

THE BUCK IN THE SNOW

& Other Poems by

Edna St. Vincent Millay



This is the first book of poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay in five years. Last year saw the publication of *The King's Henchman*, a dramatic poem of rare beauty which furnished the libretto for the opera of the same name. This work, produced at the Metropolitan Opera House, was an instant success and has been acclaimed by the critics as the most distinguished contribution of any American poet to the operatic stage.

The Buck in the Snow is a collection of the lyrics Miss Millay has written since 1924. It is a book that will give lasting pleasure to all who care for real poetry. No living writer occupies a position comparable to that held by Miss Millay in the affections of a great reading public and in the esteem of critics of literature. The fine quality of *The Buck in the Snow* will serve but to confirm her unique distinction.



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ESTABLISHED 1817

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Title: The Buck in the Snow

Date of first publication: 1928

Author: Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

Date first posted: July 5, 2020

Date last updated: July 5, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200710

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpcanada.net>

OTHER BOOKS BY

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

THE LAMP AND THE BELL
SECOND APRIL
THREE PLAYS
RENASCENCE
A FEW FIGS FROM THISTLES
THE HARP-WEAVER
ARIA DA CAPO
THE KING'S HENCHMAN

Harper & Brothers
Publishers

The
BUCK IN THE SNOW
& Other Poems by

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY



HARPER & BROTHERS *Publishers*
New York *and* London
MCMXXVIII

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

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PART ONE

MORITURUS

If I could have
Two things in one:
The peace of the grave,
And the light of the sun;

My hands across
My thin breast-bone,
But aware of the moss
Invading the stone,

Aware of the flight
Of the golden flicker
With his wing to the light;
To hear him nicker

And drum with his bill
On the rotted willow;
Snug and still
On a grey pillow

Deep in the clay
Where digging is hard,
Out of the way,—
The blue shard

Of a broken platter—
If I might be
Insensate matter
With sensate me

Sitting within,
Harking and prying,
I might begin
To dicker with dying.

For the body at best
Is a bundle of aches,
Longing for rest;

It cries when it wakes

“Alas, ’tis light!”

At set of sun

“Alas, ’tis night,

And nothing done!”

Death, however,

Is a spongy wall,

Is a sticky river,

Is nothing at all.

Summon the weeper,

Wail and sing;

Call him Reaper,

Angel, King;

Call him Evil

Drunk to the lees,

Monster, Devil,—

He is less than these.

Call him Thief,

The Maggot in the Cheese,

The Canker in the Leaf,—

He is less than these.

Dusk without sound,

Where the spirit by pain

Uncoiled, is wound

To spring again;

The mind enmeshed

Laid straight in repose,

And the body refreshed

By feeding the rose,—

These are but visions;

These would be

The grave’s derisions,

Could the grave see.

Here is the wish
Of one that died
Like a beached fish
On the ebb of the tide:

That he might wait
Till the tide came back,
To see if a crate,
Or a bottle, or a black

Boot, or an oar,
Or an orange peel
Be washed ashore. . . .
About his heel

The sand slips;
The last he hears
From the world's lips
Is the sand in his ears.

What thing is little?—
The aphid hid
In a house of spittle?
The hinge of the lid

Of the spider's eye
At the spider's birth?
"Greater am I
By the earth's girth

"Than Mighty Death!"
All creatures cry
That can summon breath;—
And speak no lie.

For He is nothing;
He is less
Than Echo answering
"Nothingness!"—

Less than the neat
Of the furthest star
To the ripening wheat;
Less by far,

When all the lipping
Is said and sung,
Than the sweat dripping
From a dog's tongue.

This being so,
And I being such,
I would liever go
On a cripple's crutch,

Lopped and felled;
Liever be dependent
On a chair propelled
By a surly attendant

With a foul breath,
And be spooned my food,
Than go with Death
Where nothing good,

Not even the thrust
Of the summer gnat,
Consoles the dust
For being that.

Needy, lonely,
Stitched by pain,
Left with only
The drip of the rain

Out of all I had;
The books of the wise,
Badly read
By other eyes,

Lewdly bawled

At my closing ear;
Hated, called
A lingerer here;—

Withstanding Death
Till Life be gone,
I shall treasure my breath,
I shall linger on.

