

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**

**- poems -**

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## **Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)**

Rossetti was born, the son of an Italian patriot and political refugee and an English mother, in England. He was raised in an environment of cultural and political activity that, it has been suggested, was of more import to his learning than his formal education. This latter was constituted by a general education at King's College from 1836 to 1841 and, following drawing lessons at a school in central London at the age of fourteen, some time as a student at the Royal Academy from 1845 onwards. Here he studied painting with William Hollman Hunt and John Everett Millais who, in 1848, would set up the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with Rossetti, Rossetti's younger brother and three other students.

The school's aspirations, in this its first incarnation, was to paint true to nature: a task pursued by way of minute attention to detail and the practice of painting out of doors. Rossetti's principal contribution to the Brotherhood was his insistence on linking poetry and painting, no doubt inspired in part by his earlier and avaricious readings of Keats, Shakespeare, Goethe, Sir Walter Scott, Byron, Edgar Allan Poe and, from 1847 onwards, the works of William Blake.

'The Germ' lasted however for only four issues, all published in 1850. In 1854 Rossetti met and gained an ally in the art critic John Ruskin and, two years later, meetings with Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris set a second phase of the Brotherhood into movement.

In 1860 Rossetti married Elizabeth Siddal, also a writer and a painter, whom he had met ten years earlier in 1850. But, by this time she was an invalid and, after giving birth to a stillborn child, she died just two years later of a laudanum overdose. Rossetti had her interned with the only extant and complete manuscript of his poems, only to have her exhumed seven years later in order to retrieve his work. By this time he had moved to Chelsea where he was a joint tenant with Swinbourne and Meredith. In 1871 he moved again, this time to Kelmscott near Oxford, with William Morris and his wife Jane, the other great love of Rossetti's life whom he painted avidly.

Rossetti collapsed in 1872 after which he never really regained his health. The last decade of his life was spent mostly in a state of semi-invalid hermitry.

## **A Little While**

A little while a little love  
The hour yet bears for thee and me  
Who have not drawn the veil to see  
If still our heaven be lit above.  
Thou merely, at the day's last sigh,  
Hast felt thy soul prolong the tone;  
And I have heard the night-wind cry  
And deemed its speech mine own.

A little while a little love  
The scattering autumn hoards for us  
Whose bower is not yet ruinous  
Nor quite unleaved our songless grove.  
Only across the shaken boughs  
We hear the flood-tides seek the sea,  
And deep in both our hearts they rouse  
One wail for thee and me.

A little while a little love  
May yet be ours who have not said  
The word it makes our eyes afraid  
To know that each is thinking of.  
Not yet the end: be our lips dumb  
In smiles a little season yet:  
I'll tell thee, when the end is come,  
How we may best forget.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **A Sea-Spell**

*(For one of his own pictures)*

Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,  
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell  
Between its chords; and as the wild notes swell,  
The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.  
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?  
What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,  
In answering echoes from what planisphere,  
Along the wind, along the estuary?  
She sinks into her spell: and when full soon  
Her lips move and she soars into her song,  
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng  
In furrowed self-clouds to the summoning rune,  
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,  
And up her rock, bare breasted, comes to die?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Aspecta Medusa ( For A Drawing)**

Andromeda, by Perseus sav'd and wed,  
Hanker'd each day to see the Gorgon's head:  
Till o'er a fount he held it, bade her lean,  
And mirror'd in the wave was safely seen  
That death she liv'd by.

Let not thine eyes know  
Any forbidden thing itself, although  
It once should save as well as kill: but be  
Its shadow upon life enough for thee.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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## Autumn Song

Know'st thou not at the fall of the leaf  
How the heart feels a languid grief  
Laid on it for a covering,  
And how sleep seems a goodly thing  
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf?

And how the swift beat of the brain  
Falters because it is in vain,  
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf  
Knowest thou not? and how the chief  
Of joys seems--not to suffer pain?

Know'st thou not at the fall of the leaf  
How the soul feels like a dried sheaf  
Bound up at length for harvesting,  
And how death seems a comely thing  
In Autumn at the fall of the leaf?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Broken Music**

The mother will not turn, who thinks she hears  
Her nursling's speech first grow articulate;  
But breathless with averted eyes elate  
She sits, with open lips and open ears,  
That it may call her twice. 'Mid doubts and fears  
Thus oft my soul has hearkened; till the song,  
A central moan for days, at length found tongue,  
And the sweet music welled and the sweet tears.

But now, whatever while the soul is fain  
To list that wonted murmur, as it were  
The speech-bound sea-shell's low importunate strain, -  
No breath of song, thy voice alone is there,  
O bitterly beloved! and all her gain  
Is but the pang of unpermitted prayer.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Dream-Land**

Where sunless rivers weep  
Their waves into the deep  
She sleeps a charmed sleep:  
Awake her not.  
Led by a single star,  
She came from very far  
To seek where shadows are  
Her pleasant lot.

She left the rosy morn,  
She left the fields of corn,  
For twilight cold and lorn  
And water springs.  
Through sleep, as through a veil,  
She sees the sky look pale,  
And hears the nightingale  
That sadly sings.

Rest, rest, a perfect rest  
Shed over brow and breast;  
Her face is toward the west,  
The purple land.  
She cannot see the grain  
Ripening on hill and plain;  
She cannot feel the rain  
Upon her hand.

Rest, rest, for evermore  
Upon a mossy shore;  
Rest, rest at the heart's core  
Till time shall cease:  
Sleep that no pain shall wake;  
Night that no morn shall break  
Till joy shall overtake  
Her perfect peace.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Dream-Love**

Young Love lies sleeping  
In May-time of the year,  
Among the lilies,  
Lapped in the tender light:  
White lambs come grazing,  
White doves come building there:  
And round about him  
The May-bushes are white.

