocean surging close beneath.

Our bridge so frail, eternity so vast!  
When we must sink into the deep at last  
Heart of my heart, will you still hold me fast?

#### A Temple

## I. DOORWAY

Carven angels  
On the portals,  
Angels with crowns, and eagles  
And golden lions  
On the door.

This is why  
The alien worshippers went their way,  
Why you alone discovered  
The gates were open.

You touched the velvet curtains behind them,  
They parted to let you pass.

## II. WINDOW

I make a window  
Of you, beloved,  
Through which the sun colours  
The silence.

Even your absences  
Are spaces I have filled  
With sapphire;

Your denials  
Are burning gold,  
I have painted your reluctance  
Emerald green:

Your silences  
Are crimson  
On which your words make delicate  
Black tracery.

As for me,  
My will is the grey lead  
Which I have bent to hold the coloured  
Panes of you.

## III. SPIRE

My wish goes singing upward  
Holding a chime of bells  
In its heart:

Pigeons know my silent bells,  
Winds touch them and wonder.

That they might reach

That high blue--

Till star fingers touch them  
Ever so gently--

And drifting clouds  
Lay cool cheeks against them--

My wish goes singing upward  
Reaching into silence.

#### IV. PRIEDIEU

Beauty passes  
But dust is eternal.  
Outside the temple  
Beauty dies in the wind.

So when my temple is fallen  
And lies in dust,  
Where then will be the memory  
Of your beauty?

I pray my dust  
That it may hold your image  
Tomorrow and for ever.

#### V. FESTIVAL

The beloved is returning,  
Let the bells ring!

I too am a tower  
Hung with bronze bells,

I too am a bell  
Chiming to the winds,

I too am the wind  
Ringing to the hills,

I too am the hills  
Singing to the sky.

I too am the sky!  
The beloved is returning,  
Let the bells ring!

#### VI. DUSK

There is no soul too poor to build a temple  
Where it may go apart  
And worship darkness.

For out of darkness  
Images shine... and fade...

Since now there is no worship nor any music,  
Let incense be a curved smile  
On lips that remember,  
And candles, notes of laughter  
In empty dusk.

Above,  
A coloured window slowly turns  
Black to the night.

## VII. RUINS

Temples have fallen  
Before today,  
Stones are ever loosening their hold  
One on another...

You blocks of marble, sleeping in the sun,  
Can you remember chiming bells  
And incense?

Now there is only silence,  
Even the winged stones of archways  
Sleep in peace.

## Candles

Silence is but the golden frame  
That holds your face,  
My thoughts, like unblown candle-flame  
In a holy place  
Surround you. From this secret shrine  
Somewhere apart  
Do you not feel my candles shine  
Upon your heart?

## Winter Night

The I that does not love you  
I have kept hidden away  
In the dark.

(I never dreamed  
There was a You  
That does not love me!)

Tonight they met.

I hear their words

Falling like icicles  
Upon me...  
I am frozen in terror...  
Have they killed the You  
That Loves me?

Beloved, can you hear me  
Through the bitter sound  
Of icicles falling?  
Can you see me from behind  
Your frozen eyes?

Last Days

I

Shall I pretend  
These days are just like other days?  
One cannot spend  
Every day for seven weeks  
Saying good-bye.

So when I must  
I speak of your departure casually  
As though it were a hundred years away;  
As Youth is wont to say:  
"Sometime we all must die!"

II

We talk of all the happy things we have done,  
We pass them in review,  
"Do you remember?" is often on our lips.

One by one  
We touch our memories and put them all away--  
How shall I dare to look at them  
When you are gone!

III

There is no beginning to my love  
Nor any end--  
It is about your head  
Like the deep air,  
More than your breath can spend.  
Oft is about your heart  
Like arms of faith--  
Where you go, it is there.

IV

There are no last things to say,

What promise can I make?  
You know my love so well.  
All that I have is yours to take.  
(How will it be, with part of me away,  
Must not my soul be changed?)

Shall I stay young for memory's sake?  
Shall I be old and grave and grey?  
If I might choose, how could I tell!

V

The You I know  
I shall not see again,  
A stranger will return.

How shall I win the love  
Which he has kept apart  
With a blurred image which once was I?

I shall not know his heart,  
How can I learn?

Sorrow

Sorrow stands in a wide place,  
Blind--blind--  
Beauty and joy are petals blown  
Across her granite face,  
They cannot find  
Sight or sentience in stone.

Yesterday's beauty and joy lie deep  
In sorrow's heart, asleep.

Prison

I close the book--the story has grown dim,  
The plot confused; the hero fades  
Behind unmeaning words, and over him  
The covers close like window shades  
On empty windows. The watchful room  
Is weary. Dully the green lamp stares  
Into the shadows. The coals are dumb,  
The clock ticks heavily. The chairs  
Wait sullenly for guests who never come.

Suppose I leave this house, suppose my feet  
Plodding into the night  
Carry me down the empty street  
Made hideous with arcs of purple light...  
Inevitably I must return to bed.  
The house is waiting, chairs, and books, and clocks.

I am their prisoner. I have no more chance  
Of escape, when all is said,  
Than a dying beetle in a box--  
And life, and love,--and death--have gone to France.

#### The Dream House

I steal across the sodden floor  
And dead leaves blow about,  
Where once we planned an iron door  
To shut the whole world out;

I find the hearth, its fires unlit,  
Its ashes cold--Tonight  
Only the stars give warmth to it,  
Only the moon gives light.

