

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82)

6 *Rose Mary*

Of her two fights with the Beryl-stone:

Lost the first, but the second won.

PART I.

“Mary mine that art Mary’s Rose,
Come in to me from the garden-close.
The sun sinks fast with the rising dew,
And we marked not how the faint moon grew;
But the hidden stars are calling you. 5

“Tall Rose Mary, come to my side,
And read the stars if you’d be a bride.
In hours whose need was not your own,
While you were a young maid yet ungrown,
You’ve read the stars in the Beryl-stone. 10

“Daughter, once more I bid you read;
But now let it be for your own need:
Because to-morrow, at break of day,
To Holy Cross he rides on his way,
Your knight Sir James of Heronhay. 15

“Ere he wed you, flower of mine,
For a heavy shrift he seeks the shrine.
Now hark to my words and do not fear;
Ill news next I have for your ear;
But be you strong, and our help is here. 20

“On his road, as the rumour’s rife,
An ambush waits to take his life.
He needs will go, and will go alone;

Where the peril lurks may not be known;
But in this glass all things are shown.” 25

Pale Rose Mary sank to the floor:—
“The night will come if the day is o’er!”
“Nay, heaven takes counsel, star with star,
And help shall reach your heart from afar:
A bride you’ll be, as a maid you are.” 30

The lady unbound her jewelled zone
And drew from her robe the Beryl-stone.
Shaped it was to a shadowy sphere,—
World of our world, the sun’s compeer,
That bears and buries the toiling year. 35

With shuddering light ’twas stirred and strewn
Like the cloud-nest of the wading moon:
Freaked it was as the bubble’s ball,
Rainbow-hued through a misty pall
Like the middle light of the waterfall. 40

Shadows dwelt in its teeming girth
Of the known and unknown things of earth;
The cloud above and the wave around,—
The central fire at the sphere’s heart bound,
Like doomsday prisoned underground. 45

A thousand years it lay in the sea
With a treasure wrecked from Thessaly;
Deep it lay ’mid the coiled sea-wrack,
But the ocean-spirits found the track:
A soul was lost to win it back. 50

The lady upheld the wondrous thing:—
“Ill fare” (she said) “with a fiend’s-fairing:
But Moslem blood poured forth like wine
Can hallow Hell, ’neath the Sacred Sign;

And my lord brought this from Palestine. 55

“Spirits who fear the Blessed Rood
Drove forth the accursed multitude
That heathen worship housed herein,—
Never again such home to win,
Save only by a Christian’s sin. 60

“All last night at an altar fair
I burnt strange fires and strove with prayer;
Till the flame paled to the red sunrise,
All rites I then did solemnize;
And the spell lacks nothing but your eyes.” 65

Low spake maiden Rose Mary:—
“O mother mine, if I should not see!”
“Nay, daughter, cover your face no more,
But bend love’s heart to the hidden lore,
And you shall see now as heretofore.” 70

Paler yet were the pale cheeks grown
As the grey eyes sought the Beryl-stone:
Then over her mother’s lap leaned she,
And stretched her thrilled throat passionately,
And sighed from her soul, and said, “I see.” 75

Even as she spoke, they two were ’ware
Of music-notes that fell through the air;
A chiming shower of strange device,
Drop echoing drop, once twice and thrice,
As rain may fall in Paradise. 80

An instant come, in an instant gone,
No time there was to think thereon.
The mother held the sphere on her knee:—
“Lean this way and speak low to me,
And take no note but of what you see.” 85

“I see a man with a besom grey
That sweeps the flying dust away.”
“Ay, that comes first in the mystic sphere;
But now that the way is swept and clear,
Heed well what next you look on there.” 90

“Stretched aloft and adown I see
Two roads that part in waste-country:
The glen lies deep and the ridge stands tall;
What’s great below is above seen small,
And the hill-side is the valley-wall.” 95

“Stream-bank, daughter, or moor and moss,
Both roads will take to Holy Cross.
The hills are a weary waste to wage;
But what of the valley-road’s presage?
That way must tend his pilgrimage.” 100

“As ’twere the turning leaves of a book,
The road runs past me as I look;
Or it is even as though mine eye
Should watch calm waters filled with sky
While lights and clouds and wings went by.” 105

“In every covert seek a spear;
They’ll scarce lie close till he draws near.”
“The stream has spread to a river now;
The stiff blue sedge is deep in the slough,
But the banks are bare of shrub or bough.” 110

“Is there any roof that near at hand
Might shelter yield to a hidden band?”
“On the further bank I see but one,
And a herdsman now in the sinking sun
Unyokes his team at the threshold-stone.” 115