I shall bolt my door
With a bolt and a cable;
I shall block my door
With a bureau and a table;

With all my might
My door shall be barred.
I shall put up a fight,
I shall take it hard.

With his hand on my mouth
He shall drag me forth,
Shrieking to the south
And clutching at the north.

SONG

GONE, gone again is Summer the lovely.
She that knew not where to hide,
Is gone again like a jeweled fish from the hand,
Is lost on every side.

Mute, mute, I make my way to the garden,
Thither where she last was seen;
The heavy foot of the frost is on the flags there,
Where her light step has been.

Gone, gone again is Summer the lovely,
Gone again on every side,
Lost again like a shining fish from the hand
Into the shadowy tide.

TO THE WIFE OF A SICK FRIEND

SHELTER this candle from the wind.
Hold it steady. In its light
The cave wherein we wander lost
Glitters with frosty stalactite,
Blossoms with mineral rose and lotus,
Sparkles with crystal moon and star,
Till a man would rather be lost than found:
We have forgotten where we are.

Shelter this candle. Shrewdly blowing
Down the cave from a secret door
Enters our only foe, the wind.
Hold it steady. Lest we stand,
Each in a sudden, separate dark,
The hot wax spattered upon your hand,
The smoking wick in my nostrils strong,
The inner eyelid red and green
For a moment yet with moons and roses,—
Then the unmitigated dark.

Alone, alone, in a terrible place,
In utter dark without a face,
With only the dripping of the water on the stone,
And the sound of your tears, and the taste of my own.

THE BOBOLINK

BLACK bird scudding
Under the rainy sky,
How wet your wings must be!
And your small head how sleek and cold with water.

Oh, Bobolink, 'tis you!
Over the buffeted orchard in the summer draught,
Chuckling and singing, charging the rainy cloud,
A little bird gone daft,
A little bird with a secret.

Only the bobolink on the rainy
Rhubarb blossom,
Knows my heart.
For whom adversity has not a word to say that can be heard
Above the din of summer.
The rain has taught us nothing. And the hooves of cattle, and the cat in
the grass
Have taught us nothing.
The hawk that motionless above the hill
In the pure sky
Stands like a blackened planet
Has taught us nothing,—seeing him shut his wings and fall
Has taught us nothing at all.
In the shadow of the hawk we feather our nests.

Bobolink, you and I, an airy fool and an earthy,
Chuckling under the rain!

I shall never be sad again.
I shall never be sad again.

Ah, sweet, absurd,
Belovèd, bedraggled bird!

THE HAWKWEED

BETWEEN the red-top and the rye,
Between the buckwheat and the corn,
The ploughman sees with sullen eye
The hawkweed licking at the sky:

Three level acres all forlorn,
Unfertile, sour, outrun, outworn,
Free as the day that they were born.

Southward and northward, west and east,
The sulphate and the lime are spread;
Harrowed and sweetened, urged, increased,
The furrow sprouts for man and beast:

While of the hawkweed's radiant head
No stanchion reeks, no stock is fed.

Triumphant up the taken field
The tractor and the plough advance;
Blest be the healthy germ concealed
In the rich earth, and blest the yield:

And blest be Beauty, that enchants
The frail, the solitary lance.

TO A FRIEND ESTRANGED FROM ME

NOW goes under, and I watch it go under, the sun
That will not rise again.
Today has seen the setting, in your eyes cold and senseless as the sea,
Of friendship better than bread, and of bright charity
That lifts a man a little above the beasts that run.

That this could be!
That I should live to see
Most vulgar Pride, that stale obstreperous clown,
So fitted out with purple robe and crown
To stand among his betters! Face to face
With outraged me in this once holy place,
Where Wisdom was a favoured guest and hunted
 Truth was harboured out of danger,
He bulks enthroned, a lewd, an insupportable stranger!

I would have sworn, indeed I swore it:
The hills may shift, the waters may decline,
Winter may twist the stem from the twig that bore it,
But never your love from me, your hand from mine.
Now goes under the sun, and I watch it go under.
Farewell, sweet light, great wonder!
You, too, farewell,—but fare not well enough to dream
You have done wisely to invite the night before the darkness came.

THE ROAD TO AVRILLÉ

APRIL again in Avrillé,
And the brown lark in air.
And you and I a world apart,
That walked together there.

