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INWARD COMPANION

poems by

WALTER DE LA MARE

FABER AND FABER LIMITED

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TO FLORENCE

'... No sound save rushing air,
Cold, yet all sweet with Spring,
And in thy mother's arms, couched weeping there,
Thou, lovely thing.'

Note

One or two of the poems in the following collection were written as many as fifty years ago; others during the last few years, and most of these are recent. All of them have been revised. They record, then, many differing moods and aspects. I am glad to have this opportunity of thanking the Editors of the periodicals in which many of them have appeared.

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Here I Sit

Here I sit, and glad am I
So to sit contentedly,
While with never-hastening feet
Time pursues the Infinite;
And a silence centuries-deep
Swathes my mind as if in sleep.
Passive hand, and inward eyes
Press on their transient enterprise;
As, across my paper's white
Creeps the ink from left to right,
Wooing from a soundless brain
The formless into words again:
So I sit, and glad am I
So to sit contentedly.

Unwitting

This evening to my manuscript
Flitted a tiny fly;
At the wet ink sedately sipped,
Then seemed to put the matter by,
Mindless of him who wrote it, and
His scrutinizing eye—
That any consciousness indeed
Its actions could descry! . . .

Silence; and wavering candlelight;
Night; and a starless sky.

Fuchsias

I envied the droning, idle bee,
 Sucking his nectar sweet—
In that palace of light suspended there
 By his hooked piratical feet.

No care, no trouble, no conscience his!
 And what of my lot, instead?
It seemed an absurd futility
 Till the notion entered my head:—

Poor wretch, my flowers are no flowers to him,
 Only his daily bread!

Martins

'Chelidon urbica urbica!'

I cried on the little bird,
Meticulously enunciating each syllable of each word;

'Chelidon urbica urbica!'

Listen to me, I plead!

There are swallows all snug in the hayloft,
I have all that your nestlings can need—
Shadow and sunshine and sweet shallow water—
Come, build in my eaves, and breed!

Fly high, my love! My love, fly low!

I watched the sweet pretty creatures go—

Floating, skimming, and wheeling so

Swiftly and softly—like flakes of snow,

'Gainst the dark of the cedar-boughs, to and fro: . . .

But no!

But no!

'Chelidon urbica urbica!'

None paid me the faintest heed.

Jackdaws

This dry old dotard lived but to amass
Old prints, books, pictures, porcelain, and glass—
As some hoard Wealth, Fame, Knowledge. Such he was.
There potted in Another, and peered round:
But he his treasures buries underground.

Izaak Walton

That lucent, dewy, rain-sweet prose—
 Oh! what a heaven-sent dish
Whereon—a feast for eye, tongue, nose,
 Past greediest gourmet's wish—
To serve not tongues of nightingale,
Not manna soused in hydromel,
Not honey from Hymettus' cell,
Garnished with moly and asphodel—
 But Fish!

Henry Vaughan

So true and sweet his music rings,
So radiant is his mind with light
The very intent and meaning of what he sings
May stay half-hidden from sight.

His flowers, waters, children, birds
Lovely as their own archetypes are shown;
Nothing is here uncommon, things or words,
Yet every one's his own.

Poetry

In stagnant gloom I toil through day,
All that enchants me put away.
No bird decoyed to such a breast
Could warble a note, or be at rest;
From the old fountains of delight
Falls not one drop to salve my sight.

Yet—Thou who mad'st of dust my face,
And shut me in this bitter place,
Thou also, past the world to know,
Did'st hinges hang where heart may go
After day's travail—vain all words!—
Into this garden of the Lord's.

The Changeling

Come in the dark did I—
The last stars in the sky,
Foretelling, 'Daybreak's nigh'.
Out of the brooding West,
Safe in my mother's breast
Love sheathed my wings in rest.

Twilight my home is, then,
In this strange world of men;
And I am happier when
The sun in flames and light
Sinks from my dazzled sight,
Leaving me sleep, and night.

So, now: only with thee
My homesick heart can be
Stilled in like mystery;
Long did life's day conceal
This tender dream and spell:
Now all is well.

Belated

Once gay, now sad; remote—and dear;
Why turn away in doubt and fear?
I search again your grieved self-pitying face;
Kindness sits clouded there. But, love? No, not a trace.

What wonder this? Mine not to scold.
You, in so much a child; and I, how old!
Who know how rare on earth your like must be:
There's nought commensurate, alas, in age or me.

Bare ruined choirs—though time may grace bestow
On such poor relics in eve's after-glow;
And even to age serenity may bring,
Where birds may haven find; and peace; though not to sing.

But ah, blest Light-of-Morning One,
Ev'n though my life were nearly done?
Ev'n though no mortal power could that delay?
Think of the lightless journey thither—you away!

Unmeant

Oh, if I spoke unkindly, heed it not:
Had it a language, my wild heart you'd hear
Weeping the love a frantic tongue forgot:
Think not mere spindrift is the sea, my dear!