“Keep heedful watch by the water’s edge,—
Some boat might lurk ’neath the shadowed sedge.”
“One slid but now ’twixt the winding shores,
But a peasant woman bent to the oars
And only a young child steered its course. 120

“Mother, something flashed to my sight!—
Nay, it is but the lapwing’s flight.—
What glints there like a lance that flees?—
Nay, the flags are stirred in the breeze,
And the water’s bright through the dart-rushes. 125

“Ah! vainly I search from side to side:—
Woe’s me! and where do the foemen hide?
Woe’s me! and perchance I pass them by,
And under the new dawn’s blood-red sky
Even where I gaze the dead shall lie.” 130

Said the mother: “For dear love’s sake,
Speak more low, lest the spell should break.”
Said the daughter: “By love’s control,
My eyes, my words, are strained to the goal;
But oh! the voice that cries in my soul!” 135

“Hush, sweet, hush! be calm and behold.”
“I see two floodgates broken and old:
The grasses wave o’er the ruined weir,
But the bridge still leads to the breakwater;
And—mother, mother, O mother dear!” 140

The damsel clung to her mother’s knee,
And dared not let the shriek go free;
Low she crouched by the lady’s chair,
And shrank blindfold in her fallen hair,
And whispering said, “The spears are there!” 145

The lady stooped aghast from her place,

And cleared the locks from her daughter's face.
"More's to see, and she swoons, alas!
Look, look again, ere the moment pass!
One shadow comes but once to the glass. 150

"See you there what you saw but now?"
"I see eight men 'neath the willow bough.
All over the weir a wild growth's spread:
Ah me! it will hide a living head
As well as the water hides the dead. 155

"They lie by the broken water-gate
As men who have a while to wait.
The chief's high lance has a blazoned scroll,
He seems some lord of tithe and toll
With seven squires to his bannerole. 160

"The little pennon quakes in the air,
I cannot trace the blazon there:—
Ah! now I can see the field of blue,
The spurs and the merlins two and two;—
It is the Warden of Holycleugh!" 165

"God be thanked for the thing we know!
You have named your good knight's mortal foe.
Last Shrovetide in the tourney-game
He sought his life by treasonous shame;
And this way now doth he seek the same. 170

"So, fair lord, such a thing you are!
But we too watch till the morning star.
Well, June is kind and the moon is clear:
Saint Judas send you a merry cheer
For the night you lie at Warisweir! 175

"Now, sweet daughter, but one more sight,
And you may lie soft and sleep to-night.

We know in the vale what perils be:
Now look once more in the glass, and see
If over the hills the road lies free.” 180

Rose Mary pressed to her mother’s cheek,
And almost smiled but did not speak;
Then turned again to the saving spell,
With eyes to search and with lips to tell
The heart of things invisible. 185

“Again the shape with the besom grey
Comes back to sweep the clouds away.
Again I stand where the roads divide;
But now all’s near on the steep hillside,
And a thread far down is the rivertide.” 190

“Ay, child, your road is o’er moor and moss,
Past Holycleugh to Holy Cross.
Our hunters lurk in the valley’s wake,
As they knew which way the chase would take:
Yet search the hills for your true love’s sake.” 195

“Swift and swifter the waste runs by,
And nought I see but the heath and the sky;
No brake is there that could hide a spear,
And the gaps to a horseman’s sight lie clear;
Still past it goes, and there’s nought to fear.” 200

“Fear no trap that you cannot see,—
They’d not lurk yet too warily.
Below by the weir they lie in sight,
And take no heed how they pass the night
Till close they crouch with the morning light.” 205

“The road shifts ever and brings in view
Now first the heights of Holycleugh:
Dark they stand o’er the vale below,

And hide that heaven which yet shall show
The thing their master's heart doth know. 210

“Where the road looks to the castle steep,
There are seven hill-clefts wide and deep:
Six mine eyes can search as they list,
But the seventh hollow is brimmed with mist:
If aught were there, it might not be wist.” 215

“Small hope, my girl, for a helm to hide
In mists that cling to a wild moorside:
Soon they melt with the wind and sun,
And scarce would wait such deeds to be done:
God send their snares be the worst to shun.” 220

“Still the road winds ever anew
As it hastens on towards Holycleugh;
And ever the great walls loom more near,
Till the castle-shadow, steep and sheer,
Drifts like a cloud, and the sky is clear.” 225

“Enough, my daughter,” the mother said,
And took to her breast the bending head;
“Rest, poor head, with my heart below,
While love still lulls you as long ago:
For all is learnt that we need to know.” 230