And yonder on our spacious bed  
Fashioned for love and sleep  
The Autumn goldenrod lies dead,  
The maple-leaves lie deep.

#### III. Studies and Designs

##### A Japanese Vase (A Design to be Wrought in Metals)

Five harsh, black birds in shining bronze come crying  
Into a silver sky,  
Piercing and jubilant is the shape of their flying,  
Their beaks are pointed with delight,  
Curved sharply with desire,  
The passionate direction of their flight,  
Clear and high,  
Stretches their bodies taut like humming wire.  
The cold wind blows into angry patterns the jet-bright  
Feathers of their wings,  
Their claws curl loosely, safely, about nothingness,  
They clasp no things.  
Direction and desire they possess  
By which in sharp, unswerving flight they hold  
Across an iron sea to the golden beach  
Whereon lies carrion, their feast. A shore of gold  
That birds wrought on a vase can never reach.

##### The Bow Moon (A print by Hiroshige)

From the dawn, Take San,  
Ungathered star,  
Follow me back through night  
Till I recapture  
Evening.

(The bending hours of darkness  
Sway apart like lilies  
Before the backward-blowing wind.)

At last,  
Bearing in her mysterious bosom  
Unravished beauty,  
Dark Yesterday rises to view against her silent sky  
Irrevocable... secret...  
Confronting the fantastic dream  
Of an impossible Tomorrow.

And that frail bridge,  
Delicate, immutable,  
Which rises higher than the moon,  
More everlasting than the fading sky,  
Joining What-was-not with What-might-have-been,  
That bridge were named "Today"  
If I had loved you, Take San,  
If you had loved me.

An Italian Chest  
(Lorenzo Designs a Bas-Relief)

Lust is the oldest lion of them all  
And he shall have first place,  
With a malignant growl, satirical,  
To curve in foliations prodigal  
Round and around his face,  
Extending till the echoes interlace  
With Pride and Prudence, two cranes, gaunt and tall.

Four lesser lions crouch and malign the cranes,  
Cursing and gossiping they shake their manes  
While from their long tongues leak  
Drops of thin venom as they speak.  
The cranes, unmoved, peck grapes and grains  
From a huge cornucopia, which rains  
A plenteous meal from its antique  
Interior (a note quite curiously Greek).

And nine long serpents twist  
And twine, twist and twine,  
A riotously beautiful design  
Whose elements consist  
Of eloquent spirals, fair and fine,  
Embracing cranes and lions, who exist  
Seemingly free, yet tangled in that living vine.

And in this chest shall be  
Two cubic meters of space  
Enough to hold all memory



Of you and me--  
And this shall be the place  
Where silence shall embrace  
Our bodies, and obliterate the trace  
Our souls made on the purity  
Of night...  
Now lock the chest, for we  
Are dead, and lose the key!

#### The Pedlar

Hark, people, to the cry  
Of this curious young magician-pedlar  
Seeking a golden bowl!

He wanders through the city  
Offering useful tin-ware  
For all the ancient metal  
You have left to rust  
In the dim, dusty attic  
Or mouldy cellar  
Of your soul.

He refuses nothing--  
Rusty nails  
Which may have played their part  
In a crucifixion--  
For ten of these he will give  
A new tin spoon.

The andirons  
Once guarding hearth-fires of content,  
Now dusty and forgotten  
In an obscure corner,  
He will give for these  
A new tin tea-kettle  
With a wooden handle.

And for this antique bowl  
Fashioned to hold  
Roses or wine?

The eyes of the pedlar glisten!  
O woman, if acid reveal  
Gold beneath the tarnished surface  
He will gladly give you  
His hands, his eyes, his soul,  
His young, white body--

If not,  
A mocking laugh  
And a bright tin sieve  
To hold your wine

And roses.

Portrait of a Lady in Bed

### I. THE COVERLET

My cowardice  
Covers me safely  
From everything...

From cold, which makes me yield  
And quietly die  
Beneath the snow;

From heat, which makes me faint  
Until cool nothingness receives me;

From hurt, (Seize me, O Lion,  
And I shall die of fright  
Before I feel your teeth!)

From love,  
Yes, most of all from love.

How can love touch me?  
Is it not heat,  
Or cold,  
Or a lion?

My cowardice covers me  
Safely  
From everything!

### II. THE PILLOW

To know you think of me  
Sustains my Spirit  
Through the long night.

(My thought of you  
Is wine, banishing sleep!)

Your thoughts of me are feathers,  
Light nothings,  
Drifting, dancing,  
Floating,  
Blown by a breath of fancy  
Away from your sight.

They would choke me,  
They would blind me  
With the Nothing I am to you  
If I dared see them;

But I bind them into a pillow,  
And to know that you think of me  
Sustains my spirit  
Through the night.

### III. SOUVENIR

Harlequin, seeing me gay  
You loved me,  
For fools need mirth,

O solemn Harlequin!

Tall tragedians make me laugh  
Joyously, riotously,  
Tall, dark villains, and heroes with blonde hair  
Make me laugh uproariously...  
(I could elope with a tragedian!)

But you with your clowning, Harlequin,  
Brought bony truth too near--

Harlequin, I might have loved you  
But I could not make you gay!

### IV. THE CURTAIN

I do not fear  
You, or me, or death,

There now is nothing left to fear  
But this,  
This curtain of blackness.

Once I feared you,  
And all you thought and felt

And all you said and did:  
I feared myself,  
And all you made me think and feel  
And say and do--

Now I no longer fear  
Thinking, feeling, saying, doing,

Nor blankness, silence, apathy, torpor--

I do not fear  
You, or me, or death--

I only fear  
This curtain of blackness  
Which is your absence.