The cuckoo spoke from out the wood,
The lark from out the sky.
Embraced upon the highway stood
Love-sick you and I.

The rosy peasant left his bees,
The carrier slowed his cart,
To shout us blithe obscenities,
And bless us from the heart,

That long before the year was out,
Under the autumn rain,
Far from the road to Avrillé,
Parted with little pain.

**FOR PAO-CHIN,
A BOATMAN ON THE YELLOW SEA**

WHERE is he now, in his soiled shirt reeking of garlic,
Sculling his sampan home, and night approaching fast—
The red sail hanging wrinkled on the bamboo mast;

Where is he now, I shall remember my whole life long
With love and praise, for the sake of a small song
Played on a Chinese flute?

I have been sad;
I have been in cities where the song was all I had,—
A treasure never to be bartered by the hungry days.

Where is he now, for whom I carry in my heart
This love, this praise?

NORTHERN APRIL

O MIND, beset by music never for a moment quiet,—
The wind at the flue, the wind strumming the shutter;
The soft, antiphonal speech of the doubled brook, never for a moment
quiet;
The rush of the rain against the glass, his voice in the eaves-gutter!

Where shall I lay you to sleep, and the robins be quiet?
Lay you to sleep—and the frogs be silent in the marsh?
Crashes the sleet from the bough and the bough sighs upward, never for
a moment quiet.
April is upon us, pitiless and young and harsh.

O April, full of blood, full of breath, have pity upon us!
Pale, where the winter like a stone has been lifted away, we emerge like
yellow grass.
Be for a moment quiet, buffet us not, have pity upon us,
Till the green come back into the vein, till the giddiness pass.

THERE AT DUSK I FOUND YOU

THERE at dusk I found you, walking and weeping
Upon the broken flags,
Where at dusk the dumb white nicotine awakes and utters her fragrance
In a garden sleeping.

Looking askance you said:
Love is dead.

Under our eyes without warning softly the summer afternoon let fall
The rose upon the wall,
And it lay there spintered.
Terribly then into my heart the forgotten anguish entered.

I saw the dark stone on the smallest finger of your hand,
And the clean cuff above.
No more, no more the dark stone on the smallest finger
Of your brown and naked arm,
Lifting my body in love!

Worse than dead is he of the wounded wing,
Who walks between us, weeping upon the cold flags,
Bleeding and weeping, dragging his broken wing.
He has gathered the rose into his hand and chafed her with his breath.
But the rose is quiet and pale. She has forgotten us all.
Even spring.
Even death.

As for me, I have forgotten nothing,—nor shall I ever forget—
But this one thing:
I have forgotten which of us it was
That hurt his wing.
I only know his limping flight above us in the blue air
Toward the sunset cloud
Is more than I can bear.

You, you there,
Stiff-necked and angry, holding up your head so proud,
Have you not seen how pitiful lame he flies, and none to befriend him?
Speak! Are you blind? Are you dead?
Shall we call him back? Shall we mend him?

BEING YOUNG AND GREEN

BEING young and green, I said in love's despite:
Never in the world will I to living wight
Give over, air my mind
To anyone,
Hang out its ancient secrets in the strong wind
To be shredded and faded. . . .

Oh, me, invaded
And sacked by the wind and the sun!

MIST IN THE VALLEY

THESE hills, to hurt me more,
That am hurt already enough,—
Having left the sea behind,
Having turned suddenly and left the shore
That I had loved beyond all words, even a song's words, to convey,

And built me a house on upland acres,
Sweet with the pinxter, bright and rough
With the rusty blackbird long before the winter's done,
But smelling never of bayberry hot in the sun,
Nor ever loud with the pounding of the long white breakers,—

These hills, beneath the October moon,
Sit in the valley white with mist
Like islands in a quiet bay,

Jut out from shore into the mist,
Wooded with poplar dark as pine,
Like points of land into a quiet bay.

(Just in that way
The harbour met the bay)
Stricken too sore for tears,
I stand, remembering the islands and the sea's lost sound. . . .
Life at its best no longer than the sand-peep's cry,
And I two years, two years,
Tilling an upland ground!

THE HARDY GARDEN

NOW let forever the phlox and the rose be tended
Here where the rain has darkened and the sun has dried
So many times the terrace, yet is love unended,
 Love has not died.

