

# The Upward Pass

*Poems*

BY

HENRY BELLAMANN

*Author of 'Cups of Illusion'*



BOSTON AND NEW YORK

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

1928

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TO MY FRIEND  
R. CHARLTON WRIGHT

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# THE UPWARD PASS

*'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita'*

## I

Observe, beloved, the increasing years,  
How darkly fruitful they become with tears—

And on our feet, renowned of silver dancing,  
The first reluctance in the light advancing!

## II

The upward pass grows warier,  
Eluding rose of hyacinth  
Upon the slopes, obscurely undulant;

Its lunar curve is charier  
Of that redundant labyrinth  
Spread by the sun, demurely scintillant.

The upward pass seems cynical,  
Denying remedy in green—  
Uncertain even of a starlit stair,

Its indirection, finical  
And sheer, becomes concretely clean  
Of dithyramb and of the dance of prayer.

## III

We must forswear the transient,  
Although the living pulse be stem  
To all that windy diadem  
Upon the fig tree of content.

The gayety of bloom that shed  
A leafy ecstasy below  
Gives hint that you and I should go  
While the black earth remembers red.

Perceive the sober blue across  
The face of all the higher rocks—  
Its thin endurance gravely mocks  
The apple branches' yearly loss,

And renders somehow sinister  
Vivacious flickerings of birds—  
We see them now as written words  
Of Death's discreetest minister.

#### IV

I can believe the final measure  
Of that clear music heard together  
In the first dawn of youthful weather  
Must close on some quite certain pleasure.

We have been told through long devotion  
How last things are in first things dwelling  
As fruit is in the May-bud's swelling—  
How often we have heard without emotion!

(Each one must tread a separate pattern,  
Seeming to all the world eccentric  
Ending at last designs concentric  
And perfect as the rings of Saturn.)

And yet, surprise will crowd our altars  
When we in some exact conclusion  
Rend veils of solemn old delusion  
And fling behind us well-thumbed Psalters.

I see your silver image glow  
Upon the loom; I count the breath  
Tossed to and fro by life and death;  
I watch the increasing pattern grow.

I can accept a plan of doom;  
(The years compound propitiate pain:  
The years decline like passing rain.)  
But—Who the weaver? What the loom?

Now have we seen that signal from the hills—  
A gilded hieroglyph upon the air—  
A falling flutter of a broken wing  
That gropes and staggers in a dizzy ring,  
Something beset with more than mortal ills,  
Something abandoned to a desperate care.

A single leaf, as yellow as the moon—  
So has Death set a single golden sail,  
The first envoy of all that later fleet  
Intent and certain of our keen defeat.  
(A wind has stirred along the hills' high noon—  
And all the trees are shivering and pale.)

If there were reason to discover now  
A new simplicity in older ways  
I could proclaim historical lament  
And cry the hope of some quite sure content  
In such hypocrisies as sweetly bow  
To blind destroyers of these perfect days.

I praise the candor of this somber fate,  
Its high design and reckless love of law—  
Ourselves the mates of stars in lofty stress  
The equal sharers of divine duress—  
Perhaps its rudeness and our scornful hate  
Together may anneal the seeming flaw.

Look now on either side the edge  
Of snow that cuts the world in two;  
This is the reach of that great wedge  
Of mountain shouldering the blue.

Here are the last waves of the storm  
Fixed sharp, and frozen in the bland  
Immensity, as tides leave form  
Of their retreat upon the sand.

Prepare now for the clear surprise  
Of avalanche along your track,  
One shout of your exultant rise  
Will loose the mountain at your back ...

See! Half a shining world drops sheer—  
White-feathered, wild, upon the way  
We came—is gone; nor can we hear  
One echo break this perfect day.

## VIII

I rise from fear as one might rise from death  
With certain knowledge of an empty place,  
Assured that when the ebb of failing breath  
Is done, I shall not wake, nor shall I dream.

(There is tranquillity in this, the grace  
Of a quite solitary heritage ...)  
And so departing, leave no single trace  
Of guiding light, or dark misguiding fate.

Nor is there left a cause for noble rage,  
Seeing that things are simply what they seem;  
There is no caged, no keeper, and no cage—  
Only a music silenced soon or late.

## IX

I have gone back to some forgotten places  
No longer haunted by the grotesque faces  
With which we always mask the unknown hosts.

I found no more than gay, sun-haunted spaces,  
Bright gardens peopled by amazing races  
Who seemed, and were, no more, no less, than ghosts.

I was a stranger in those cheery regions  
Bewildered by the insubstantial legions  
Of jack-o'-lanterns lit with candle fires:

But less a stranger to oncoming years,  
Less cold, less shaken with recurrent fears,  
And still a leman of the old desires.

A TRIPTYCH: THREE MEN HEAR A WORLD WALK  
BY

I

I have been blind so long I have forgot  
The pictures of the world that go with words—  
I understand that words are just the sound  
Of things, somewhat as shadow is the blot  
Which men and trees make on a field of light;  
And so I hear the wings of speech in flight  
About my ears like subtle, unknown birds  
Passing to secret islands in the night.

I miss completeness in all words you say—  
The faces of the ghostly actors blur:  
I find I listen past the echoing play  
For signals of more certain utterance.

I hear a curious language of my own,  
Continuous in the multitudinous drone  
Of falling steps that chatter dissonance  
Of delicate staccato counterpoint  
Above the Doric choruses of streets.

So when I tap my way along the walk  
I read the whole orchestral cry that beats  
Upon my senses—spell out the ringing talk  
Of April romance on the lyric stone,  
And the dull tread, like muffled elegies,  
Of those who walk already with the dead.

Those steps are but the marching sound of dreams;  
The sound of hope, the sound of those who run  
Like stripped and broken leaves in twisting streams  
Of wind—they are the whispers of delight;  
They are the trumpet notes of victory;  
They are the mordant thunders of lament.

I do not fully understand the lore  
Of words, but I can hear on stony streets  
The straining and exulting feet of men  
Crying the soul's long epic, step by step.