## V. THE DREAM

Harlequin comes to me, smiling,  
Through the white-shining birch trees  
Of the twilight wood.

He has forgiven  
My cowardice and hesitations,  
Soon I shall sink into his arms  
With all the imagined fervour...  
Of a thousand dreams.

Why does he come so slowly?  
There is no longer anything  
To mar our meeting...

This must be real  
For Harlequin is still clowning,  
He waves his arms grotesquely  
To make me smile....

Quick, into his arms  
With unspent fervour.  
Why are the trees all sighing?  
Look, whispering birches, if you will,  
I and my love embrace!

They do not look,  
They do not seem to care...

Embrace me, my beloved!  
(Can these be passionate kisses?  
They feel so thin and cool  
Like mist.)

The birches shiver  
As though the night-wind stirred them.

Can we be dead?

Portrait of a Gentleman

Tower of stone  
Rugged and lonely,  
My thoughts like ivy  
Embrace my memory of you,  
Climbing riotously, wantonly,  
Till the harsh walls  
Are clothed in tender green.

Tower of stone,  
Stark walls and a narrow door

Which speak:

"You who are not for me  
Are against me,--  
If you are mine,  
Enter!"

But who would be prisoned  
In unknown darkness?

Tower of stone  
Rugged and lonely,  
I dared not enter and I would not go  
Till clasping you  
My arms were bruised and torn.

From the Madison Street Police Station

I, John Shepherd, vagrant,  
Petition the park commissioners  
For wider benches.

My soul has long been reconciled  
To the prick of gunny-sack,  
(O well-remembered woollen fleeces!)  
And rustling vests of newspaper,  
And the chill of rubbers on unshod feet,  
But to the wasteful burning of dry leaves,  
God's shepherd's mattress,  
Never!

Descendant of ancient ones  
Who tended flocks and watched the midnight sky,  
My forebears saw the Eastern star appear  
Over Judean hills.

Where do your flocks graze, gentlemen?  
Are there no sheep or shepherds any more?  
All day long I sought the flocks  
And came by night to a wide, grassy place,  
Where I could sit and watch the stars wheel by--  
And in the morning some one brought me here.

La Felice

La Felice, by the forest pond  
looks through leaves to the Western screen  
of Chinese gold that lies beyond  
black trees and boughs of golden-green.

The little body of La Felice  
weary of everything on earth  
has passed from love to love, till peace  
and beauty alone have any worth.

So still and deep the water lies,  
so fiery-cool, so yellow-clear;  
Here beauty sleeps! La Felice cries,  
I will give myself to beauty here !"

The mud is smooth and deep, the weeds  
beneath her feet are soft and cool,  
ripples widen and glistening beads  
of bubble rise on the forest pool.

The water reaches to her knee,  
now to her thigh, now to her breast,  
till like a child all peacefully  
does La Felice lie down to rest.

She struggles like a fearful bride  
with ecstasy--then La Felice  
turns quietly upon her side  
and over the sunset pool is peace.

#### The Journey

Three women walked through the snow  
    Beneath an empty sky,  
And one was blind, and one was old,  
    And one was I.

Bravely the Blind One led,  
    I questioned from behind  
"Tell me, where do we go?" She said  
    "Have courage... I am blind!"

We came at last to a cliff,  
    The Blind One plunged, and was gone--  
I looked behind me, stark and stiff  
    The Old One stood in the dawn.

The deep crevasse was black  
    Beneath the dawning day,  
I could not turn and travel back,  
    The Old One barred the way.

I could not turn aside,  
    (To lead, one dare not see)  
I think that day I must have died  
    Such silence is in me.

#### The Last Illusion

Along the twilight road I met three women,  
And they were neither old nor very young;  
In her hands each bore what she most cherished,

For they were neither rich, nor very poor.

In the hands of the first woman  
I saw white ashes in an urn,  
In the hands of the next woman  
I saw a tarnished mirror gleam,  
In the hands of the last woman  
I saw a heavy, jagged stone--

Along the twilight road I met three women,  
And they were neither fools nor very wise,  
For each was troubled lest another covet  
Her precious burden--so they walked alone.

### The Desert

Through dusty years, and drearily,  
Two lovers rode across a desert hill  
While patient love followed them wearily  
Through the long, sultry day...  
But when night came, the desert had its way,  
Turning, they found love cold and still.

It lay so pitiful a thing,  
Threadbare, and soiled, and worn--  
"Why have we kept such starveling love?" she cried,  
"Was it worth treasuring?"  
And he replied:  
"Bury it then! I shall not mourn!"

The wind came from the West,  
It seemed to blow  
Across a million graves to the sordid bier  
Where lay their love. She said: "We will bury it here!"  
They laid it low,  
They rode on, dispossessed.

And all around  
Rose silent hills against the darkening sky,  
Wave upon motionless wave.  
The night wind made a mournful sound.  
The woman turned: "It is lonely here!  
I am afraid!" she said.  
He made reply:  
"What is there left to lose or save?  
What is there left to fear?  
Our hearts are empty. Have we not buried our dead?"  
She said, "I fear the empty dark, be kind!"  
He said, "I am still here, be comforted!"

Then from its shallow grave  
Their love rose up and followed close behind.

## The Picnic

Here they come, in pairs, carrying baskets,  
Pale clerks with brilliant neckties, and cheap serge suits,  
Steering girls by the arm, clerks, too,  
Pretty and slim and smart,  
Even to yellow kid boots, laced up behind.

