

*'I will not come  
At his command. I have a royal heart  
And will not thus disgrace the Persian throne.'*

# The Blood of Rachel

A Dramatization of *Esther*

AND OTHER POEMS

BY COTTON NOE

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To

HONORABLE MOSES KAUFMAN

From whom I differ on some political and religious questions, but whose warm friendship and keen literary appreciation have been a source of much inspiration to me, particularly in the writing of this drama.

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## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
The Blood of Rachel . . . . .	I
The Old Dog Irons . . . . .	79
The Age Electric . . . . .	82
Grandmother Days . . . . .	86
Just to Dream . . . . .	88
Amnemon . . . . .	90
A Romance of the Cumberland . . . . .	102
Morning Glories . . . . .	111
Christmastide . . . . .	112
Kinship . . . . .	113
Precocity . . . . .	114
The Secret . . . . .	115
A Rhymeless Sonnet . . . . .	116
Ambition . . . . .	117
Opportunity . . . . .	118
Holiday Thoughts . . . . .	119
The Old Year and the New . . . . .	120
Fellow Travelers . . . . .	121
James Whitcomb Riley . . . . .	122
Cale Young Rice . . . . .	123
Pilate's Mono'ogue . . . . .	124
The Virile Spirit . . . . .	128
Bluebird . . . . .	131
An Autumn Minor . . . . .	132
Slabs and Obelisk . . . . .	133
On Broadway . . . . .	134
An Ember Etching . . . . .	137
A Tragedy in Birdland . . . . .	140

## PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

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AHASUERUS.....	<i>King of Persia</i>
VASHTI.....	<i>Queen of Persia</i>
ESTHER.....	<i>Second Queen of Persia</i>
HAMAN.....	<i>Premier</i>
MORDECAI.....	<i>A Jew, afterwards Premier</i>
ZERESH.....	<i>Wife of Haman</i>
MEHEUMAN.....	<i>A Chamberlain</i>
ABAGTHA.....	<i>Another Chamberlain</i>
AHAFID.....	<i>Court Poet</i>
SMERDIS.....	<i>Court Fool</i>
SAADI.....	<i>Young Court Poet</i>
PARSHANDATHA.....	<i>Lady in Waiting to Zeresh</i>
ZETHAR.....	<i>Lady in Waiting to Vashti</i>

*Chamberlains, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court,  
Heralds, Royal Dancers, Nubian  
Slaves, Waiters, and others.*

# The Blood of Rachel

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## ACT I

### SCENE I

Place—Shushan, the Capital of Persia.

Time—478 B. C.

*[A hall in the palace of the king. Enter Smerdis, the king's jester, and Ahafia, poet and minstrel to the king, from opposite sides of the hall. Ahafid is already an old man, with long grey beard and a little stooped with age. He carries a golden Persian harp on which he plays and accompanies his own song.]*

*Ahafid*

*[Sings.]*

Now War has doffed his mailed coat  
And Peace forgot her art;  
The lute but not the bugle's note  
Can stir the kingly heart;  
Nights of revel and carp,  
And days of sensuous rust,  
How can a poet's harp  
Intone a song of lust?



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

The king is mad. His flight from Salamis  
Was bad enough. But that could be excused.  
For six months now what has he done but drink,  
Carouse and wallow in lascivious ease,  
While subjects driven to despair with tax  
Have fallen on the poisoned sword and cursed  
In death the son of their once goodly king?

*Smerdis*

Ahahid, you do seem to think the first  
Great business of a king is war. Now pray  
You, why should Xerxes waste the lusty days  
Of youth in bloody strife? To furnish themes,  
No doubt, for dullard bards and minstrelsy.  
Ahasuerus is the wisest king  
That ever sat upon a Persian throne.  
You graybeard fool, stupid as poets are,  
Can you not see the wisdom of our king  
In substitution of the flight for death,  
Of feast for fight, of wine for blood? Think you  
'Tis wise to wear the plaited mail of Mars  
When Venus bids you to the festival  
Of love?

*Ahafid*

You call me then a graybeard fool!  
Though I have dropped the purple bloom of spring  
The autumn's silvery down may indicate  
The ripened fruit of wisdom which your youth  
Has never tasted. Smerdis, you are blind!  
My beard is white, but vision clear. The king  
Does daily waste the substance of his realm,  
And nightly dissipates his energies  
In vices of the blood. Vashti, the queen,  
The idol of her people, is in grief.

*Smerdis*

In grief for what? Does she too wish the king  
To take the field? I know our queen is fair  
Of face and most voluptuous of form.  
Perhaps her grief is due to jealousy.  
Would she monopolize his love, because  
Her beauty is surpassing?

*Ahafid*

Vashti does  
Not know that she is beautiful. She loves  
Her country and is brave as well as good.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

I dread the issue of this night. The king  
Has ordered that the queen be brought before  
The court, a target for licentious eyes.  
She will refuse to go because her heart  
Is pure. Ahasuerus, flushed with wine,  
Will brook no opposition to his will.  
A tragedy that never Persia knew  
Will see the rising of to-morrow's sun.

*Smerdis*

A tragedy no country ever knew—  
A woman who is beautiful, but doesn't know it's true.

*Ahafid*

[*Sings.*]

Oh, for a song to cleanse the heart  
Or touch the sceptred power;  
Oh, might the gods a strength impart  
To meet this tragic hour.

[*Exeunt Ahafid and Smerdis.*]

[*Enter Vashti and Zethar.*]

*Vashti*

Oh, Zethar, do you think this night will end  
The revels that dishonor Persia's king?  
To-day unknown I strolled through squalid parts  
Of this old city and observed the poor.  
My lord, unmindful of their misery,  
Has laid a heavy tax for his insane  
Extravagance upon the helpless child  
That begs in Shushan's streets. Not here alone,  
This suffering; but Persia's peasantry,  
The glory of the old empire, the heart  
That once defied the world, is broken on  
The wheel of tax. And all for what?

*Zethar*

O queen,  
Always the world has had its poverty.  
You shall forget the poor. One stoop of wine  
Will bring you happiness. Vashti, drink.

*Vashti*

Forgive me, Zethar, but no wine to-night.

[*Enter Meheuman, Biztha and Abagtha.*]

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Meheuman*

[*Loftily.*]

Our most imperial queen, the king has laid  
A banquet in the palace garden court,  
The crowning act of that munificence  
Toward prince and people great and small alike,  
Ahasuerus now for many months  
Has shown the loyal subjects of his realm.  
The adornment of the court displays a rich  
Magnificence of taste; the couches are  
Of fretted gold and silver set upon  
A pavement of mosaic inlaid stone.  
The drinking is according to the law—  
None can compel, each vessel is diverse,  
But all of gold. Th' abundance of the wine  
Shows the unstinted bounty of the king.  
Our monarch's heart is merry in the cup,  
And boasts that Vashti's beauty does excel  
In magic power the fabled Helen's charms,  
And bids us bring immediately before  
The court great Persia's matchless queen!

*Vashti*

Meheuman, tell Ahasuerus I  
Must thank his majesty since he can still  
Remember Vashti's beauty, though his grace  
Has lost all sense of modesty and shame.  
You say his heart is merry now in wine  
And that he glories with exceeding pride  
Because my face is fair to look upon!  
I do not doubt his tongue is eloquent;  
The fiery phrase is his! Why, often I  
Have heard him praise his horse in language that  
Seemed kindled at the altar of the gods.  
It may be that he holds me higher than  
His hundred concubines.

*Meheuman*

Your majesty,  
The king does hold his queen a goddess.

*Vashti*

Well,  
Perhaps he thinks himself divine. Go tell  
The king I do not wish to be enrolled  
Among divinities. I am the queen—  
He must respect me as the one who wears  
The Persian crown.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

'Tis scarce three years since he  
Began to reign. He was Darius' son—  
A king of whom the world was proud. He wooed  
Me as a prince of noble blood, and I  
Received his hand with dignity as well  
As love. I was a princess, but I had  
A heart. Long since I found that he had none.  
A hundred eighty days continuous feast  
He has oppressed the people of his rule  
With drunken revels and with wanton waste.  
And now to crown his sensuality  
He sends his vulgar chamberlains to bring  
Me to his palace garden that his lords  
May gaze with unchaste eyes upon my form.  
Meheuman, Biztha, will you tell the king  
That Vashti bids him come to her if he  
Would see the queen.

*Meheuman*

You understand  
The costly hangings of the garden court  
Are blue and green and white?

*Vashti*

Now pray you what  
Significance has that? What if each couch  
Is gold and silver and each goblet set  
With stones?

*Meheuman*

The king's great love for Vashti!

*Vashti*

Then  
He has prepared this banquet for his queen?  
And does he think this is an evidence  
Of love. It rather means the king's debauched.  
I will not be a party to his sin.

*Meheuman*

The etiquette of court commands you to  
Obey.

*Vashti*

Commands! Well, has it come to that?  
But I will not obey. I am a queen!  
Here! Take this purple robe and coronet,  
And tell Ahasuerus to adorn  
Some harlot of his harem. She will grace  
The queenship of his kingdom better than  
A pure and modest wife.



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Abagtha*

You do not know  
The meaning of your words!

*Vashti*

Abagtha, why  
Do you admonish me? Do I not know  
The forfeit? Chamberlains, this message take  
Licentious Xerxes from his virtuous queen:  
I do not fear his wrath. I will not come  
At his command. I have a royal heart  
And will not thus disgrace the Persian throne.  
The king that's halfway worthy of my hand  
Would hate the queen that yielded to his lust.  
My heart, O chamberlains, is broken, not  
That Vashti's crown is lost, but oh, to see  
The regal name of Persia brought so low!  
I weep. The tears are for my country. Go!

*[Exeunt Vashti, Abagtha, etc.]*

*[Curtain is lowered to denote the passage of six years.]*

## THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

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### SCENE II

*[Outer hall in palace. Throne room back concealed by curtain. Queen Esther, disguised by loose dress thrown over royal robe and head and face below the eyes hidden by mask, approaches the door where Mordecai, the Jew, is standing.]*

*Mordecai*

Ah, Esther! Though your queenly robe you do  
Conceal, I know that regal gait. Before  
I ever looked upon these palace walls,  
When you were yet a little child beyond  
The purple peaks, where shepherds led their flocks  
In pastures green, I often dreamed that you  
Would one day wear a golden coronet  
And sit in majesty upon a throne.

*Esther*

*[Dejectedly.]*

Four years I have been queen, which time I have  
Not heard the voice of any one I love;  
And though disguised, I hardly dare to speak  
My heart even to you. This palace is  
A gloomy prison cell. The Persian crown

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

Is meaningless to me. The hundred gems  
That blaze upon its field of gold are dull  
And heavy lead. I would exchange it all  
For but a glint of sunshine on the hills  
Where I was born. But why this interview?

*Mordecai*

My royal niece, I know that you are queen.

*Esther*

A queen? But what of that? Though of my blood,  
You can not even look upon my face.  
What would you have?

*[Wailing without.]*

*Mordecai*

My daughter, do you hear  
The cries of anguish that disturb the peace  
Of Shushan's streets? Your people everywhere  
Are clothed in sackcloth. Read the king's decree!

*[Handing her paper.]*

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Esther*

[*Reads.*]

“It has been written and commanded by  
Ahasuerus, emperor of all  
The East, and sealed in every tongue with his  
Own ring—the royal seal—that governors  
And princes and lieutenants, everyone  
Within the Persian rule, shall make and cause  
To die and perish every Jew, both young  
And old, the women and the children, rich  
And poor alike, and forfeit all their goods.  
This is Ahasuerus’ sovereign will  
And shall be done and executed in  
The month of Adar on the thirteenth day.”  
Oh, God! It is Ahasuerus’ seal.

*Mordecai*

But Haman’s hand.

*Esther*

Why does the premier hate  
The Jews?

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Mordecai*

Because the children of the true  
And living God will never bend the knee  
To heathen pride. He hates the Jews because  
Your uncle is a child of Abraham  
And will not do obeisance to a son  
Of Baal. Esther, though I made you queen,  
I plead not for the life of Mordecai,  
But for the sacred blood of Israel.  
You alone can intervene. Go straight  
Before the king and make demand that he  
Reverse this law that puts the Jews to death.

*Esther*

A Persian king can not reverse his own  
Decree. Besides, the queen who goes into  
The presence of her lord unless by his  
Express command, must sacrifice her life,  
Except through some unguarded impulse he  
Extends his golden sceptre that she live.  
I can not go unto the king.

*Mordecai*

Your life  
Is forfeited already, child; you are  
A Jew.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Esther*

You did conceal my blood nor dare  
Reveal my lineage now. Your own deceit  
Has brought this death upon the house of Israel,  
Nor will Jehovah hold you guiltless in  
The hour of doom.

*Mordecai*

Esther, if you keep  
Your peace when Rachel's children wail and cry  
For help, deliverance will arise  
Unto the Jews but you shall be destroyed  
And all your father's house.

*Esther*

Depart. [Sound of trumpets within.]

The king  
Is on his throne. I go, and if I die,  
I can but perish. Peace to Israel.

[Exit Mordecai.]

[The curtain back rises and discloses Ahasuerus on his throne surrounded by court. Esther approaches to center of hall before the king, and extends her hands as though supplicating. The king seems dazed for a moment and then deeply moved; slowly he lifts the golden sceptre and extends it toward the queen who approaches and touches it.]

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahasuerus.*

Why did you, Esther, O most beauteous queen,  
Thus dare to come unbidden to the king?  
'Twas jealous Death unbarred the royal door  
That he might claim you for his paramour?  
Your innocence and charms have saved your life!

*Esther*

[*Innocently.*]

My lord, how now was I in danger? Ah,  
You know I am your loyal wife? I would  
Not be your queen alone. The crown is naught  
Compared to pleasures of companionship.  
O Xerxes, may not Esther share your joys  
Of wine and song? Too long you have denied  
That which I covet most—to be beside  
My king.