She Said

She said, 'I will come back again
As soon as breaks the morn.'
But the lark was wearying of the blue,
The dew dry on the thorn;
And all was still forlorn.

She said, 'I will come back again,
At the first quick stroke of noon.'
But the birds were hid in the shade from the heat
When the clock tolled, *No: but soon!*
And then beat slowly on.

She said, 'Yes, I'll be back again
Before the sun has set.'
But the sweetest promises often made
Are the easiest to forget,
No matter grief and fret. . . .

That moon, now silvering the east,
One shadow casts—my own.
Thought I, My friend, how often we
Have shared this solitude. And see,
Midnight will soon draw on,
When the last leaf of hope is fallen,
And silence haunts heart's vacancy,
And even pining's done.

The House

The rusty gate had been chained and padlocked
 Against the grass-grown path,
Leading no-whither as I knew well,
 In a twilight still as death.

Once, one came to an old stone house there,
 Wheels crunched in those scarce-seen ruts;
A porch with jasmine, a stone-fringed garden—
 Lad's-love, forget-me-nots.

A happy house in that long-gone sunshine;
 And a face in the glass-bright moon,
And a voice at which even memory falters,
 Now that the speaker's gone.

I watch that image as I look at the pathway—
 My once accustomed zest,
As the painted gate on its hinges opened,
 Now locked against the past!

A true face too, yet scant of the future—
 A book that I never read . . .
Nor shall now, since I soon must be going
 To another old house instead.

The Rose

He comes to where a seeding rose
Has scattered her last petals on
 The stones about her stem.
Beyond the luring hills a moon
Among the stars of heaven goes,
 Stealing their light from them.

His eyes shine darkly in his head—
A face that dream has scrawled upon.
 He trembles, listening there.
Once—before Winter had snowed up
His heart—one loved had hither sped,
 His solitude to share.

Here

Forgave I everything—
The heart's foreboding unless she were near
Who all things lovely made even lovelier;
The baffled hopes, the care, dismay, desire,
The mocking images that feed love's fire;
The glut of leaden days, the futile dream,
Night's stagnant brooding by its sluggish stream:
Yes, every anguished sigh, and unshed tear,
Pang of foul jealousy, the woe, the sweat. . . .
 But how forgive, forget,
 In this bleak winter sere—
 That she is here?

No

A drear, wind-weary afternoon,
Drenched with rain was the autumn air;
As weary, too, though not of the wind,
I fell asleep in my chair.

Lost in that slumber I dreamed a dream,
And out of its strangeness in stealth awoke;
No longer alone. Though who was near
I opened not eyes to look;

But stayed for a while in half-heavenly joy,
Half-earthly grief; nor moved:
More conscious, perhaps, than—had she been there—
Of whom,—and how much,—I loved.

Usury

'Let be, unreasonable heart, let go;
Why struggle so
Vainly and foolishly? A day will come
When failing eyes, with infinite regret,
Their farewell, heartsick gaze will set
On this, your earthly home;
And what you now death-dark afflictions deem
Only the shadows of its joys may seem.

'What now you crave
Nought mortal ever gave;
Nor within earthly bounds lies where you'd range.
Give, and give yet again
The utmost love you have,
Ev'n though it be in vain,
It's usury to ask it in exchange.

'Did toil and seeking find
The sealed and secret fountains of your mind?
Can you, by dipping bucket in a well
Dredge up the riches of the imaginable?
Like some small wild flower, open in the sun,
Did *you* your heart the nectar give
By which alone that very love can live?
Did you your eyes make see
The beauty and grace of wake and dream whereon
Your soul has feasted, and content should be,
Seeing that all things temporal stay
Only their transitory day?

'Never. From some unknown
Source inexhaustible the seeds were sown
Whence blooms the fleeting dayspring of delight;
And, were your being never dark with night,
Where then the cockcrow of another morn?
As well go seek a rose without a thorn
As, famished with desire,
To aught that's flawless on this earth aspire. . . .'

So argued on and on
My tedious censor—sermon never done;
While yet a haggard exile in my heart
Cared not a jot
For what he would impart;
But, pining still for what the while was gone,
Wept, like a thwarted changeling, for the Moon!

The Last Guest

Now that thy friends are gone,
And the spent candles, one by one,
Thin out their smoke upon the darkening air;
Now that the feast's first flowers
Flagged have irrevocably in these latening hours,
With perfumes that but tell how sweet they were;
Turn now—the door ajar—
See, there, thy winter star,
Amid its wheeling consorts wildly bright,
Herald of inward rapture, never of rest!
Still must thy threshold wait a laggard guest
Who comes, alone, by night.

Beyond

On such an evening—still; and crystalline
With light, to which the heavens their fairness owe,
What wakes some changeling in the heart to pine
For what is past the mortal to bestow?

Ev'n in the shallow, busy hours of day
Dreams their intangible enchantments weave;
And in the dead of dark the heart may crave
A sleep beyond sleep, and for its visions grieve.