## II

He sat alone in that old basement room  
For forty years and heard the muffled boom  
Of passing feet outside the window, where,  
If he looked up at all, he saw no more  
Than feet that seemed to wave in empty air,  
Although an ever-changing beat would pour  
Like noisy waters down the narrow stair.

The shelves were filled with worn, misshapen shoes—  
An ark arranged grotesquely two by twos.  
I can remember that it seemed too dark,  
Too grim a place for simple, casual things  
Like shoes.

Sometimes he talked to us, the stark,  
Severely straight and simple talk that rings  
With sober echoes of a few great books.  
And if he saw exchange of wondering looks,  
He crossed his rich, Devonian accent thick

He snapped, his rich Bavarian accent thick,  
'I know a thing or two. I've been to school:  
My friends, I spent a year at Göttingen;  
But this humped back of mine made trouble quick,  
The kind that turns a wise man out a fool.  
*Und* now—I fix old shoes!'

We watched him go.

He labored down his stair as though he dug  
A painful way into the stubborn ground,  
While we who loitered in the courthouse shade  
Would smile a little, wonder, then forget  
About his talk of Hegel and of Kant,  
To have this wonder reawake sometime  
When passing by the rusty swinging sign  
Which read, 'Here I. K. Schwartz Makes Old Shoes New.'

One day, about a year ago, I think,  
He sat with me on this same shaded bench;  
I still can see the way he had to wrench  
His wrinkled neck to bring his face around  
To mine—it gave his voice a half-choked sound—  
And how his stained and crooked fingers crawled  
Along his stick and scratched as though they scrawled  
A crabbed legend of the words he spoke.

'For forty years I twist my head and look  
Out of that piece of window in my shop.  
Always I see those feet that never stop—  
At last I learn to read them like a book.  
I know a lonesome step: I know the way  
It wears a shoe.  
I know a guilty walk—

Listening so long I understand the talk  
Of all of them ...  
For forty years and more!...

‘You know the *motif* of Beethoven’s Fifth?  
Four notes! You know the way they pound and roar  
And make your whole thought swing and go in time  
To those four notes?  
For forty years I hear a symphony  
Of walking, running, scraping feet up there.  
And when I walk, my humped back bends me down  
So that I see but one thing of this town—  
Shoes and forever shoes  
Tramping their dreadful carrousel!

‘I’m not so crazy as I sound, my friend,  
But forty years it is I’ve worked on shoes.  
Perhaps you have not thought of shoes so much;  
You do not know all that a shoe can tell.  
You bring a pair of them to me to mend  
And when I look at them they tell me news  
Of you you hardly know yourself—some things  
You could not know.  
And then I patch and sew,  
And all the time I work I read your life.

‘It is not good to think so much of shoes—  
One day you wake and find your eyes refuse  
To see another thing but walking feet  
All dressed in worn-out shoes that seem to beat  
Their stories in and in upon your brain  
Until the grinding patter comes to eat  
It full of holes like sod beneath the covers

IT FULL OF HOLES LIKE SOU BENEATH THE EAVES

When there has been a week of steady rain.

‘Old shoes forever standing in my hands—  
See how my hands are knotted up and bent!—  
Old shoes forever sounding in my ear—  
This devil symphony of shoes goes on  
Even at night. I lie awake and hear  
Them curse and mutter, whine and beg till dawn.  
‘Schiller, and Goethe, and Beethoven ...  
“*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt!*” ...

‘Who could remember when the grimy shoes  
Of a whole town have walked for forty years  
Across the heart?’

. . . . .  
Old I. K. Schwartz has shot himself. I hear  
He rigged a shotgun with a wooden bar,  
And that the buckshot made a purple smear  
Above his heart quite like the brutal scar  
A hob-nailed boot might leave on human flesh.

### III

This is already half a grave, this bed;  
I know what Heine meant, but then the dead  
Are eaten quickly in the dark by worms  
Far more dispassionate than things assumed  
To be a mercy to a man who burns  
In little fires, yet never is consumed.

Soft pillows, coverlets, and all the bland,  
Slow-rotting silences devour flesh

SLOW-TOTTING STEPS DEVOUR FLESH

As surely as the creeping, grinding sand  
Which breaks the coffin lid and rends the mesh  
Which fettered once the dreams we call a soul.

Not least among the terrors of this quiet room  
Is the dull throb of feet that pass the gate,  
As, step by step, they measure off the length  
Of life, and tick away the springs of strength.

This ceiling is a sort of sounding board,  
And when the steps play most like xylophones  
I think that hands, no longer flesh, but bones,  
Are rattling dice inside my skull—  
And then I think the ceiling is a floor  
And that those feet come waltzing through the door  
While heads hang down like grapes on swinging vines.

How can they walk so slowly on the way  
With feet like the indifferent pendulums  
Exasperating clocks might swing in hell?  
I know if I could move myself to-day  
My feet would go ringing like a bell  
Outspeeding all the world to that black door  
Which swallows the last step of every man.

I wonder if the oceanic roar  
Of steps will still shake through six feet of earth  
Until, hating the grave as I hate this bed,  
I clamor in my shroud for some new birth?

## IN THE GREEK ROOM

Broken and stained and old, wrenched from the earth  
That covers and forgets all perfect things,  
These lordly images from Grecian springs  
Wear the full glory of their artist birth.  
Broken and old and stained, a secret mirth  
Is on their lips, and in their fragment wings  
The airs of flight. A pride and calmness clings  
To them—the mark of an immortal worth.

What if they spoke? What if their marble hands  
Could move, their maimed and marble feet could walk?  
What unknown grace of speech and life would be?  
And could we bear again the brute commands  
Of our own days—the dull, unsubtle talk?  
Better that dream we should not know or see!

## PORTRAIT OF A MAN

He has an air compounded subtly well  
Of certain attributes possessing fame  
As having graced the practices and name  
Of all the better Medici. The fell  
Deceits of scoffers never quite dispel  
His almost perfect patience with their game,  
While savory triumphs in his look proclaim  
Foreknowledge of their just and certain hell.