*Ahasuerus*

There is no favor, Esther, I  
Would longer hold from you; even to half  
My kingdom, tell me what you most desire,  
And I will give it you.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Esther*

My lord, I have  
Already spoke my heart, but you will not  
Believe. To test Ahasuerus' love,  
I have a favor I would ask of you;  
But first that my most gracious lord may know  
His queen has taste and skill as well as charms,  
I will prepare a banquet for the king  
With my own hands. You are a judge of wine,  
And every dish that graces banquet halls.  
To-morrow, let Ahasuerus come,  
And bring his premier Haman, who no doubt  
Can tell a heron from a hawk, and if  
My lord shall praise my art, and I  
Find favor in his sight, I will make known  
My dearest wish.

*Ahasuerus*

Oh, Esther, you have pleased  
Your king already far beyond what he  
Had ever hoped. To-morrow night at six!

*[Music and revels. Esther retires.]*

*[The king and retinue retire in opposite direction. Haman and followers pass out front where Mordecai sits by the gate, together with others. All except Mordecai salaam, but the Jew remains stiff, looking Haman defiantly in the face.]*

*[Curtain.]*



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

SCENE III

Home of Haman—two days later.

[*Enter Haman, Zeresh, and Parshandatha.*]

*Haman*

My star grows brighter with each setting sun;  
The lowly child of old Hammedetha  
Is first among the servants of the king.  
Ah, Mordecai, you did not know I am  
An Agagite, who fed upon the breast  
Of unrelenting hate toward every child  
Of Israel, who will not bend the knee  
Save to the God of Abraham. Oh, do

[*Wailing in Street.*]

You, Zeresh, hear that wail of anguish? Love,  
I know that you are proud to be the wife  
Of him who can direct such music.

*Zeresh*

I

Am proud of Haman's power.

*Haman*

Go call our friends.

*Zeresh*

Before the rising sun had touched with gold  
The treetops on the peaks of Zagros, Tesh,  
The son of Zalphon, was abroad  
In Shushan on the errand of my lord.

*Haman*

Not only in this city, but, my spouse,  
In every province of the king, the Jews  
In sackcloth mourn because of Haman's might.  
But would you know the secret of my strength?  
This ring! The seal of Xerxes. It is death  
To every drop of Jacob's blood within  
The Domain of Ahasuerus' rule.

*Zeresh*

The guests are coming.

*Haman*

Oh, the messages  
Of enmity are swift as shafts of love.  
Now, Zeresh, call the servants of the house  
And set a sumptuous feast, for Haman would  
Take counsel of his friends.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Zeresh*

My gracious lord,  
The table is already set. Go greet  
The guests and bring them in.

[*Exit Haman.*]

[*Zeresh continues.*]

Parshandatha,  
What do you think of Haman? Did you note  
My lord?

*Parshandatha*

I did, madam. His happiness  
Is most complete. His rapid rise to power  
Has all but ravished him with joy. And yet,  
Methought that something still he lacked. Perhaps  
The queen's consent has not yet been obtained  
To this decree that puts the Jews to death.

*Zeresh*

What do you mean? The queen's consent? My Lord  
Has naught to do with Xerxes' wife, and why  
Should he be troubled for a woman's whim?  
Besides, who knows but Esther does approve  
This slaughter of the Jews?

*Parshandatha*

Approve, madam?

She is a queen, but still a woman!

*Zeresh*

So

Am I, though not a queen! A woman, yes  
But with no stomach for that hated race!

*Parshandatha*

'Tis whispered in the court that Esther is  
Herself a Jew.

*Zeresh*

The Persian queen a Jew!  
Then let her perish with her blood.

*Parshandatha*

But would

My lord consent to Esther's death?

*Zeresh*

Consent

Again! Parshandatha, why do you harp  
Upon consent? Now listen to my words.  
But should you e'er disclose one breath  
Of what I say, you are yourself a Jew,

Nor is there any power in Persia's king  
To save your life. My lord pretends to hate  
The Jews. His hate is only wounded pride.  
The deference of Mordecai is all  
That Haman wants. He does not know the queen  
Is Hebrew blood. This fact must still be kept  
Concealed—concealed, that is, until the day  
Of death. Oh, he shall know who Esther is—  
This Israelite that banquets with my lord!  
You think his rise is due to Esther's power?

*Parshandatha*

Madam, I do not know.

*Zeresh*

Not know! not know!  
But what think you, Parshandatha? Of course  
You do not know.

*Parshandatha*

Madam, he often dines  
With Esther and the king. The king no doubt  
Is very fond of your most gracious lord.

*Zeresh*

The king!

*Parshandatha*

Mayhap the queen also. Your lord  
Is young and handsome still. The king is far  
Beyond the queen in years.

*Zeresh*

I can

Not catch your drift.

*Parshandatha*

Madam, your husband has  
A ready wit. The queen enjoys life.

*Zeresh*

Enjoys life!

And so do I, and likewise death. Now hold  
Your blasted tongue. My husband sups again  
To-morrow with the Jewish queen. They say  
When Haman dines her majesty prepares  
The banquet with her own most dainty hand!  
Parshandatha, whose hand, think you, has laid  
The feast of Adar?

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Parshandatha*

Zeresh! call you death

A feast!

*Zeresh*

A glorious feast on which my soul  
Already feeds, and Esther shall be there!

[*Re-enter Haman and Friends.*]

*Haman*

Be seated at the table.

*Citizens*

Of Shushan, patriots of Persia, friends,  
The servant of the king has called you here  
To tell you of his triumph and to ask  
Your sage advice. Two days ago the prince  
And I sat down together to a feast  
Within the palace walls and drank your health.  
The royal cup was blushing like the spume  
Of autumn clouds at sunset, when a wail  
Arose in Shushan that has sore perplexed  
The people. Mordecai, the haughty Jew,  
Who sits beside the palace gate, refused  
To bow or do me reverence, although

Admonished by the king. I was born  
A humble subject in the private ranks  
Of life; but now I wear the signet ring  
Of Xerxes. Friends, the law that dooms the Jews  
To simultaneous slaughter can not be  
Revoked. Last night the queen invited me  
To banquet with her lord. The necklace that  
She wore of iridescent pearls was like  
A rainbow over polar snows. Ah, she  
Was fair to look upon! And now my cup  
Was filled to overflowing—

[*Zeresh shows great emotion.*]

(*Zeresh, are  
You ill?*)—when Esther begged that I would come  
Again to-morrow to another feast  
Her hand would lay for Haman and the king.  
My wealth is multiplied beyond my ken;  
The sceptre is almost within my grasp.  
But all these things avail me naught, so long  
As yonder hated Jew remains unbent.

*A Friend*

Destroy the brute at once!



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Haman*

Oh, that will not  
Suffice. 'Tis not his death, but homage that  
Must sweeten my revenge. Ah, I would see  
Him groveling on the earth as Haman passed.  
My rank and station must be recognized.  
I sit beside the king; I am premier  
Of Persia. Yet this Jewish dog is still  
Unmoved!

*Zeresh*

Hang him where the kites will eat  
His eyes!

*Haman*

O Zeresh, you are like the rising sun—  
An inspiration in the hour of gloom.  
We'll build this gallows fifty cubits high,  
And then his Hebrew pride will bite the dust.  
Oh, I can hear him whining like a cur,  
My love, your wisdom is above the head.  
A woman's heart is like an oracle  
Divine. Prepare this gallows. Friends, I go  
At dawn to greet the king. At night we dine  
Alone with Esther, and—

[*Zeresh faints.*]

*THE BLOOD OF RACHEL*

---

Why Zeresh, are  
You ill again? Send for the leech. Her blood  
Is over wrought with too much happiness.

*[Curtain.]*

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

ACT II

SCENE I

Place—The palace of the king. Outer room of banquet hall. Curtain back.

[*Enter Meheuman, Biztha, and Smerdis.*]

*Meheuman*

Ahafid has become most deaf of late;  
Advancing age has wrought a piteous change  
In him. He can not understand our king.

*Smerdis*

'Tis not the king but age that makes him groan.  
I mean this age, the age in which we live.

[*Meheuman and Biztha exeunt on the opposite side of stage, as Ahafid enters more stooped, and singing.*]

*Ahafid*

[*Sings.*]

A country but no king,  
An empire but no throne,  
An upstart wears the signet ring,  
My harp has lost its tone.  
I can no longer sing great Persia's praise.

*Smerdis*

The trouble isn't with the harp, the country, king, nor  
throne;  
Nor that an upstart wears the ring: Ahafid's  
voice is gone.

*Ahafid*

What say you, Smerdis?

*Smerdis*

Art is marvelous.

*Ahafid*

Even Ahasuerus once was king.  
He was a despot, it is true, but still  
A prince.

*Smerdis*

If prince, then why not still a king?

*Ahafid*

Eh, Smerdis?

*Smerdis*

[*Aloud.*]

More than prince and less than king.

*Ahafid*

Why now the sceptre, aye, almost the crown  
Are worn by Haman, not of noble birth,  
But lowborn, vulgar, raised by royal will  
To first place in a land renowned for blood.

*Smerdis*

To first place in a land renowned for fools.

*Ahafid*

What's that?

*Smerdis*

This Haman is a cunning fox.

*Ahafid*

The exile of the virtuous Vashti was  
A fatal sin.

*Smerdis*

She should have feasted with  
The king.

*Ahafid*

I did not hear.

*Smerdis*

[*Aloud.*]

Old Xerxes lost  
The finest hour in his harem. Oh,  
The royal fool!

*Ahafid*

The Jewess Esther's but  
A girl, as beautiful as a lustrous star,  
But innocent as dawn of dew-washed day.

*Smerdis*

As wise as snakes and innocent as doves!

*Ahafid*

What, Smerdis, what? You catch my simile?

*Smerdis*

Ah, yes, Ahafid, yes, Aurora in  
The bath pool. That was fine. Your poetry  
Like wine improves with age. Go on, go on,  
Let's have another picture of the dawn.

*Ahafid*

Her beauty made her queen, but can not save  
Her life.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Smerdis*

Ahasuerus will attend  
To that.

*Ahafid*

[*Not hearing.*] Ahasuerus does not seem  
To know a Persian law can not be changed.

*Smerdis*

He knows that lawyers can be bribed.

*Ahafid*

What's that?

*Smerdis*

[*Louder.*]

Just thinking of the lustrous stars of dawn.

*Ahafid*

But Mordecai believes that Esther can  
Control the king, and yet may save the Jews.

*Smerdis*

I am more interested in fools than Jews.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahafid*

The golden sceptre was extended when  
She went into his presence yesterday.  
Last night she banqueted with him but still  
Refused to name the favor that she wished.

*Smerdis*

A bathrobe or some new stars for her crown.

*Ahafid*

[*Not hearing.*]

The king does not suspect her origin.  
What will he do when he finds out the truth?

*Smerdis*

Since when has Xerxes cared for truth?

*Ahafid*

What say?

*Smerdis*

He'll add two extra stars to Esther's crown.



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahafid*

Beloved Vashti lives in poverty,  
The victim of a lewd and brutal whim.  
And now it seems that Esther's fate was sealed  
When Haman wrote that every Jew must die  
Because the Hebrew Mordecai refused  
Obeisance to his over-bearing pride.

*Smerdis*

Watch Esther smash that seal.

*Ahafid*

I did not hear.

*Smerdis*

[*Louder.*]

Still quoting lines upon the innocence  
Of lustrous stars, and dawn of dew-washed day.

*Ahafid*

[*Singing.*]

Minstrelsy shall be no more,  
The poet's tongue is still;  
The strings that woke to deeds of yore  
No longer feel the thrill.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Smerdis*

I'm glad no more we'll feel the thrill  
For I, for one have had my fill.

*Ahafid*

Eh, Smerdis?

*Smerdis*

[*Louder.*]

Bathing in that simile.

[*Exeunt Ahafid and Smerdis.*]

SCENE II

[*The curtain rises, disclosing Ahasuerus, Esther, Haman, and attendants at the banquet table.*]

*Ahasuerus*

Beloved Esther, my most beauteous queen,  
This banquet does surpass in excellence  
Even the feast of yesterday, which you  
Prepared for Haman and the king. Your hand  
Grows deft with practice.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Esther*

But, my lord, you are  
A connoisseur, and can but speak these words  
In flattery. O king, it was my heart,  
And not my hand that flavored every dish  
That lies before you.

*Ahasuerus*

Esther, now it is  
Your tongue that flatters. Still, it does rejoice  
Me much to hear such language from the queen.  
A connoisseur, say you? Haman, can  
You tell me, now, what bay or bight in all  
The salted seas once held this shrimp?

*[Holding up shrimp.]*

*Haman*

*[Tasting it meditatively.]*

My lord,  
I think it must have been the Persian Gulf.

*Ahasuerus*

Ha, ha, Haman, why you do not know  
A wild goose from the Bird of Paradise.  
This crangonoid is found nowhere except  
Along the Red Sea beach not far from where  
The hosts of Pharaoh were engulfed and lost.

*Esther*

*[With suppressed emotion.]*

Oh, king, your tongue is most acute. But whence,  
Think you, this tinct of cinnamon that makes  
The savor of the dish.

*Ahasuerus*

*[Tasting for a long time.]*

I give it up,  
Unless it came from Java or Ceylon.

*Esther*

*[Laughing, changing rapidly to deep feeling.]*

My lord, it is not cinnamon at all,  
But spice that grew a thousand years ago  
In hills beyond the Jordon. Haman, can  
You tell the flavor of the grape that fills  
Your goblet?

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Haman*

[*Flattered.*]

Oh, I think it must have grown  
In islands of the blue Aegean Sea.

*Esther*

[*Turning to the king.*]

My lord, it is the selfsame cup they drank  
From sacred vessels at Belshazzar's feast  
That night in Babylon.