“Long the miles and many the hours
From the castle-height to the abbey-towers;
But here the journey has no more dread;
Too thick with life is the whole road spread
For murder's trembling foot to tread.” 235

She gazed on the Beryl-stone full fain
Ere she wrapped it close in her robe again:
The flickering shades were dusk and dun,
And the lights throbbled faint in unison,

Like a high heart when a race is run. 240

As the globe slid to its silken gloom,
Once more a music rained through the room;
Low it splashed like a sweet star-spray,
And sobbed like tears at the heart of May,
And died as laughter dies away. 245

The lady held her breath for a space,
And then she looked in her daughter's face:
But wan Rose Mary had never heard;
Deep asleep like a sheltered bird
She lay with the long spell minister'd. 250

“Ah! and yet I must leave you, dear,
For what you have seen your knight must hear.
Within four days, by the help of God,
He comes back safe to his heart's abode:
Be sure he shall shun the valley-road.” 255

Rose Mary sank with a broken moan,
And lay in the chair and slept alone,
Weary, lifeless, heavy as lead:
Long it was ere she raised her head
And rose up all discomforted. 260

She searched her brain for a vanished thing,
And clasped her brows, remembering;
Then knelt and lifted her eyes in awe,
And sighed with a long sigh sweet to draw:—
“Thank God, thank God, thank God I saw!” 265

The lady had left her as she lay,
To seek the Knight of Heronhaye.
But first she clomb by a secret stair,
And knelt at a carven altar fair,
And laid the precious Beryl there. 270

Its girth was graved with a mystic rune
In a tongue long dead 'neath sun and moon:
A priest of the Holy Sepulchre
Read that writing and did not err;
And her lord had told its sense to her. 275

She breathed the words in an undertone:—
“None sees here but the pure alone.”
“And oh!” she said, “what rose may be
In Mary’s bower more pure to see
Than my own sweet maiden Rose Mary?” 280

BERYL-SONG.

*We whose home is the Beryl,
Fire-spirits of dread desire,
Who entered in
By a secret sin,
'Gainst whom all powers that strive with ours are sterile,— 5
We cry, Woe to thee, mother!
What hast thou taught her, the girl thy daughter,
That she and none other
Should this dark morrow to her deadly sorrow imperil?
What were her eyes 10
But the fiend’s own spies,
O mother,
And shall We not fee her, our proper prophet and seër?
Go to her, mother,
Even thou, yea thou and none other, 15
Thou, from the Beryl:
Her fee must thou take her,
Her fee that We send, and make her,
Even in this hour, her sin’s unsheltered avower.
Whose steed did neigh, 20
Riderless, bridleless,*

*At her gate before it was day?
 Lo! where doth hover
 The soul of her lover?
 She sealed his doom, she, she was the sworn approver,— 25
 Whose eyes were so wondrous wise,
 Yet blind, ah! blind to his peril!
 For stole not We in
 Through a love-linked sin,
 'Gainst whom all powers at war with ours are sterile,— 30
 Fire-spirits of dread desire,
 We whose home is the Beryl?*

PART II.

“Pale Rose Mary, what shall be done
 With a rose that Mary weeps upon?”
 “Mother, let it fall from the tree,
 And never walk where the strewn leaves be
 Till winds have passed and the path is free.” 5

“Sad Rose Mary, what shall be done
 With a cankered flower beneath the sun?”
 “Mother, let it wait for the night;
 Be sure its shame shall be out of sight
 Ere the moon pale or the east grow light.” 10

“Lost Rose Mary, what shall be done
 With a heart that is but a broken one?”
 “Mother, let it lie where it must;
 The blood was drained with the bitter thrust,
 And dust is all that sinks in the dust.” 15

“Poor Rose Mary, what shall I do,—
 I, your mother, that lovèd you?”
 “O my mother, and is love gone?
 Then seek you another love anon:

Who cares what shame shall lean upon?" 20

Low drooped trembling Rose Mary,
Then up as though in a dream stood she.
"Come, my heart, it is time to go;
This is the hour that has whispered low
When thy pulse quailed in the nights we know. 25

"Yet O my heart, thy shame has a mate
Who will not leave thee desolate.
Shame for shame, yea and sin for sin:
Yet peace at length may our poor souls win
If love for love be found therein. 30

"O thou who seek'st our shrift to-day,"
She cried, "O James of Heronhay—
Thy sin and mine was for love alone;
And oh! in the sight of God 'tis known
How the heart has since made heavy moan. 35