Men tell two stories of the thing that lies  
Secure behind the azure of his gaze.  
A few insist on splendors—bright, and gold—  
Like secret stars that move in sunlit skies;  
But more will smile and say the sapphire blaze  
Of skies but masks a waste of arid cold.

## GAME

‘The game is plentiful—the weather fine,’  
My friend wrote from the country in this wise.  
His letter hinted all the gay emprise  
Of autumn hunts, the certain anodyne  
Of hills and trees, October air like wine,  
The ardor of the ride, the brilliant skies,  
The hounds, the view halloo, and laughing cries  
When quarry breaks before the beaters’ line.

In leafless places of the hills to-day  
Feathered and furry game goes stark with fear,  
And wild eyes watch from sheltered holes  
The cavalcades of death upon their way.  
Huddled and silent in their caves they hear  
The sure advance of laughing, monstrous trolls.

## THE GULF STREAM

They say a tropic river threads the seas  
Bearing the strangest things to northern lands:  
Vermilion fish, like flowers, with silver bands,  
And bronze seaweed from scarlet coral keys.  
Green birds that mock the moon from tall palm trees  
Where ghost-gray monkeys hang by cunning hands,  
Follow the thinning blue to northern sands,  
And there among the black pines scream and freeze.

The while this ardent current chills and fades,  
Splendors of ice drift slowly south, each one  
A frozen torch of borealic fire,  
Each one a spectral ship with rainbow sails,  
Sinking and fading as it nears the sun  
In this relentless river of desire.

## EN FÊTE

### I

Your love is like a fête in early spring  
With lanterns swinging row on colored row  
And mandolins where many dancers go,  
And—just the hint of chill that night-winds bring.  
My love is dancing, too, in maddening swing  
To demon drums that roar, now loud, now low,  
Finding the hours too quick, the years too slow  
As days burn high and red in a closing ring.

En fête! I see you near, but know you far,  
And find it strange that I who am so wise  
Have not the wish to break this mortal spell,  
But, hurl my soul out like a falling star,  
Beyond the circle where the wild flames rise,  
To find a Heaven, or a deeper Hell.

### II

To find a Heaven, or a deeper Hell!  
These are the desperate goals on either hand  
With no mid-choice of mere content to stand  
Between two ecstasies—no tale to tell  
Of half-acceptances which can compel  
The rage and clamor of the blood to bland  
And even measure like unhurried sand  
In glass, or voices of a distant bell.

I know that I am clearly dedicate—  
Constrained by circumstances of the soul—  
To this necessity of resolute  
And changeless immolation—that no fate  
Of less extremity could now take toll:  
Gaunt destiny rides toward the absolute.

## STAR-BORN

### I

I am less homesick for Byzantium,  
Less exigent of some like victories,  
And more content to lose lost centuries,  
Their lustered wonder and the richest sum  
Of all their ministrations to our dumb  
And tedious day. The doubtful penuries—  
Negations of our arid verities—  
Seem unimportant all, since you have come  
With fantasies transcending heritage  
Of all the crowns on Glory's weary brow—  
Transforming relic dust to golden fleece,  
Translating wisdom that it may presage  
A wiser laughter, so that I am now  
Less homesick for Byzantium and Greece.

### II

Translating wisdom into wiser laughter—  
For this I thank you always from my heart,  
Certain that I shall always know hereafter  
A deeper wisdom and a deeper art  
Not in the casual maze of living only,  
But in the subtler tangles which the days  
Contrive to snare the soul upon its lonely  
And unillumined, fate-appointed ways.  
There is an art in all this blithe uncaring—  
So have I seen a juggler play with swords,  
Meeting their danger with a brilliant daring  
That only courage to the hand affords;  
There is a grace in it, as well—a gesture  
Marking some quite rare investiture.

### III

I think that you are star-born—clearly so,  
And here in passage to some further star—  
A brilliant changeling quick amid the slow  
Retreat and sure advance of days which bar  
The ways of flight. And so you are alone  
Sometimes in lonely regions of the soul  
Where only star-born wings escape the stone  
And dust of known roads to an unknown goal.  
Yes, you are star-born, clearly so! Something  
Is in your eyes, a look perhaps that gazes  
Past the shadow and the stain which ring  
The earth—past and far past to golden mazes  
Where swing eternally the golden cars  
Of stars and stars, and yet more golden stars.

## APRIL-BORN

### I

The dogwood is a cloud of stars once more,  
The Judas tree a pillar now of fire.  
These April answers to the soul's desire  
Are certain signals of a deeper lore  
Than changing seasons in a march before  
Our ravished eyes—are more than singing lyre  
Of winds in trees, or all the wingèd choir  
That comes in April from a tropic shore.  
They are the sign and countersign of all  
You are to us in other months than spring,  
You who are May when skies declare November,  
You who are June when last leaves wheel and fall,  
When grass and waves are still in a frozen ring—  
Then are you still the spring—and we remember.

### II

Surely the green earth was less green last year,  
The gaily repetitious birds less gay;  
And April had a less enchanting way,  
With skies less radiant, and stars less near.  
What if a year is gone—dropped down the sheer  
Lost deep where even this most lovely day  
Must sink with all Earth's gracious things, and stay?—  
Surely last April was less green, less dear.  
For we have laughed a whole year round with you,  
Have mocked a little, wept, and smiled again  
And so have learned a deeper laughter still.  
Because of this, and this, we know it true  
That last spring was less green in every lane,  
Less radiant her wings above the hill.

### III

There are no changing seasons in your soul,  
No autumn and no weariness to send  
Our own hearts questing to some strange world end,  
Where only perfect springs forever roll.  
You feel no chilling winds from an unkind pole,  
No fading month, no ruthless storms that rend  
The blossom sheaths, no winter to attend  
On restless change and take a summer's toll.  
What is it like to live a life secure  
And free beneath the penitential moons,  
To be a welcome season all the year,  
To make your natal April so endure  
That we forget the months are not all Junes?  
How do you hold your springtime all the year?