*Haman*

What means the queen,  
This wine is not that old, and yet, 'tis not  
Excelled at banquets of the gods.

*Ahasuerus*

[*Showing effect of wine.*]

Nor kings.  
This is a joyous night! Oh, queen, your wit  
Has filled my cup with wine of happiness.  
What think you, Haman, should be done to him  
The king delighteth most to honor now?

*Haman*

Bring forth the robe, O king, your majesty  
Does wear, and place it on the one your grace  
Does most delight to honor. Xerxes, set  
This man upon your royal horse, and place  
Your majesty's own jeweled crown upon  
His head, and let him be proclaimed  
Throughout the public streets.

*Ahasuerus*

[*Rises. Emphatic.*]

So let it then  
Be done to Mordecai, the Jew beside  
The palace gate.

*Haman*

What words are these?  
You can not mean the Jew!

*Ahasuerus*

[*More emphatic.*]

The Jew I mean.  
Last night I could not sleep, and so I had  
The book of records read, the chronicles,  
Wherein I learned that this same Mordecai  
The Jew had saved Ahasuerus' life,

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

When Teresh and another chamberlain  
Had sought to lay the hand of violence  
Upon your king. Let nothing fail of all  
That you have spoken should be done to him  
The king delighteth now to honor most.  
And Esther, tell Ahasuerus now  
Your dearest wish. On yesterday I begged  
To know the favor you did most desire  
And now it shall be granted unto you,  
Whatever your request, even to half  
My kingdom, it shall be performed.

*Esther*

*[With hands extended toward the king.]*

Have I  
Found favor in your sight, O king, then let  
My life be given unto me at my  
Petition and my people live at my  
Request! For we are sold to be destroyed—  
To perish and be slain.

*Ahasuerus*

*[Surprised and dazed.]*

O where is he—  
Oh, who is he, that dare presume to lay  
The hand of violence upon my queen!

*Esther*

There stands this adversary, O my king,  
The wicked Haman!

*Ahasuerus*

Haman! Haman! What  
Can be the meaning of this speech? This man  
I have advanced to be my premier?

*Esther*

I mean this craven whom you have advanced  
To put to death with your own royal seal  
The queen, as well as every other Jew  
That breathes the Persian air, both young and old  
Alike, the laughing child and gray-haired sire.

*Ahasuerus*

What! Esther, you a Jew!

*Esther*

[*Proudly.*]

I am a Jew.

A daughter of the tribe of Benjamin—  
Pure Hebrew blood!



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

[*A dramatic pause. Esther awaits the decision of the king, who for a time seems to waver, then extends his sceptre toward Esther. Harbonah, the king's high officer, appears. Haman throws himself at Esther's feet.*]

*Haman*

[*Pleading.*]

Oh, queen, I do beseech  
You, save me from his wrath.

*Ahasuerus*

[*Angrily.*]

Harbonah, let  
This traitor, Haman, die at once.

*Harbonah*

My lord,  
You know the scaffold that the premier built  
For Mordecai?

*Ahasuerus*

The premier! What's that,  
Harbonah? You mock your king? Let him  
Be hanged upon this gallows. Call the Jew!  
He holds the first place in my kingdom now.

[*Exeunt Ahasuerus, Esther, Haman, Harbonah,  
and attendants.*]

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Zeresh*

*[Who has been concealed in a corner of the hall, advancing.]*

At Esther's feet! An Aggagite! Ha, Ha!  
A hater of the Jews! You hypocrite!  
A lover of this queen! A paramour  
Of her who boasts that she can trace her blood  
An unpolluted stream a thousand years  
To one who watched his humble flocks on bleak  
Judean hills. A shepherd queen that rules  
The Persian throne, and you, O Haman, you  
That fed on venom for her race, are now,  
Though premier, a cringing, craven wretch,  
Begging this Jewish girl for worthless life.  
"A rainbow over polar snows," ha, ha!  
No doubt her grace was fair to look upon.  
False-hearted queen, O royal prostitute!  
It was your jeweled hand that laid this feast  
But Zeresh's heart that furnished all the wine!

*[Curtain]*

ACT III

SCENE I

Some time Later. Room in the Palace of Shushan.

*[Enter Ahafid and Smerdis.]*

*Ahafid*

*[Singing.]*

In the morning man may flourish  
In the evening be cut down;  
Dawn may find a hero famous,  
Nightfall see him lose renown.

*Smerdis*

*[Singing.]*

In his youth Ahafid's singing  
Was the pride of Persia's rule;  
Now that age has come upon him,  
Hear him braying like a mule.

*Ahafid*

Still singing like a nightingale, say you?

*Smerdis*

[*Aloud.*]

I did. [*Aside.*] The long-eared kind that crops the  
grass.

*Ahafid*

Haman's hanged upon the scaffold that  
He built for Mordecai. The Jew now wears  
The signet ring that sealed his nation's life.  
His nation's life? But how can he explain  
The slaughter of the Persian hosts?

*Smerdis*

Now if he would, I think he could, and if he should,  
He'd thus explain: "The hosts were slain because my  
brain  
Was not insane. So I raised Cain, obtained the reign  
Of this campaign, and still remain, though they were  
slain."

*Ahafid*

I think I must be growing deaf. You rhymed?

*Smerdis*

I only spoke a little joke. If I could sing, I'd say the  
ring,  
And not the king explains the thing.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahafid*

But does  
The God of Abraham inspire revenge?  
The worshippers of Moloch would have shrunk  
From such a day of death. I marvel that  
Queen Esther did not intervene. She rules  
The king. But wherefore did I say the king?

*Smerdis*

I think it must have been to rhyme with ring.

*Ahafid*

Darius' son's a spineless debauchee.

[*Sings.*]

The Jew the purple robe enfolds  
And eke the royal gown;  
For Mordecai the sceptre holds  
And Esther wears the crown.

[*Exit Ahafid.*]

*Smerdis*

Ahafid said he couldn't sing Ahasuerus' praise,  
And that his harp had lost the tone it had in other  
days.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

But though the Jews are on the throne and Xerxes  
maudlin full,  
Ahafid once more tunes his lyre and bellows like a bull.

Look out, here comes the Jew, a cloud upon  
His brow, the weight of empires on his brain.  
What matters does he now revolve? I fear  
The day of Adar troubles Mordecai.  
We'll stand aside and hear the premier.

*[Exit Smerdis.]*

*[Enter Mordecai meditatively, followed by Zeresh,  
who is unseen by him at first.]*

*Mordecai*

The name of Haman perish from the earth!  
The seed of Abraham be multiplied  
Until they are as numberless as sands  
Upon ocean's shore! This was my prayer,  
I learned it at my mother's knee. Was I  
Not justified?

*Zeresh*

*[Disguised as a Hebrew woman.]*

The Holy Scripture saith,  
"Vengeance belongs to God."

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Mordecai*

But was I not  
His instrument? Jehovah wrought through me;  
His will, not mine was done.

*Zeresh*

And yet His will  
Was yours?

*Mordecai*

The wicked Haman would have slain  
Even the queen herself and every Jew  
That lives within the hundred provinces  
Of Xerxes' weak and vacillating rule.

*Zeresh*

Thy action was no more than self-defense?

*Mordecai*

Not self-defense of Mordecai alone,  
But of my blood, of Esther and the sons  
Of Jacob, exiled and defenseless else.  
The God of Abraham may chasten, but  
He keeps his promises, nor will forsake.

Rameses sat upon his haughty throne  
And knew not Joseph, for my people were  
Oppressed with bitter bondage and their lives  
Made hard in mortar and in brick; but still  
They grew in numbers and increased and waxed  
Exceeding mighty, till the land was filled  
With them. And then the king was sore afraid  
And wroth because the Jews had never bent  
The knee at Egypt's shrines. He could enslave  
But not corrupt the children of the true  
And living God. And then he called  
The Hebrew midwives and commanded them  
To slay thereafter every son that might  
Be born to Jacob's sacred blood. God kept  
His covenant with Abraham and raised  
Up Moses, the deliverer, and when  
The plagues had failed to soften Pharaoh's heart,  
The Lord smote every firstborn in the land  
Of Egypt, save where hyssop mixed with blood  
Was sprinkled on the lintel of the door  
And on the two side posts, as Moses had  
Directed. Saviour of his people, son  
Of Amram and of Jochebed, obscure  
Levites, found in an ark of bulrushes  
Afloat among the flags near by the spot  
Where Pharaoh's daughter bathed, and yet, and yet—



*THE BLOOD OF RACHEL*

---

*Zeresh*

Was Moses not selected by the Lord  
To lead the Israelites into the Land  
Of Promise?

*Mordecai*

*[As in soliloquy.]*

And did he not talk with God  
Upon the Mount of Sinai, when smoke  
Enveloped all the peak, and even priests  
Were not allowed upon that holy ground?  
Was I more lowly than was Amram's child?

*Zeresh*

Yet God exalted him until the throne  
Of Egypt was within his grasp.

*Mordecai*

Though I,  
Like Jesse's son, was once a shepherd's lad,  
To-day I rule ten million souls.  
Now Moses was a vessel of the Lord  
When Death passed over every Hebrew home,  
But slew the firstborn where no blood was found.  
Was this revenge? Not Moses' hand, but God's  
Was red.

*THE BLOOD OF RACHEL*

---

*Zeresh*

The servant must obey his Lord.

*Mordecai*

I did not plot the Persians' death. The plan  
Of God was in it all.

*Zeresh*

Else why were you  
Made premier at the moment when the Jews  
Faced death in every province of the king?

*Mordecai*

It was my hand that stopped the massacre,  
But God avenged the awful wrong!

*Zeresh*

And Esther! How is it with her? You made  
Her queen. She was a humble Hebrew girl,  
Unknown and friendless, but for Mordecai.

*Mordecai*

She should be grateful for the crown I gave.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Zeresh*

But Hatach says her cheeks are often wet  
With tears.

*Mordecai*

It may be that she weeps for him  
Who won her girlish heart before we came  
To Shushan or had ever seen the king.

*Zeresh*

And yet that can not be. The shepherd's crook  
Is not the golden sceptre of a king.  
I have no doubt that she has long since ceased  
To think of youthful dreams. She rules the king,  
And what more does a woman want?

*Mordecai*

I did  
Not hope to make her understand at once.  
My reasons were too subtle for her heart.  
And so I kept my counsel, for I knew  
No girl would ever sacrifice her love  
To save the remnant of a nation's life.

*Zeresh*

[*Justifying.*]

And why might even Esther not forget  
When once she felt the spell of royal power,—  
The tinsel show and glamour of the court?  
No woman lives that would not be a queen.

*Mordecai*

I knew Ahasuerus was a brute,  
But what of that? Through Esther I have saved  
A half a million souls.

*Zeresh*

[*Aside.*]

Through Esther you  
Have slain a million souls.

*Mordecai*

When Jephthah vowed  
A vow unto the Lord he kept his pledge  
And slew the only daughter of his flesh  
For a burnt offering unto God, because  
The Ammonites, his enemy, had been  
Delivered to the hands of Israel.  
Now Esther was my only child.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Zeresh*

[*A little sarcastically.*]

You have

Not sacrificed, but elevated her.

Although she does not understand your heart,  
She can but bless her uncle Mordecai.

*Mordecai*

But why should Esther weep? She risked her life  
At my behest, but did she not obtain  
Great favor with the king?

*Zeresh*

And Esther's life  
Was forfeit then through Haman's wicked hate.

*Mordecai*

I wear the royal robe of blue and white.

*Zeresh*

Does Esther think because her vanity  
Is flattered by the jewels of a queen  
That Mordecai is moved by pomp and show?

*Mordecai*

'Tis not the kingly trappings but the seal—  
Not sceptre merely but the signet ring,  
Not rank, but rule that Mordecai would have.  
I can not understand her tears no more  
Than she knows why I wear the crown. But I  
Am justified. Jehovah wrought through me.

[*Exit Mordecai.*]

*Zeresh*

[*Bursting into fury.*]

Jehovah wrought through him! Hell wrought  
through him!  
I marvel that his tongue is not consumed  
By blasted lies. Wait till he feels the flame  
That rages in my heart. Hell may not burn  
A Jew, but even he can not withstand  
The simoon of a fiery dragon's breath!

*Parshandatha*

But Zeresh, was the Jew not justified?

*Zeresh*

Justified! gratified! satisfied! Parshandatha,  
Justified in Jephthah; gratified  
That he is like the meek and lowly son  
Of Amram; satisfied that now the crown  
Of Persia presses only Hebrew brows.

*Parshandatha*

[*Sarcastically.*]

You do forget my lord, Darius' son.  
You can not think the blood of Jacob flows  
Through Xerxes' veins? Does he not wear the crown?

*Zeresh*

[*With contempt.*]

Ahasuerus wears a pigeon's heart.  
The Persian robe's a Jewish gabardine;  
The crown, a Hebrew priest's phylactery.  
But did you say forget? Have you been so  
Long with me, dear, and doubt my memory?  
Forget Ahasuerus, did you say?  
That minion of a Jewish girl, who sealed  
The death of Haman and his sons? His face  
Is seared upon my heart, his image burnt  
Into my brain. I tell you Xerxes is  
No longer king.

*Parshandatha*

But is not Esther queen?

*Zeresh*

Parshandatha, why do you taunt me thus?  
Have I not proved your friend? Do I deserve  
Your mockery?

*Parshandatha*

I do but speak to sting  
You to revenge.

*Zeresh*

Let fly your venom then.  
The Persian empire is in arms. To-night  
The king does hold a great carouse. The Jew  
Will sit in state beside the profligate.  
This blade I have prepared against that hour.  
The queen, I understand, will be a blaze  
Of gems. Ahasuerus boasts this night  
Would all but wreck a petty kingdom.

*Parshandatha*

Should never live to see the rising sun.