For that strange absence nothing can atone;
And every hope is servant to desire;
The flower conceals a beauty not its own,
And echo sighs from even the silent wire.

Occluded

Chilled is the air with fallen rain,
Flood-deep the river flows;
A sullen gloom daunts heart and brain,
And no light shows.

Yet, in a mind as dark, a hint may steal
Of what lies hidden from an earth-bound eye:
Beyond the clouds the stars in splendour wheel,
The virgin huntress horns the silent sky.

The Burning Letter

The saffron flames, edged with that marvellous blue,
Creep through the paper, blackening as they move.
So senseless time robs heart and memory too
Of what was once their very life and love.

Oh, marvel, if in some unearthly May
The wintering bee its wings again should beat,
And, waking, rove the hive death hid away,
Its wax-celled honeycomb no whit less sweet!

The Plaster Cast

It called to mind one now long out of sight,
Whom love still treasures with its secret grace:
That cast—half-hidden there—sepulchral white,
A random moonbeam on its peaceful face.

February 29

Odd, waif-like Day, the changeling of
Man's 'time' unreckoned in his years;
The moon already shows above
 Thy fickle sleet—now tears!

As brief thy stay has been as though
Next Spring might seal our tryst again.
Alas, fall must four winters' snow
 Ere you come back. And then?

I love thy timid aconite,
Crocus, and scilla's deep-sea blue;
Hark, too, that rainbird, out of sight,
 Mocking the woodland through!

But see, it's evening in the west:
Tranquil, withdrawn, aloof, devout.
Soon will the darkness drape your breast,
 And midnight shut you out! . . .

Sweet February Twenty Nine!—
This is our grace-year, as I live!
Quick, now! this foolish heart of mine:
 Seize thy prerogative!

Deliverance

Starved-capped, implacable, through the slow dark night
She had toiled; and through a dawn she had not seen,
To bring into the world this shapeless mite.
Cheeks cold with sweat, strong hands, eyes kestrel-keen,
She had coaxed, and wheedled: 'Patience, now; push hard.
Strive on! I'm travailing too. Oh, have no fear!
See, I am come to comfort, help, keep guard.
Deliverance soon will come, swift, sure, my dear!' . . .
A last gasped wrenching groan; a gnatlike wail,
Shrill, angry, sweet, all human cries above:
'Thank God,' she sighed, 'Who did not let me fail!'
And sighed again—for pity, grief, and love.

The Chart

That mute small face, but twelve hours here,
Maps secrets stranger than the seas',
In hieroglyphics more austere,
And wiser far than Rameses'.

A Snowdrop

Thou break'st from earth. Thy beauty of dust is made.
Light called thee, trembling, from the sod's cold shade,
While yet bleak winter's blast its snow outspread.

Dark storm thy swaddling was, and freezing sky.
O dauntless loveliness, may Spring, on high,
Yet shed her balm, and sing thee lullaby!

Afraid

Here lies, but seven years old, our little maid,
Once of the darkness Oh, so sore afraid!
Light of the World—remember that small fear,
And when nor moon nor stars do shine, draw near!

The Sleeping Child

Like night-shut flower is this slumbering face,
Lamplight, for moon, upon its darkness spying;
That wheat-stook hair, the gold-fringed lids, the grace
Of body entranced, and without motion lying.

Passive as fruit the rounded cheek; bright lip;
The zigzag turquoise of that artery straying;
Thridding the chartless labyrinths of sleep,
River of life in fount perpetual playing.

Magical light! though we are leagues apart,
My stealthiest whisper would at once awake thee!
Not I, thou angel thing! At peace thou art.
And childhood's dreams, at least, need not forsake thee.

'Love'

Children—alone—are grave,
Even in play with some poor grown-up's toy;
Solemn at heart, and wise:
Whence else their secret joy?
And the deep sleep they crave?

So Love is pictured—with his bandaged eyes,
To veil the blinding beauty of his skies—
And laughs out, naked, like a little boy.

Rarities

Beauty, and grace, and wit are rare;
 And even intelligence:
But lovelier than hawthorn seen in May,
Or mistletoe berries on Innocents' Day
The face that, open as heaven, doth wear—
With kindness for its sunshine there—
 Good nature and good sense.

To Corinna, frowning

Dark, historied eyes,
Head of Hypnotic grace,
Lips into silence sinking,
Brows deep as midnight skies,
Wisdom beyond surmise,—
Why shallow, sharpen, darken so lovely a face—
Well, with this 'thinking'?

Days and Moments

The drowsy earth, craving the quiet of night,
Turns her green shoulder from the sun's last ray;
Less than a moment in her solar flight
Now seems, alas! thou fleeting one, life's happiest day.

The Two Lamps

Two lights well over this old oak table—
The lamp I have read by, the risen sun;
In a brimming flood through the windowed gable,
As I turn to the day's work, scarcely begun.