## FRAGMENT

I gave you all that once I gave to God:  
The grave allegiance of my lonely soul  
That straightly burned like altar fire; the roll  
Of solemn syllables; the flowering rod  
Of faith; the thoughts that link this dreaming clod  
To stars; my secret rosary—the whole  
Brave ritual of names that chime and toll  
The perfect worship I once gave to God.

## THE KNOTTED CORD

I think the mystery lies there,  
Its answer, too.

You stand before your smoke-veiled altar,  
Say your words so, and so—  
*'Inscrutable—the will of God.*  
*The first and great unknown—*  
*The word of God' ...*

I have my altar, too, and altar smoke,  
In crucible, and fire, and the balance  
Of scales so slight that the faint far light  
Of unseen stars can turn them.

What does it all come to, you say,  
When I have done?  
There's only paper  
And a host of numbers crowding  
Like the print of some old language  
Lost, or never known.  
How well you say the very thing—  
*Numbers!*  
The mystery lies there, its answer, too.

From the fountain of beginning  
Whence comes the universe,  
The rain of stars and all the falling spray  
Of worlds that make the Milky Way—  
From that deep source rises and falls  
Cascades of numbers only

Cascades of numbers only.  
Word of God, you say;  
I say, God—no, more—  
Mother of all the multitude of gods.

They learned the first word long ago,  
Of that great stream of language  
Pouring its spheres of fire  
Across the scrolls of space—  
They learned the first word  
With a knotted cord.  
They measured, made an angle,  
Turned in such wise—so—  
'Cording the temple' was the phrase—  
And the first word was said.  
Follows all we know,  
All we are to know.  
Grammarians of numbers, from Euclid down,  
Charted systole and diastole  
Of a tide of numbers that is the will of—  
You whisper—God:—  
We'll not quarrel now about a name.  
The mystery is there—  
I think the answer, too.

A number, a simple great first number  
Folding and unfolding itself  
In clear geometry upon the sky,  
Here in the cryptic curve  
Of a dead seashell,  
There in the swirl of leaves that winds  
A spiral of myriad laughter  
On a slender stem.

Look at this silent string  
Taut on the mystic curve  
Of the harp's romantic frame.  
It sustains a weight of—what?  
Numbers—numbers only.  
I touch it and it clothes itself  
In a bright haze of—what, again?  
Numbers—numbers that murmur a rain  
Of delicate words from the gold lexicon  
Of suns and stars and meteors.

Must I recall for you the lesser miracles?—  
The calculus of stone and strain  
In the lyric arch of wingèd bridges  
Plunging across dark, hungry gulfs?

There's evil in them, too, you know.  
Kreisler's violin might find a numbered word  
Which uttered against stone and steel  
Would break the spirit links  
On which we ride securely.  
That's the other half your mystery—  
Maybe that's your devil,  
Against whose subtle searching  
You sought aid this morning  
In words that are themselves but numbers  
Beating a formula of unknown powers  
Across the sea of silence that divides us.

We go different paths, my friend,  
Seeking the same end, a last word  
Of which the first was spoken

when the world was young.

Light—the cheer and comfort,  
And the ecstasy of artists painting the spring  
As it veils bare branches with satin buds  
And all the wantonness of bloom—  
Light—only a pattern of numbers  
Laid upon the eye!  
Sound, thought, love—  
Numbers—numbers in symphony somewhere  
In the close bound cells of brain.

We go on various paths,  
Seeking the same thing,  
Muttering difficult words  
Whose numbered sum is—you say, God, again:  
I say, the Great Number, the Last Good,  
The end of a long story  
Written in tears and blood and pain—  
The end of a long story  
Whose first word was said  
With a knotted cord,  
In Egypt, when the world was young.

## MASK AND FRIEZE

The frieze is finished:  
all day I moulded,  
carved,  
and struck new splendors  
from reluctant stone.  
Noon and afternoons,  
while others climbed  
ridge upon ridge of hills,  
caressing fatigue  
with spiced pine branches  
under the eastward shadows  
of high rocks;  
while others walked  
in the waist-high ferns,  
and leaned importunate faces  
on the blanched elder-bloom,  
looking with gay eyes  
on the west-running flood  
of day—  
noon and afternoon  
and into the closing shell  
of night I waited  
beside the blind marble  
and found these splendors  
and wrought them—  
wreath and shoulder  
and thigh—  
struck them at last  
from white stone.

Were you not pleased  
with the hills  
and the farther hemlocks,  
with green filterings of sun  
on the wind-ridged grasses  
and green-mossed tree trunks—  
were you not filled,  
eyes and soul,  
and content,

Must I find new shapes—  
new, darker shapes,  
and contorted—  
to please you?

These are massed splendors—  
and vast:  
there is soberness  
and austere nobilities  
upon them.  
Do you see the very flicker,  
arrested, of fingers,  
the twining reach  
of arms,  
the knees pausing subtly—  
all of them still  
like a pause after wind,  
after fire,  
after running?

There is the turn of calm brows—  
white unfrowned brows

white arrowhead brows,  
and lips  
calm after smiling—  
cool, moon-lustered, upon us ...

My mouth is sharply salt,  
my hands crisped still  
to the chisel.

Is not the cool moon-luster  
enough?—  
and the lips,  
calm after smiling,  
the pause, and the stillness?

You ask the strange glory  
of pain,  
figures sharp with ridged muscles,  
and eyes deep in nets.

Quick, then—  
a mask in red clay!  
I will command all wariness  
of fingers—  
significance of swift pressures—  
I will freeze shadows  
into stiff darkness  
under eyes  
under mouth—  
keen shades of agony,  
quick as the gray run of winter waters,  
these, and sly dagger thrusts  
of distress

under mouth  
under eyes ...

These were things learned  
while I stood dust-covered,  
covered with fine chips  
of flaked stone—  
stone mixed with sweat—  
things learned  
while the slow travail of stone  
came to white birth—  
things learned  
while bitter stone smiled at last  
under relentless chisels.

This is the last summation,  
the calculus of grief  
in burnt red,  
in choice clay.

## THE WIND

Only the wind is ageless.

The sea was long since old;  
Its tides more bitter  
Than the bitterest tears,  
Are hag-ridden of the moon—  
The moon itself shrunken and blind  
And mayhaps mad.