He



*Zeresh*

The rising sun! My dear, he shall not see  
The Pleiades again, and they are up  
At nine. When cornet and the trumpet bruit  
The entry of the queen, a hundred blades  
Like this [*disclosing dagger*] shall be unsheathed.

Parshandatha,

You know whose blood my blade shall drink!  
My hour has come! Ah, Esther, you shall sup  
Once more with Haman and your drunken lord,  
While Zeresh keeps her lonely watch  
Beneath the silent, glittering stars. Come on!

[*Exeunt Zeresh and Parshandatha.*]

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE II

Place—Outer hall to throne room, curtain back.  
Time—The following evening.

[*Enter Vashti and Esther from opposite sides of the stage.*]

*Esther*

Ah, here already, Vashti, at my poor  
Request, who dared defy a despot king's  
Command to come before him and his lords?

Your beauty, radiant and spotless, grows  
Each hour of exiled life more potent still  
Than when it hurled an oriental crown,  
With all its flashing jewels, in the face  
Of brutal Xerxes rather than unveil  
Unto a drunken court of lustful eyes.  
Uncrowned, deposed, you are, yet thrice a queen!

*Vashti*

The sting, the sting of your envenomed words!

*Esther*

Forgive me, dear, I do not mock your fate;  
No word of mine is spoke in scorn. I would  
Exchange the royal robe and crown I wear  
For just one hour of virtuous freedom that  
Belongs to you.

*Vashti*

I can not understand!

*Esther*

I know; 'tis my misfortune, and I called  
You to the palace that I might explain.  
Yet every word seems cruel mockery.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

I do not blame you that your cheek, as chaste  
As lilies, blushes at my seeming shame.  
Yet, Vashti, can you not believe I need  
Your sympathy? I crave your high respect?

*Vashti*

You must an explanation.

*Esther*

Well, did you  
Not sacrifice a queenship for the gem  
That every woman holds above a throne?  
How can we estimate your loss? The pomp  
That follows majesty; the crooking knee;  
Ten thousand minions at your beck and call;  
A thousand syncophantic, fawning lords;  
A hundred gleaming jeweled chandeliers;  
The radiance and rich magnificence  
Of court; long hours of revel and of wine;  
And then above the splendor and the show  
God's finger writing on the wall! Is this  
The precious price that you have paid?

*Vashti*

The price.

This is

*Esther*

Sweet friend, I thank you. Yes, your loss  
Has been my gain! Yet what reward have I?  
How I do hate the crown that you did spurn!  
O how I love the pearl of greatest price!  
God pardon my great sin!

Vashti, I am  
A daughter of Rebecca and the blood  
Of Rachel pulses in my veins! Beyond  
The northern hills, within a valley green,  
A shepherd watches o'er his flocks to-night  
Beside a starlit stream, and dreams of her  
Who gave the promise of her hand when life  
Was young and all the earth was pure and fair.

His love was constant as the northern star,  
And mine was like the needle pointing true.  
That day is but a sad remembrance now.  
I never knew the ones who gave me life.  
My uncle, Mordecai, who sits in state  
Beside the king instructed me in love  
And knowledge of my people. Every night,  
As well as every day, like Daniel, I  
Was taught to pray, my window open toward  
Jerusalem. God softened Cyrus' heart  
Because of Daniel's prayer. But, Vashti, you

Must know from Persian Gulf to Caspian Sea,  
The sons of Jacob still in exile groan  
Beneath a tyrant's yoke. I hear the wail  
Of Rachel weeping for her children still;  
I hear my lover playing on his flute,  
Who waits the coming of a faithless bride!  
*But Mordecai has stayed the hand of Death!*

*Vashti*

And you did eat your heart to save your blood?

*Esther*

You comprehend at last? Your sympathy,  
O Vashti, I must have, if not respect,  
Else can I not return unto the king. [*Vashti weeps.*]  
There, there, I thank you, sister, friend, proud queen!  
The tears that glitter on your cheeks are worth  
A diadem of sparkling Indian stones.  
But weep no more—your hand—for Esther's heart  
Can now endure, since Vashti understands!  
The stars are twinkling in the northern skies;  
They shimmer on the stream beyond the hills;  
The shepherd's reed is wailing on the breeze;  
The revels in the palace now begin;  
The call has come; I must no longer stay.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

The daughter of a Benjamite will lay  
Her heart upon the altar of her blood.  
Hear you the crimson riot in my veins?  
'Tis Rachel's voice! I would that you could know!

. . . . .

Forgive me, Vashti, for my brain's distraught!

The lights die out beyond the palace walls.  
The stars are hid . . . I can no longer hear  
The wailing flute. . . Return unto your hut.  
Ahasuerus calls with mantling wine.  
My place is yonder by the king. I go!

[*Exeunt Esther and Vashti.*]

[*Enter Ahafid and Smerdis.*]

*Ahafid*

The last word has been spoken  
The last true song been sung;  
My country's heart is broken,  
The poet's harp unstrung.

*Smerdis*

Ahafid seems to harp upon his strings.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahafid*

It seems Ahasuerus means to drink  
The cup of revel to its bitter lees.

*Smerdis*

The deeper in the cup he goes  
The sweeter is the wine that flows;  
The closer to the lees, he thinks,  
The purer is the wine he drinks.

*Ahafid*

Messengers from every province bring  
Reports of mutterings and dangerous  
Revolt. But Xerxes, heedless still, declares  
This night shall dim the glories of the past.

*Smerdis*

[*Sings.*]

The lower in the lamp the oil  
The fewer are the days of toil.  
The brighter burns the wick of life,  
The sooner end the days of strife.  
'Tis not for oil that Xerxes cares,  
But brilliancy of flame that flares.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahafid*

I hate the Hebrews and their Jewish God;  
I hate Jehovah for his jealous love,  
But Mordecai refuses to attend  
The feast. The God of Israel must save  
Us now, or Persia perish utterly.

My hand will pen no ribald verse  
This revel to adorn;  
Ye gods, inspire my tongue to curse  
The day the king was born.

[*Exit Ahafid.*]

*Smerdis*

The more he swears the less he sings,  
Then welcome is this news he brings;  
For listening to his song is worse  
Than hearing old Ahafid curse.

[*Exit Smerdis.*]

[*Re-enter Ahafid.*]

*Ahafid*

[*Sings.*]

Persia's heart is beating low,  
Thinking of the long ago,  
When the king that wore the crown  
Was a prince of great renown;



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

When her name without a peer  
Did inspire the world with fear;  
But to-night her sovereign's lust  
Trails her banner in the dust.

Now my life is ebbing fast,  
Dreaming of the glorious past;  
Feeling all the shame and smart,  
Dying of a broken heart.

[*Sinks to floor.*]

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE III

[*Curtain rises on Ahasuerus and his court.*]

*Ahasuerus*

Sha-ashgaz, keeper of the concubines,  
Ahasuerus drinks your health  
And bids you bring immediately before  
The court the serpents of the Orient!  
The king would have a night of revelry.

[*The court fool, Smerdis, dances out before the court.*]

*Ahasuerus (Continues)*

What, Smerdis, is the office of a fool?

*Smerdis*

To charm these serpents of the Orient!  
[*Aside*] But more to furnish brains for idiot kings.

*Ahasuerus*

Now tell the chief musicians every one  
To string his harp with golden wire and tune  
His finest Persian reed to touch the heart  
With joy. To-night the emperor of the East,  
The monarch of the world from Babylon  
To India, would show munificence  
Of entertainment never seen within  
The palace walls before.

*Smerdis*

You do forget  
That night six years ago. The palace was  
A blaze of light. The air was fragrant with  
The breath of spice from off the Indian seas.  
Ahasuerus, flushed with flattery  
And wine, was mad with passion . . . .

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahasuerus*

[*Impetuously.*]

Smerdis, charm  
These serpents, if you will, your glittering words  
Are meaningless to me. Carshena, let  
The Jewish Esther come in Tyrian robe,  
In such a gown as never Vashti wore!

*Smerdis*

[*Aside.*]

His orders have not always been obeyed.

*Ahasuerus*

And I would have my queen adorned with gems,  
That diamond cluster from beyond the Ind,  
Which, sparkling in her aureole of gold, bedims  
The constellation of the Southern Cross.

*Smerdis*

[*Aside.*]

And makes the Persian peasants mourn their loss!

*Ahasuerus*

I say, Meheuman, this shall be a night  
In which Ahasuerus feasts his friends—  
A banquet for the soul, as well as flesh.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Smerdis*

[*Aside.*]

A famished soul such feasting would refresh!

*Ahasuerus*

For who does not delight to look upon  
The rhythmic beauty of voluptuous form?

*Smerdis*

[*Aside.*]

Cold-blooded heart a writhing snake can warm!

*Ahasuerus*

Whose ear is not enthralled by luscious lute,  
Whose heart is not inspired by festive song!

*Smerdis*

[*Aside.*]

The one bowed down by tyranny and wrong!

*Ahasuerus*

But why has Mordecai delayed to come?  
The hated sons of Haman are no more;  
That reprobate who would have slain the queen  
Herself to gratify his wounded pride  
Has long since festered in the rain and sun.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

No enemy remains alive who dares  
To touch the people of the Jew that saved  
The life of Persia's king. He wears my ring;  
The purple of my empire is a shield  
Against the world. I do not understand  
Why Mordecai is late. He should be here;  
The tabor and tymbrel sound anon.

*Smerdis*

*[Dances and capers before the king, then speaks solemnly.]*

O king, I know why Mordecai is late  
He sits once more beside the palace gate,  
In sackcloth and bemoans his fate.  
He sits and dreams of hills and streams  
That flow through pasture lands and fields.  
He sees a child of golden hair,  
As happy as the vibrant air,  
And hears the notes and pulse of song  
Where birds and sheep and shepherds throng.  
And then he turns to banquet halls  
And scenes like this in palace walls,  
Where lords and queens and fools and kings,  
And concubines and underlings,  
Made one with wine and passion's thrall,  
Throw dice with Death, nor heed the call

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

That comes from Persia's bleeding heart,  
[*Aside*] (A fool that can not play his part).  
And this explains why he is late,  
The Jew beside the palace gate.

*Ahasuerus*

You are a jester, not a bard. Your cap  
And bells, or else Death wins his throw with you.  
Meheuman, call the poet of the court,  
The great Ahafid. Let him celebrate  
This feast in song. This rhyming fool presumes  
Too much upon the patience of the king.

*Smerdis*

Your majesty, I did but rhyme because  
Ahafid's dead.

*Ahasuerus*

His death? Ahafid dead? What caused  
His death?

*Smerdis*

[*Aside.*]

A broken heart. [*Aloud.*] He broke his harp  
And died of grief. [*Aside again.*] The good gray poet  
could  
Remember real kings.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Ahasuerus*

Of grief? The fool!  
Well, let the younger minstrel, Saadi sing.

*Saadi*

[*Sings.*]

Lift the voice and let us sing,  
The monarch's on his throne;  
Xerxes is the greatest king  
The world has ever known.  
Women, wine and happy song,  
Let the revels ring,  
Lift your voices loud and long,  
For Xerxes is our king.

[*Much revel and dancing. The trumpet sounds.*]

*Ahasuerus*

Ahafid's death was only Persia's gain.

[*Meditatively.*]

Could Vashti look upon this gorgeous scene  
The bitter tears would scald her faded cheeks  
At thoughts of her own folly.

THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

[*Confusion and much disturbance. Ahasuerus, surprised, cries in angry passion.*]

Ho! What means  
This rude confusion? Who has dared disturb  
The king in this unwonted way?

[*Enter messenger.*]

*Messenger*

Tidings,

O king, of riot and revolt!

*Ahasuerus*

Restore

The court to order. I will hear no news!  
There is no news but this night's joy. What fear  
Need Persia have? The world is safe;  
The emperor lives! Go put the messengers to death!  
This is no time to cloud the royal brow!  
Bring forth the vintage from the deepest vault.  
Here are a hundred irised pearls. They cost  
A million sesterces. Let each man crush  
A lustrous shell and drink it to the health  
Of Esther, beauteous queen of all the East.  
Arise! She comes! A blaze of splendor. Now  
Let every instrument be sounded.  
The revels shall continue till the dawn!



THE BLOOD OF RACHEL

---

*Zeresh*

*[Rushing in with uplifted dagger and thrusting it into the heart of Esther, crying as she flourishes it before the astonished court.]*

The dawn, O king, is breaking in the east!