Let here no seed of a season, that the winter
But once assails, take root and for a time endure;
But only such as harbour at the frozen centre
 The germ secure.

Set here the phlox and the iris, and establish
Pink and valerian, and the great and lesser bells;
But suffer not the sisters of the year, to publish
 That frost prevails.

How far from home in a world of mortal burdens
Is Love, that may not die, and is forever young!
Set roses here: surround her only with such maidens
 As speak her tongue.

THE PIGEONS

Well I remember the pigeons in the sunny arbor
Beyond your open door;
How they conversed throughout the afternoon in their monotonous
 voices never for a moment still;
Always of yesterday they spoke, and of the days before,
Rustling the vine-leaves, twitching the dark shadows of the leaves on
 the bright sill.

You said, the soft curring and droning of the pigeons in the vine
Was a pretty thing enough to the passer-by,
But a maddening thing to the man with his head in his hands,—“Like
 mine! Like mine!”
You said, and ran to the door and waved them off into the sky.

They did not come back. The arbor was empty of their cooing.
The shadows of the leaves were still. “Whither have they flown, then?”
I said, and waited for their wings, but they did not come back. If I had
 known then
What I know now, I never would have left your door.

Tall in your faded smock, with steady hand
Mingling the brilliant pigments, painting your intersecting planes you
 stand,
In a quiet room, empty of the past, of its droning and cooing,
Thinking I know not what, but thinking of me no more,
That left you with a light word, that loving and rueing
Walk in the streets of a city you have never seen,
Walk in a noise of yesterday and of the days before,
Walk in a cloud of wings intolerable, shutting out the sun as if it never
 had been.

THE BUCK IN THE SNOW

WHITE sky, over the hemlocks bowed with snow,
Saw you not at the beginning of evening the antlered buck and his doe
Standing in the apple-orchard? I saw them. I saw them suddenly go,
Tails up, with long leaps lovely and slow,
Over the stone-wall into the wood of hemlocks bowed with snow.

Now lies he here, his wild blood scalding the snow.

How strange a thing is death, bringing to his knees, bringing to his
antlers

The buck in the snow.

How strange a thing,—a mile away by now, it may be,
Under the heavy hemlocks that as the moments pass
Shift their loads a little, letting fall a feather of snow—
Life, looking out attentive from the eyes of the doe.

PART TWO

THE ANGUISH

I WOULD to God I were quenched and fed
As in my youth
From the flask of song, and the good bread
Of beauty richer than truth.

The anguish of the world is on my tongue.
My bowl is filled to the brim with it; there is more than I can eat.
Happy are the toothless old and the toothless young,
That cannot rend this meat.

JUSTICE DENIED IN MASSACHUSETTS

LET us abandon then our gardens and go home
And sit in the sitting-room.
Shall the larkspur blossom or the corn grow under this cloud?
Sour to the fruitful seed
Is the cold earth under this cloud,
Fostering quack and weed, we have marched upon but cannot conquer;
We have bent the blades of our hoes against the stalks of them.

Let us go home, and sit in the sitting-room.
Not in our day
Shall the cloud go over and the sun rise as before,
Beneficent upon us
Out of the glittering bay,
And the warm winds be blown inward from the sea
Moving the blades of corn
With a peaceful sound.
Forlorn, forlorn,
Stands the blue hay-rack by the empty mow.
And the petals drop to the ground,
Leaving the tree unfruited.
The sun that warmed our stooping backs and withered the weed
 uprooted—
We shall not feel it again.
We shall die in darkness, and be buried in the rain.

What from the splendid dead
We have inherited—
Furrows sweet to the grain, and the weed subdued—
See now the slug and the mildew plunder.
Evil does overwhelm
The larkspur and the corn;
We have seen them go under.

Let us sit here, sit still,
Here in the sitting-room until we die;
At the step of Death on the walk, rise and go;
Leaving to our children's children this beautiful doorway,
And this elm,
And a blighted earth to till
With a broken hoe.

HANGMAN'S OAK

BEFORE the cock in the barnyard spoke,
Before it well was day,
Horror like a serpent from about the Hangman's Oak
Uncoiled and slid away.

Pity and Peace were on the limb
That bore such bitter fruit.
Deep he lies, and the desperate blood of him
Befriends the innocent root.