"Three days yet!" she said to her heart;
"But then he comes, and we will not part.
God, God be thanked that I still could see!
Oh! he shall come back assuredly,
But where, alas! must he seek for me? 40

"O my heart, what road shall we roam
Till my wedding-music fetch me home?
For love's shut from us and bides afar,
And scorn leans over the bitter bar
And knows us now for the thing we are." 45

Tall she stood with a cheek flushed high
And a gaze to burn the heart-strings by.
'Twas the lightning-flash o'er sky and plain
Ere labouring thunders heave the chain
From the floodgates of the drowning rain. 50

The mother looked on the daughter still
As on a hurt thing that's yet to kill.
Then wildly at length the pent tears came:
The love swelled high with the swollen shame,
And their hearts' tempest burst on them. 55

Closely locked, they clung without speech,
And the mirrored souls shook each to each,
As the cloud-moon and the water-moon
Shake face to face when the dim stars swoon
In stormy bowers of the night's mid-noon. 60

They swayed together, shuddering sore,
Till the mother's heart could bear no more.
'Twas death to feel her own breast shake
Even to the very throb and ache
Of the burdened heart she still must break. 65

All her sobs ceased suddenly,
And she sat straight up but scarce could see.
"O daughter, where should my speech begin?
Your heart held fast its secret sin:
How think you, child, that I read therein?" 70

"Ah me! but I thought not how it came
When your words showed that you knew my shame:
And now that you call me still your own,
I half forget you have ever known.
Did you read my heart in the Beryl-stone?" 75

The lady answered her mournfully:—
"The Beryl-stone has no voice for me:
But when you charged its power to show
The truth which none but the pure may know,
Did naught speak once of a coming woe?" 80

Her hand was close to her daughter's heart,
And it felt the life-blood's sudden start:
A quick deep breath did the damsel draw,
Like the struck fawn in the oakenshaw:
"O mother," she cried, "but still I saw!" 85

"O child, my child, why held you apart
From my great love your hidden heart?
Said I not that all sin must chase
From the spell's sphere the spirits of grace,
And yield their rule to the evil race? 90

"Ah! would to God I had clearly told
How strong those powers, accurst of old:
Their heart is the ruined house of lies;
O girl, they can seal the sinful eyes,
Or show the truth by contraries!" 95

The daughter sat as cold as a stone,
And spoke no word but gazed alone,
Nor moved, though her mother strove a space
To clasp her round in a close embrace,
Because she dared not see her face. 100

"Oh!" at last did the mother cry,
"Be sure, as he loved you, so will I!
Ah! still and dumb is the bride, I trow;
But cold and stark as the winter snow
Is the bridegroom's heart, laid dead below! 105

"Daughter, daughter, remember you
That cloud in the hills by Holycleugh?
'Twas a Hell-screen hiding truth away:
There, not i' the vale, the ambush lay,
And thence was the dead borne home to-day." 110

Deep the flood and heavy the shock

When sea meets sea in the riven rock:
But calm is the pulse that shakes the sea
To the prisoned tide of doom set free
In the breaking heart of Rose Mary. 115

Once she sprang as the heifer springs
With the wolf's teeth at its red heart-strings.
First 'twas fire in her breast and brain,
And then scarce hers but the whole world's pain,
As she gave one shriek and sank again. 120

In the hair dark-waved the face lay white
As the moon lies in the lap of night;
And as night through which no moon may dart
Lies on a pool in the woods apart,
So lay the swoon on the weary heart. 125

The lady felt for the bosom's stir,
And wildly kissed and called on her;
Then turned away with a quick footfall,
And slid the secret door in the wall,
And clomb the strait stair's interval. 130

There above in the altar-cell
A little fountain rose and fell:
She set a flask to the water's flow,
And, backward hurrying, sprinkled now
The still cold breast and the pallid brow. 135

Scarce cheek that warmed or breath on the air,
Yet something told that life was there.
"Ah! not with the heart the body dies!"
The lady moaned in a bitter wise;
Then wrung her hands and hid her eyes. 140

"Alas! and how may I meet again
In the same poor eyes the selfsame pain?"