*[Curtain.]*

FINIS

# POEMS AND SONNETS

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To

**DOCTOR W. W. RAY**

PHYSICIAN, SCIENTIST, POET, MUSICIAN

To Whom

Whether in Art or Nature

Truth is Beauty and Beauty Truth,

To Whose Appreciation and Enthusiasm I Owed my Intellectual  
Awakening in Youth, and Whose Friendship and Love  
have Increased That Obligation Immeasurably  
as the Years have Passed,

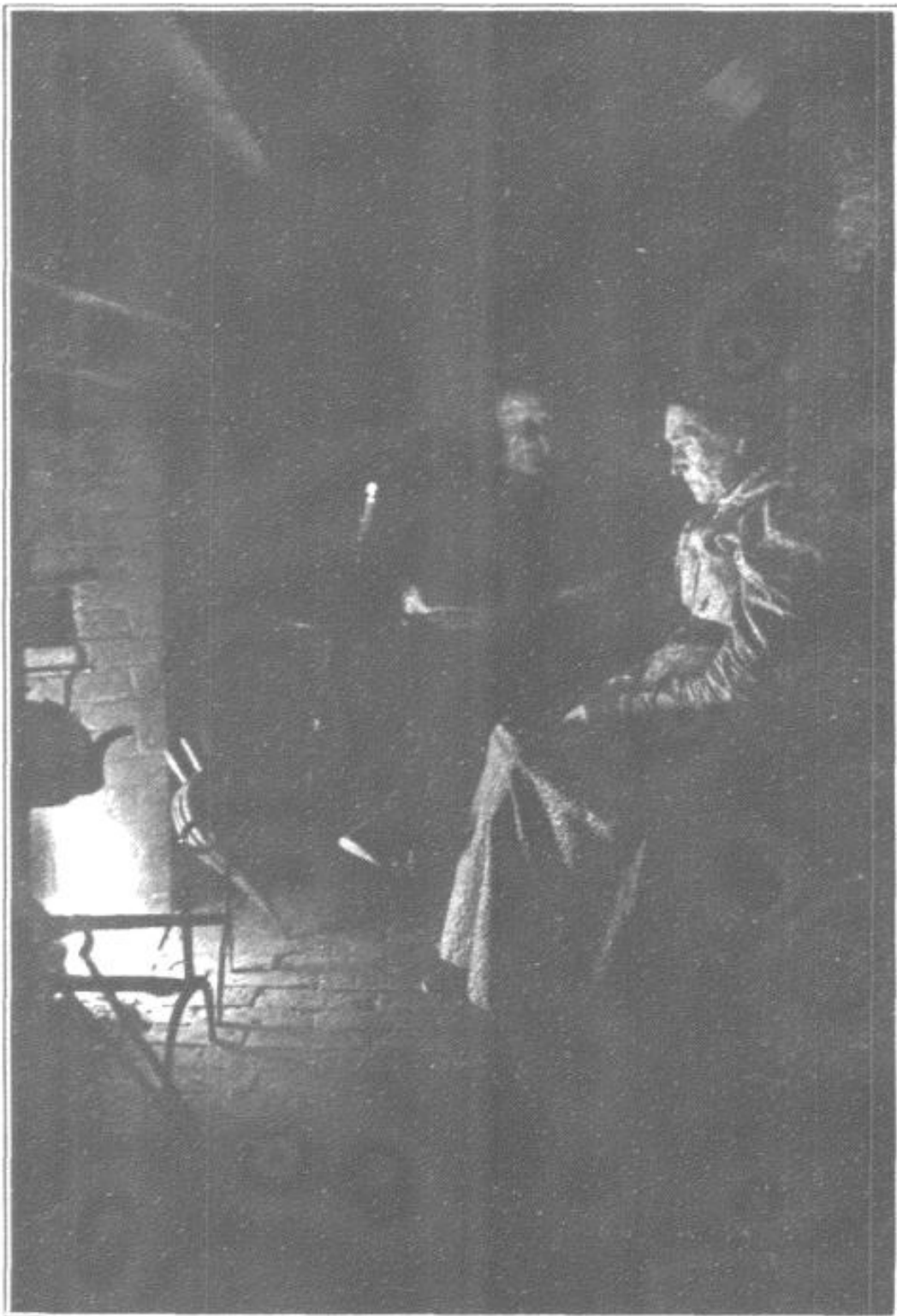
I Dedicate these Poems

With the Affection of a Full Heart

COTTON NOE

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*" Then why not praise the tallow-dip, the dog irons and the crane.  
The kettle singing on the coals, or hanging to a chain?"*

# Poems and Sonnets

---

## THE OLD DOG IRONS

Oh, the old, old dog irons! How the picture thrills my  
soul,

As I stir the ashes of the past and find this living coal:  
When I blow the breath of memory it flashes into  
flame,

That seems to me far brighter than the most undying  
fame.

Will you listen to the story of my early childhood days  
When I read the mystic symbols in the embers and  
the blaze

Of the old wide-open fireplace, where the backlog, all  
aglow

With its shifting scenes of fancy, was a motion  
picture show?

I know about your natural gas, your stoves and  
anthracite,

Your phonograph and telephone and incandescent light;  
I've heard about the comforts and the use of gasoline,  
And the educative value of a Pathe photo-scene;  
The future of the biplane and the wonders of the press,  
And the blessings of the wireless when a ship is in  
distress.

I marvel at invention and its all but magic art,  
But the things that make for happiness concern the  
human heart.



POEMS AND SONNETS

---

Then why not praise the tallow dip, the dog irons and  
the crane,  
The kettle singing on the coals, or hanging to a chain?  
The children gathered round the hearth to hear of  
early days—  
The wildcat and the panther, the redman's sneaking  
ways;  
The bravery of our fathers, the scalping knife and gun,  
The courage of the women folks; I tell you, boys,  
'twas fun.  
We roasted sweet potatoes and we talked of Marion's  
men,  
How they routed all the redcoats, or slew them in  
the fen.  
We learned to love our country and we swore to tell  
the truth,  
And do no deed of treachery and never act uncouth;  
To guard the honor of our name, and shield a vir-  
tuous home,  
To read the Proverbs and the Psalms and love the  
sacred tome.  
I know our home was humble then—rag carpet on the  
floor—  
But the stranger found a welcome there, the latch-  
string on the door.  
The well-sweep and the woodpile and the ox team in  
the shed,  
Dried apples hung around the walls, and pumpkins  
overhead—

Not sanitary, I'll admit, nor stylish-like, nor rich,  
But health and comfort and content; now tell me,  
    which is which?  
Then who can blame me that I love the good old dog  
    iron days,  
When men had hearts and character that fortune  
    couldn't faze;  
The years before the slitted skirts and the Turkish  
    cigarettes,  
When women wove their linsey clothes instead of  
    devilish nets;  
When children did the chores at night, nor ever heard  
    of gym,  
Or movements such as boy scouts, yet kept in health  
    and trim.  
We spent our evenings all at home, and read and sang  
    and played,  
Or talked of work and feats of strength, or what our  
    crops had made;  
And when we mentioned quilting bees and apple-  
    peeling time,  
We had in mind our sweethearts and we sometimes  
    made a rhyme:  
'Twas then I read my future in the embers and the  
    blaze,  
And this is why I celebrate the good old dog iron  
    ways.

THE AGE ELECTRIC

The glory of the good old days has passed from earth  
away,

The lumbering loom, the spinning wheel, Maud  
Muller raking hay;

The old rail fence, the moldboard plough, the scythe  
and reaping hook,

Corn shuckings, and Virginia reel, and young folks'  
bashful look.

Now poor old father limps behind his motorcycle son  
And sees the world go whizzing by and knows his race  
is run.

With rheumatism in his joints and crotchets in his  
brain,

He finds that he can hardly catch th' accommodation  
train.

Two dozen bottles of the oil of Dr. Up-To-Date  
Would put to flight the rheumatiz and straighten out  
his pate;

But foggy folks don't have the faith, nor interest in  
the race,

They'd rather drive a slow coach horse than go at such  
a pace.

Efficiency! efficiency! In business, church and school,  
Where Culture in a dunce's cap sits grinning on a stool,

And wondering where the thing will end, and what the  
prize will be,

When Intellect, all geared and greased, is mere  
machinery.

Old Homer and the Iliad, the Trojan and the Greek,  
The Parthenon and Phidias, not ancient, but antique.  
Great Cæsar and the Gallic War and Virgil with his  
rhyme,

And Cicero have all gone down beneath the wheel of  
time.

And Dante now lies buried deep beneath the art  
debris,

Where Michael Angelo once wrought for immor-  
tality.

The Swan of Avon's not in school, but on the movie  
screen,

The Prince of Denmark can not talk but still he may  
be seen.

All history and literature, philosophy and truth  
Would take about three evenings off of any modern  
youth

To master through the picture art if he the time could  
spare,

From vaudeville shows and joy rides and tango with  
the fair.

The problem is to find an hour so busy is the age,  
And so important is the work and tempting is the  
wage.

Then what's the use of poetry or history anyhow?  
Best turn your back upon the past and face the  
present *now!*

Get busy, and be on the job, the world will pay  
for skill.

It says: "Deliver me the goods, and then present  
your bill."

The family circle and the talk around the old hearth  
stone,

The sage advice, when backlogs glowed and grease  
lamps dimly shone,

Are mouldy pictures of the past, mere myths of long  
ago,

When grandsires had found out some things that  
children didn't know.

How many bushels can you raise upon your plot of  
ground?

How many blades of grass now grow where once just  
one was found?

Oh! Nature is the proper theme, but better Words-  
worth drop,

San Jose scale and coddling moth will get your apple  
crop.

POEMS AND SONNETS

---

Ben Johnson and Will Shakespeare and Goldsmith all  
are dead.

Put nodules in alfalfa roots not dramas in your  
head.

Tomato canning's orthodox if done with due dis-  
patch

Don't let your daughter dream of fame, just show  
her how to patch.

The laws of sanitation soon will put the fly to flight,  
Then stop tuberculosis next and win the hookworm  
fight.

If man could live a century it may be in the strife,  
He'd learn to make a *living* if he didn't make a *life!*  
What matter if the primrose is beside the river's brim,  
A yellow primrose growing there and nothing more  
to him,

He's caught the trick of sustenance (but lost his taste  
for rhyme),

Though the oxen in the clover fields have had that all  
the time!

GRANDMOTHER DAYS

Ah, Grandmother Young was wrinkled and o!d  
When she sat by the mantelpiece;  
And she wore a cap with many a fold  
Of ribbon and lace, as rich as gold,  
And worked in many a crease:  
And the billowy clouds of smoke that rolled  
From her little stone pipe whenever she told  
Of the quest of the Golden Fleece,  
Wrought me to think that Grandmother Young  
Was shriveled and gray when Homer sung  
Of the gods of ancient Greece.

But all of her marvelous mythical lore  
Was naught to her magical power—  
Transforming a house with a puncheon floor  
To a palace of wealth with a golden door  
That lead to a castle tower—  
An attic loft with a wonderful store  
Of things that we feared, but longed to explore—  
Our grandmother's ancient dower.  
Oh, grandmother's charm could change but a base  
Rude vessel of clay to a Haviland vase,  
A weed to a royal flower.

Ah, grandmother's home was a temple of grace  
And my child-heart worshipped there,  
When Balm-of-Gilead around the place,  
Like incense, for a mile of space,  
Perfumed the glorious air;  
And the song that came from the feathered race  
In the boughs of the tangled interlace  
Of apple and peach and pear,  
Enthralled me like the magic spell  
Of siren music when it fell  
On old Ulysses' ear.

Last summer I passed where the palace once stood  
Whose beauty my life beguiled;  
It's a cabin now; and the charmed wood  
Of sugar and oak, in brotherhood  
Of walnut and hickory, aisled  
For gathering nuts and the merry mood  
That only our childhood understood,  
By man has been defiled.  
Oh, how can I ever cease to praise  
The fairy enchantment of grandmother days  
When I was a little child!



JUST TO DREAM

Just to dream when sapphire skies  
Are as blue as maidens' eyes;  
Just to dream when petals sow  
All the earth with pink and snow;  
Just to sit by youth's bright stream,  
Gazing at its crystal gleam—  
Listening to the wren and dove—  
Hearing only songs of love—  
*Just to dream.*

Just to dream of sabre's flash  
When the lines of battle clash;  
See the army put to rout—  
Hear the world's triumphant shout;  
Just to dream our name supreme—  
Hero of a poet's theme,  
First among the sons of men,  
Master of the sword or pen—  
*Just to dream.*

POEMS AND SONNETS

---

Just to dream when skies grow gray,  
Just to dream the days away—  
Living over childhood's joys,  
Sorrow that no longer cloy;  
Just to muse of days that seem  
Like the sunlight's golden beam,  
Summer nights and winter's snow,  
Just to dream of long ago—  
*Just to dream.*

AMNEMON

“Dear, the struggle has been hard and long—  
The wine-press I have trodden,  
Paved with flint and shard;  
And many times my feet have stained  
The flagstones of the street with blood.  
Out yonder in the park where life’s rich chalice  
Sparkles with the wine of happiness and love  
The world was always dull and dark to me.  
Hours I have stood upon the beach  
And watched the whitecaps glinting  
In the sunlight and listened to the breakers  
Booming on the sinuous shore,  
While little children clapped their hands  
And shouted out across the waters,  
And gray-haired men and women shook their heads  
In silence and looked toward the sunset.  
But everything was always meaningless to me.  
Season after season I have watched the butterflies  
By millions come and go  
And katydids each year have sung  
The song monotonous and passed away.  
Yesterday the sun arose upon another world.  
Gray skies have turned to brilliant blue;

POEMS AND SONNETS

---

The droning hum of beetles on the breeze  
Is like an orchestra of lovely music.  
The air is sweet and fresh as dewdrops in convolvuli.  
For two bright hours I have strolled  
Among the flowering shrubbery near the seashore,  
Listening to a song I had not heard for years.  
And now once more that I am happy,  
May I not confess it all?  
I did you wrong, great wrong.  
There was no stain upon my life,  
No taint of blood within my veins.  
I came of Pilgrim stock, vigorous and strong.  
I did not understand my heart,  
And knowing all the stress you placed upon heredity,  
I told a falsehood, partly as a test of love,  
And part for self-protection.  
I have suffered much, but justly.  
You said my story broke your heart,  
And left me where I stood,  
Pondering on the sin I had committed.  
I had proved your love, but all too late.  
Your talent meant a brilliant future,  
And I knew your great ambition.  
For years I scanned the periodicals  
Where names of most renown in literature are found,  
Expecting always to see my lover's there,

But always doomed to disappointment.  
And yet I now rejoice  
That you have not achieved great fame,  
For otherwise I could not write this letter.  
Perhaps 'twere best that I should never send it;  
If so, it will not find its way to you.  
It may be that you think me dead,  
Or worse—I may have been forgotten.  
This is April twenty-first;  
The hillsides now are pink with peach and apple bloom.  
I will arrive in Salt Lake City, May the third,  
And be at Hotel Utah.  
If your heart, through all these years,  
Like mine, has hungered, you will be there too.  
Geraldine."