Brother, I said to the air beneath the bough
Whence he had swung,
It will not be long for any of us now;
We do not grow young.

It will not be long for the knotter of ropes, not long
For the sheriff or for me,
Or for any of them that came five hundred strong
To see you swing from a tree.

Side by side together in the belly of Death
We sit without hope,
You, and I, and the mother that gave you breath,
And the tree, and the rope.

WINE FROM THESE GRAPES

WINE from these grapes I shall be treading surely
Morning and noon and night until I die.
Stained with these grapes I shall lie down to die.

If you would speak with me on any matter,
At any time, come where these grapes are grown;
And you will find me treading them to must.
Lean then above me sagely, lest I spatter
Drops of the wine I tread from grapes and dust.

Stained with these grapes I shall lie down to die.
Three women come to wash me clean
Shall not erase this stain.
Nor leave me lying purely,
Awaiting the black lover.
Death, fumbling to uncover
My body in his bed,
Shall know
There has been one
Before him.

TO THOSE WITHOUT PITY

CRUEL of heart, lay down my song.
Your reading eyes have done me wrong.
Not for you was the pen bitten,
And the mind wrung, and the song written.

PART THREE

DAWN

ALL men are lonely now.
This is the hour when no man has a friend.
Memory and Faith suspend
From their spread wings above a cool abyss.
All friendships end.

He that lay awake
All night
For sweet love's unregenerate sake,
Sleeps in the grey light.

The lover, if he dream at all,
Dreams not of her whose languid hand sleeps open at his side;
He is gone to another bride.
And she he leaves behind
Sighs not in sleep "Unkind . . . unkind . . .";
She walks in a garden of yellow quinces;
Smiling, she gathers yellow quinces in a basket
Of willow and laurel combined.

Should I return to your door,
Fresh and haggard out of the morning air,
There would be darkness on the stair,
And a dead close odor painfully sad,
That was not there before.
There would be silence. There would be heavy steps across the floor.
And you would let me in, frowning with sleep
Under your rumpled hair.

Beautiful now upon the ear unshut by slumber
The rich and varied voices of the waking day!—
The mighty, mournful whistles without number
Of tugs and ferries, mingling, confounding, failing,
Thinning to separate notes of wailing,
Making stupendous music on the misty bay.

Now through the echoing street in the growing light,
Intent on errands that the sun approves,

Clatter unashamed the heavy wheels and hooves
Before the silent houses; briskly they say:
“Marshal not me among the enterprises of the night.
I am the beginning of the day.”

TO A YOUNG GIRL

SHALL I despise you that your colourless tears
Made rainbows in your lashes, and you forgot to weep?
Would we were half so wise, that eke a grief out
By sitting in the dark, until we fall asleep.

I only fear lest, being by nature sunny,
By and by you will weep no more at all,
And fall asleep in the light, having lost with the tears
The colour in the lashes that comes as the tears fall.

I would not have you darken your lids with weeping,
Beautiful eyes, but I would have you weep enough
To wet the fingers of the hand held over the eye-lids,
And stain a little the light frock's delicate stuff.

For there came into my mind, as I watched you winking the tears down,
Laughing faces, blown from the west and the east,
Faces lovely and proud that I have prized and cherished;
Nor were the loveliest among them those that had wept the least.

EVENING ON LESBOS

TWICE having seen your shingled heads adorable
Side by side, the onyx and the gold,
I know that I have had what I could not hold.

Twice have I entered the room, not knowing she was here.
Two agate eyes, two eyes of malachite,
Twice have been turned upon me, hard and bright.

Whereby I know my loss.

Oh, not restorable
Sweet incense, mounting in the windless night!

DIRGE WITHOUT MUSIC

I AM not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard
ground.

So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remains,—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,—
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses of the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

MEMORY OF CASSIS

Do YOU recall how we sat by the smokily-burning
Twisted odorous trunk of the olive-tree,
In the inn on the cliff, and skinned the ripe green figs,
And heard the white sirocco driving in the sea?

The thunder and the smother there where like a ship's prow
The lighthouse breasted the wave? how wanly through the wild spray
Under our peering eyes the eye of the light looked out,
Disheveled, but without dismay?

Do you recall the sweet-alyssum over the ledges
Crawling and the tall heather and the mushrooms under the pines,
And the deep white dust of the broad road leading outward
To a world forgotten, between the dusty almonds and the dusty vines?