Soft moss the pillow  
For oh, a softer cheek;  
Broad leaves cast shadow  
Upon the heavy eyes:  
There wind and waters  
Grow lulled and scarcely speak;  
There twilight lingers  
The longest in the skies.

Young Love lies dreaming;  
But who shall tell the dream?  
A perfect sunlight  
On rustling forest tips;  
Or perfect moonlight  
Upon a rippling stream;  
Or perfect silence,  
Or song of cherished lips.

Burn odours round him  
To fill the drowsy air;  
Weave silent dances  
Around him to and fro;  
For oh, in waking  
The sights are no so fair,  
And song and silence  
Are not like these below.

Young Love lies dreaming  
Till summer days are gone, -  
Dreaming and drowsing  
Away to perfect sleep:  
He sees the beauty  
Sun hath not looked upon,  
And tastes the fountain  
Unutterably deep.

Him perfect music  
Doth hush unto his rest,  
And through the pauses  
The perfect silence calms:  
Oh, poor the voices  
Of earth from east to west,  
And poor earth's stillness

Between her stately palms.

Young Love lies drowsing  
Away to poppied death;  
Cool shadows deepen  
Across the sleeping face:  
So fails the summer  
With warm delicious breath;  
And what hath autumn  
To give us in its place?

Draw close the curtains  
Of branched evergreen;  
Change cannot touch them  
With fading fingers sere:  
Here first the violets  
Perhaps with bud unseen,  
And a dove, may be,  
Return to nestle here.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## From The House Of Life The Sonnet

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,  
    Memorial from the Soul's eternity  
    To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,  
Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,  
Of its own arduous fulness reverent:  
    Carve it in ivory or in ebony,  
    As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see  
Its flowering crest impearl'd and orient.

A Sonnet is a coin: its face reveals  
    The soul,--its converse, to what Power 'tis due: --  
Whether for tribute to the august appeals  
    Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,  
It serve; or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,  
In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## Genius in Beauty

Beauty like hers is genius. Not the call  
Of Homer's or of Dante's heart sublime, --  
Not Michael's hand furrowing the zones of time, --  
Is more with compassed mysteries musical;  
Nay, not in Spring's Summer's sweet footfall  
More gathered gifts exuberant Life bequeaths  
Than doth this sovereign face, whose love-spell breathes  
Even from its shadowed contour on the wall.

As many men are poets in their youth,  
But for one sweet-strung soul the wires prolong  
Even through all change the indomitable song;  
So in likewise the envenomed years, whose tooth  
Rends shallower grace with ruin void of truth,  
Upon this beauty's power shall wreak no wrong.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## Insomnia

Thin are the night-skirts left behind  
By daybreak hours that onward creep,  
And thin, alas! the shred of sleep  
That wavers with the spirit's wind:  
But in half-dreams that shift and roll  
And still remember and forget,  
My soul this hour has drawn your soul  
A little nearer yet.

Our lives, most dear, are never near,  
Our thoughts are never far apart,  
Though all that draws us heart to heart  
Seems fainter now and now more clear.  
To-night Love claims his full control,  
And with desire and with regret  
My soul this hour has drawn your soul  
A little nearer yet.

Is there a home where heavy earth  
Melts to bright air that breathes no pain,  
Where water leaves no thirst again  
And springing fire is Love's new birth?  
If faith long bound to one true goal  
May there at length its hope beget,  
My soul that hour shall draw your soul  
For ever nearer yet.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Lost on Both Sides**

As when two men have loved a woman well,  
Each hating each, through Love's and Death's deceit;  
Since not for either this stark marriage-sheet  
And the long pauses of this wedding bell;  
Yet o'er her grave the night and day dispel  
At last their feud forlorn, with cold and heat;  
Nor other than dear friends to death may fleet  
The two lives left that most of her can tell:  
So separate hopes, which in a soul had wooed  
The one same Peace, strove with each other long,  
And Peace before their faces perished since:  
So through that soul, in restless brotherhood,  
They roam together now, and wind among  
Its bye-streets, knocking at the dusty inns.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## Love Lily

Between the hands, between the brows,  
Between the lips of Love-lily,  
A spirit is born whose birth endows  
My blood with fire to burn through me;  
Who breathes upon my gazing eyes,  
Who laughs and murmurs in mine ear,  
At whose least touch my color flies,  
And whom my life grows faint to hear.

Within the voice, within the heart,  
Within the mind of Love-Lily,  
A spirit is born who lifts apart  
His tremulous wings and looks at me;  
Who on my mouth his finger lays,  
And shows, while whispering lutes confer,  
That Eden of Love's watered ways  
Whose winds and spirits worship her.

Brows, hands, and lips, heart, mind, and voice,  
Kisses and words of Love-Lily,--  
Oh! bid me with your joy rejoice  
Til riotous longing rest in me!  
Ah! let not hope be still distraught,  
But find in her its gracious goal,  
Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought  
Nor Love her body from her soul.

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## Love's Nocturn

Master of the murmuring courts  
Where the shapes of sleep convene!--  
Lo! my spirit here exhorts  
All the powers of thy demesne  
For their aid to woo my queen.  
What reports  
Yield thy jealous courts unseen?

Vaporous, unaccountable,  
Dreamland lies forlorn of light,  
Hollow like a breathing shell.  
Ah! that from all dreams I might  
Choose one dream and guide its flight!  
I know well  
What her sleep should tell to-night.

There the dreams are multitudes:  
Some that will not wait for sleep,  
Deep within the August woods;  
Some that hum while rest may steep  
Weary labour laid a-heap;  
Interludes,  
Some, of grievous moods that weep.

Poets' fancies all are there:  
There the elf-girls flood with wings  
Valleys full of plaintive air;  
There breathe perfumes; there in rings  
Whirl the foam-bewildered springs;  
Siren there  
Winds her dizzy hair and sings.