What help can I seek, such grief to guide?
Ah! one alone might avail," she cried,—
"The priest who prays at the dead man's side." 145

The lady arose, and sped down all
The winding stairs to the castle-hall.
Long-known valley and wood and stream,
As the loopholes passed, naught else did seem
Than the torn threads of a broken dream. 150

The hall was full of the castle-folk;
The women wept, but the men scarce spoke.
As the lady crossed the rush-strewn floor,
The throng fell backward, murmuring sore,
And pressed outside round the open door. 155

A stranger shadow hung on the hall
Than the dark pomp of a funeral.
'Mid common sights that were there alway,
As 'twere a chance of the passing day,
On the ingle-bench the dead man lay. 160

A priest who passed by Holycleugh
The tidings brought when the day was new.
He guided them who had fetched the dead;
And since that hour, unwearied,
He knelt in prayer at the low bier's head. 165

Word had gone to his own domain
That in evil wise the knight was slain:
Soon the spears must gather apace
And the hunt be hard on the hunters' trace;
But all things yet lay still for a space. 170

As the lady's hurried step drew near,
The kneeling priest looked up to her.
"Father, death is a grievous thing;

But oh! the woe has a sharper sting
That craves by me your ministering. 175

“Alas for the child that should have wed
This noble knight here lying dead!
Dead in hope, with all blessed boon
Of love thus rent from her heart ere noon,
I left her laid in a heavy swoon. 180

“O haste to the open bower-chamber
That’s topmost as you mount the stair:
Seek her, father, ere yet she wake;
Your words, not mine, be the first to slake
This poor heart’s fire, for Christ’s sweet sake! 185

“God speed!” she said as the priest passed through,
“And I ere long will be with you.”
Then low on the hearth her knees sank prone;
She signed all folk from the threshold-stone,
And gazed in the dead man’s face alone. 190

The fight for life found record yet
In the clenched lips and the teeth hard-set;
The wrath from the bent brow was not gone,
And stark in the eyes the hate still shone
Of that they last had looked upon. 195

The blazoned coat was rent on his breast
Where the golden field was goodliest;
But the shivered sword, close-gripped, could tell
That the blood shed round him where he fell
Was not all his in the distant dell. 200

The lady recked of the corpse no whit,
But saw the soul and spoke to it:
A light there was in her steadfast eyes,—
The fire of mortal tears and sighs

That pity and love immortalize. 205

“By thy death have I learnt to-day
Thy deed, O James of Heronhaye!
Great wrong thou hast done to me and mine;
And haply God hath wrought for a sign
By our blind deed this doom of thine. 210

“Thy shrift, alas! thou wast not to win;
But may death shrive thy soul herein!
Full well do I know thy love should be
Even yet—had life but stayed with thee—
Our honour’s strong security.” 215

She stooped, and said with a sob’s low stir,—
“Peace be thine,—but what peace for her?”
But ere to the brow her lips were press’d,
She marked, half-hid in the riven vest,
A packet close to the dead man’s breast. 220

’Neath surcoat pierced and broken mail
It lay on the blood-stained bosom pale.
The clot clung round it, dull and dense,
And a faintness seized her mortal sense
As she reached her hand and drew it thence. 225

’Twas steeped in the heart’s flood welling high
From the heart it there had rested by:
’Twas glued to a broidered fragment gay,—
A shred by spear-thrust rent away
From the heron-wings of Heronhaye. 230

She gazed on the thing with piteous eyne:—
“Alas, poor child, some pledge of thine!
Ah me! in this troth the hearts were twain,
And one hath ebb’d to this crimson stain,
And when shall the other throb again?” 235

She opened the packet heedfully;
The blood was stiff, and it scarce might be.
She found but a folded paper there,
And round it, twined with tenderest care,
A long bright tress of golden hair. 240

Even as she looked, she saw again
That dark-haired face in its swoon of pain:
It seemed a snake with a golden sheath
Crept near, as a slow flame flickereth,
And stung her daughter's heart to death. 245

She loosed the tress, but her hand did shake
As though indeed she had touched a snake;
And next she undid the paper's fold,
But that too trembled in her hold,
And the sense scarce grasped the tale it told. 250

"My heart's sweet lord," ('twas thus she read,
"At length our love is garlanded.
At Holy Cross, within eight days' space,
I seek my shrift; and the time and place
Shall fit thee too for thy soul's good grace. 255

"From Holycleugh on the seventh day
My brother rides, and bides away:
And long or e'er he is back, mine own,
Afar where the face of fear's unknown
We shall be safe with our love alone. 260

"Ere yet at the shrine my knees I bow,
I shear one tress for our holy vow.
As round these words these threads I wind,
So, eight days hence, shall our loves be twined
Says my lord's poor lady, JOCELIND." 265

She read it twice, with a brain in thrall,
And then its echo told her all.
O'er brows low-fall'n her hands she drew:—
"O God!" she said, as her hands fell too,—
"The Warden's sister of Holycleugh!" 270

She rose upright with a long low moan
And stared in the dead man's face new-known.
Had it lived indeed? She scarce could tell:
'Twas a cloud where fiends had come to dwell,—
A mask that hung on the gate of Hell. 275