They take the electric cars far into the country,  
They descend, gaily chattering, at the Amusement Park.  
Under the trees they eat the lunch they have carried--  
Salad, sausages, sandwiches, candy, warm beer.  
They ride in the roller-coaster, two in a seat,  
(Glorious danger! Warm, delicious proximity!)  
The unaccustomed beer floods their veins like heady wine,  
And smothered youth awakens with shrill screams of joy.

The sun sets, and evening is drowned in electric lights;  
Arm-in-arm, they wander under the trees  
Everywhere meeting others, wandering arm-in-arm  
In the same wistful wonder, seeking they know not what.

Two leave the park and the crowds--The stars shine out,  
A river runs at their feet, behind them, a leafy copse,  
Away on the other shore, the fields of grain  
Lie sleeping peacefully in the starlight.  
Tonight the world is theirs, a legacy  
From those who lived familiar friends with river, field and forest--  
Their forebears.

Through the night, the same earth-magic moves them  
Which swayed those ancient ones, long-dead--  
And these, too, lean and drink,  
Drink deeply from the river, the flowing river of life.

Slowly they return to the crowds and the brilliant lights,  
Dazzled, they look aside, silently climb on the cars.  
They cling to the swaying straps, weary, inert, confused.  
The lurching ear makes halt--they are thrown in each others' arms--  
Alien and unmoved, they sway apart again--  
The car moves through the fields and suburbs back to the town.

They leave the car in pairs, the picnic basket's  
Rattling dismally, plate and spoon and jar.  
The boy takes his girl to her lodgings in awkward silence.

They look askance--"Good-night!"--the front door closes,  
Indeed their eyes have not met, since by the river  
Those wondrous moments  
Linked them to earth and night, not to each other.

## IV. INTERLUDE



Mountain Trails  
(GLACIER PARK, SEPT. '17)

I

Night stands in the valley  
Her head  
Is bound with stars,  
While Dawn, a grey-eyed nun  
Steals through the silent trees.  
Behind the mountains  
Morning shouts and sings  
And dances upward.

II

The peaks even today show finger prints  
Where God last touched the earth  
Before he set it joyously in space  
Finding it good.

III

You, slender shining--  
You, downward leaping--  
Born from silent snow  
To drown at last in the blue silent  
Mountain lake--  
You are not snow or water,  
You are only a silver spirit  
Singing!

IV

Sharp crags of granite,  
Pointing, threatening,  
Thrust fiercely up at me;  
And near the edge, their menace  
Would whirl me down.

V

Climbing desperately toward the heights  
I glance in terror behind me  
To be deafened--to be shattered--  
By a thunderbolt of beauty.

VI

The mountains hold communion;  
They are priests, silent and austere,  
They have come together

In a secret place  
With unbowed heads.

## VII

This hidden lake  
Is a sapphire cup--  
An offering clearer than wine,  
Colder than tears.  
The mountains hold it toward the sky  
In silence.

### October Morning

October is brown  
In field and row--

Yet goldenrod  
And goldenglow,  
Purple asters  
And ruddy oaks,  
Sumach spreading  
Crimson cloaks,  
Apples red  
And pumpkins gold--?

Perhaps it's gayer  
To be old!

### October Afternoon

The air is warm and winey-sweet,  
Over my head the oak-leaves shine  
Like rich Madeira, glossy brown,  
Or garnet red, like old Port wine.  
Wild grapes are ripening on the hill,  
Dead leaves curl thickly at my feet,  
Yet not one falls, it is so still.  
Crickets are singing in the sun,  
And aimlessly grasshoppers leap  
From discontent to discontent,  
Their days of leaping nearly done.  
There's a rich quietness of earth  
That holds no promise any more,  
And like a cup, Today is filled  
With the last wine the year shall pour.

### Maternity

Sturdy is earth,  
Dull and mighty,  
Unresentful--  
Of her own fertility

Covering scars  
With healing green.

You cannot anger earth,  
You cannot cause her pain  
Nor make her remember  
Your hungry, querulous love.

At last your unwilling body  
She tranquilly receives  
And turns it to her uses.

#### The Father Speaks

My little son, when you were born  
    There died a being, sweet and wild,  
    A lovely, careless, radiant child,  
A passionate woman--her I mourn.

And in her place has come another,  
    With troubled smile and brooding eyes,  
    Insatiate of sacrifice  
And wholly, utterly your mother.

#### To Allen

Beauty, the dream that I have dreamed so much  
Comes true in your quick smile,  
And on your cheek I see her touch  
And sometimes in your eyes a while  
Immortal beauty's fleeting image lies.  
Dear child, in whose veins beat  
The marching centuries of lovers' feet,  
All those brave, ardent ghosts in you arise--  
The souls who, loving beauty, gave you birth,  
With a chain of passion binding beauty to earth,  
A captured dream--these souls breathe with your breath  
Living again in beauty that knows no death.

#### To Helen

Lie still in my arms, little four-years-old,  
    Little bud that glows  
With more beauty and passion than it can hold,  
    Little flaming rose,

The spring's red blossoms, when winter lies deep  
    On a wind-swept world  
Of tossing branches, lie safely asleep  
    In brown buds curled.

They wake--and the wind strips their petals away  
    And spills them afar--

Can I keep you from blooming, whatever I say,  
Wild bud that you are!

#### The Immortal

Child of a love denied, a dream unborn,  
Spirit more brave  
Than passion's unfulfilment, wiser than fate--  
Nor breast nor grave  
As cradle you have known,--  
I mourn  
That my soul knows its own  
Too late!