The once tumultuous earth lies mouldering.  
Worm-eaten, oblivious and black,  
The rocks are rotting in the dark.  
Thin scums of life  
Creep with the seasons  
Hunted by hungry suns  
And stilled at last with snow.

Only the wind is ageless,  
Restless, variable, and fresh  
With all caprice.  
The wind flows as a river,  
Is still, or darts like a falcon  
Through the changing zones.  
All else is destined to its way:  
Earth, moon and stars  
Move on the unexploring feet  
Of age.

Only the wind is young  
And friend to youth

And men to you.  
Its wings are eager  
Of discovery.  
It mocks the moon,  
It drives the sea,  
And scorns the land.

Its beauty rides invisible  
And all its ways are ways  
Of gay disdain.

Only the clouds belong to it—  
The lonely, lovely clouds  
That are the trailing garments  
Of its processional.

Only the clouds can be  
So proud, remote and secret,  
But they pass:  
The wind returns—  
Only the wind in all the universe  
Is ageless.

# SONGS OF DISCONTENT

## I

For a long time your presence  
Was like the thin gray shadow  
Of bare branches  
Broken on the ground.  
I did not look up.

One day I lifted my eyes  
And found the tree  
Fluttering with plum-blossoms!

## II

I meant to kiss you lightly ...

I meant to stir  
Little circles of casual flight  
Among some jaunty birds  
Whimpering their musical discontent  
On the gray branches  
Before the spring.

I was unprepared  
For this tumult of wings—  
This deep cry from an aching voice  
That drips wild sparkles  
Through the night ...

I meant to kiss you lightly!

III

I said my thoughts were fixed and clear  
As the hard writing of bare branches  
Against March skies.

I had believed the wintry plains  
Would sooner bloom with hyacinth  
Than those ashy branches  
Be frivolous with flowers.

The dogwood has betrayed me—  
Its austere fingers  
Juggle a sudden constellation  
Of giddy stars;  
The peach trees swarm with blossoms  
Like rose-winged bees;  
The shadow of the Judas tree  
Is blurred with shaking fire!

#### IV

You know how well I play with words—  
How I have made of them  
Eager birds to search strange skies,  
Trained them as leopards  
To leap and snarl—  
How I have made them  
Thin-breathed music  
To flutter on a thread of silk.

You know how well I play with words.  
And now the thing I wish to say,  
Wish most to say,  
Slides like light  
From spinning silver balls,  
Goes like fire on running water ...

My words drift,  
Pale moths,  
Into the dark!

## SOIRÉE JAPONAISE

My spring thoughts of you  
Rise in many gay colors—  
Lo, gardens in bloom!

\* \* \*

Why do you sorrow  
For day-stars in your garden?  
Look! The hummingbird!

\* \* \*

One violet bloomed—  
Summer's key is in the door.  
Give me but one word.

\* \* \*

The moon draws the tide—  
Broken spray lies on the sand.  
I sing at your door.

\* \* \*

In the flower cup  
One drop of dew mirrors heaven.  
I have but one song.

\* \* \*

Clouds swallow the stars—  
The rice fields bloom with fireflies.  
So—remembered smiles.

\* \* \*

In the dark forest  
Wind and waterfall singing—  
I weep here alone.

# PANELS FOR A JAPANESE SCREEN

You sat beneath the plum trees;  
    (Warm flower-snow fell)  
You spoke idly of summer:  
    In the silences  
Scarlet drums beat furiously.

\* \* \*

A leaf falls through the cold air:  
    In a crystal ball  
A yellow butterfly floats.  
    Leaf and butterfly  
Journey deathward together.

\* \* \*

The leaves—dry little old women—  
    Fluttering deathward,  
Gather in sheltered corners  
    And whisper fragments  
Of the legend of summer.

\* \* \*

In the deep moss-gray waters  
    There is a still gold—  
Fallen suns of many days.  
    In your eyes old loves  
Sink to a hidden coolness.

# INDEX TO A BOOK OF THE MOON

## I. Ill Argia

Beware that silver-green!  
It is a leprosy, which,  
touching the eye,  
will eat along the secret ways  
where the soul sleeps  
until at last,  
green-silver-scaled moon-snakes  
curl through the empty veins  
whence the last drop of blood  
has fled.

## II. The Mad Sisters

Ophelia's sister  
mourns Ophelia dead:  
nightly she strays  
through the laurel grove,  
shreds of her bridal lace  
blown from the bramble branch,  
nightly she stares in wan amaze  
at Ophelia's face  
drowned in the garden pool.

## III. Valkyrie

She rides on a smoky cloud,  
her shining hat  
swung at her saddle bow.

#### IV. Faerie

Under a floating mushroom  
Fata Morgana blows bubbles of stars  
across the sky.

#### V. Troll Garden

I cannot see the tendrils of a star,  
nor yet the vine on which the moon is bred:  
I should like to gather pods of moon-seed  
when the bloom is shed.

#### VI. October

Wild horses neigh above the house  
as the windy hunters go ...

Too faint and far the call,  
but through a shutter crack  
I see the gleaming horn  
the leader blows.

#### VII. Legend

A golden pheasant  
clears the thicket on the hill.

... Gilt-feathered careless bird  
tumbling along high grass—  
while black foxes on the ground  
slant their eyes,  
and brush the grass  
with silver dusted tails.

### VIII. Poisson d'Or

He recedes,  
diminishes—  
thins to a gold-leaf fin,  
swells to a mythic serpent,  
turns,  
doubles,  
makes ten eyes,  
flicks,  
dissolves—  
rises again from his fern  
a delicate orange moon.

### IX. Japanese New Moon

Fold after fold  
the sea uncovers her deep.  
From jaws of dragon rocks  
a black breath curls up  
against the day.

The silver flower breaks—  
a last curled petal drops  
softly down the western sky.