Thence the one dream mutually  
Dreamed in bridal unison,  
Less than waking ecstasy;  
Half-formed visions that make moan  
In the house of birth alone;  
And what we  
At death's wicket see, unknown.

But for mine own sleep, it lies  
In one gracious form's control,  
Fair with honourable eyes,  
Lamps of a translucent soul:  
O their glance is loftiest dole,  
Sweet and wise,  
Wherein Love descries his goal.

Reft of her, my dreams are all  
Clammy trance that fears the sky:  
Changing footpaths shift and fall;  
From polluted coverts nigh,

Miserable phantoms sigh;  
Quakes the pall,  
And the funeral goes by.

Master, is it soothly said  
That, as echoes of man's speech  
Far in secret clefts are made,  
So do all men's bodies reach  
Shadows o'er thy sunken beach,--  
Shape or shade  
In those halls pourtrayed of each?

Ah! might I, by thy good grace  
Groping in the windy stair,  
(Darkness and the breath of space  
Like loud waters everywhere,)  
Meeting mine own image there  
Face to face,  
Send it from that place to her!

Nay, not I; but oh! do thou,  
Master, from thy shadowkind  
Call my body's phantom now:  
Bid it bear its face declin'd  
Till its flight her slumbers find,  
And her brow  
Feel its presence bow like wind.

Where in groves the gracile Spring  
Trembles, with mute orison  
Confidently strengthening,  
Water's voice and wind's as one  
Shed an echo in the sun.  
Soft as Spring,  
Master, bid it sing and moan.

Song shall tell how glad and strong  
Is the night she soothes away;  
Moan shall grieve with that parched tongue  
Of the brazen hours of day:  
Sounds as of the springtide they,  
Moan and song,  
While the chill months long for May.

Not the prayers which with all leave  
The world's fluent woes prefer,--  
Not the praise the world doth give,  
Dulcet fulsome whisperer;--  
Let it yield my love to her,  
And achieve  
Strength that shall not grieve or err.

Wheresoe'er my dreams befall,  
Both at night-watch, (let it say,)  
And where round the sundial  
The reluctant hours of day,  
Heartless, hopeless of their way,  
Rest and call;--  
There her glance doth fall and stay.

Suddenly her face is there:  
So do mounting vapours wreath  
Subtle-scented transports where  
The black firwood sets its teeth.  
Part the boughs and look beneath,--  
Lilies share  
Secret waters there, and breathe.

Master, bid my shadow bend  
Whispering thus till birth of light,  
Lest new shapes that sleep may send  
Scatter all its work to flight;--  
Master, master of the night,  
Bid it spend  
Speech, song, prayer, and end aright.

Yet, ah me! if at her head  
There another phantom lean  
Murmuring o'er the fragrant bed,--  
Ah! and if my spirit's queen  
Smile those alien prayers between,--  
Ah! poor shade!  
Shall it strive, or fade unseen?

How should love's own messenger  
Strive with love and be love's foe?  
Master, nay! If thus, in her,  
Sleep a wedded heart should show,--  
Silent let mine image go,  
Its old share  
Of thy spell-bound air to know.

Like a vapour wan and mute,  
Like a flame, so let it pass;  
One low sigh across her lute,  
One dull breath against her glass;  
And to my sad soul, alas!  
One salute  
Cold as when Death's foot shall pass.

Then, too, let all hopes of mine,  
All vain hopes by night and day,  
Slowly at thy summoning sign  
Rise up pallid and obey.

Dreams, if this is thus, were they:--  
Be they thine,  
And to dreamworld pine away.

Yet from old time, life, not death,  
Master, in thy rule is rife:  
Lo! through thee, with mingling breath,  
Adam woke beside his wife.  
O Love bring me so, for strife,  
Force and faith,  
Bring me so not death but life!

Yea, to Love himself is pour'd  
This frail song of hope and fear.  
Thou art Love, of one accord  
With kind Sleep to bring her near,  
Still-eyed, deep-eyed, ah how dear.  
Master, Lord,  
In her name implor'd, O hear!

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Poets' fancies all are there:  
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## **LXVI The Heart Of The Night**

From child to youth; from youth to arduous man;  
From lethargy to fever of the heart;  
From faithful life to dream-dower'd days apart;  
From trust to doubt; from doubt to brink of ban;--  
Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran  
Till now. Alas, the soul!--how soon must she  
Accept her primal immortality,--  
The flesh resume its dust whence it began?

O Lord of work and peace! O Lord of life!  
O Lord, the awful Lord of will! though late,  
Even yet renew this soul with duteous breath:  
That when the peace is garner'd in from strife,  
The work retriev'd, the will regenerate,  
This soul may see thy face, O Lord of death!

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **LXXI The Choice, I**

Eat thou and drink; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Surely the earth, that's wise being very old,  
Needs not our help. Then loose me, love, and hold  
Thy sultry hair up from my face; that I  
May pour for thee this golden wine, brim-high,  
Till round the glass thy fingers glow like gold.  
We'll drown all hours: thy song, while hours are toll'd,  
Shall leap, as fountains veil the changing sky.

Now kiss, and think that there are really those,  
My own high-bosom'd beauty, who increase  
Vain gold, vain lore, and yet might choose our way!  
Through many years they toil; then on a day  
They die not,--for their life was death,--but cease;  
And round their narrow lips the mould falls close.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## LXXII The Choice, II

Watch thou and fear; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Or art thou sure thou shalt have time for death?  
Is not the day which God's word promiseth  
To come man knows not when? In yonder sky  
Now while we speak, the sun speeds forth: can I  
Or thou assure him of his goal? God's breath  
Even at this moment haply quickeneth  
The air to a flame; till spirits, always nigh

Though screen'd and hid, shall walk the daylight here.  
And dost thou prate of all that man shall do?  
Canst thou, who hast but plagues, presume to be  
Glad in his gladness that comes after thee?  
Will his strength slay thy worm in Hell? Go to:  
Cover thy countenance, and watch, and fear.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

### **LXXIII The Choice, III**

Think thou and act; to-morrow thou shalt die  
    Outstretch'd in the sun's warmth upon the shore,  
    Thou say'st: "Man's measur'd path is all gone o'er:  
Up all his years, steeply, with strain and sigh,  
Man clomb until he touch'd the truth; and I,  
    Even I, am he whom it was destin'd for."  
    How should this be? Art thou then so much more  
Than they who sow'd, that thou shouldst reap thereby?