As if in ineffable peace together,
They mingle their beams in a mutual bliss;
And I marvel at both, who am little able
To measure their ultimate loveliness.

With the [lamps](#) alone a miracle enters
The transient life which on earth I have spent—
Whose utmost fringes this frail mind centres—
Yet a life that resembles a banishment,

When challenged like this by such sudden splendour,
That Eastern glory of rose and gold;
And out of my darkness and dwindling winters
I weep at the sight, like a child grown old!

The Risen Sun

I lay a while, exulting in its light,
My Druid heart drenched through with awe and praise;
Then into darkness turned a dazzled sight,
That dared not meet its gaze.

Second-Hand

Courage, poor fool! Ripe though thy tare-crop be,
Love, over its bonfire, still may smile on thee.
Yes; and, perhaps, when that rank seed was sown,
Some herb of grace was there, though not thine own.

The Last Swallow

The robin whistles again. Day's arches narrow.
Tender and quiet skies lighten the withering flowers.
The dark of winter must come. . . . But that tiny arrow,
Circuiting high in the blue—the year's last swallow,
Knows where the coast of far mysterious sun-wild Africa lours.

Another Spring

What though the first pure snowdrop wilt and die?
What though the cuckoo, having come, is gone?
Clouds cold with gloom assail the sun-sweet sky,
And night's dark curtains tell that day is done?—
This is our earthly fate. Howe'er we range,
Life and its dust are in perpetual change.

What though, then, Sweet, as welling time wins on,
The early roses in thy cheeks shall ail?
When they have bloomed, it's not thyself shall wan,
Nor for lost music shall thy heart-strings fail.
That Self's thine own. And all that age can bring
Love will make lovely. Then another Spring!

The Spotted Flycatcher

Gray on gray post, this silent little bird
Swoops on its prey—prey neither seen nor heard!
A click of bill; a flicker; and, back again!
Sighs Nature an *Alas*? Or merely, *Amen*?

The Idol of the World

I saw the Idol of the World descend
To lave herself in the slow stream of *Time*.

Bespangled with bright stars in highest noon,
The soundless water flowed, and reflex gave
To the wild beauty of her sweet-tongued throng,
As one by one they stooped; and one by one,
Doffing their raiment even lovelier showed.

The swans that float
On vaulted branchings through the wild ravines
Of that dark other river, *Sleep*, cast not
Such marvellous whiteness on the unrippling flood;
And these, past all pure white, incomparable,
Had tinged their beauty with the rose's dye;
And in the wind's breath as they stirred their heads
Shook out like banners, trembling, serpentine
The incomputable riches of their hair:
Out on the wind, and out too over the water,
Flowing, in silence, these bright phantoms by.

But I, in vision, marvelled more to see—
While these, her nymphs, Wealth, Fame, Lust, Glory, Power,
Painted the wave with their bare loveliness,
And wakened Echo to take tongue and sing—
She of the World, pranked in her pomp, step down,
Her face a spectral ort beneath its hood,
Her hands concealed and stiff beneath her gloves,
Her very shape and substance swathed and farced—
A monstrous formlessness on fire with gems—
And cast herself into their virgin arms.
Thus was she there disported, and made clean!

Wherefore I know not what her semblance is,
Know not the likeness of her form and face,
Nor what gross life stirred in those monstrous clouts,
Nor any charm in her, nor any lure,
Who seemed a rottenness scarce aught at all.

The Ruinous Abbey

Stilled the meek glory of thy music;
Now only the wild linnets sing
Along the confusion of thy ruins,
And to cold Echo sing.

Quenched the wan purple of thy windows,
The light-thinned saffron, and the red;
Now only on the sward of thy dominion
Eve's glittering gold is shed.

Oh, all fair rites of thy religion!—
Gone now the pomp, the ashen grief;
Lily of Easter, and wax of Christmas;
Grey water, chrism, and sheaf!

Lift up thy relics to Orion;
Display thy green attire to the sun;
Forgot thy tombs, forgot thy names and places;
Thy peace for ever won!

The Bombed House

Daughters of Joy lived here—
Glazed, watching, sleep-drugged eyes; reluctant feet.
Now, from these shattered, shuttered windows, dark and drear,
They ghost the abandoned street.

Pride Hath its Fruits Also

What shades are these that now oppress my eyes,
And hang a veil of night on burning day?
I see the Sun through shadows; and his clouds
Clothed in their mutable magnificence
Seem to some inward sorrow moving on.

What meaning has the beauty of the earth?
And this unageing sweetness of the Spring—
Her trees that once, as if from paradise,
Borrowed their shining simpleness; her flowers,
Blowing where nothing but the bleak snow was,
Like flames of crystal brightness in the fields?

Once I could gaze until these seemed to me
Only my mind's own splendours in disguise.
But now their inward beauty is lost and faded:
They are the haunts of alien voices now—
An alien wonderment of light beams forth—
No more the secret reflex of my soul.