### X. The Moon Remembers

The sun forgets—  
he flings indifferent light  
across the empty galleries.  
But the moon remembers,  
and she sets the stage  
that old enchantments walk again—  
frail silver ghosts,  
beneath the marble-columned fronts  
that stand with unchanged gesture  
looking beyond the aging trees  
hung with eternal elegies  
of ancient moss.

## HILL PIECES

### I. Prelude Before Dawn

Before dawn a cloud,  
Meaningless and vague,  
Hung like an unlit altar lamp  
In the blue east nave.

Then the fire burned upon it:  
Rose windows flamed  
North, south,  
And west.

### II. Skylines

The skyline of these hills  
writes out the slow speech  
of the centuries.

The strife of wind and snow  
persists,  
the long rains blur,  
peacock blue shades violet—  
and a new word is said.

The palimpsest of spring  
obscures the rocky lettering  
of antique tragedy:  
the artistry of mist  
glosses the grim text—  
and an old word is lost.

The language is forgotten—  
or unlearned—  
written out along the skylines  
of these hills  
in the slow speech of centuries.

### III. Ancient Drama

I have been sick with longing  
for these high reaches  
of the hills—  
here where the keen wings of eagles  
cut the shining winds—  
here where the white clouds  
go foaming through the gaps  
like cataracts.

Struggle is here,  
and the vast play of purple  
over green and bluer green:  
the ancient drama  
of the soul at war  
with untoward gods  
portrayed in choric gestures  
by twisted pines  
that still aspire,  
and kneeling, still defy.  
I can forget  
in these sharp hours—  
I can forget the hopeless elegy  
of the long marshes,  
and the triumph of the sea  
beating all night  
across the prostrate sand.

#### IV. Repetition

Once more a fleet of colored sails  
sets out from these high cliffs  
upon the tide of autumn winds.

How swift and light they are—  
eager upon eccentric courses  
toward their secret ports—  
and yet how freighted each  
with cargoes of the year!

Dreams and illusions  
and the gold of youth—  
I watch them go—  
each one bears away from me  
the perfect treasures of a year  
and none returns!

## V. Fulfillment

Strange how dying things can be so beautiful:

This resolution of daring scarlet  
must have lurked the summer through  
in the wistful purple of the dreaming hills.

And so to-day  
the cool monotony of leaves  
turns Romany rout  
in a last dance toward the setting sun.

## VI. The Ascent

The intricate way of valley waters  
seems but a shaken scarf;  
the even tread of long winds  
on the tumult of tree-waves  
is like motion seen through glass:  
the illusion of swift moving things  
sinks to a crystal certainty.

The restless flight of vision  
folds tired wings among the peaks,  
and the soul's quest ends  
on Fujiyamas of new faith.

## VII. Hill Trees

Plunge toward the valley,  
Hill trees!

Snap the sly vines,  
Beseech the still valleys—  
Wolf winds are in the ways,  
Wolf winds!

(Sycamore skeletons  
rot on the rocks.)

Sleek sided winds  
Breathe cold in the ways.  
Twist out of their paths,  
Seek the soft flowing grass,  
Leap like green swirling seas—

Wolf winds are in the ways,  
Wolf winds!

## VIII. November Rain

Sharp-pointed hoofs  
of the wild-riding rains  
slash at the crowding trees.  
Steel-colored lashes  
flick through mimosa leaves.  
Thin, cruel hands  
twist the naked whiteness  
of the crepe-myrtles.

Underfoot—crimson splashes.



flowered with sea and trees,  
and fluttered with wind.  
She hums quite softly to herself,  
treading the swaying edge  
of her ice-blue wheel.

This is a peaceful track—  
this curve from the gold-blurred gate  
to those outlying signs  
faint on the rim of night.

Tame stars,  
and worn stars,  
shells of dry stars,  
and husks of pale, dead stars,  
float by.

Perhaps beyond the posts,  
these two dim posts,  
the way is black  
and savage stars  
with manes and tails  
and devastating breath  
threaten the road.  
Perhaps the eye of the meekest star  
is a flame of death:  
perhaps the bluer sea of a lonelier sky  
is the grave of the gayest star.

Perhaps we go to the high estate  
of suns—  
those wild, white suns,  
Lords of a purple space,—

two thousand snow white suns  
in a leisured dance,  
after a thousand sleeps—  
after a thousand thousand sleeps.

## THE PAVILION

Earth and moon:

A pale moth wing  
and a silver midge,  
adventuring together.

Fountains of stars in the east  
blown spray of flung stars  
on the spreading rise—  
a plume-curl of high stars  
at the poised turn of midnight.

Cataracts of stars in the west  
drop fall upon fall  
of spent glitter—  
a winking drift of thin shine  
at the cool rise of morning.

In the still black,  
in the white spinning,  
earth and moon  
dance a bright adventure.

In the still black  
and the white spinning  
is the scarlet flutter;  
the pallid trembling  
of all our days:

Crusades. and solemn wars.

and wide migrations,  
the glitter of Sargon's men,  
the pomp of Shi-hwang-ti's  
great gates;—  
these, all of these,  
and the blossom robes  
of jasmine breasted dancers  
are but a rumor of shaken music  
in the quick bubbling days,  
a casual flutter of flutes  
and a skein of singing—  
raveling silver.

Preoccupied, the earth and moon  
are lost in wanton spinning—  
earth and moon,  
a slight moth wing  
and a dizzy midge,  
adventuring together.

## THE STRANGER

I have seen a wild bird lose its way:

The flock,  
A wavering pennant,  
Kept familiar roads;  
But in the air, as on the land,  
Unknown lanes have strange allure—  
One bird would fly alone.

Then in a distant garden  
Where trees and vines are tamed  
By wall and hedge,  
Wide, bright wings would strike  
In expert daring on a passing storm,  
And eager eyes  
Would look most curiously  
Upon the sky.

Sometimes would sound  
On cloistered afternoons  
A note—  
A single note—  
That stirred the idle peacocks  
To unrestful dreams.

## MIND DARK

I can't remember, quite—  
I sit here in the sun,  
And the ordered world  
Swims back to me,  
Forms itself in patterns  
Of houses and trees  
And flower beds.  
Sky and clouds  
Bend their circles  
Over the town that slowly—  
Slowly brings itself in focus,  
As though a glass were set  
To my blurred vision.