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-wash'd mound  
    Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me;  
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.  
    Miles and miles distant though the last line be,  
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,--  
    Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Mary's Girlhood ( For A Picture)**

This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect  
God's Virgin. Gone is a great while, and she  
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.  
Unto God's will she brought devout respect,  
Profound simplicity of intellect,  
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee  
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;  
Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect.

So held she through her girlhood; as it were  
An angel-water'd lily, that near God  
Grows and is quiet. Till, one dawn at home,  
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear  
At all,--yet wept till sunshine, and felt aw'd:  
Because the fulness of the time was come.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## My Sister's Sleep

She fell asleep on Christmas Eve:  
At length the long-ungranted shade  
Of weary eyelids overweigh'd  
The pain nought else might yet relieve.

Our mother, who had lean'd all day  
Over the bed from chime to chime,  
Then rais'd herself for the first time,  
And as she sat her down, did pray.

Her little work-table was spread  
With work to finish. For the glare  
Made by her candle, she had care  
To work some distance from the bed.

Without, there was a cold moon up,  
Of winter radiance sheer and thin;  
The hollow halo it was in  
Was like an icy crystal cup.

Through the small room, with subtle sound  
Of flame, by vents the fireshine drove  
And reddened. In its dim alcove  
The mirror shed a clearness round.

I had been sitting up some nights,  
And my tired mind felt weak and blank;  
Like a sharp strengthening wine it drank  
The stillness and the broken lights.

Twelve struck. That sound, by dwindling years  
Heard in each hour, crept off; and then  
The ruffled silence spread again,  
Like water that a pebble stirs.

Our mother rose from where she sat:  
Her needles, as she laid them down,  
Met lightly, and her silken gown  
Settled: no other noise than that.

"Glory unto the Newly Born!"  
So, as said angels, she did say;  
Because we were in Christmas Day,  
Though it would still be long till morn.

Just then in the room over us  
There was a pushing back of chairs,  
As some who had sat unawares  
So late, now heard the hour, and rose.

With anxious softly-stepping haste  
Our mother went where Margaret lay,

Fearing the sounds o'erhead--should they  
Have broken her long watch'd-for rest!

She stoop'd an instant, calm, and turn'd;  
But suddenly turn'd back again;  
And all her features seem'd in pain  
With woe, and her eyes gaz'd and yearn'd.

For my part, I but hid my face,  
And held my breath, and spoke no word:  
There was none spoken; but I heard  
The silence for a little space.

Our mother bow'd herself and wept:  
And both my arms fell, and I said,  
"God knows I knew that she was dead."  
And there, all white, my sister slept.

Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn  
A little after twelve o'clock  
We said, ere the first quarter struck,  
"Christ's blessing on the newly born!"

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## Silent Noon

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass, --  
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:  
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms  
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.  
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,  
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge  
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.  
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly  
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky: --  
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.  
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,  
This close-companioned inarticulate hour  
When twofold silence was the song of love.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## Sister Helen

"Why did you melt your waxen man  
Sister Helen?  
To-day is the third since you began."  
"The time was long, yet the time ran,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Three days to-day, between Hell and Heaven!)

"But if you have done your work aright,  
Sister Helen,  
You'll let me play, for you said I might."  
"Be very still in your play to-night,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Third night, to-night, between Hell and Heaven!)

"You said it must melt ere vesper-bell,  
Sister Helen;  
If now it be molten, all is well."  
"Even so,--nay, peace! you cannot tell,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
O what is this, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Oh the waxen knave was plump to-day,  
Sister Helen;  
How like dead folk he has dropp'd away!"  
"Nay now, of the dead what can you say,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What of the dead, between Hell and Heaven?)

"See, see, the sunken pile of wood,  
Sister Helen,  
Shines through the thinn'd wax red as blood!"  
"Nay now, when look'd you yet on blood,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
How pale she is, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Now close your eyes, for they're sick and sore,  
Sister Helen,  
And I'll play without the gallery door."  
"Aye, let me rest,--I'll lie on the floor,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What rest to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Here high up in the balcony,  
Sister Helen,  
The moon flies face to face with me."  
"Aye, look and say whatever you see,

Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What sight to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Outside it's merry in the wind's wake,  
Sister Helen;  
In the shaken trees the chill stars shake."  
"Hush, heard you a horse-tread as you spake,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What sound to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)

"I hear a horse-tread, and I see,  
Sister Helen,  
Three horsemen that ride terribly."  
"Little brother, whence come the three,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Whence should they come, between Hell and Heaven?)

"They come by the hill-verge from Boyne Bar,  
Sister Helen,  
And one draws nigh, but two are afar."  
"Look, look, do you know them who they are,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Who should they be, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Oh, it's Keith of Eastholm rides so fast,  
Sister Helen,  
For I know the white mane on the blast."  
"The hour has come, has come at last,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Her hour at last, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He has made a sign and called Halloo!  
Sister Helen,  
And he says that he would speak with you."  
"Oh tell him I fear the frozen dew,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Why laughs she thus, between Hell and Heaven?)