A soul's half-breath,  
Passion's unremembered dream,  
Perfume without a vase,  
Intangible you seem  
To life or death.

And when the coloured mantle of the days  
Slips from my shoulders, and I lie  
Forgetful, dumb,  
Mingled with earth in passionless embrace,  
Will you, forgotten as a bird,  
Singing unheard  
In space,  
Will you not come  
When every other dream is gone,  
Bringing to that silent place  
The shadow of a gesture flung  
By motionless hands, a floating echo hung  
From an unspoken word,  
And to the empty sky  
The sunset of a day which did not dawn  
And cannot die !

#### To an Absent Child

I

At first in dreams  
I pressed you so close  
That you melted away on my breast,  
But now I wait, breathless and motionless,  
Till I feel your slender arms caress me  
Like swallows blown against me  
And quickly flown.

II

Small flower,  
My body is the earth from which you sprang,

But we are more to each other than earth and flower,  
Closer, even, than earth and flower,  
For the sky in me is one with the sky in you...

My love for you  
Is like sunlight shining in a quiet place,  
You shall feel my love like soft light  
Pouring about you.

III

I will not kiss you,  
For my kisses are a chain without an end;  
Nor take you in my arms,  
My arms would smother you against my breast;  
I will not even touch your shining head--  
But lift your eyes up, flower-face,  
And I will fill them as full of love  
As they can hold!

IV

Ah no! If you were here  
I would sweep you into my arms and hold you close!  
Though my love is of the spirit  
I must feel your little restless body  
Pressed for a moment against my heart.

Summer Night

Rain, rain murmuring endless complaints  
In mournful whisperings that never cease,  
You bring my tired brain a certain peace  
Like Latin prayers to absent-minded saints.

And whether silently to earth you fall,  
Or dashed and driven in tempestuous flight  
Like souls before God's wrath, the thirsty night,  
The soft and fecund earth shall drink you all.

Maura

I

Maura dreams unawakened--  
The warm winds touch the bands  
That hold her hair.  
The call of a silver horn floats by,  
A lover tosses flowers into her hands.

Maura dreams unawakened--  
She joins the maidens in their dance,  
Her limbs follow slow rhythms,

A lover leads her into the shade,  
She moves as in a trance.

## II

What dim confusion  
Troubles her dream,  
What passionate caress  
Disturbs her spirit's rapt seclusion?

Earth draws her close. How warm  
Is lover-earth! Like a sleeping bird  
She gives herself, then suddenly  
She is a leaf whirled in the storm.

Somewhere in a quiet room, her soul unstirred,  
Dead... or sleeping,  
Through the blind tumult hears afar  
The note of a horn, like a silver thread.  
She has given her soul to an echo's keeping.

## III

Who knows the mountain where the hunter rides  
Winding his horn?  
Maura who heard it in her dream  
Wakens forlorn,  
Too late to catch the tenuous thread  
Of silver sound  
Which in the troubled, intricate fugue of earth  
Is drowned.

## IV

Maura cannot follow over the hill,  
Her youth is landlocked as a hidden pool  
Where thirsty love drinks deep,  
A shining pool, where lingers  
The colour of an unseen golden sky,  
A pool where echoes fall asleep.

But restless fingers  
Trouble the waters cool,  
Snatch at reflected beauty, and destroy  
The mirrored dream. The pool is never still,  
And broken echoes die.

## V

The silver call has gone, but there is left to her  
The gentleness of earth,  
The simple mysteries of sleep and death,  
Of love and birth.

There are faces hungry for smiles, and starving fingers  
Reaching for dreams.

And like a memory are the wind-swept chords of night,  
And the wide melody of evening sky  
Where gleams  
A colour like the echo of a horn.  
There is a far hill where winds die,  
And over the hill lies music yet unborn.

VI

Maura lies dead at last,  
The body she gave to child and lover  
Now feeds flower and tree.

Earth's arms are wide to her. What breast  
Offers such gentle sleeping?  
Her limbs lie peacefully.

From the dark West  
There comes a note like the echoing cry  
Of one who rides through the dusk alone  
After the hunt sweeps by.

It fades--the night wind is forlorn--  
Music is still,  
But Maura has followed the silver horn  
Over the distant hill,  
Over the hill where all winds die.

November Dusk

Where like ghosts of verdant days  
Whispering down,  
Leaves in the November dusk  
Drift and drown,

Stand two lovers, motionless  
And apart  
In their sturdy nakedness  
Of the heart,

Two dark figures, side by side  
Through the mist  
Standing as though time had died  
Since they kissed,

Whose deep roots, alive and sound  
Blindly reach  
Mingling in the fertile ground  
Each with each--

Pray that we, when gaunt and old  
Like bare trees  
Through our common earth may hold  
Close, like these!

#### Winter Valley

I

Grey grasses drown  
in thin brown water  
Wound like a chain on the valley's  
Sunken breast.

Fallen leaves on the stream  
Float motionless--rest--  
So secretly the pale  
Water winds around  
Toward hidden pools,

Or sinking in the earth  
Is drowned.

II

Curved crimson stems,  
Thorny fingers of vine,  
Reach toward the wind.

Sunlight, thin and cold,  
Touches them--they shine.

Nothing passes for thorns to hold--  
Red thorns,  
Catching at shadows of the wind.

III

Silence in the valley,  
Silence without wings--

Like the caught breath  
Of an unspoken word  
When no words come.