She lifted the lock of gleaming hair
And smote the lips and left it there.
"Here's gold that Hell shall take for thy toll!
Full well hath thy treason found its goal,
O thou dead body and damnèd soul!" 280

She turned, sore dazed, for a voice was near,
And she knew that some one called to her.
On many a column fair and tall
A high court ran round the castle-hall;
And thence it was that the priest did call. 285

"I sought your child where you bade me go,
And in rooms around and rooms below;
But where, alas! may the maiden be?
Fear nought,—we shall find her speedily,—
But come, come hither, and seek with me." 290

She reached the stair like a lifelorn thing,
But hastened upward murmuring:—
"Yea, Death's is a face that's fell to see;
But bitterer pang Life hoards for thee,
Thou broken heart of Rose Mary!" 295

BERYL-SONG.

*We whose throne is the Beryl,
Dire-gifted spirits of fire,
Who for a twin
Leash Sorrow to Sin,
Who on no flower refrain to lour with peril,— 5
We cry,—O desolate daughter!
Thou and thy mother share newer shame with each other
Than last night's slaughter.
Awake and tremble, for our curses assemble!
What more, that thou know'st not yet,— 10
That life nor death shall forget?
No help from Heaven,—thy woes heart-riven are sterile!
O once a maiden,
With yet worse sorrow can any morrow be laden?
It waits for thee, 15
It looms, it must be,
O lost among women,—
It comes and thou canst not flee.
Amen to the omen,
Says the voice of the Beryl. 20
Thou sleep'st? Awake,—
What dar'st thou yet for his sake,
Who each for other did God's own Future imperil?
Dost dare to live
'Mid the pangs each hour must give? 25
Nay, rather die,—
With him thy lover 'neath Hell's cloud-cover to fly,—
Hopeless, yet not apart,
Cling heart to heart,
And beat through the nether storm-eddying winds together? 30
Shall this be so?
There thou shalt meet him, but mayst thou greet him?
ah no!
He loves, but thee he hoped nevermore to see,—
He sighed as he died,*

But with never a thought for thee. 35
Alone!
Alone, for ever alone,—
Whose eyes were such wondrous spies for the fate foreshown!
Lo! have not We leashed the twin
Of endless Sorrow to Sin,— 40
Who on no flower refrain to lour with peril,—
Dire-gifted spirits of fire,
We whose throne is the Beryl?

PART III.

A swoon that breaks is the whelming wave
When help comes late but still can save.
With all blind throes is the instant rife,—
Hurtling clangour and clouds at strife,—
The breath of death, but the kiss of life. 5

The night lay deep on Rose Mary's heart,
For her swoon was death's kind counterpart:
The dawn broke dim on Rose Mary's soul,—
No hill-crown's heavenly aureole,
But a wild gleam on a shaken shoal. 10

Her senses gasped in the sudden air,
And she looked around, but none was there.
She felt the slackening frost distil
Through her blood the last ooze dull and chill:
Her lids were dry and her lips were still. 15

Her tears had flooded her heart again;
As after a long day's bitter rain,
At dusk when the wet flower-cups shrink,
The drops run in from the beaded brink,
And all the close-shut petals drink. 20

Again her sighs on her heart were rolled;
As the wind that long has swept the wold,—
Whose moan was made with the moaning sea,—
Beats out its breath in the last torn tree,
And sinks at length in lethargy. 25

She knew she had waded bosom-deep
Along death's bank in the sedge of sleep:
All else was lost to her clouded mind;
Nor, looking back, could she see defin'd
O'er the dim dumb waste what lay behind. 30

Slowly fades the sun from the wall
Till day lies dead on the sun-dial:
And now in Rose Mary's lifted eye
'Twas shadow alone that made reply
To the set face of the soul's dark sky. 35

Yet still through her soul there wandered past
Dread phantoms borne on a wailing blast,—
Death and sorrow and sin and shame;
And, murmured still, to her lips there came
Her mother's and her lover's name. 40

How to ask, and what thing to know?
She might not stay and she dared not go.
From fires unseen these smoke-clouds curled;
But where did the hidden curse lie furled?
And how to seek through the weary world? 45

With toiling breath she rose from the floor
And dragged her steps to an open door:
'Twas the secret panel standing wide,
As the lady's hand had let it bide
In hastening back to her daughter's side. 50

She passed, but reeled with a dizzy brain

And smote the door which closed again.
She stood within by the darkling stair,
But her feet might mount more freely there,—
'Twas the open light most blinded her. 55