"The wind is loud, but I hear him cry,  
Sister Helen,  
That Keith of Ewern's like to die."  
"And he and thou, and thou and I,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
And they and we, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Three days ago, on his marriage-morn,  
Sister Helen,  
He sicken'd, and lies since then forlorn."  
"For bridegroom's side is the bride a thorn,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Cold bridal cheer, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Three days and nights he has lain abed,  
Sister Helen,  
And he prays in torment to be dead."  
"The thing may chance, if he have pray'd,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
If he have pray'd, between Hell and Heaven!)

"But he has not ceas'd to cry to-day,  
Sister Helen,  
That you should take your curse away."  
"My prayer was heard,--he need but pray,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Shall God not hear, between Hell and Heaven?)

"But he says, till you take back your ban,  
Sister Helen,  
His soul would pass, yet never can."  
"Nay then, shall I slay a living man,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
A living soul, between Hell and Heaven!)

"But he calls for ever on your name,  
Sister Helen,  
And says that he melts before a flame."  
"My heart for his pleasure far'd the same,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Fire at the heart, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Here's Keith of Westholm riding fast,  
Sister Helen,  
For I know the white plume on the blast."  
"The hour, the sweet hour I forecast,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Is the hour sweet, between Hell and Heaven?)

"He stops to speak, and he stills his horse,  
Sister Helen;  
But his words are drown'd in the wind's course."  
"Nay hear, nay hear, you must hear perforce,

Little brother!" .  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What word now heard, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Oh he says that Keith of Ewern's cry,  
Sister Helen,  
Is ever to see you ere he die."  
"In all that his soul sees, there am I  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
The soul's one sight, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He sends a ring and a broken coin,  
Sister Helen,  
And bids you mind the banks of Boyne."  
"What else he broke will he ever join,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
No, never join'd, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He yields you these and craves full fain,  
Sister Helen,  
You pardon him in his mortal pain."  
"What else he took will he give again,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Not twice to give, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He calls your name in an agony,  
Sister Helen,  
That even dead Love must weep to see."  
"Hate, born of Love, is blind as he,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Love turn'd to hate, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Oh it's Keith of Keith now that rides fast,  
Sister Helen,  
For I know the white hair on the blast."  
"The short short hour will soon be past,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Will soon be past, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He looks at me and he tries to speak,  
Sister Helen,  
But oh! his voice is sad and weak!"  
"What here should the mighty Baron seek,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Is this the end, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Oh his son still cries, if you forgive,  
Sister Helen,  
The body dies but the soul shall live."  
"Fire shall forgive me as I forgive,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
As she forgives, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Oh he prays you, as his heart would rive,  
Sister Helen,  
To save his dear son's soul alive."  
"Fire cannot slay it, it shall thrive,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Alas, alas, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He cries to you, kneeling in the road,  
Sister Helen,  
To go with him for the love of God!"  
"The way is long to his son's abode,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
The way is long, between Hell and Heaven!)

"A lady's here, by a dark steed brought,  
Sister Helen,  
So darkly clad, I saw her not."  
"See her now or never see aught,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What more to see, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Her hood falls back, and the moon shines fair,  
Sister Helen,  
On the Lady of Ewern's golden hair."  
"Blest hour of my power and her despair,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Hour blest and bann'd, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Pale, pale her cheeks, that in pride did glow,  
Sister Helen,  
'Neath the bridal-wreath three days ago."  
"One morn for pride and three days for woe,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Three days, three nights, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Her clasp'd hands stretch from her bending head,  
Sister Helen;  
With the loud wind's wail her sobs are wed."  
"What wedding-strains hath her bridal-bed,

Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What strain but death's, between Hell and Heaven?)

"She may not speak, she sinks in a swoon,  
Sister Helen,--  
She lifts her lips and gasps on the moon."  
"Oh! might I but hear her soul's blithe tune,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Her woe's dumb cry, between Hell and Heaven!)

"They've caught her to Westholm's saddle-bow,  
Sister Helen,  
And her moonlit hair gleams white in its flow."  
"Let it turn whiter than winter snow,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Woe-wither'd gold, between Hell and Heaven!)

"O Sister Helen, you heard the bell,  
Sister Helen!  
More loud than the vesper-chime it fell."  
"No vesper-chime, but a dying knell,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
His dying knell, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Alas! but I fear the heavy sound,  
Sister Helen;  
Is it in the sky or in the ground?"  
"Say, have they turn'd their horses round,  
Little brother?"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
What would she more, between Hell and Heaven?)

"They have rais'd the old man from his knee,  
Sister Helen,  
And they ride in silence hastily."  
"More fast the naked soul doth flee,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
The naked soul, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Flank to flank are the three steeds gone,  
Sister Helen,  
But the lady's dark steed goes alone."  
"And lonely her bridegroom's soul hath flown,  
Little brother."  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
The lonely ghost, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Oh the wind is sad in the iron chill,  
Sister Helen,  
And weary sad they look by the hill."  
"But he and I are sadder still,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Most sad of all, between Hell and Heaven!)

"See, see, the wax has dropp'd from its place,  
Sister Helen,  
And the flames are winning up apace!"  
"Yet here they burn but for a space,  
Little brother! "  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Here for a space, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Ah! what white thing at the door has cross'd,  
Sister Helen?  
Ah! what is this that sighs in the frost?"  
"A soul that's lost as mine is lost,  
Little brother!"  
(O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven!)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Song and Music**

O leave your hand where it lies cool  
Upon the eyes whose lids are hot:  
Its rosy shade is bountiful  
Of silence, and assuages thought.  
O lay your lips against your hand  
And let me feel your breath through it,  
While through the sense your song shall fit  
The soul to understand.