Alfred Milner read this letter  
While great drops of perspiration  
Stood upon his brow and trembling hand.  
For seven winters he had tried  
To bury in oblivion a face and form  
That always with the dogwood blossoms  
Came again, and each time seemed more fair.  
He had tried for fame and failed.  
But now his book that bore a pen name only  
Was selling daily by the thousands

And fame and fortune, latter-day twin saints,  
Were building him a shrine.  
But did she know of his success,  
And was her conduct  
Years before base cowardice?  
Had she only told the cruel tale  
Because she knew his theory of insane blood,  
And hid her lack of faith  
By taking refuge in his prejudice?  
Or was her story true?  
If true or false, why had she kept it back  
Until she knew red passion  
Was a-riot in his heart?  
He tore the letter into strips  
And blew them fiercely through the air.  
He had suffered much himself,  
But she was not concerned.  
What if this letter had been sent  
To open healing wounds,  
To win some wager with another man  
To whom she boasted of her power?  
He would not go!

The air was growing foul and stuffy  
In his suite of rooms,  
And Alfred threw the window open.

The subway in the distance  
Rumbled like a gathering storm;  
The palisades across the Hudson  
Now were darkling in the falling shadows.

April thirtieth at noon.  
The Rocky Mountains looked like towers  
On the Chinese Wall a hundred miles away.  
Would he make connection at Pueblo?  
The gray monotony of grass and cacti  
Had begun to wear upon his nerves.  
He longed to see the Royal Gorge—  
The steep and jagged heights of hills.  
They spoke of giant strength  
He needed for the coming struggle.  
It might be that the air  
From off eternal snows  
Would cool the fever in his brain.

“May second, and yonder lies the Great Salt Lake,  
Or else a mirage on the desert’s rim.”

Alfred put his pen upon the register  
Of Hotel Utah,  
And read the list of names above.  
She was there, “Geraldine Mahaffy.”  
Finally he scrawled a signature,  
But wrote his *nom de plume*.

The clerk thrust out his hand and beamed.  
Two porters swooped upon his grips,  
And soon the lobby hummed.  
But Alfred Milner sat alone within his room  
Battling with emotions he could neither  
Overcome nor understand.  
He did not know the stir his name upon the register  
Had made below, or knew what name he wrote.  
At last: "Geraldine Mahaffy:  
This is May the third and I am here."  
Thoughtfully he creased the sheet  
And rang: "Room ten, and answer, please."

The smell of brine was heavy on the air  
That blew across the lake.  
The mountains to the north were white with snow  
    above  
And dogwood petals on the southern slopes.  
But winter was forgotten in the plains,  
For rivulets imprisoned long in cataracts  
Were leaping over waterfalls  
And shouting like a red bird,  
In an April cedar tree.

Milner drew a long deep breath of spring  
And walked into the parlor.

"Alfred!"

"Geraldine!"



*POEMS AND SONNETS*

---

“Last night I dreamed of Cornell days,  
And saw the redbuds blooming in the hills  
Behind the cliffs of Ithaca!”

“The ice in Cascadilla Creek is gone.  
All night I heard the roaring of the falls!”

“The call of flickers sounded through the canyons  
Of Old Buttermilk, and peckerwoods were beating  
Reveilles before the sun was up!”

“Two blue birds built a mansion  
In a dead oak trunk  
And called the world to witness!”

“Alfred!”

“Geraldine!”

“The train for California leaves at nine!”

Some hours out from Great Salt Lake,  
The sand dunes stretching southward  
O'er a waste of shubbery and alkali  
Were shimmering in the sunshine  
Like copper kettles on a field of bronze.

“Dear Alfred, can you still recall  
Those afternoons upon the cliffs above Cayuga Lake?  
The little city, Ithaca,  
Was like a jewel on the breast of Nature.  
The lake a band of silver, stretching northward.  
A hundred waterfalls were visible  
From where we used to sit.  
We often thought the lime-washed houses  
Far to west, resembled whited decks  
Upon a sea of emerald;  
And wondered if our own good ship  
Would one day cast its anchor in the harbor.  
Over to the right the Cornell towers,  
Like mediæval castles beetling o'er the precipice,  
Were keeping silent watch above it all.  
The memory of those blessed days alone  
Has kept my heart alive.”

“But Geraldine, our vessel richly laden  
Has at last come in  
Nor ever will put out to sea again.  
Happy as those moments were,  
Forget the past, so fraught with bitterness to me.”

The desert now a hundred miles behind  
Was fading like a crescent sea beach  
In the setting sun.

Slowly like a giant serpent  
The Sunset Limited climbed the great Sierras  
And started down the western slope at dawn.  
The valley of the Sacramento  
Never bloomed so beautiful before.  
The blue Pacific through the haze  
Was like a canvas sea.  
Peace permeated all the earth.  
The sun at last was resting on the ocean's rim.  
The turquoise waters turned to liquid gold.

"Life, O my beloved, is like eternal seas—  
Emerald in the morning, changing into opal,  
Amethyst and pearl, but ruby red at last.  
Behold the Golden Gate!  
The seas beyond are all like that!"

Morning in the Sacramento!  
Petals, dew and fragrance—indescribable!  
Plumage, song and sunshine,  
And over all a California sky!

"O Alfred, could it only be like this forever!  
Back yonder in New York,  
The world is built of brick and mortar,  
And men forget the handiwork of God.  
How can a poet hope to win a name  
Where men are mad for gold?"

"A name! Why Geraldine! I had forgot  
To tell the story of my fame.  
The ecstasy of these three days  
Had blotted all earthly fortune from my memory.  
I am Ralph Nixon, author of the *Topaz Mystery*."

"Ralph Nixon! You! Then who am I?"  
A heavy tide of blood swept over  
All the tracery of the bitter past,  
And in a moment more  
She lay unconscious on a bed of thorny cactus.

The *City Argentina* blew a long loud blast  
And anchored in the bay.

The woman opened wondering eyes  
And looked at Milner.

"Why do you call me Geraldine?  
My Christian name's Annemon.  
We never met before.

I am Major Erskine's wife.

We live in Pasadena.

I do not know your name or face,  
Nor how I came to be with you.

I never saw this place before,  
But those are California hills  
And yonder is the great Pacific.

The mystery of who you are,

And where I am, I can not solve.  
I only know I wish to see my home and child;  
Little Alfred never has been left alone,  
And may be calling for his mother now.  
You seem to be a gentleman.  
Please show me to the nearest train  
That goes to Pasadena.”

Half in fright and half in rage  
Milner looked at Geraldine and tried to speak.  
The mountains reeled and pitched into the sea.  
A cleavage in the brain! But whose?  
This was insanity, but whether his  
Or hers he was unable to decide.  
The memory of the Cornell days came back—  
The cliffs above the lake, the emerald farms,  
The gorges and the waterfalls,  
And finally the wild, weird light  
That played in iridescent eyes  
That last day on the hills—  
The story of the tainted blood and what it meant  
For future generations.  
Milner saw an eagle soaring high above the park  
And then he heard a scream  
As though a ball had pierced its heart.

*POEMS AND SONNETS*

---

The bird careened and dropped a hundred feet,  
Then spreading broad its wings again,  
Shot upward to the heights.

The train for Pasadena speeded onward  
Toward its destination.  
A poet sat within his room  
That opened on the Golden Gate  
And as the sun dropped into the wave,  
He wrote a Requiem to Hope,  
That filled the earth with fame.

A ROMANCE OF THE CUMBERLAND

Early in the day they passed the pinnacle,  
And now the shadow of each human form  
Was lengthening backwards like Lombardy poplars  
Fallen toward the east.  
For days the fairest maiden of the caravan  
Had fevered—whether from malaria and fatigue,  
Or more because of one whom they had left behind,  
Beyond the wooded mountains,  
Neither sire nor matron could agree.  
But Martha Waters, as they laid her stretcher down  
And prepared the camp for coming night,  
Declared unless they rested here for days to come,  
Her bones must bleach beside the trail  
That led into the Dark and Bloody Ground.

And so they waited for the fever to abate,  
But when they thought her strong enough,  
A score of hardy pioneers trudged down  
The slope and launched canoes and dug-outs  
And a flatboat in the turgid waters  
Of the Cumberland, for heavy rains had fallen  
And all the mountain streams were swollen  
In these early days of June.

But the air was sweet with the odor  
Of wild honeysuckle and the ivy  
With its starry clusters fringed  
The milky way of elder bloom  
That filled each sheltered cove  
Like constellations on a summer night.  
But now the rains had ceased, the air  
Was fresh and bracing, and each glorious day  
Out-rivaled all the rest in beauty.  
Lying on her pallet on the flatboat,  
The maiden breathed the fragrant atmosphere,  
And drank refreshing whiffs of air  
That drove the fever from her blood  
And wakened dreams of conquest  
In the wilderness toward which  
Her life was drifting rapidly.  
But how could she find heart for conquest?  
Why seek this new land anyway, where only  
And forever to card the wool and spin the flax  
Would be the woman's portion?  
Would ever in the forest or beyond it  
In the rolling bluegrass,  
Return the vision that was hers,  
When only a few brief months ago  
She watched the sea gulls battling with the storm  
Above the waves of Chesapeake Bay?



Oh, how that day was filled with meaning  
For her now! For as the birds disported  
With the whirlpools of the air,  
A lover's magic words were whispered in her ear,  
How that storm and stress of life to those that love  
Are little more than winds to swallows of the sea.  
But now, if hardship meant so little,  
Why had he remained behind, when she  
Was forced to go upon the long and weary journey?  
Ah! Could it be he cared no longer for her love?  
His arm was strong. Then was his heart  
Not brave enough to conquer this new world,  
Where savage lurked and wild beast made  
The darkness dreaded by the most courageous soul?

For days the fleet had drifted down the river,  
But now her boat was anchored to a tree  
That grew upon an island in the Cumberland,  
And every man and woman but the convalescent  
Had gone ashore to stalk a deer or gather berries  
That everywhere were found along the river bank.  
But Martha Waters lay upon her bed and pondered—  
Dreaming day dreams, as she watched  
A golden oriole who fed her young  
In boughs that overhung the water,  
And a vague unhappiness arose

Within her heart, until she tossed  
Again in fever on her couch.  
She could hear the roaring falls  
A mile below, but she thought the sounding  
Cataract the sickness booming in her ears again.  
When she looked to eastward where the mountain  
Rose a thousand feet, she saw a crown of wealth  
Upon its crest of which no pioneer yet had dreamed.  
Long she lay and marveled at its beauty,  
Wondering how many ages would elapse before  
The god of Mammon would transport its treasures  
To his marts beside the sea.  
Feverish she mused and pondered until at last she  
slept.

And then upon the little island,  
A city rose as from the ocean wave—  
A city of a thousand streets, and every house  
Was made from trees that grew upon the mountain.  
Many were the palaces of wealth and beauty,  
But those who dwelt therein she did not recognize.  
Strange were their faces and their manners haughty,  
And while they lived in luxury and ease,  
Others toiled at mill and furnace. Oh! The awful din  
Of sledge and hammer, beating in her ears.  
She woke. A storm seemed just about to burst in fury,  
So loud and terrible was the roaring!

But the sky was clear. It is the booming  
Of the falls, for her boat has broke its moorings,  
And now is rapidly drifting toward the cataract,  
But four hundred yards away!

She leaped upon her feet and screamed for help.  
It was impossible for her to swim ashore,  
And her fever-wasted frame could find no strength  
With which to steer the boat.  
Again she saw the crown of wealth  
Upon the mountain top, untouched by human hands.  
But the island city now had faded from her vision,  
The mountain lowered and the world grew dark.  
Onward the boat shot faster toward the roaring falls.  
But look! A race is on! A birch canoe,  
Driven by as swift a hand as ever gripped  
An oar, is leaping o'er the waves in mad pursuit.  
With every stroke the Indian bark is gaining twenty  
feet.

Will it reach the flatboat soon enough to save the girl?  
But who is he that rides the fleet canoe?  
No red man ever had an arm like that,  
For already he has reached the speeding raft,  
And with gigantic strength he steers it toward the  
shore.

But no! The current is too swift!

A moment more and all will be engulfed within  
The swirling flood. It is too late! Too late?  
But love is swifter than the angry tide,  
For like a mighty porpoise, wallowing in the wave,  
The valiant hero leaps into the stream,  
And holding Martha Waters in his strong right arm  
High above the water, reaches shore  
A hundred feet above the deadly precipice.

The air was growing chilly even on this summer night,  
And the emigrants had gathered round a crackling fire,  
Discoursing of the past, and listening to a modest tale  
of love.

Simply and unfaltering James Hunt related  
How his heart had hungered back beside the old  
Potomac,

Till he found he could no longer brook the passion  
That grew stronger as the days of summer lengthened.  
At last he started, and following every night  
The blazing dogstar, and resting through the day till  
evening,

In just three weeks he reached the river  
Where he found the birch canoe that rode  
The seething waters like a greyhound of the ocean.

POEMS AND SONNETS

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Then the maiden told her vision of the island city,  
How its palaces and mansions, rich as gold and beautiful as crystal,  
Were constructed by her people, toiling hundreds,  
Sore and weary, of times cold and hungry.  
She had seen them fell the forests,  
Hew and mill and dress the lumber,  
Till the soil and reap the harvests, gathering into  
others' garner.

Stalwart were these men and women, pure of heart  
And strong of muscle, fitted for the tasks before  
them.

She had seen her brothers laboring at the forge and  
sounding anvil;  
Sisters toiling at the wheel and distaff, heard them at  
the loom  
While flying shuttle threaded warp with web of  
beauty;  
Watched them till they fell asleep with weariness,  
While the sons of leisure feasted.

Thus the maiden told her story, saying:  
"Shall we undertake the journey? Plows are  
waiting  
In the furrows back in Maryland, my people,  
Back beyond the rugged mountain. There are  
harvests

Yet ungarnered, waiting for scythe and sickle.  
Calculate the cost, and weigh it, for my vision is  
prophetic.

For my part, I choose this lover, for my guide and  
valiant leader.

He shall point the way forever,  
Though he take the road that's darkest."