Within her mind no wonder grew
At the secret path she never knew:
All ways alike were strange to her now,—
One field bare-ridged from the spirit's plough,
One thicket black with the cypress-bough. 60

Once she thought that she heard her name;
And she paused, but knew not whence it came.
Down the shadowed stair a faint ray fell
That guided the weary footsteps well
Till it led her up to the altar-cell. 65

No change there was on Rose Mary's face
As she leaned in the portal's narrow space:
Still she stood by the pillar's stem,
Hand and bosom and garment's hem,
As the soul stands by at the requiem. 70

The altar-cell was a dome low-lit,
And a veil hung in the midst of it:
At the pole-points of its circling girth
Four symbols stood of the world's first birth,—
Air and water and fire and earth. 75

To the north, a fountain glittered free;
To the south, there glowed a red fruit-tree;
To the east, a lamp flamed high and fair;
To the west, a crystal casket rare
Held fast a cloud of the fields of air. 80

The painted walls were a mystic show
Of time's ebb-tide and overflow;

His hoards long-locked and conquering key,
His service-fires that in heaven be,
And earth-wheels whirled perpetually. 85

Rose Mary gazed from the open door
As on idle things she cared not for,—
The fleeting shapes of an empty tale;
Then stepped with a heedless visage pale,
And lifted aside the altar-veil. 90

The altar stood from its curved recess
In a coiling serpent's life-likeness:
Even such a serpent evermore
Lies deep asleep at the world's dark core
Till the last Voice shake the sea and shore. 95

From the altar-cloth a book rose spread
And tapers burned at the altar-head;
And there in the altar-midst alone,
'Twi' wings of a sculptured beast unknown,
Rose Mary saw the Beryl-stone. 100

Firm it sat 'twixt the hollowed wings,
As an orb sits in the hand of kings:
And lo! for that Foe whose curse far-flown
Had bound her life with a burning zone,
Rose Mary knew the Beryl-stone. 105

Dread is the meteor's blazing sphere
When the poles throb to its blind career;
But not with a light more grim and ghastr
Thereby is the future doom forecast,
Than now this sight brought back the past. 110

The hours and minutes seemed to whirr
In a clanging swarm that deafened her;
They stung her heart to a writhing flame,

And marshalled past in its glare they came,—
Death and sorrow and sin and shame. 115

Round the Beryl's sphere she saw them pass
And mock her eyes from the fated glass:
One by one in a fiery train
The dead hours seemed to wax and wane,
And burned till all was known again. 120

From the drained heart's fount there rose no cry,
There sprang no tears, for the source was dry.
Held in the hand of some heavy law,
Her eyes she might not once withdraw,
Nor shrink away from the thing she saw. 125

Even as she gazed, through all her blood
The flame was quenched in a coming flood:
Out of the depth of the hollow gloom
On her soul's bare sands she felt it boom,—
The measured tide of a sea of doom. 130

Three steps she took through the altar-gate,
And her neck reared and her arms grew straight:
The sinews clenched like a serpent's throe,
And the face was white in the dark hair's flow,
As her hate beheld what lay below. 135

Dumb she stood in her malisons,—
A silver statue tressed with bronze:
As the fabled head by Perseus mown,
It seemed in sooth that her gaze alone
Had turned the carven shapes to stone. 140

O'er the altar-sides on either hand
There hung a dinted helm and brand:
By strength thereof, 'neath the Sacred Sign,
That bitter gift o'er the salt sea-brine

Her father brought from Palestine. 145

Rose Mary moved with a stern accord
And reached her hand to her father's sword;
Nor did she stir her gaze one whit
From the thing whereon her brows were knit;
But gazing still, she spoke to it. 150

"O ye, three times accurst," she said,
"By whom this stone is tenanted!
Lo! here ye came by a strong sin's might;
Yet a sinner's hand that's weak to smite
Shall send you hence ere the day be night. 155

"This hour a clear voice bade me know
My hand shall work your overthrow:
Another thing in mine ear it spake,—
With the broken spell my life shall break.
I thank Thee, God, for the dear death's sake! 160

"And he Thy heavenly minister
Who swayed erewhile this spell-bound sphere,—
My parting soul let him haste to greet,
And none but he be guide for my feet
To where Thy rest is made complete." 165

Then deep she breathed, with a tender moan:—
"My love, my lord, my only one!
Even as I held the cursed clue,
When thou, through me, these foul ones slew,—
By mine own deed shall they slay me too! 170

"Even while they speed to Hell, my love,
Two hearts shall meet in Heaven above.
Our shrift thou sought'st, but might'st not bring:
And oh! for me 'tis a blessed thing
To work hereby our ransoming. 175