The music lives upon my brain  
Between your hands within mine eyes;  
It stirs your lifted throat like pain,  
An aching pulse of melodies.  
Lean nearer, let the music pause:  
The soul may better understand  
Your music, shadowed in your hand  
Now while the song withdraws.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

### **Sonnet XCVII: How like a Winter hath my Absence been**

How like a winter hath my absence been  
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!  
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!  
What old December's bareness everywhere!  
And yet this time remov'd was summer's time,  
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,  
Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,  
Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decease:  
Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me  
But hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;  
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,  
And thou away, the very birds are mute;  
Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer  
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **Soul's Beauty**

Under the arch of Life, where love and death,  
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw  
Beauty enthroned; and though her gaze struck awe,  
I drew it in as simply as my breath.  
Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,  
The sky and sea bend on thee,—which can draw,  
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,  
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.

This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise  
Thy voice and hand shake still,—long known to thee  
By flying hair and fluttering hem,—the beat  
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,  
How passionately and irretrievably,  
In what fond flight, how many ways and days!

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## Spring

Soft-littered is the new-year's lambing fold,  
And in the hollowed haystack at its side  
The shepherd lies o' night now, wakeful-eyed  
At the ewes' travailing call through the dark cold.  
The young rooks cheep 'mid the thick caw o' the old:  
And near unpeopled stream-sides, on the ground,  
By her Spring cry the moorhen's nest is found,  
Where the drained flood-lands flaunt their marigold.

Chill are the gusts to which the pastures cower,  
And chill the current where the young reeds stand  
As green and close as the young wheat on land  
Yet here the cuckoo and cuckoo-flower  
Plight to the heart Spring's perfect imminent hour  
Whose breath shall soothe you like your dear one's hand.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## Sudden Light

I have been here before,  
    But when or how I cannot tell:  
    I know the grass beyond the door,  
    The sweet keen smell,  
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

    You have been mine before,--  
    How long ago I may not know:  
    But just when at that swallow's soar  
    Your neck turn'd so,  
Some veil did fall,--I knew it all of yore.

    Has this been thus before?  
    And shall not thus time's eddying flight  
    Still with our lives our love restore  
    In death's despite,  
And day and night yield one delight once more?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The Ballad of Dead Ladies**

Tell me now in what hidden way is  
Lady Flora the lovely Roman?  
Where's Hipparchia, and where is Thais,  
Neither of them the fairer woman?  
Where is Echo, beheld of no man,  
Only heard on river and mere--  
She whose beauty was more than human?--  
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Where's Heloise, the learned nun,  
For whose sake Abeillard, I ween,  
Lost manhood and put priesthood on?  
(From Love he won such dule and teen!)  
And where, I pray you, is the Queen  
Who willed that Buridan should steer  
Sewed in a sack's mouth down the Seine?--  
But where are the snows of yester-year?

White Queen Blanche, like a queen of lilies,  
With a voice like any mermaiden--  
Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice, Alice,  
And Ermengarde the lady of Maine--  
And that good Joan whom Englishmen  
At Rouen doomed and burned her there--  
Mother of God, where are they then?--  
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,  
Where they are gone, nor yet this year,  
Except with this for an overword--  
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## The Blessed Damozel

The blessed damozel lean'd out  
From the gold bar of Heaven;  
Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
Of waters still'd at even;  
She had three lilies in her hand,  
And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,  
No wrought flowers did adorn,  
But a white rose of Mary's gift,  
For service meetly worn;  
Her hair that lay along her back  
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Her seem'd she scarce had been a day  
One of God's choristers;  
The wonder was not yet quite gone  
From that still look of hers;  
Albeit, to them she left, her day  
Had counted as ten years.

(To one, it is ten years of years.  
. . . Yet now, and in this place,  
Surely she lean'd o'er me--her hair  
Fell all about my face ....  
Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves.  
The whole year sets apace.)

It was the rampart of God's house  
That she was standing on;  
By God built over the sheer depth  
The which is Space begun;  
So high, that looking downward thence  
She scarce could see the sun.

It lies in Heaven, across the flood  
Of ether, as a bridge.  
Beneath, the tides of day and night  
With flame and darkness ridge  
The void, as low as where this earth  
Spins like a fretful midge.

Around her, lovers, newly met  
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,  
Spoke evermore among themselves  
Their heart-remember'd names;  
And the souls mounting up to God  
Went by her like thin flames.

And still she bow'd herself and stoop'd  
Out of the circling charm;  
Until her bosom must have made

The bar she lean'd on warm,  
And the lilies lay as if asleep  
Along her bended arm.

From the fix'd place of Heaven she saw  
Time like a pulse shake fierce  
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove  
Within the gulf to pierce  
Its path; and now she spoke as when  
The stars sang in their spheres.

The sun was gone now; the curl'd moon  
Was like a little feather  
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now  
She spoke through the still weather.  
Her voice was like the voice the stars  
Had when they sang together.

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,  
Strove not her accents there,  
Fain to be hearken'd? When those bells  
Possess'd the mid-day air,  
Strove not her steps to reach my side  
Down all the echoing stair?)

"I wish that he were come to me,  
For he will come," she said.  
"Have I not pray'd in Heaven?--on earth,  
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd?  
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?  
And shall I feel afraid?"

"When round his head the aureole clings,  
And he is cloth'd in white,  
I'll take his hand and go with him  
To the deep wells of light;  
As unto a stream we will step down,  
And bathe there in God's sight.

"We two will stand beside that shrine,  
Occult, withheld, untrod,  
Whose lamps are stirr'd continually  
With prayer sent up to God;  
And see our old prayers, granted, melt  
Each like a little cloud.

"We two will lie i' the shadow of  
That living mystic tree  
Within whose secret growth the Dove  
Is sometimes felt to be,  
While every leaf that His plumes touch  
Saith His Name audibly.

"And I myself will teach to him,  
I myself, lying so,  
The songs I sing here; which his voice  
Shall pause in, hush'd and slow,  
And find some knowledge at each pause,  
Or some new thing to know."

(Alas! We two, we two, thou say'st!  
Yea, one wast thou with me  
That once of old. But shall God lift  
To endless unity  
The soul whose likeness with thy soul  
Was but its love for thee?)