Withered reeds, and thin brown water  
Above the reeds  
Are dumb.

IV

For what are you waiting, winter valley,



Withered valley, brown with reeds?  
You are hushed with waiting.

You are old with secrets,  
You are tranquil with forgetting.

You are harsh with thorns  
Of fruits long vanished.

## V. Love Poems in Autumn

### Ballad

Follow, follow me into the South,  
And if you are brave and wise  
I'll buy you laughter for your mouth,  
Sorrow for your eyes.

I'll buy you laughter, wild and sweet,  
And sorrow, grey and still,  
But you must follow with willing feet  
Over the farthest hill.

Follow, follow me into the South,  
You may return tomorrow  
Wearing my kisses on your mouth,  
In your eyes my sorrow.

### The Pathway of Black Leaves

#### I. THE TURNING

The pathway opened before her eyes  
Between black leaves--  
She laughed, and shivered, and turned aside  
From the dusty road.

Her feet moved on like heart-beats,  
She could not stop them;  
Relentlessly each step fulfilled itself  
And the steps behind it--  
A hidden chain, drawing her onward  
Captive.

And yet she said: "Now I walk free  
At last!"

#### II. TOLL-GATE

The sign read:

"Paupers may pass untaxed,  
The Rich shall pay a penny,

The Poor  
Must give all they possess."

She emptied her pockets bravely and passed through...  
They gave her a golden coin in return for her silver,  
Bearing on one side the head of a king,  
And on the other a worn inscription  
Curved like a wreath  
And written in a tongue she did not know.

### III. THE INN

There was the inn, beside the path,  
Standing like the words of an ancient prophet  
Forgotten long, now suddenly come true.

"They who break bread here  
Shall not eat for hunger;  
They who lie here  
Shall not sleep."

All night long the black leaves, one by one,  
Laughed, and shivered, and fell into darkness.

### IV. RETURN

She has come home  
To the house she knew:  
But she has forgotten  
The square oaken smile of the door.

The room is a stranger,  
The fire is sullen;  
On her hair a black leaf shines  
And clings where it fell.

Against her heart  
She has hidden away  
The bitter golden profile of a king.

### Elegy

I would be autumn earth, and hold  
Your beautiful body, slain,  
Where, lying still and cold,  
Only the winter rain  
Shall touch your limbs and face;  
Where the white frost shall wed.  
Your body to black mould  
In the close, passionless embrace  
Of that dark marriage bed:  
I would be autumn earth, and hold  
Your beautiful body, dead.

## Sequence

### I. ARRIVAL

Shining highways  
Sing to your step,  
Windows beckon,  
Doorways open a square embrace.

Doors laugh gently  
Swinging together  
Behind you.

### II. THE TOWER

There's a flag on my tower,  
And my windows  
Are orange to the night.  
They are set in grey stone that frowns  
At the black wind.

Inside, there's a guest at my hearth,  
And a fire  
Painting the grey stone gold.  
My windows are black  
With the hungry night peering through them.

Blackness lurks in corners,  
Wind snatches the sparks,  
Tongs and poker jangle together  
Like the iron bones  
Of a man that was hanged.

### III. THEY WHO DANCE

The feet of dancers  
Shine with mirth,  
Their hearts are vibrant as bells:

The air flows by them  
Divided like water  
Cut by a gleaming ship.

Triumphantly their bodies sing,  
Their eyes are blind  
With music.

They move through threatening ghosts  
Feeling them cool as mist  
On their brows.

They who dance

Find infinite golden floors  
Beneath their feet.

#### IV. PIANISSIMO

I took Night  
Into my arms,  
Night lay upon my breast.

If night had wings  
She would have brought me  
Stars for my hair.

The stars laughed  
Lightly  
From far away.

About my shoulders  
White mist curled.

#### V. PORTRAIT BY ZULOAGA

Death lies in wait  
For those who do not know  
What they desire,  
And Hell for those  
Who fear what they have taken.

These hands are wrinkled  
From stretching forth,  
Brown  
From the winds blowing upon them.

They are strong with seizing,  
They do not tremble.

#### VI. GESTURES

Let there be dancing figures  
On our wine-flask,  
Swastikas on our rug,  
Inscriptions in our rings  
And on our dwelling.

Let us build ritual  
For our worship,  
Pledge our love  
With vows and holy promises.

If oaths are broken,  
Let it be darkly  
With threatening gestures.

Thus we ignore  
That we love and die  
Like insects.

#### VII. VEILS

I shall punish your blindness  
With a veil.

I shall choose words that join  
Gaily word to word,  
I shall weave them flauntingly  
Into veil upon veil,

I shall wind them defiantly  
Over my lips, over my eyes.

You shall not see your name  
On my lips,  
You shall not see your image  
In my eyes!

And through my veils I shall not see  
That you are blind.

#### VIII. FREEDOM

I would be free  
From two old superstitions,  
Thanks and Forgiveness.

So I would think of you  
As Flame,  
As Wind,  
As Night,

To whom I have been  
Wind,  
And Flame  
And Night,

Together burned and swept,  
Now smothered  
In separate darkness.

#### IX. MUD

I am dazed and weary  
From the shapelessness  
Of what I am--

I am poured  
Among haphazard stones

In meaningless patterns.

Yesterday's sun dried me  
Between rounded cobbles,  
Today's deluge sweeps me  
Toward alien pavements,  
Tomorrow's sun shall dry me  
In a new design.

Better the turbid gutter  
Toward the open sea!