Then James Hunt, the hero lover,  
Who had never quailed at danger,  
Trembling for his happy passion,  
Rose and pointed toward the westward,  
Toward the Pleiades descending,  
Deep behind the gloomy forest.

"Let us face toward dark Kentucky, fell its forests,  
Build its roads and bridge its rivers,  
Give our children to the nation.

What though others reap our harvests,  
Hoard the wealth we have created?

Ours shall be the nobler portion.

Blessed is the one that suffers,  
If he spends himself for others.

Should the toiling millions falter,  
Though they work for others' comfort,  
Building homes they can not enter?

Christ was born within a manger,

May we not produce a leader,  
Who shall save our nation's honor?  
At to-morrow morning's dawning,  
Ere the sunrise gild the treetops,  
Let us take the darkling pathway."

Still the Pleiades are circling,  
Still the dogstar glows in heaven,  
But the oak and pine and poplar  
All have gone from off the mountain—  
Passed into the marts of Mammon,  
By the hands of toil and labor.  
Silent are the loom and distaff,  
In the cabin and the cottage,  
And the songs of scythe and sickle  
Gathering in the golden harvests.  
But the pain of drudgery lingers,  
And the heart still longs and hungers  
For the fruitage it shall gather,  
Yet beyond the wooded westward.

MORNING GLORIES.

A roguish laugh, a rustling vine,  
I turn my eager eye;  
Big drops of dew in bells of blue  
And red convolvuli.

But nothing more; I hold my breath  
And strain my eager eye;  
A yellow crown, two eyes of brown,  
And pink convolvuli!

The golden curls, the elfish laugh,  
Rose cheeks and glittering eye  
Are glories, too, like bells of blue  
And red convolvuli.



CHRISTMASTIDE

Evergreen and tinsel'd toys,  
Drums and dolls, and bursting joys—  
Blessed little girls and boys!

Holly, bells, and mistletoë,  
Tinkling sledges, here we go—  
Youth and maiden o'er the snow.

Chilling winds and leaden days,  
Vesper songs and hymns of praise  
Silver hair and dying blaze!

Christmas morn and yuletide eve,  
Dear Lord, help us to believe—  
Naught but blessings we receive.

KINSHIP

Oh, little children, ye who watch the trains go by,  
With yearning faces pressed against the window  
panes,  
You do not know the reason why  
Your lingering image dims my eye  
Though I have passed beyond the hills into the  
rolling plains.

Dear little children, I once watched the trains go by,  
And hungered, much as when I feel the silent stars;  
And then I saw the cold gray skies,  
And felt the warm tears in my eyes,  
When far beyond the distant hills I heard the  
rumbling cars.

PRECOCITY

- “Oh, grandfather, what are the stars?  
Stones on the hand of God?  
I heard you call that red one Mars  
And those three Aaron’s rod;  
And these are great Orion’s band!”  
“My child, you are too young to understand!”
- “Oh, grandfather, what are the winds  
That sough and moan and sigh?  
Does God grow angry for men’s sins  
He lifts the waves so high?  
And blows his breath o’er sea and land?”  
“My boy, you are too young to understand!”
- “Oh, grandfather, what are the clouds  
In yonder sunset sky?  
They look to me like winding shrouds  
For men about to die!  
Dear grandfather, your trembling hand!”  
“My son, you are too young to understand!”

THE SECRET

Old Santa Claus came with his pack  
On his back

Right down the chimney flue;  
His long flowing beard was ghostlike and weird  
But his cheeks had a ruddy hue;  
And his jacket was as red as a woodpecker's head  
But his breeches, I think, were blue.

I heard a soft step like a hoof  
On the roof,

And I closed my outside eye;  
Then played-like I slept, but the other eye kept  
A watch on the jolly old guy;  
And I caught him in the act with his bundles all  
unpacked,  
But I'm not going to tell, not I.

When Santa comes again this year  
With his deer

And a sled full of toys for me,  
I don't mean to keep either eye from its sleep  
While he climbs my Christmas tree;  
For I don't think it's right to the happy old wight  
To spy on his mystery.

A RHYMELESS SONNET

Sardonic *Death*, clothed in a scarlet shroud,  
Salutes his minions on the crumbling thrones  
Of Tyranny, and with malicious leer,  
He points a fleshless finger toward the fields  
Of Belgium: "No harvest since the days  
Of Bonaparte and Waterloo hath filled  
My flagons with a wine of such a taste;  
Your crowns ye hold by rights divine indeed!"

But *One* has entered in at lowly doors  
And sits by every hearthstone where they will:  
"My *Word* enthron-ed in Democracy  
Has twined the holly round Columbia's brow—  
A crown of 'Peace on earth, good will to men.'  
I am the *Resurrection* and the *Life*!"

AMBITION

I covet not the warrior's flashing steel  
That drives the dreaded foe to headlong flight;  
I envy not the czar his ruthless might  
That grinds a state beneath an iron heel;  
I do not ask that I may ever feel  
The thrill that follows fame's uncertain light;  
And in the game of life I do not quite  
Expect always to hold a winning deal.

Grant me the power to help my fellow man  
To bear some ill that he may not deserve;  
Give me the heart that I may never swerve,  
In scorn of Death, to do what good I can;  
But most of all let me but light the fires  
Upon the altar of the *youth's* desires.

OPPORTUNITY

I often met her in the days of youth  
    Along the highway where the world goes by;  
    And sometimes when I caught her wistful eye  
I wondered that it seemed so filled with ruth.  
She was a modest maiden, plain, in truth,  
    And unattractive, and I thought, "Now why  
    Should one seek her companionship; not I—  
At least, until I've had my fling, forsooth!"

And so I passed her by and had my day,  
    And met a thousand whom I thought more fair  
    In tinsel gowns beneath electric glare—  
A thousand, but they went their primrose way.  
Now she's a queen, and boasts a score of sons—  
Her consort he who shunned my charming ones!

HOLIDAY THOUGHTS

The night was like some monster omen ill,  
Whose shrieking froze the marrow of my bones;  
But day dawned calm, though white as polar zones,  
The bluebird shouting "Spring!" from every hill.  
The world lay parching in the noonday grill,  
And blades of corn were twisting into cones;  
But night brought rain, and now, like golden  
    thrones,  
The fruited shocks deride October's chill.

Dear Lord, I would that we might live by faith,  
    However cold and dark the day may seem,  
And trust that every cloud is just a wraith,  
    And every shadow but a fading dream.  
Oh, grant our eyes may see the beacon lights  
That blaze forever on the peaks and heights!



THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW

Good-bye, Old Year; our journey has been brief;  
I'm sorry now to leave thee dying here,  
For thou hast borne my burdens with good cheer,  
And never murmured, but assuaged my grief.  
When buds of promise never came to leaf;  
When broken resolutions, doubt, and fear  
Did mock at my defeat, O good Gray Year,  
Thy reassuring smile restored belief.

Good-bye—farewell! I trust thy dear young child,  
Who greets me at the gateway of the dawn,  
Will deal as gently with me and my friends,  
And lead our footsteps through the springtime mild,  
O'er summer's lawn, down autumn's slopes, and on  
To where the path of chill December ends.

FELLOW TRAVELERS

Old comrade, must we separate to-day?  
Sometimes my feet have faltered, sore and tired,  
And sometimes in the sloughs and quicksands  
    mired,  
But it has always helped to hear you say,  
"The road is fine a little further on."  
Your optimism and your hearty cheer  
Have made the journey pleasant, good Old Year,  
And I, in truth, regret to see you gone.

Young New Year whom you leave me as a guide,  
In doubt, would have me pledge a lot of things  
Before we start, and make some offerings  
To gods whose love, I fear, will not abide.  
And yet I like my new companion's face.  
Old Year, lend him your wisdom and your grace.

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

Beloved Poet, thou hast taught our heart  
A sympathy it hardly knew before—  
A yearning kinship and a spirit lore  
Of humble folk, a love transcending art!  
The pulse of brotherhood throbs in thy song.  
No mystic, blindly groping on the shore  
Of dark uncertainty; unlike Tagore,  
Thy faith is pure and definite and strong.

Consumpted Jim and thriftless Coon-dog Wess,  
The Girly Girl with eyes of limpid blue,  
The Raggedy Man that Orphant Annie knew;  
The Little Cripple, glad, though motherless;  
Poor hare-lip Joney and the Wandering Jew—  
All these thy pen doth glorify and bless!

CALE YOUNG RICE

He loves the boom of breakers on the shore,  
And winds that lash the billows into foam;  
He loves the placid seas beneath the dome  
Of blue infinitudes—not less, but more;  
He loves to brood upon the mystic lore  
Of silent stars above the silent seas,  
And feel the passion of infinities  
Beyond, where only Faith would dare explore.

Thus groping after God has helped him find  
Divinity in man (where only sin  
And brutal lusts have seemed to hedge him in),  
And taught his heart that Fate is never blind.  
That somehow, somewhere, now beyond our ken,  
One day we'll understand the wrongs of men.

PILATE'S MONOLOGUE

*[This monologue of Pilate to Herod takes place a few days after the resurrection at the home of Pontius Pilate. Pilate and Herod are standing on the east porch of the Governor's mansion in Jerusalem, looking toward the Mount of Olives. The time is just at sunset.]*

Oh! Herod, couldst thou find no fault in Him—  
The Man of Galilee? Clearly He  
Belonged within thy jurisdiction. Didst  
Thou fear to do thy duty? Still I blame  
Thee not—the mob was clamorous for blood!  
I questioned Him, but like a lamb before  
His shearers He was dumb and answered me  
No word. Was not His silence proof of guilt?  
But even then I offered to release  
Him, till the rabble shouted, “Crucify  
This Man: set free Barabbas, if thou wilt,  
But we demand the life of Jesus whom  
They call the *Christ*.” Oh! dost thou think His blood  
Can be upon my head? I washed my hands  
Before the multitude and told them I  
Was innocent of any crime toward Him.  
I scourged Him, it is true, but that was all.  
They stripped Him and bedecked Him with a robe

Of scarlet cloth, and placed a crown of thorns  
Upon His head, and then they mocked and jeered  
And spat upon Him, hailing Him as *King!*  
I can not think that this was right, but still  
They say He blasphemed and deserved to die.  
But what is blasphemy?

Oh, Herod, I  
Can never rid my dreams of Jesus' look.  
He turned His eyes upon me as I dipped  
My fingers in the bowl—a glance that seemed  
More fraught with love and pity than with hate.  
He blessed the people as He hung upon  
The cross in agony of pain, and prayed  
His God to pardon them because they knew  
Not what they did. Thou canst not, Herod, think  
This Nazarene was more than man? It can't  
Be possible that He whom Pilate scourged  
Was *Christ* indeed! But could a *man* forgive  
His murderers? They say the tomb is burst  
And that His body is no longer there!  
I might endure His curse. My pen has stabbed  
To death a thousand men and never felt  
Compunction for the deed, because I knew  
They hated me. But now the voice that haunts  
My sleep asks only blessings on my head.

They say He wept for men because of sin,  
And yet no guile was found in Him. If I  
Could close my eyes and see that face no more  
I might find peace again.

Three nights I have  
Not slept. I hear that Judas hanged himself!  
And now no guard that watched before  
The sepulchre can anywhere be found.  
Had I but set the Galilean free!  
But did he not insult my majesty?  
He must have known I ruled in Cæsar's stead.  
What if my wife was troubled in a dream  
And suffered many things on His account?  
A Roman governor must be a man!  
They say the temple's veil was rent in twain—  
The sky was darkened and the sun was hid.  
He said I had no power to crucify  
Except that it be given from above.  
He did not know the strength of Pilate's arm!  
'Tis said He cried, "My God, my God, why hast  
Thou now forsaken me?" The earth did quake,  
The tombs were cracked, and then the shrouded dead  
Stalked ghost-like through the fields and open streets!  
Look! Look! What is yon robe of shining white?  
Behold the Man—the Man of Galilee!

With outstretched arms He stands on Olivet,  
The shadows purpling o'er Gethsemane.  
I hear Him cry in agony of soul,  
"How often would I, O Jerusalem,  
Have gathered unto Me thy children as  
A hen her brood beneath her wing, but ye  
Would not come." Herod, canst thou hear His voice?  
It is impossible! It can not be!  
He must not know that I am Pilate! Still  
He calls my name! I can not, dare not go!  
What would the people think? I will  
Be free. There is no blood upon my hands.  
See, I wash them clean and am myself  
Again. Oh! Now the spell is gone. Though not  
The king, I am governor of the Jews!



THE VIRILE SPIRIT

*[Written after reading a letter in which the writer said: "I covet for our country a great war—one that will stir our virile spirits and send forth our youth to fight and die for our country."]*

What is courage? To face the bursting shell  
When rhythmic sheets of fire discover gulfs  
Of death, yet rather steel than daunt the heart;  
When comrades fall beneath the knapsack's weight,  
Foot froze and bleeding on the icy road,  
To hear the blasts from towering snow-crowned Alps  
Sing only martial airs that stir the blood!  
It is a noble thing to die in war—  
To sacrifice the breath of life; to feel  
The pain of hunger and of cold, yet flinch  
Not that one's country may be great or free.  
Many a generation yet unborn  
Will bless the name of Valley Forge, and hold  
In reverence the field of Gettysburg.  
But war is not the only thing that tries  
The bravest soul. To live does sometimes take  
More courage than to close with death; and oft  
The coward shrinks from living when the brave  
Man scorns to die. We need no bugle note

To rouse our manhood's strength. The call to men  
Is clear and strong. It is not to repel  
The Hun, the Teuton, or the Slav, nor yet  
To drive the Yellow Peril from the seas.  
We must send forth our men to live, not die—  
We need to save, not kill our fellow man,  
To smite the Minotaur of Sin, and stop  
The tribute greater now than all the tolls  
Of war. The beast in man is ravenous  
And must be slain. He feeds upon the fruits  
Of toil, and blights the home with poverty;  
He drags the innocent to dens of shame  
To satisfy his brute carnality.  
No fiery dragon in the days of myth  
Laid waste a land or blasted life with breath  
More foul or appetite insatiate.  
This is the enemy that we must fight.  
No dreadnaughts now afloat, no submarines,  
No legions that may ever bivouac on  
Our shores, no Zeppelins disgorging fire  
Portend the dire disasters wrought upon  
Our nation's strength by Avarice and Lust.  
The sword of Theseus is too dull a blade,  
The arm of Beowulf not strong enough  
To battle with Cupidity and Sin.