PORTRAIT

OVER and over I have heard,
As now I hear it,
Your voice harsh and light as the scratching of dry leaves over the hard
ground,
Your voice forever assailed and shaken by the wind from the island
Of illustrious living and dead, that never dies down,
And bending at moments under the terrible weight of the perfect word,
Here in this room without fire, without comfort of any kind,
Reading aloud to me immortal page after page conceived in a mortal
mind.
Beauty at such moments before me like a wild bright bird
Has been in the room, and eyed me, and let me come near it.

I could not ever nor can I to this day
Acquaint you with the triumph and the sweet rest
These hours have brought to me and always bring,—
Rapture, coloured like the wild bird's neck and wing,
Comfort, softer than the feathers of its breast.
Always, and even now, when I rise to go,
Your eyes blaze out from a face gone wickedly pale;
I try to tell you what I would have you know,—
What peace it was; you cry me down; you scourge me with a salty flail;
You will not have it so.

WINTER NIGHT

PILE high the hickory and the light
Log of chestnut struck by the blight.
Welcome-in the winter night.

The day has gone in hewing and felling,
Sawing and drawing wood to the dwelling
For the night of talk and story-telling.

These are the hours that give the edge
To the blunted axe and the bent wedge,
Straighten the saw and lighten the sledge.

Here are question and reply,
And the fire reflected in the thinking eye.
So peace, and let the bob-cat cry.

THE CAMEO

FOREVER over now, forever, forever gone
That day. Clear and diminished like a scene
Carven in cameo, the lighthouse, and the cove between
The sandy cliffs, and the boat drawn up on the beach;
And the long skirt of a lady innocent and young,
Her hand resting on her bosom, her head hung;
And the figure of a man in earnest speech.

Clear and diminished like a scene cut in cameo
The lighthouse, and the boat on the beach, and the two shapes
Of the woman and the man; lost like the lost day
Are the words that passed, and the pain,—discarded, cut away
From the stone, as from the memory the heat of the tears escapes.

O troubled forms, O early love unfortunate and hard,
Time has estranged you into a jewel cold and pure;
From the action of the waves and from the action of sorrow forever
secure,
White against a ruddy cliff you stand, chalcedony on sard.

COUNTING-OUT RHYME

SILVER bark of beech, and sallow
Bark of yellow birch and yellow
Twig of willow.

Stripe of green in moosewood maple,
Colour seen in leaf of apple,
Bark of popple.

Wood of popple pale as moonbeam,
Wood of oak for yoke and barn-beam,
Wood of hornbeam.

Silver bark of beech, and hollow
Stem of elder, tall and yellow
Twig of willow.

THE PLUM GATHERER

THE angry nettle and the mild
Grew together under the blue-plum trees.
I could not tell as a child
Which was my friend of these.

Always the angry nettle in the skirt of his sister
Caught my wrist that reached over the ground,
Where alike I gathered,—for the one was sweet and the other wore a
frosty dust—
The broken plum and the sound.

The plum-trees are barren now and the black knot is upon them,
That stood so white in the spring.
I would give, to recall the sweetness and the frost of the lost blue
plums,
Anything, anything.
I thrust my arm among the grey ambiguous nettles, and wait.
But they do not sting.

WEST COUNTRY SONG

SUN came up, bigger than all my sorrow;
Lark in air so high, and his song clean through me.
Now comes night, hushing the lark in's furrow,
And the rain falls fine.
What have I done with what was dearest to me?

Thatch and wick, fagot, and tea on trivet,—
These and more it was; it was all my cheer.
Now comes night, smelling of box and privet,
And the rain falls fine.
Have I left it out in the rain?—It is not here.

PUEBLO POT

THERE as I bent above the broken pot from the mesa pueblo,
Mournfully many times its patterned shards piecing together and laying
 aside,
Appeared upon the house-top, two Navajos enchanted, the red-shafted
 flicker and his bride,
And stepped with lovely stride
To the pergola, flashing the wonder of their underwings;
There stood, mysterious and harsh and sleek,
Wrenching the indigo berry from the shedding woodbine with strong
 ebony beak.