'Incomprehensible'

Engrossed in the day's 'news', I read
Of all in man that's vile and base;
Horrors confounding heart and head—
Massacre, murder, filth, disgrace:
Then paused. And thought did inward tend—
On my own past, and self, to dwell.

Whereat some inmate muttered, 'Friend,
If you and I plain truth must tell,
Everything human we comprehend,
Only too well, too well!

'See, Here's the Warrant . . .'

The day has foundered, and dead midnight's here:
As dark this spirit now with doubt and fear.
Doused is the candle of celestial fire,
 Lighting my secretest desire.

Put up the board! This house of life's to let.
Cold-chimneyed, void, its mouldering parapet
Surveys lost forests and a tongueless sea;
Gone joy, light, love, fire, hospitality.

Moons may perpetually wax and wane,
And morning's sun shine out again;
But when the heart at core is cold and black,
No cock, all earth for ear, will ever crow
 Its witching wildfire back.

Lost World

Why, inward companion, are you so dark with anguish?
A trickle of rancid water that oozes and veers,
Picking its sluggish course through slag and refuse,
Down at length to the all-oblivious ocean—
What else were apt comparison for your tears?

But no: not of me are you grieving, nor for me either;
Though I, it seems, am the dungeon in which you dwell,
Derelict, drear, with skeleton arms to heaven,
Wheels broken, abandoned, greenless, vacant, silent;
Nought living that eye can tell.

Blame any man might the world wherein he harbours,
Washing his hands, like Pilate, of all its woes;
And yet in deadly revolt at its evil and horror,
That has brought pure life to this pass, smit through with sorrow,
Since he was its infamous wrecker full well he knows.

Not yours the blame. Why trouble me then with your presence?
Linger no instant, most Beautiful, in this hell.
No touch of time has marred your immutable visage;
Eros himself less radiant was in his dayspring!—
Or nearer draw to your heartsick infidel!

The Dunce

And 'Science' said,
'Attention, Child, to me!
Have I not taught you all
You touch; taste; hear; and see?

'Nought that's true knowledge now
In print is pent
Which my sole method
Did not circumvent.

'Think you, the amoeba
In its primal slime
Wasted on dreams
Its destiny sublime?

'Yet, when I bid
Your eyes survey the board
Whereon life's How, When, Where
I now record,

'I find them fixed
In daydream; and you sigh;
Or, like a silly sheep,
You bleat me, *Why?*

""Why is the grass so cool, and fresh, and green?
The sky so deep, and blue?"
Get to your Chemistry,
You dullard, you!

""Why must I sit at books, and learn, and learn,
Yet long to play?"
Where's your Psychology,
You popinjay?

""Why stay I here,
Not where my heart would be?"
Wait, dunce, and ask that
Of Philosophy!

'Reason is yours
Wherewith to con your task;
Not that unanswerable
Questions you should ask.

'Stretch out your hands, then—
Grubby, shallow bowl—
And be refreshed, Child—
Mind, and, maybe, soul!

'Then—when you grow into
A man—like me;
You will as learnèd, wise,
And—happy be!

Another Washington

'*Homo?* Construe!' the stern-faced usher said.

Groaned George, 'A man, sir.' 'Yes.

Now *sapiens?*' . . . George shook a stubborn head,

And sighed in deep distress.

Here Lies a Tailor

Here lies a Tailor, well-loved soul!
Whether but ninth, or one man whole.
Yet of our loss the world to tell
There tolled but one cracked funeral bell.

Cross-legged we'd see him, early and late.
Now he must in that garment wait
Wherein to ease their earthly rest
Slumbers unstirred Death's every guest.

His was by his own needle made—
And not a stitch but sang his trade.
Good woollen too. For well knew he
What scarecrows most men naked be.

Theologians

They argued on till dead of night—
"God" *versus* "God"—till ceased to shine
The stars in cold Olympus: and
Daybreak their very faces proved divine!

False Gods

From gods of other men, fastidious heart,
You thank your stars good sense has set you free.
Ay. But the dread slow piercing of death's dart?
Its, 'Why, *my* God, have I forsaken *thee*.'

Pale-Face

Dark are those eyes, a solemn blue:
Yes, silent Pale-face, that is true;
But I—I watch the fires that sleep
In their unfathomable deep,
Seeming a smouldering night to make
Solely for their own shining's sake.

It's common talk you're beautiful:
But I—I sometimes wonder, will
Love ever leave my judgment free
To see you as the world doth see—
'All passion spent'. No more to know
The very self that made you so.

Frescoes in an Old Church

Six centuries now have gone
Since, one by one,
These stones were laid,
And in air's vacancy
This beauty made.

They who thus reared them
Their long rest have won;
Ours now this heritage—
To guard, preserve, delight in, brood upon;
And in these transitory fragments scan
The immortal longings in the soul of Man.

Benighted

'Frail crescent Moon, seven times I bow my head,
Since of the night you are the mystic queen:
May your sweet influence in her dews be shed!