"We two," she said, "will seek the groves  
Where the lady Mary is,  
With her five handmaidens, whose names  
Are five sweet symphonies,  
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,  
Margaret and Rosalys.

"Circlewise sit they, with bound locks  
And foreheads garlanded;  
Into the fine cloth white like flame  
Weaving the golden thread,  
To fashion the birth-ropes for them  
Who are just born, being dead.

"He shall fear, haply, and be dumb:  
Then will I lay my cheek  
To his, and tell about our love,  
Not once abash'd or weak:  
And the dear Mother will approve  
My pride, and let me speak.

"Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,  
To Him round whom all souls  
Kneel, the clear-rang'd unnumber'd heads  
Bow'd with their aureoles:  
And angels meeting us shall sing  
To their citherns and citoles.

"There will I ask of Christ the Lord  
Thus much for him and me:--  
Only to live as once on earth  
With Love,--only to be,  
As then awhile, for ever now  
Together, I and he."

She gaz'd and listen'd and then said,  
Less sad of speech than mild,--

"All this is when he comes." She ceas'd.  
The light thrill'd towards her, fill'd  
With angels in strong level flight.  
Her eyes pray'd, and she smil'd.

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path  
Was vague in distant spheres:  
And then she cast her arms along  
The golden barriers,  
And laid her face between her hands,  
And wept. (I heard her tears.)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## The Choice

Think thou and act; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Outstretch'd in the sun's warmth upon the shore,  
Thou say'st: 'Man's measured path is all gone o'er:  
Up all his years, steeply, with strain and sigh,  
Man clomb until he touch'd the truth; and I,  
Even I, am he whom it was destined for.'  
How should this be? Art thou then so much more  
Than they who sow'd, that thou shouldst reap thereby?

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-wash'd mound  
Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me;  
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.  
Miles and miles distant though the last line be,  
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,—  
Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## The Cloud Confines

The day is dark and the night  
To him that would search their heart;  
No lips of cloud that will part  
Nor morning song in the light:  
Only, gazing alone,  
To him wild shadows are shown,  
Deep under deep unknown  
And height above unknown height.  
Still we say as we go,--  
"Strange to think by the way,  
Whatever there is to know,  
That shall we know one day."

The Past is over and fled;  
Nam'd new, we name it the old;  
Thereof some tale hath been told,  
But no word comes from the dead;  
Whether at all they be,  
Or whether as bond or free,  
Or whether they too were we,  
Or by what spell they have sped.  
Still we say as we go,--  
"Strange to think by the way,  
Whatever there is to know,  
That shall we know one day."

What of the heart of hate  
That beats in thy breast, O Time?--  
Red strife from the furthest prime,  
And anguish of fierce debate;  
War that shatters her slain,  
And peace that grinds them as grain,  
And eyes fix'd ever in vain  
On the pitiless eyes of Fate.  
Still we say as we go,--  
"Strange to think by the way,  
Whatever there is to know,  
That shall we know one day."

What of the heart of love  
That bleeds in thy breast, O Man?--  
Thy kisses snatch'd 'neath the ban  
Of fangs that mock them above;  
Thy bells prolong'd unto knells,  
Thy hope that a breath dispels,  
Thy bitter forlorn farewells  
And the empty echoes thereof?  
Still we say as we go,--  
"Strange to think by the way,  
Whatever there is to know,  
That shall we know one day."

The sky leans dumb on the sea,  
    Aweary with all its wings;  
    And oh! the song the sea sings  
Is dark everlastingly.  
    Our past is clean forgot,  
    Our present is and is not,  
    Our future's a seal'd seedplot,  
And what betwixt them are we?--  
    We who say as we go,--  
        "Strange to think by the way,  
        Whatever there is to know,  
        That shall we know one day."

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The Gloom that Breathes Upon Me**

The gloom that breathes upon me with these airs  
Is like the drops which stike the traveller's brow  
Who knows not, darkling, if they bring him now  
Fresh storm, or be old rain the covert bears.  
Ah! bodes this hour some harvest of new tares,  
Or hath but memory of the day whose plough  
Sowed hunger once, -- the night at length when thou,  
O prayer found vain, didst fall from out my prayers?

How prickly were the growths which yet how smooth,  
Along the hedgerows of this journey shed,  
Lie by Time's grace till night and sleep may soothe!  
Even as the thistledown from pathsides dead  
Gleaned by a girl in autumns of her youth,  
Which one new year makes soft her marriage-bed.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of Life: 22. Heart's Haven**

Sometimes she is a child within mine arms,  
    Cowering beneath dark wings that love must chase,--  
    With still tears showering and averted face,  
Inexplicably fill'd with faint alarms:  
And oft from mine own spirit's hurtling harms  
    I crave the refuge of her deep embrace,--  
    Against all ills the fortified strong place  
And sweet reserve of sovereign counter-charms.

And Love, our light at night and shade at noon,  
    Lulls us to rest with songs, and turns away  
    All shafts of shelterless tumultuous day.  
Like the moon's growth, his face gleams through his tune;  
And as soft waters warble to the moon,  
    Our answering spirits chime one roundelay.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of Life: 41. Through Death to Love**

Like labour-laden moonclouds faint to flee  
From winds that sweep the winter-bitten wold,--  
Like multiform circumfluence manifold  
Of night's flood-tide,--like terrors that agree  
Of hoarse-tongued fire and inarticulate sea,--  
Even such, within some glass dimm'd by our breath,  
Our hearts discern wild images of Death,  
Shadows and shoals that edge eternity.