“One were our hearts in joy and pain,
And our souls e’en now grow one again.
And O my love, if our souls are three,
O thine and mine shall the third soul be,—
One threefold love eternally.” 180

Her eyes were soft as she spoke apart,
And the lips smiled to the broken heart:
But the glance was dark and the forehead scored
With the bitter frown of hate restored,
As her two hands swung the heavy sword. 185

Three steps back from her Foe she trod:—
“Love, for thy sake! In Thy Name, O God!”
In the fair white hands small strength was shown;
Yet the blade flashed high and the edge fell prone,
And she cleft the heart of the Beryl-stone. 190

What living flesh in the thunder-cloud
Hath sat and felt heaven cry aloud?
Or known how the levin’s pulse may beat?
Or wrapped the hour when the whirlwinds meet
About its breast for a winding-sheet? 195

Who hath crouched at the world’s deep heart
While the earthquake rends its loins apart?
Or walked far under the seething main
While overhead the heavens ordain
The tempest-towers of the hurricane? 200

Who hath seen or what ear hath heard
The secret things unregister’d
Of the place where all is past and done,
And tears and laughter sound as one
In Hell’s unhallowed unison? 205

Nay, is it writ how the fiends despair
In earth and water and fire and air?
Even so no mortal tongue may tell
How to the clang of the sword that fell
The echoes shook the altar-cell. 210

When all was still on the air again
The Beryl-stone lay cleft in twain;
The veil was rent from the riven dome;
And every wind that's winged to roam
Might have the ruined place for home. 215

The fountain no more glittered free;
The fruit hung dead on the leafless tree;
The flame of the lamp had ceased to flare;
And the crystal casket shattered there
Was emptied now of its cloud of air. 220

And lo! on the ground Rose Mary lay,
With a cold brow like the snows ere May,
With a cold breast like the earth till Spring,
With such a smile as the June days bring
When the year grows warm for harvesting. 225

The death she had won might leave no trace
On the soft sweet form and gentle face:
In a gracious sleep she seemed to lie;
And over her head her hand on high
Held fast the sword she triumphed by. 230

'Twas then a clear voice said in the room:—
“Behold the end of the heavy doom.
O come,—for thy bitter love's sake blest;
By a sweet path now thou journeyest,
And I will lead thee to thy rest. 235

“Me thy sin by Heaven's sore ban

Did chase erewhile from the talisman:
But to my heart, as a conquered home,
In glory of strength thy footsteps come
Who hast thus cast forth my foes therefrom. 240

“Already thy heart remembereth
No more his name thou sought’st in death:
For under all deeps, all heights above,—
So wide the gulf in the midst thereof,—
Are Hell of Treason and Heaven of Love. 245

“Thee, true soul, shall thy truth prefer
To blessed Mary’s rose-bower:
Warmed and lit is thy place afar
With guerdon-fires of the sweet Love-star
Where hearts of steadfast lovers are:— 250

“Though naught for the poor corpse lying here
Remain to-day but the cold white bier,
But burial-chaunt and bended knee,
But sighs and tears that heaviest be,
But rent rose-flower and rosemary.” 255

BERYL-SONG.

*We, cast forth from the Beryl,
Gyre-circling spirits of fire,
Whose pangs begin
With God’s grace to sin,
For whose spent powers the immortal hours are sterile,— 5
Woe! must We behold this mother
Find grace in her dead child’s face, and doubt of none other
But that perfect pardon, alas! hath assured her guerdon?
Woe! must We behold this daughter,
Made clean from the soil of sin wherewith We had
fraught her, 10*

*Shake off a man's blood like water?
 Write up her story
 On the Gate of Heaven's glory,
 Whom there We behold so fair in shining apparel,
 And beneath her the ruin 15
 Of our own undoing!
 Alas, the Beryl!
 We had for a foeman
 But one weak woman;
 In one day's strife, 20
 Her hope fell dead from her life;
 And yet no iron,
 Her soul to environ,
 Could this manslayer, this false soothsayer imperil!
 Lo, where she bows 25
 In the Holy House!
 Who now shall dissever her soul from its joy for ever,
 While every ditty
 Of love and plentiful pity
 Fills the White City, 30
 And the floor of Heaven to her feet for ever is given?
 Hark, a voice cries "Flee!"
 Woe! woe! what shelter have We,
 Whose pangs begin
 With God's grace to sin, 35
 For whose spent powers the immortal hours are sterile,
 Gyre-circling spirits of fire,
 We, cast forth from the Beryl?*

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