So ran by heart the rune in secret said:
Relic of heathen forbears centuries dead?
Or just a child's, in play with the Unseen?

Blondin

With clinging dainty catlike tread,
His pole in balance, hand to hand,
And, softly smiling, into space
He ventures on that threadlike strand.

Above him is the enormous sky,
Beneath, a frenzied torrent roars,
Surging where massed Niagara
Its snow-foamed arc of water pours:

But he, with eye serene as his
Who sits in daydream by the fire,
His every sinew, bone and nerve
Obedient to his least desire,

Treads softly on, with light-drawn breath,
Each inch-long toe, precisely pat,
In inward trust, past wit to probe—
This death-defying acrobat! . . .

Like some old Saint on his old rope-bridge,
Between another world and this,
Dead-calm 'mid inward vortices,
Where little else but danger is.

Jonathan Swift

That sovereign mind;
Those bleak, undaunted eyes;
Never to life, or love, resigned—
How strange that he who abhorred cant, humbug, lies,
Should be aggrieved by such simplicities
As age, as ordure, and as size.

Double Dutch

That crafty cat, a buff-black Siamese,
Sniffing through wild wood, sagely, silently goes,
Prick ears, lank legs, alertly twitching nose,
And on her secret errand reads with ease
A language no man knows.

The Forest

'Death-cold is this house. Beasts prowl at its threshold;
A forest of darkness besieges its gate,
Where lurks the lynx, Envy; the leopard named Malice;
And a gaunt, famished wolf, padding softly, called Hate.

'So when that fair She, there—slant eyes and slim shoulders,
Voice stealthy with venom—our solitude shares,
I sit with my sewing away from the window,
Since it's thence that the wild cat called Jealousy glares.

'But supposing ajar were that door—she alone here?
And my whisper the black stagnant forest lipped through? . . .
No, she sips of my wine; breaks bread; has no notion
It is I, the despised one, those bolts might undo.'

All Hallowe'en

It was not with delight
That I heard in the dark
And the silence of night
The little dog bark.

It was not for delight
That his master had come
That so shrill rang his bark;
And at dawn, cold with rain,
That he yelped yet again:

But for fear, fury, fright
At the softness, the swiftness, the waft of the spright,
Doomed to roam
Through the gloom,
As the vague murk of night
Gave cold, grudging birth
To daybreak, on earth—
Wanning hillside and grove,
Once his lodgement and love:
And now, poor soul,
Hieing off home.

Slim Cunning Hands

Slim cunning hands at rest, and cozening eyes—
Under this stone one loved too wildy lies;
How false she was, no granite could declare;
Nor all earth's flowers, how fair.

'It was the last time he was seen alive'

'You saw him, then? . . . That very night?'
A moment only. As I passed by.

'The lane goes down into shadow there,
And the sycamore boughs meet overhead;
Then bramble and bracken everywhere,
Moorland, whin, and the wild instead.
But the jasmined house is painted white
And so reflects the sky.

'He was standing alone in the dwindling dusk,
Close to the window—that rapt, still face,
And hair a faded grey—
Apparently lost in thought; as when
The past seeps into one's mind again,
With its memoried hopes and joys, and pain,
And seduces one back . . .

'He stirred, and then
Caught sight, it seemed, of the moon in the west—
Like a waif in the heavens astray—
Smiled, as if at her company;
Folded his old hands over his breast;
Bowed: and then went his way.'

The Vacant Farmhouse

Three gables; clustered chimney-stacks; a wall
Snowed every Spring with cherry, gage, and pear,
Now suckered, rank, unpruned. Green-seeded, tall,
A drift of sullen nettles souring near—
Beside a staved-in styer and green-scummed pond,
Where once duck-dabbled sunshine rippled round.

Dark empty barns; a shed; abandoned byres;
A weedy stack-yard whence all life has fled;
A derelict wain, with loose and rusted tyres;
And an enormous elm-tree overhead . . .

That attic casement. . . Was there flaw in the glass? . . .
I thought, as I glanced up, there had peered a face.
But no. Still: eyes are strange; for at my steady stare
Through the cool sunlit evening air,
Scared silent sparrows flew up out of the ivy there
Into an elder tree—for perching-place.

Flood Water

What saw I—crouching by that pool of water
Bright-blue in the flooded grass,
Of ash-white sea-birds the remote resort, and
April's looking-glass?—
Was it mere image of a dream-dazed eye—
That startled Naiad—as the train swept by?

Haunted

'The roads are dangerous.'

'*What? What? . . .* "The roads"!

I sit at home. And what my heart forebodes
Is not . . . mere death—to catch me unawares,
But Life, which ever in at window stares;
Life that still drives me on, and edges by
Perils perpetual, and not transitory.
Knife-edged the daily precipices I tread,
By trotting footfall of the unseen misled:
Abyssees of time; vile scenes illusions breed;
Fear that like fungus sprouts from viewless seed.