X. FOOLS SAY--

November's breath  
Is black in the branches of trees  
And under the bushes,

Harsh rain  
Whips down the rustling dance  
Of leaves.

There is smoke  
In the throat of the wind,  
Its teeth  
Bite away beauty.

Let fools say:  
"Spring  
Will come again!"

Disillusion

I touch joy and it crumbles under my fingers--  
The dust from it rises and fills the world,  
It blinds my eyes--I cannot see the sun.  
A choking fog of dust shuts me apart.

I remember the sparkling wind on a bright autumn morning,  
I let down my hair and danced in the golden gale,  
Then chased the wind as the wind chased fallen leaves--  
Wind cannot be caught and tamed like a bird.

I touch joy and it crumbles to dust in my fingers.

November Afternoon

Upon our heads  
The oak leaves fall  
Like silent benedictions  
Closing Autumn's gorgeous ritual,  
And we, upborne by worship,  
Lift our eyes to the altar of distant hills.

Beloved  
How can I know  
What gods are yours,  
How can I guess the visions of your spirit,  
Or hear  
The silent prayers your heart has said?

Only by this I feel  
Your gods akin to mine,  
That when our lips have met  
On this last golden Autumn afternoon  
They have confessed in silence  
Our kisses were less precious than our dreams.

Today, our passion drowned in beauty,  
We turn away our faces toward the hills  
Where purple haze, old incense,  
Spreads its veil.

Yareth at Solomon's Tomb

At last  
Your search is at an end,  
King Solomon,

You, restless dreamer,  
For whom each face held promise  
Unfulfilled,  
Whose hungry arms held many women,  
(Though none could fill your need)  
Who seized, but never loved,  
This is your sepulchre...

I who till today  
Questioned my heart  
Now find it buried with you  
In this tomb;

So now I can forgive you  
That you never believed  
My love!

Argolis

Like sun on grasses  
Warming to life  
Quaint beetles, curious weeds,  
Till earth awakens, pregnant beneath its rays--  
So came the shepherds down to Argolis.

As nameless trees

Cast cloud-grey shadows there  
On moon-pale, tarnished snow,  
Till snow and shadow are lost,  
Alike confused and forgotten  
Among the withered reeds--  
So lies their memory across its heart.

St. Faith's Eve

We stood together on a balcony  
An hour when the night  
Died into blankness,  
And light mist  
Curling beneath us, hid the earth,  
And the cold, unburied stars  
Drew further into space...

I turned to meet your eyes  
And saw  
Like a light, rosy veil  
Your flesh sink gently down  
Leaving only the simple skeleton  
And a white voice which said:  
"This still is I,  
Do you love me  
Now?"

Quietly, and without sadness  
I looked upon you,  
For comfort blindly reached my soul  
And primitive beauty.  
Without passion, without fervour,  
I spoke at last:  
"Somehow Faith  
Shines from your empty eye-holes,  
And Truth  
Speaks mutely from your fleshless jaws.  
I choose your skeleton to lie with  
In the peaceful bed of earth  
Through all the dreamless, mornless, utter night!"

Poems of Elijah Hay

The Golden Stag

O hungry hearted ones, sharp-limbed, keen-eyed,  
Let me have place!  
I too would ride  
On your fantastic chase.

Your hunger is a silver hunting horn,  
I heard it sweep  
The frozen, peaceful morn:



Its note bit me from sleep.

I will ride with you, hunters, even I,  
Toward a far hill  
To see the golden stag against the sky  
Uncaptured still.

To Anne Knish

Madam, you intrigue me!

I have come this far  
Cautiously sneezing  
Along the dusty highroad of convention,  
But now it leads no farther toward you.

Today  
I have reached the cross roads--  
A weather-beaten sign-board  
Blazons undecipherable wisdom  
Of which the arrow-heads, even,  
Have been effaced.

Eastward, it leads through cultivated fields  
Of intellectual fodder,  
Where well-fed cattle, herding together,  
Browse content:  
Are you of these?

Westward, is a lane, hedge-bordered,  
Shady, and of gentle indirection,  
In May, a bower of sentimental bloom,  
But this November weather  
Betrays its destiny, the poultry yard  
Where geese foregather.

And there ahead, the ancient, swampy way  
Modernized by a feeble plank or two:  
But the morass of passion lures me not!  
I see a vision of two plunging feet,  
Discreetly shod, yet struggling in vain--  
Slime  
Creeps ankle-high, knee-high, thigh-high,  
Till all is swallowed save a brave silk hat  
Floating alone, a symbol of the creed  
I perished shedding.

Yet somewhere you  
Intelligent of my distress  
Smile, undisturbed--  
I have no pedlar's license to submit,  
No wares to cry, nor any gift to bring--  
I do not know

Anything new--  
In truth, then, what have I to do with you?

Yet, madam, you intrigue me!

Lolita

How curious to find in you, Lolita,  
The geisha  
Who sits and strums in the immortal  
Attitude of submission.  
There is a ledger in place of her soul!

Your shoulders sang  
For admiration,  
Your hair wept for kisses,  
Your voice curved softly, a caress--  
You came among us as a suppliant,  
What had we you desired?

Bringing to market stolen goods,  
Holding to view used charms,  
Behold a hawker's spirit!

Eagles perch proudly  
In isolation,  
They swoop to seize a living prey--  
Crows hover to feed,  
Waiting with patience till the soul is fled  
Leaving a helpless body--carrion--  
(Vile thoughts obsess me!)

What did you want, Lolita?

Spectrum of Mrs. Q.