His head without a crest
Wore the red full moon for crown;
The black new moon was crescent on the breast
Of each;
From the bodies of both a visible heat beat down,
And from the motion of their necks a shadow would fly and fall,
Skimming the court and in the yellow adobe wall
Cleaving a blue breach.

Powerful was the beauty of these birds.
It boomed like a struck bell in the silence deep and hot.
I stooped above the shattered clay; passionately I cried to the beauty of
 these birds,
“Solace the broken pot!”

The beauty of these birds
Opened its lips to speak;
Colours were its words,
The scarlet shaft on the grey cheek,
The purple berry in the ebony beak.
It said, “I cannot console
The broken thing; I can only make it whole.”

Wisdom, heretic flower, I was ever afraid
Of your large, cool petals without scent!
Shocked, betrayed,
I turned to the comfort of grief, I bent

Above the lovely shards.

But their colours had faded in the fierce light of the birds.

And as for the birds, they were gone. As suddenly as they had come,
they went.

WHEN CAESAR FELL

WHEN Caesar fell, where yellow Tiber rolls
Its heavy waters muddy,
Life, that was ebbing from a hundred holes
In Caesar's body,
Cried with a hundred voices to the common air,
The unimperial day,
"Gather me up, oh, pour me into the veins of even a gilder of hair!
Let me not vanish away!"

The teeth of Caesar at the ignoble word
Were ground together in pride;
No sound came from his lips: the world has heard
How Caesar died.
In the Roman dust the cry of Caesar's blood
Was heard and heard without wonder
Only by the fly that swam in the red flood
Till his head went under.

LETHE

AH, DRINK again
This river that is the taker-away of pain,
And the giver-back of beauty!

In these cool waves
What can be lost?—
Only the sorry cost
Of the lovely thing, ah, never the thing itself!

The level flood that laves
The hot brow
And the stiff shoulder
Is at our temples now.

Gone is the fever,
But not into the river;
Melted the frozen pride,
But the tranquil tide
Runs never the warmer for this,
Never the colder.

Immerse the dream.
Drench the kiss.
Dip the song in the stream.

ON FIRST HAVING HEARD THE SKYLARK

NOT knowing he rose from earth, not having seen him rise,
Not knowing the fallow furrow was his home,
And that high wing, untouchable, untainted,
A wing of earth, with the warm loam
Closely acquainted,
I shuddered at his cry and caught my heart.
Relentless out of heaven his sweet crying like a crystal dart
Was launched against me. Scanning the empty sky
I stood with thrown-back head until the world reeled.
Still, still he sped his unappeasable shafts against my breast without a
shield.

He cried forever from his unseen throat
Between me and the sun.
He would not end his singing, he would not have done.
“Serene and pitiless note, whence, whence are you?”
I cried. “Alas, these arrows, how fast they fall!
Ay, me, beset by angels in unequal fight,
Alone high on the shaven down surprised, and not a tree in sight!”
Even as I spoke he was revealed
Above me in the bright air,
A dark articulate atom in the mute enormous blue,
A mortal bird, flying and singing in the morning there.
Even as I spoke I spied him, and I knew,
And called him by his name;
“Blithe Spirit!” I cried. Transfixed by more than mortal spears
I fell; I lay among the foreign daisies pink and small,
And wept, staining their innocent faces with fast-flowing tears.

TO A MUSICIAN

WHO, now, when evening darkens the water and the stream is dull,
Slowly, in a delicate frock, with her leghorn hat in her hand,
At your side from under the golden osiers moves,
Faintly smiling, shattered by the charm of your voice?

There, today, as in the days when I knew you well,
The willow sheds upon the stream its narrow leaves,
And the quiet flowing of the water and its faint smell
Are balm to the heart that grieves.

Together with the sharp discomfort of loving you,
Ineffable you, so lovely and so aloof,
There is laid upon the spirit the calmness of the river view:
Together they fall, the pain and its reproof.

Who, now, under the yellow willows at the water's edge
Closes defeated lips upon the trivial word unspoken,
And lifts her soft eyes freighted with a heavy pledge
To your eyes empty of pledges, even of pledges broken?

PART FOUR

SONNET

LIFE, were thy pains as are the pains of hell,
So hardly to be borne, yet to be borne,
And all thy boughs more grim with wasp and thorn
Than armoured bough stood ever; too chill to spell
With the warm tongue, and sharp with broken shell
Thy ways, whereby in wincing haste forlorn
The desperate foot must travel, blind and torn,
Yet must I cry,—So be it; it is well.