'You say, *This is*. The soul cries, *Only seems*.
And who, when sleeping, finds unreal his dreams? . . .
That hill; those hollows; sloping into shade.
The spawning sun; the earth for night arrayed;
The listening dark; the Fiend with his goads. . . .
"The roads are dangerous"? . . .
Oh, yes: "the roads".'

The Others

'Friendly?'

'Perhaps!'

'Say, neutral?'

'How to tell?'

'Not hostile!'

'Well—who then would intercede?'

'And do you rap? Or crystal-gaze? Or set
Traps in the dark? Glass? Ouija? Or planchette?
A Madame Medium pay? Book—candle—bell?'

'Oh, no; I sit and read.'

'Or merely sit?'

'Sometimes. Why not? The air,
Wild Ariel's air, must thrill with secrecies
Beyond the scope of sense. . . . Ev'n we two share
Our thoughts and feelings chiefly by surmise.
You speak: I watch and listen. But faith alone
Vows that the well-spring of your life's my own.
And when Goodbye is said, and comes the night,
What proof has each of either—out of sight?'

'Yes, even now—to eyes of love how clear!—
It is the ghost in you I hold most dear.
When, then, you urge me—mockery or dismay—
For evidence, for proof, I can but say,
The deeper my small solitude may be
The surer I am of unseen company . . .
It haunts with loveliness this silent night.'

'Evils?'

'They too may prowl. 'Gainst them we had best
Guard unrelentingly both mind and breast.
I cannot answer, No, then. Only pray
Fortress of life and love the soul shall stay.
And Good-Night come—well this must be confessed:
It grieves me to the heart when, blessing the blest,
I have to add, Alas! For, truth to say,
They are the happier when I'm away.'

Company

There must be ghosts, I think, in this old house.
Often, when I am alone,
The quiet intensifies;
The very air seems charged with mute surmise;
I pause to listen, with averted eyes;
As if in welcome. And a passionate rapture,
As if at some thing long since pondered on,
Wells suddenly up within me. . . . Then is gone.

Enigmas

I weep within; my thoughts are mute
With anguish for poor suffering dust;
Sweet wails the wild bird, groans the brute:
Yet softly to a honied lute
Crieth a voice that heed I must;
 Beckons the hand I trust.

O from nefarious enigmas freed
Shall all that dies not live at last,
Obedient as the seeding weed
Unto fruition come indeed,
 Its perilous blossoming past!

An Angel

Oh, now, Alexander's Angel,
Whither are thy pinions winnowing,
On what swift and timeless errand
Through the wilds of starry splendour
That to mortal eyes are merely
Points of radiance pricked in space?
Earthly minds can see thee solely
In the semblance of their bodies,
Winged with light thy locks of glory,
Streaming from thy brows gigantic,
Brows unmoved, and feet of crystal,
Heaven reflected in thy face!

The Tower

There were no flowers among the stones of the wilderness.
I was standing alone by the green glazed tower,
Where among the cypresses winds went wandering,
Tinged now with gold-dust in the evening hour.

What goddess lingered here no tablet recorded;
Birds wild with beauty sang from ilex and yew;
Afar rose the chasms and glaciers of mountains,
The snow of their summits wax-wan in the blue—

In the blue of the heights of the heavenly vacancy—
My companions the silence, the relics, the lost;
And that speechless, divine, invisible influence,
Remote as the stars in the vague of the Past.

Go far; Come near

Go far; come near;
You still must be
The centre of your own small mystery.
Range body and soul—
Goal on to further goal,
Still shall you find
At end, nought else but *thee*.
Oh, in what straitened bounds
Of thought and aim—
And even sights and sounds—
Your earthly lot is doomed to stay!

And yet, your smallest whim
By secret grace
To look the simplest flower in the face
Gives an inevitable reflection back,
Not of your own self only,
But of one
Who, having achieved its miracle,
Rests there, and is not gone;
Who still o'er your own darker deeps holds sway
Into whatever shallows you may stray.

Whatever quicksands loom before you yet,—
Indifference, the endeavour to forget,
Whatever truce for which your soul may yearn,
Gives you but smaller room
In which to turn,
Until you reach the haven
Of the tomb.

'The haven'? Count the chances . . . Is that so?
You are your Universe. Could death's quick dart
Be aimed at aught less mortal than the heart?
Could body's end,
Whereto it soon shall go,
Be end of all you mean, and are, my friend?

Ah, when clocks stop, and no-more-time begins,
May he who gave the flower
Its matchless hour,
And you the power
To win the love that only loving wins,
Have mercy on your miseries and your sins.

A Daydream

In a daydream, all alone,
Shone another sun on me,
Where, on cliffs of age-cold stone,
Harebell, thyme and euphrasy,
Seraphs came that to the air
Blew a music watery-sweet;
And, as I watched, in reverie,
Danced with flowerlike soundless feet.