*POEMS AND SONNETS*

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We need the breastplate of a righteous life,  
Our loins must be girt about with truth,  
The heart protected by the shield of faith,  
And in the right hand there must ever be  
The spirit's sword, which is the Word of God!  
And even clothed and weaponed thus it takes  
A heart as fearless as the dauntless Dane's  
To strike the Mammon of Unrighteousness—  
To grapple with this Grendel that invades  
The mead-halls still and ravishes our youth.

BLUEBIRD.

Bluebird in the cedar bush—  
Fresh and clean as the evergreen,  
Through a rift of leaves,  
Or my eye deceives.  
But silent! Hush!  
He calls, he calls!  
The first spring note  
From a feathered throat  
My heart enthralls;  
And my pulses leap  
As a child from sleep  
On Christmas morn, at the blast of horn,  
To meet, to greet,  
The choral sweet  
From bluebird in the cedar bush:  
*At last, at last*  
*The snow and sleet*  
*Of winter's blast*  
*Have passed, have passed,*  
*And spring is here, good cheer, good cheer!*  
The call comes ringing in to me  
From Bluebird in the cedar tree.

AN AUTUMN MINOR

Russet and amber and gold,  
Crimson and yellow and green,  
And far away the blue and gray,  
A twinkling silver sheen.

Violet, scarlet and red,  
Purple and dark maroon,  
And over it all the music of fall—  
A weird prismatic tune.

An opera serious and grand,  
An orchestra mystic and sad—  
A symphony alone of color and tone  
To drive a mortal mad.

SLABS AND OBELISK

Hollyhocks were blooming in the backyard near the  
barn,

Proud as rhododendrons by a regal mountain tarn,

Purple, white and yellow, blue and velvet red—

Humble little cottage, but a royal flower bed.

Pink and crimson roses and carnations took your  
breath—

Dark-eyed little pansies looking like the Head of  
Death;

Golden-rayed sunflowers, lifting discs of hazel brown,

Filled the heart with wonder and the garden with  
renown.

Little Harold, born a poet, watched the petals blow,

Read the mystic cryptographs his elders didn't know;

Heard the music in the wind like sirens on the shore,

Far beyond the sunset in the land Forevermore.

Oft the village sages saw him lying in the shade,

Gazing where the sun and vapor wrought a strange  
brocade—

Tapestries of gold and silver on a field of blue,

Heard him murmur softly riddles no one ever knew.

All the people pitied Harold, thinking of the end  
In the cold, unfeeling world he couldn't comprehend—  
Seeing nothing else but lilies, living in a trance,  
In an age of facts and figures, dreaming wild romance.  
But the sages now are sleeping on the little hill,  
Modest slabs are keeping watch with rue and daffodil.  
Harold has an obelisk that towers toward the sky,  
Hollyhocks upon his mound to bless and glorify.

ON BROADWAY

Even as to-night on Broadway  
Long ago I wandered down  
The Great White Way of childhood,  
Mystified, enchanted, as I watched  
The million butterflies  
That tilted through the air in rhythmic flight,  
And pulsed above the petaled sweets,  
And sipped the nectar of the purple thistle bloom,  
Until at last they staggered down the dusty Road to  
Death.

# POSTSCRIPT



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# Postscript

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## AN EMBER ETCHING

An old man sat before his great log fire  
And gazed dreamily into the dying blaze.  
His eyes were red as though with weeping.  
The long, thin locks of hair  
Were spotless as the snow  
Silently mantling the earth  
That last sad night of the dying year.  
Four days and nights  
He had sat beside the bed  
Of his life-companion.  
But now the watchers by the bier  
In the adjoining room,  
Were dozing in their chairs.  
The cold night  
Had driven the mice from their hiding,  
And the loud tick of the clock  
No longer frightened them  
As they scampered over the hearth.

The man was breathing heavily,  
Although his eyes were open,  
And his stare fixed upon the fire:  
*Down by a gnarled oak near the spring  
Two children played.*

## POSTSCRIPT

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*Rebecca had dipped a dock leaf  
In the water,  
And now whisked it in the sunlight.  
Against the trunk of the tree  
There was a playhouse made of broken boughs.  
The girl's dolls were lying on the green moss bed,  
And a little cracked slate lay upon the ground.  
An almost illegible scrawl was written on the slate.  
Two childish hands had traced their names:  
"Rupert—Rebecca."  
And the words were linked together by lines  
That looked like twisted ropes.  
The boy and girl sat down before the playhouse,  
And crossed their hands in imitation  
Of the lines that bound their names together.  
And then they smiled  
And looked upon the dolls  
Asleep in the fresh June morning.*

*A chunk broke and fell in the ashes.  
The blaze died into a glow of coals.  
In the gray beyond the dog irons  
The old man saw two figures  
Sitting before an awning:  
Two golden haired children  
Slept in a little bed.*

POSTSCRIPT

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*The man and woman who sat beside the shelter  
Were old and bent,  
Their faces thin and white.  
They clasped their hands  
And looked into each other's face.  
And then they turned and looked  
Upon the children.  
A coal dropped into the picture,  
And the fitful fire died  
Into deepening shadows.*

Next day the pall-bearers  
Bore two bodies away  
And lowered a single coffin  
Into a grave  
Beneath the snow-laden cedar.

A TRAGEDY IN BIRDLAND

A little maiden blue-jay,  
Fresh from her April morning bath,  
Sat on the limb of a weeping willow,  
Preening her shining feathers  
And dreaming of a song  
To which she had listened  
On the afternoon of the preceding day.  
A wild joy was in her heart  
And yet it took all the sunshine and song  
From a hundred other throats  
To withstand the gloom  
That seemed hovering just above her.  
She was conscious of the threatening cloud,  
But her heart beat furiously  
And hope thrilled her bird-being  
With an unwonted light.  
And yet she knew,  
When she dared to think at all,  
That it was a hopeless hope  
That flooded her soul with love—  
A hope that must ere long  
Change to a black despair.

She lifted her crested head  
And looked toward the old beech tree  
Where her blue-jay lover now sat  
In melancholy gloom.  
Why not raise her voice  
And gladden his heart?  
He had been true and faithful  
For many weeks,  
And his suit would long since  
Have won another's love.  
Why had she thrilled  
At the alien voice of another throat?  
She had been a foolish maiden  
To have entertained so wild a thought.

But hark! Again the song!  
On the topmost spire  
Of yonder Gothic poplar  
Sits a cardinal fop,  
In a coat of matchless red,  
And a beak of shining ivory.  
He lifts his sumach plume  
Into the glinting sunlight  
And sends a Cupid shaft  
From his beaded eye  
Into the trembling breast

POSTSCRIPT

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Of little maiden blue-jay.  
Poor little mademoiselle!  
Once more the notes  
Come whistling and glittering  
Like a shower of pearls  
Through the sunshine:  
“Oh! my true love is a little blue-jay—  
    Mademoiselle, my bird gazelle,  
My little gazelle, and I love her well.  
Fresh and sweet from her morning spray  
She sits on the willow and her crest is gay—  
    Mademoiselle, my little gazelle I love so well.”

Down from his commanding height  
Flashed the cardinal flame  
And perched on another limb  
Of the weeping willow.  
And then he strutted and pranced  
And capered and danced  
And shot his fiery glances  
Toward the modest little maiden  
Whose heart was now fluttering  
Beyond all control. Master blue-jay  
Over on the beech bough  
Saw the terrible tragedy  
That would follow in the wake of betrayal

And was desperate to save this Psyche  
To whom he had often poured out his soul  
In amorous vows,  
Swearing by all the gods in birdland  
That there was none other beside her.  
But like many another lover  
Of larger experience and better advantage,  
He forgot that the very way  
To lose his loved one  
Was to berate his rival,  
And lifting his reed  
To the upper register of a clarinet,  
He almost screamed:

“He’s a liar, he is, by the god of all birds,  
A master of villainous art—  
A hypocrite, a varlet, believe not his words,  
This dandy, this fop, deceiver, betrayer,  
A coward, seducer, a murderous slayer—  
He’ll crush thy innocent heart.”

Poor little maiden blue-jay  
Heard his screams of anger and despair  
But heeded not the warning.  
She only fluttered over



*POSTSCRIPT*

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To where the cardinal sat  
And threw herself under his protecting arm,  
Declaring her perfect faith  
In his undying love.

The red prince lifted  
His burning plume triumphantly  
Into the sunlight,  
And shot a contemptuous glance  
Toward the old beech tree.  
Master Blue-Jay unable  
Longer to control himself,  
Darted like a lance of blue steel  
At the red coat.  
But the high churchman was a skilled fencer,  
And stepped aside just in time  
To send his antagonist  
With terrible momentum  
Into the thorn tree  
Beyond the willow,  
Where a moment later he writhed and fluttered,  
Pinioned through his body  
By a sword-like thorn  
That projected from the trunk of the spiny tree.  
It was a sight to touch the heart  
Of the most abandoned denizen of birdland.

But Mademoiselle Blue-Jay,  
Who would ordinarily have wept  
At so sad a fate of one of her kind,  
Was just now too happy  
In the love of her wooer  
To notice another;  
And unmindful of the ebbing life-blood  
That was fast turning her unfortunate lover's coat  
Of bright and shining blue  
To one of dark and dull maroon,  
She nestled close  
To the false-hearted ecclesiastic  
And sighed the lovelorn sigh  
That has come from the maiden heart  
Since the foundation of the world.

The low cedar  
In which Madam Blue-Jay-Cardinal now sat  
On such a nest of eggs  
As no blue-jay had ever brooded over before,  
Wondering, fearing, doubting, longing—  
Was only a rod or so from the spiny thorn  
Where the dried body of the fated lover  
Still hung.  
But where now was the supercilious fop  
Whose seductive vows of love

POSTSCRIPT

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Had won the little maiden's confidence  
And robbed her true and faithful lover  
Of that incense that belonged of right  
Only to him?  
For more than a week  
She had not seen him.  
Surely he would return on the morrow,  
For he must remember  
That soon the little brood  
Would need his protecting love.  
Yes, he would return again  
To praise her slender form and shining crest  
And call her once more his little gazelle.

But the cardinal came not.  
The brood had hatched,  
And the little birds were covered now  
With tiny feathers.  
Strange sight!  
All the blue-jays in the woods around  
Had gathered to witness  
What no mortal bird had ever seen before—  
Little birdling blue-jays  
With crimson stains on wings and breasts!  
And the poor little mother,  
Madam Blue-Jay-Cardinal,

POSTSCRIPT

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No longer mademoiselle, the bird gazelle,  
But an outcast and disgraced mother  
Of a mongrel offspring,  
Left alone in this hour of shame,  
Remembered now the words of him  
Who had warned against this sad hour.

But the memory brought her only bitter grief,  
And she watched her brood in broken-hearted  
    sorrow,  
As they looked with wondering eyes  
At the strange panorama in birdland.  
And all the blue-jays sat in silent condemnation  
Of the unpardonable sin.  
There was no mercy  
To be found in all the land of birds  
For either the forsaken mother  
Or her little brood.  
The deserted wife and widowed mother blue-jay  
Suddenly threw her wings  
Over the astonished little children,  
As though to wipe the stain of sin  
From their innocent lives,  
And as she did so,  
The crested cardinal

*POSTSCRIPT*

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With a fresh crimson bride flashed by,  
And perched upon the old beech limb.  
And there he sat  
In undisturbed and cynical silence,  
While all the court  
Of high crimes and misdemeanors  
Praised his sacerdotal coat and shining mitre.  
The mother felt the birdlings stir beneath her  
    wing,  
And their scarlet stain suffuse her being.  
She looked toward the thorn tree  
But no word was spoken.  
A wise old owl that moped and moaned  
On the limb of a sycamore tree  
That overhung the little stream  
Suddenly lifted his voice and cried:

“Let him who is without stain of sin,  
Lift the first note of song  
Against the little blue-jay.”

But all the woods were still.  
Only the thorn tree swayed slightly in the breeze,  
And then a flute-like note floated out  
Upon the wondering air:

POSTSCRIPT

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“Oh! my little blue-jay, my little bluebell,  
I would I could come to thee;  
I would find all the food for thy sin-stained brood,  
And thy bridegroom I should be.  
That villainous fop on the old beech limb  
And the arrogant wife that sits by him  
Have broken the heart of my little bluebell,  
The little gazelle, the bird gazelle he loved so well,  
And they laugh in their cynical glee.  
Oh! I would heal thy deep chagrin,  
Forgive thy blood-stained life its sin,  
And thou shouldst be my beauteous bride,  
Forever happy at my side.  
My hope, my joy, my love, my pride,  
If I could only come to thee,  
If I could only come to thee.”

Again the air was silent as the tomb.  
The little mother bird  
Moved with her frightened children  
Toward the old thorn tree.  
And when she at last stood  
Beneath the sword  
Upon which her faithful lover was pinioned  
Behold the miracle that was enacted  
Before her wondering eyes.

*POSTSCRIPT*

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The crimson dyes  
That streaked the birdlings' wings and breasts  
Turned suddenly to a dull and dark maroon,  
And not a jay in all birdland  
But would swear that her little children  
Now resembled in every line and stain  
The dead body of her valiant lover  
Who had shed his blood  
To save his little bluebell from betrayal.