I can't remember, quite—

I sit here in the sun,  
Volition drained,  
Little by little  
A world of roofs  
And towers  
Paints itself on my sight.

I sit here in the sun,  
And flash from world to world.

If I could remember—  
But this commonplace of lawn,  
These walls and latticed windows  
Disc like a flood

RISE LIKE A HOOD

And drown in a slow, strangling death  
That other sight and sound.

If I could remember—

You see, Beethoven heard—  
And he remembered;  
Angelo saw and held the vision,  
But his hand was strong—  
Blake rode upon the same dark wings.

If I could remember  
While I sit here in the sun—  
But the colors fade  
And the sounds stray  
When this world of commonplace  
Swims slowly back to me.

## THE POET RETURNS FROM THE WORLD TO HIS GARDEN

They say, my friendly leaves,  
that you are unimportant,  
that your tilt and ripple  
is too slight to trace a record  
of significance:  
they say your complex whisper  
never can be heard  
above orchestral magnitudes  
of loops and terminals ...

No one remembers  
that you are dial and sure compass  
of the winds that pour across the latitudes,  
or that the same law slants your gesture  
which charts the frozen circles of Uranus  
and the moon.

They say, my spectral fountain,  
your cadenzas are too faint,  
too much like Mozart  
played on old claviers ...

When you are still  
I see a field of stars  
upon your polished astronomic plate—  
there I have watched the ways  
of savage suns and meteors.

How your most casual snout drops

now your most casual spent drop  
shakes ultimate heaven  
and starts wild chaos  
in the Milky Way!

Walled in,  
this garden is a laboratory  
where every chemistry of earth  
gives up its secret.  
Here upon strange disks and cylinders  
the faintest far earth tremors write.  
and the chariots of the nebulae  
fill the green alleys  
with imagined thunder.

## THE SCULPTOR

My hands remember  
When my eyes forget.  
They know the secrets  
Of your slenderness—  
They recall the slightest line,  
The faintest pulse,  
Of all your loveliness.

Here upon the shadow  
My hands remake you,  
Vibrant and aflame,  
Until you stand  
Taut and perfect  
As the strung passion  
Of the archer's bow.

My eyes forget  
But my hands still know  
The slightest lovely line  
Of all your secret slenderness.  
Nightly, on the shadow,  
You quiver into life again  
On their remembrance.

## BIRTHDAY

The years fall like jewels  
Slipping from a loosened string  
Into a restless pool.  
Some are pearl,  
Some are red—  
Some shine like tears ...  
Dropping through my eager fingers  
One by one.

Some day I shall hold an empty string  
And a still crystal will steal  
Across the troubled waves.  
Then these flying jewels  
Will gleam in the quiet deep  
Like faithful stars;  
And if you lean to look at them  
They will bend a crown about your head.

## PROMENADE WITH THE INFANTA

The flowers stand respectfully in rows,  
the grasses bend beside the walk,  
and the sky silvers a still mirror  
in the porphyry jar.

Like a ring bent to clasp a jewel  
the garden holds this little figure  
pearled and laced.

‘Who is that who stares so?—  
Seems to look as though he saw  
only a child walk there  
with tired little legs  
bent beneath the loveliness and weight  
of cloth of gold.’

‘I’m not sure—  
I think they say he’s named  
Velasquez.’

## CINQUAIN

Death owns  
Such solemn words:  
Dirge and doom, shroud and tomb—  
Always against my ear they toll  
Like bells.

## RONDELET MACABRE

That first clod fell.

Earth spoke her ancient triumph when  
That first clod fell.

Her final word in your red clay cell  
Was not to you but to living men.  
I could not think you dead—and then  
That first clod fell!

# NOTATIONS FROM A MUSIC MASTER'S NOTEBOOK

## Flyleaf

Uplifted faces  
of slim, laughing girls—  
fleeting  
as wild roses on a hedge.

### I. Jaqueline Dent

I am your teacher, you my pupil, say;  
then I should be counting pieces-of-eight  
and other hoarded things  
into your reverent hands.

But—  
we play a game as gamblers play,  
Matching our worlds as they match cards.

We match our play—  
Worn cards and skill  
against your questing nerve.

We match our play—  
Do you go my way,  
or do I go yours?

### II. Eloise Tracey

I've heard it whispered you were born  
with neither cross nor creed to bless—  
perhaps—

You have that dowered look  
that Hagar's children often wear—  
almost a dancer's grace,  
almost a royal pride—  
something denied the rest of us—  
as though a love most rich  
and unafraid,  
had journeyed far and sought  
bright stuffs and strange deep gems  
to clothe and crown you!

### III. Carrie Dyer

You wait with what slow patience  
some magic from my lips  
that your good biscuit-making fingers  
may learn the subtlety and indirection  
of this little compliment  
Chopin paid a Countess.

Laughter and kisses and tears,  
a gesture of youth  
in the stark face of Death  
while the Polish exquisite  
danced toward Père la Chaise.

How does it go, now?  
Let us see.

#### IV. Sue Kittrell

Rutledge, Ravenal, and Rhett:

Flowered names often on your lips ...  
Chaucerian tricks  
(something Charleston lends)  
to make your flying speech  
just past clear comprehension.

Reluctant of fortissimos,  
your playing peeps out from the silence  
half-heard, as one half-sees  
painted silken ladies  
in a folded fan.

V. Doris McKee

You could walk unseen  
with silver birches  
in the April shine ...

You are heir to that one  
who challenged the hot old priest  
and took his acolyte  
to be father to wild, straight sons.

In this musty room  
I hear the faculty give voice  
to ancient blames.

... you shining gold and white  
under the spring-lit trees.

VI. Edna Bentley

You have the line of cheek and chin  
and dark fanatic eyes  
so often seen in quaintly drawn  
mediæval heads.

They lived in little cities  
walled from the wilderness,  
knew God and the saints  
through Dante's bitter speech  
and Savonarola's threats.