So fair to me thy vineyards, nor less fair
Than the sweet heaven my fathers hoped to gain;
So bright this earthly blossom spiked with care,
This harvest hung behind the boughs of pain,
Needs must I gather, guessing by the stain
I bleed, but know not wherefore, know not where.

SONNET

GROW not too high, grow not too far from home,
Green tree, whose roots are in the granite's face!
Taller than silver spire or golden dome
A tree may grow above its earthy place,
And taller than a cloud, but not so tall
The root may not be mother to the stem,
Lifting rich plenty, though the rivers fall,
To the cold sunny leaves to nourish them.
Have done with blossoms for a time, be bare;
Split rock; plunge downward; take heroic soil;
Deeper than bones—no pasture for you there;
Deeper than water, deeper than gold and oil:
Earth's fiery core alone can feed the bough
That blooms between Orion and the Plough.

SONNET TO GATH

COUNTRY of hunchbacks!—where the strong, straight spine,
Jeered at by crooked children, makes his way
Through by-streets at the kindest hour of day,
Till he deplore his stature, and incline
To measure manhood with a gibbous line;
Till out of loneliness, being flawed with clay,
He stoop into his neighbour's house and say,
“Your roof is low for me—the fault is mine.”

Dust in an urn long since, dispersed and dead
Is great Apollo; and the happier he;
Since who amongst you all would lift a head
At a god's radiance on the mean door-tree,
Saving to run and hide your dates and bread,
And cluck your children in about your knee?

THE PIONEER

On the Unveiling of a Statue to Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Washington, November eighteenth, 1923.

UPON this marble bust that is not I
Lay the round, formal wreath that is not fame;
But in the forum of my silenced cry
Root ye the living tree whose sap is flame.
I, that was proud and valiant, am no more;—
Save as a dream that wanders wide and late,
Save as a wind that rattles the stout door,
Troubling the ashes in the sheltered grate.
The stone will perish; I shall be twice dust.
Only my standard on a taken hill
Can cheat the mildew and the red-brown rust
And make immortal my adventurous will.
 Even now the silk is tugging at the staff:
 Take up the song; forget the epitaph.

TO JESUS ON HIS BIRTHDAY

FOR this your mother sweated in the cold,
For this you bled upon the bitter tree:
A yard of tinsel ribbon bought and sold;
A paper wreath; a day at home for me.
The merry bells ring out, the people kneel;
Up goes the man of God before the crowd;
With voice of honey and with eyes of steel
He drones your humble gospel to the proud.
Nobody listens. Less than the wind that blows
Are all your words to us you died to save.
O Prince of Peace! O Sharon's dewy Rose!
How mute you lie within your vaulted grave.
 The stone the angel rolled away with tears
 Is back upon your mouth these thousand years.

SONNET

NOT that it matters, not that my heart's cry
Is potent to deflect our common doom,
Or bind to truce in this ambiguous room
The planets of the atom as they ply;
But only to record that you and I,
Like thieves that scratch the jewels from a tomb,
Have gathered delicate love in hardy bloom
Close under Chaos,—I rise to testify.
This is my testament: that we are taken;
Our colours are as clouds before the wind;
Yet for a moment stood the foe forsaken,
Eyeing Love's favour to our helmet pinned;
Death is our master,—but his seat is shaken;
He rides victorious,—but his ranks are thinned.

ON HEARING A SYMPHONY OF BEETHOVEN

SWEET sounds, oh, beautiful music, do not cease!
Reject me not into the world again.
With you alone is excellence and peace,
Mankind made plausible, his purpose plain.
Enchanted in your air benign and shrewd,
With limbs a-sprawl and empty faces pale,
The spiteful and the stingy and the rude
Sleep like the scullions in the fairy-tale.
This moment is the best the world can give:
The tranquil blossom on the tortured stem.
Reject me not, sweet sounds! oh, let me live,
Till Doom espy my towers and scatter them,
A city spell-bound under the aging sun,
Music my rampart, and my only one.



NEW YORK

Publishers of BOOKS and of
HARPER'S MAGAZINE

Established 1817

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Buck in the Snow* by Edna St. Vincent Millay]