With what joy each instrument
Answered their sweet mouths. How burned
Their tranquil heads in ardour bent,
While, in peace unfaltering, turned—
Turned they their strange eyes on me,
Blue in silver of the morn.
But in leaden slavery
Lay my limbs, and I forlorn
Could but watch till faint and wan
Waned their beauty, and was gone.

O my heart, what eyes were these?
What viols theirs, that haunt me so?—
Those faint-sunned cliffs, those leaf-still trees,
Heavily hanging, shade o'er shade,
Where flowers of coral, amber, pearl,
In a burning stillness laid,
Coloured the clear air with light?—
O too happy dreams that furl
Their day-fearing petals white;
And vanish out of sight!

Friends

When on my bed I lie,
 To sleep and rest,
My two hands loosely folded on my breast,
 As all men's are when they the long sleep share,
It seems they are closer friends than ever I guessed
 They even in childhood were!

Solitude

Space beyond space: stars needling into night:
Through rack, above, I gaze from Earth below—
Spinning in unintelligible quiet beneath
A moonlit drift of cloudlets, still as snow.

Mirach, Antares . . .

Mirach, Antares, Vega, Caph, Alcor—
From inch-wide eyes I scan their aeon-old flames,
Enthralled: then wonder which enchants me more—
They, or the incantation of their names.

The Celestial Library

'The secrets of all hearts', I read. And sighed.
That vast cold gallery. Tomes in endless line.
"All!" mused the Stranger, standing at my side;
'These contain only thine.'

Winter Evening

Over the wintry fields the snow drifts; falling, falling;
Its frozen burden filling each hollow. And hark;
Out of the naked woods a wild bird calling,
On the starless verge of the dark!

Blow, Northern Wind

Blow, northern wind; fall snow;
And thou—my loved and dear,
See, in this waste of burthened cloud
 How Spring is near!

See, in those labouring boughs,
Buds stir in their dark sleep;
How in the frost-becrumbling ruts
 The green fires creep.

The dreamless earth has heard
Beneath snow's whispering flakes
A faint shrill childlike voice, a call—
 Sighs, ere she wakes . . .

What Spring have we? Turn back!—
Though this be winter's end,
Still may far-remembered snowdrops bloom
 For us, my friend.

The Kiss

In the long drouth of life,
Its transient wilderness,
The mindless euthanasia of a kiss

Reveals that in
An instant's beat
Two souls in flesh confined
May yet in an immortal freedom meet.

From those strange windows
Called the eyes, there looks
A heart athirst
For heaven's waterbrooks.

The hands tell secrets.
And a lifted brow
Asks, 'O lost stranger,
Art thou with me now?'

All stumbling words are dumb;
And life stands still;
Pauses a timeless moment; then resumes
The inevitable.

Words

Were words sole proof of happiness,
How poor and cold the little I have said!
And if of bitter grief, no less
Am I discomfited.

The lowliest weed reflects day's noon of light,
Its inmost fragrance squanders on the air;
And a small hidden brook will all the night
Mourn, beyond speech to share.

Incomputable

Think you the nimblest tongue has ever said
A morsel of what may ravish heart and head?
Think you the readiest pen that ever writ
Has more than hinted at what makes life sweet?

As well assume old Thames—eyot, meadow, copse—
Sums, as he disembogues, his waterdrops:
That beechen woods count up their countless leaves;
Furrows the birds once nurtured on their sheaves.

See, now, the stars that mist the Milky Way;
The hosting snowflakes of a winter's day;
Count them for tally of what life gives, thus shown,
Then reckon how many you have made your own!

Seen and Heard

Lovely things these eyes have seen—
Dangling cherries in leaves dark-green;
Ducks as white as winter snow,
Which quacked as they webbed on a-row;
The wren that, with her needle note,
Through blackthorn's foam will flit and float,
And sun will sheen.

Lovely music my ears have heard—
Catkined twigs in April stirred
By the same air that carries true
Two notes from Africa, *Cuck-oo*;
And then, when night has darkened again,
The lone wail of the willow-wren,
And cricket rasping on, 'Goode'n—goode'n',
Shriller than mouse or bird.

Ay, and all praise would I, please God, dispose
For but one faint-hued cowslip, one wild rose.

Day

Wherefore, then, up I went full soon
And gazed upon the stars and moon—
The soundless mansion of the night
Filled with a still and silent light:

And lo! night, stars and moon swept by,
And the great sun streamed up the sky,
Filling the air as with a sea
Of fiery-hued serenity.

Then turned I in, and cried, O soul,
Thank God thine eyes are clear and whole;
Thank God who hath with viewless heaven
Drenched this gross globe, the earth, and given,
In Time's small space, a heart that may
Hold in its span all night, all day!

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The following change was made to the original text:

Page 46: With the lamp's alone → [With the lamps alone](#)

Other than deleting a single quotation mark and adding 2 missing ones, minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[The end of *Inward Companion* by Walter de la Mare]