You live, walled tight,  
in Orangeburg,  
know God from the harsh echo  
of outworn creeds—  
burnt cinders of Savonarola's fire,  
backwash of Dante's hell.  
Outside,  
God walks with man.

You still pile bricks along your walls!

VII. Carey Moore

Irish—  
by your eyes' amazing blue.

You will play to-day—Brahms?  
I wonder.

*Capriccio ...*  
... sun on swift water,  
terrace on terrace of mountain fire,  
a silver globe of whirling rain!

#### VIII. Dorothy Grant

Something of Venice  
and of Singapore,  
something of England  
in haughty windows,  
and of France  
in tight-lipped garden gates:  
something of all of these is Charleston!

Something of all of these are you.  
I think you should be always standing  
at the curve of gracious stairs  
with lovely faded walls behind you  
and the fall of plumed wistaria—  
slight as shadows  
purpling on a crumbling wall.

#### IX. Mary Larkin

... Bread and butter manners—  
manners like your father's  
smoothly buttered sermons.

... Is this your writing, girl?  
the jig-step of your thoughts?  
Now I know your mind  
races at night over the tiles  
the flame-eyed cat I thought it was.

### X. Frances Gaylord

You are so slight and quick of turn,  
it seems you must have learned  
some trick of motion  
from the swallow's wing,  
or from the blown flight  
of silver moths  
across the low rice fields.

You are an ivory cup,  
most finely carved,  
and brimming with a scarlet draught.

What will happen  
when that cup is raised  
to this new day,  
and some chance light  
strikes sultry red  
across the ivory rim?

## XI. Esther Cain

Professor Vale and Doctor Gray,  
Dean Cartwright, and Tutor Waite:

Running river,  
do you heed them,  
these old snags that break  
your silver chain?

Better snap them—  
take them with you  
to the sea.

## XII. Louise Traylor

The supercilious Dean  
makes sad eyebrows  
at the mention of your name.  
Ladies in Hampton Street  
creak their Sunday taffetas  
with sighs  
as your car, orange pennants on the back,  
and five co-eds on the running board,  
roars out the Camden road.

But I have heard adagios  
singing under your hands  
until my head bowed  
in memory of Rubinstein,  
and mighty allegros  
running like chariot horses  
before the whiplash  
of your thin brown arms.

Oh chilly-fingered, school-girl crew,  
do you hear the Valkyr cry—  
Walhalla bound?

# A MASQUE OF CARDS

## I. The Queen of Diamonds

His violin twines frosty variations  
on a torrid theme.

Her necklace pricks a blue fire curve  
of secret snows.

There is no hint of answering relations.

The arabesque of sounding passion,  
the rigid rainbow of the jeweled line,  
preserve unpromising divergence.

## II. The Jack of Spades

And now that Napierkowska's dancing  
brings us to agreement,  
note how Blandino's observation  
of her most casual undulation  
takes on the clear notation  
of clamorous approval.

Bereft of certain marks of station  
we guess perforce at pips—  
if clubs,  
if spades.

And yet—  
the fine perfection of his partnering,  
affirming and fulfilling all her fantasy,  
bears rhythms of the curled and perfumed  
valet's supple acquiescence.

### III. The Queen of Spades

The *mise-en-scène* should be—perfect!

Set the Byzantine screen  
back of the carved gold chair  
so that an ivory light  
strikes her regal profile.

You have heard the red silk strings  
of huge Æolian harps  
twist the straight shafts of silence  
to a filigree of singing lizard shapes?

—Just so Lydia's fine-skeined mind  
can shred the wings of speech  
until you have a nest of stinging words  
biting each other's heads.

It is tormented music—  
finally deformed—  
when she talks.

Set the screen—I hear her step—  
Walpurgis preludes sound!

#### IV. The Queen of Clubs

Unfolding gold rotundities  
of notes from fine French horns  
turn her thoughts on effigies  
not to be named.

The white hail of xylophones  
remind her far too much  
of porcine hoofs beating across a bridge;  
while rich bassoons seem always clothed  
in fish scales squirming like a dragon's tail.

She has consulted Dr. Freud,  
who talks like Dr. Faust enlightened—  
perhaps she yet may listen  
to César Franck without unlocking  
that black box  
which makes Pandora's seem  
a chest of fairies.

## V. The Queen of Hearts

Let sound premonitory music—  
Janet's deft and jeweled fingers  
know the intricate key paths  
where dance the slight ironic feet  
of melodies in cap and bells—  
a super jazz—  
love's weary, time-stiff smile  
quirked to a new grimace.

Lenora's entrance must have music!  
Her long Italian neck,  
her pendant pearls  
have panoplied significance.  
There are the gestures of antiquity,  
the garments worn by amorous queens—  
just now a little frayed,  
a little fissured at the seams.

We listen for a warning *Rat-a-planh,*  
*Rat-a-planh!*

Janet's fingers rattle bony dissonances:

*Rat-a-planh,*  
*Rat-a-planh!*  
*-planh,*  
*-planh,*  
*-planh!*

## VI. The Jack of Hearts

In gay recitals of adventure  
his eyebrows hinted at selection,  
both of prey and spoils;—  
there was suggestion,  
if exquisite,  
of many insolent refusals.

Adroitly, then,  
he indicated dim old gardens  
where lips and hands,  
almost imperial,  
were faint with wonder  
that, of cool intention,  
their utmost boon remained  
in dereliction.

How strange it was  
that two of us observed,  
beneath the fall of lace  
on his unsculptured hands,  
coarctate gestures  
which were the definite inscription  
of high familiarity  
with buxom heartiness and unreserve—  
the very mould, still fingered,  
of generous bulk—  
*un peu roturière!*

## VII. The King of Spades

If sinister intent were indexed  
by the play and interplay  
of mordant words and Merlin attitudes,  
we might receive delicious thrills  
from peering down the sheer abyss  
of his complete malignity.

But steadily one feels  
through all the mellow threat and thunder  
of his impending ruthlessness,  
the break of sensitive harmonies  
entirely benevolent.

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[The end of *The Upward Pass--Poems* by Henry  
Bellamann]