Fear not, beautiful lady,  
That I shall ravish you!  
Your arms are languorous lilies--  
There is not a thorn  
In all your slender greenness,  
And you are sweet to madden buzzing bees!

Fear not, beautiful lady,  
A hard, black cricket  
Inspects you.

Epitaph

Courage is a sword,

Honour, but a shield...  
Here lies a turtle.

A Sixpence

OBVERSE

If I loved you,  
You would rear  
Eight healthy children  
To our love,  
(Forgetting me)  
And be happy.

REVERSE

But I do not love you,  
So you will write  
Eight hundred poems  
To our love,  
(Forgetting me)  
And be happy!

Three Spectra

Of Mrs. X.

You--  
Too well fed for rebellion,  
Too lazy for self-respect, too timid for murder,  
Disgracefully steal the trade-mark of the fairy-tale--  
"And they lived together happily  
Ever after!"

Of Mrs. Z.

Madam, you are ever retreating,  
But are never  
Gone--  
Some day I shall pursue you  
Hoping to see you  
Vanish.

Of Mrs. Andsoforth.

Old ladies, bless their hearts,  
Are contented as house-flies  
Dozing against the wall.  
But you,  
Imprisoned in the forties,  
Delirious, frenzied, helpless,

Are a fly, drowning in a cocktail!

Two Commentaries

### I. TO AN ACTOR

You are a gilded card-case  
Which I took for a purse.  
Your spirit's coin was squandered long ago,  
And in its place  
Are white cards, all alike,  
Bearing a word,  
A name,  
Connoting nothing.

### 2. PHILOSOPHER TO ARTIST

You are a raisin, but I am a nut!  
What meat there is to you  
Can be seen at a glance--  
(Seeds, when they exist, are bitter)  
My calm, round glossiness,  
(For I am sound and free  
From wormy restlessness of spirit)  
Defies your casual inspection.

It takes sharp teeth  
And some determination  
To taste my kernel!

A Womanly Woman

You sit, a snug, warm kitten  
Blinking through the window  
At a storm-haunted world--

Sleet wind caterwauls  
Through icy trees,  
Which clack their hands at you  
Tauntingly.

Why should you leave  
Radiator and rubber-plant?  
Do people stand at attention to mourn a hero  
When they behold  
A frozen kitten  
In a gutter?

Lolita Now Is Old

Lolita now is old,  
She sits in the park, watching the young men pass  
And huddles her shawl against the cold.

One night last summer when the moon was red,  
Lolita, hearing an old song sung  
And amorous laughter down the street  
Left her bed--  
Lolita thought she was young.

With ancient finery on her back,  
A lace mantilla hiding her grey head,  
She crept into the warm and alien night.

Her trembling knees remembered the languid pace  
Of beauty on adventure bent--her fan  
Waved challenges with unforgotten grace.  
Cunningly she played her part  
For to her peering age  
Love was a well-remembered art.

Footsteps followed her--footsteps drew near!  
She dropped a rose--hush, he is here!  
There came hard arms and a panting kiss--

He felt the fraud of those withered lips,  
He cursed and spat--"Was it for this,  
You came, old woman, to the park?"  
Lolita gathered skirts and fled  
Through the dim dark.

Lolita huddles her shawl against the cold,  
She sits and mumbles by the fire. In truth  
Lolita knows she is old.

### The Shining Bird

A bird is three things:  
Feathers, flight and song,  
And feathers are the least of these.

At last I hold her in my hands  
The shining bird whose flight along  
The perilous rim of trees  
Has made my days adventurous, my spirit strong.

And now her wings  
Are still--her vivid song  
But ceaseless twitterings.

Her words are feathers, falling  
Lightly, relentlessly, and without rest,

Revealing to my face  
Her pinched and starveling breast  
Like poultry, dead and unashamed  
And naked in the market place.

A shattered flash of wings,  
A broken song,  
Echo and shine along the rim of trees.

#### The King Sends Three Cats to Guinevere

Queen Guinevere,  
Three sleek and silent cats  
Bring you gifts from me.

The first is a grey one,  
(I wanted a white one,  
I could not find one snowy white enough,  
Queen Guinevere,)  
He brings you purple grapes.

The second is a grey one,  
(I wanted a sleek one,  
Where could I find one sleek enough,  
Queen Guinevere?)  
He brings you a red apple.

The third one, too, is grey.  
(I wanted a black one,  
Not Hate itself could find one black enough,  
Queen Guinevere,)  
He brings you poison toadstools.

I send you three grey cats with gifts--  
(For uniformity of metaphor,  
Since Bacchus, Satan, and the Hangman  
Are not contemporaneous in my mythology)  
I send you three grey cats with gifts,  
Queen Guinevere,  
To warn you, sleekly, silently  
To pay the forfeit.

#### Ode in the New Mode

Your face  
Was a temple  
From which your soul  
Came to me beneath arched brows:  
And my soul knelt at your feet.

Then

Inadvertently  
I saw your leg  
Curved and turned like a bird-song  
Dying into ecstatic silence at the garter...

Wretched  
Women!  
When you are wholly lovely  
Man cannot forget either of his two afflictions,  
Soul, or body!

Night

I opened the door  
And night stared at me like a fool,  
Heavy dull night, clouded and safe--  
I turned again toward the uncertainties  
Of life within doors.

Once night was a lion,  
No, years ago, night was a python  
Weaving designs against space  
With undulations of his being--  
Night was a siren once.

O sodden, middle-aged night!

End of Project Gutenberg's A Woman of Thirty, by Marjorie Allen Seiffert

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