Howbeit athwart Death's imminent shade doth soar  
One Power, than flow of stream or flight of dove  
Sweeter to glide around, to brood above.  
Tell me, my heart,--what angel-greeted door  
Or threshold of wing-winnow'd threshing-floor  
Hath guest fire-fledg'd as thine, whose lord is Love?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of Life: 66. The Heart of the Night**

From child to youth; from youth to arduous man;  
From lethargy to fever of the heart;  
From faithful life to dream-dower'd days apart;  
From trust to doubt; from doubt to brink of ban;--  
Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran  
Till now. Alas, the soul!--how soon must she  
Accept her primal immortality,--  
The flesh resume its dust whence it began?

O Lord of work and peace! O Lord of life!  
O Lord, the awful Lord of will! though late,  
Even yet renew this soul with duteous breath:  
That when the peace is garner'd in from strife,  
The work retriev'd, the will regenerate,  
This soul may see thy face, O Lord of death!

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of Life: 71. The Choice, I**

Eat thou and drink; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Surely the earth, that's wise being very old,  
Needs not our help. Then loose me, love, and hold  
Thy sultry hair up from my face; that I  
May pour for thee this golden wine, brim-high,  
Till round the glass thy fingers glow like gold.  
We'll drown all hours: thy song, while hours are toll'd,  
Shall leap, as fountains veil the changing sky.

Now kiss, and think that there are really those,  
My own high-bosom'd beauty, who increase  
Vain gold, vain lore, and yet might choose our way!  
Through many years they toil; then on a day  
They die not,--for their life was death,--but cease;  
And round their narrow lips the mould falls close.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of Life: 72. The Choice, II**

Watch thou and fear; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Or art thou sure thou shalt have time for death?  
Is not the day which God's word promiseth  
To come man knows not when? In yonder sky  
Now while we speak, the sun speeds forth: can I  
Or thou assure him of his goal? God's breath  
Even at this moment haply quickeneth  
The air to a flame; till spirits, always nigh

Though screen'd and hid, shall walk the daylight here.  
And dost thou prate of all that man shall do?  
Canst thou, who hast but plagues, presume to be  
Glad in his gladness that comes after thee?  
Will his strength slay thy worm in Hell? Go to:  
Cover thy countenance, and watch, and fear.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

### **The House of Life: 73. The Choice, III**

Think thou and act; to-morrow thou shalt die  
Outstretch'd in the sun's warmth upon the shore,  
Thou say'st: "Man's measur'd path is all gone o'er:  
Up all his years, steeply, with strain and sigh,  
Man clomb until he touch'd the truth; and I,  
Even I, am he whom it was destin'd for."  
How should this be? Art thou then so much more  
Than they who sow'd, that thou shouldst reap thereby?  
Nay, come up hither. From this wave-wash'd mound  
Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me;  
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.  
Miles and miles distant though the last line be,  
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,--  
Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of Life: 97. A Superscription**

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;  
I am also call'd No-more, Too-late, Farewell;  
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell  
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;  
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen  
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell  
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,  
Of ultimate things unutter'd the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart  
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise  
Of that wing'd Peace which lulls the breath of sighs,--  
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart  
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart  
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of Life: The Sonnet**

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,  
    Memorial from the Soul's eternity  
    To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,  
Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,  
Of its own arduous fulness reverent:  
    Carve it in ivory or in ebony,  
    As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see  
Its flowering crest impearl'd and orient.

A Sonnet is a coin: its face reveals  
    The soul,--its converse, to what Power 'tis due: --  
Whether for tribute to the august appeals  
    Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,  
It serve; or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,  
In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of the Life (19): Silent Noon**

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,--  
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:  
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms  
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.  
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,  
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge  
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.  
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-search'd growths the dragon-fly  
Hangs like a blue thread loosen'd from the sky:--  
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.  
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,  
This close-companion'd inarticulate hour  
When twofold silence was the song of love.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of the Life (66): The Heart of the Night**

From child to youth; from youth to arduous man;  
From lethargy to fever of the heart;  
From faithful life to dream-dower'd days apart;  
From trust to doubt; from doubt to brink of ban;--  
Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran  
Till now. Alas, the soul!--how soon must she  
Accept her primal immortality,--  
The flesh resume its dust whence it began?

O Lord of work and peace! O Lord of life!  
O Lord, the awful Lord of will! though late,  
Even yet renew this soul with duteous breath:  
That when the peace is garner'd in from strife,  
The work retriev'd, the will regenerate,  
This soul may see thy face, O Lord of death!

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## The House of the Life: 19. Silent Noon

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,--  
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Dante Gabriel Rossetti

### **The House of the Life: 36. Life-in-Love**

Not in thy body is thy life at all  
But in this lady's lips and hands and eyes;  
Through these she yields thee life that vivifies  
What else were sorrow's servant and death's thrall.  
Look on thyself without her, and recall  
The waste remembrance and forlorn surmise  
That liv'd but in a dead-drawn breath of sighs  
O'er vanish'd hours and hours eventual.

Even so much life hath the poor tress of hair  
Which, stor'd apart, is all love hath to show  
For heart-beats and for fire-heats long ago;  
Even so much life endures unknown, even where,  
'Mid change the changeless night environeth,  
Lies all that golden hair undimm'd in death.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of the Life: Silent Noon**

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The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:  
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms  
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.  
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Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky: --  
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Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,  
This close-companioned inarticulate hour  
When twofold silence was the song of love.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The House of the Life: The Kiss**

What smouldering senses in death's sick delay  
Or seizure of malign vicissitude  
Can rob this body of honour, or denude  
This soul of wedding-raiment worn to-day?  
For lo! even now my lady's lips did play  
With these my lips such consonant interlude  
As laurelled Orpheus longed for when he wooed  
The half-drawn hungry face with that last lay.

I was a child beneath her touch, -- a man  
When breast to breast we clung, even I and she, --  
A spirit when her spirit looked through me, --  
A god when all our life-breath met to fan  
Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,  
Fire within fire, desire in deity.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Fire within fire, desire in deity.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## The Portrait

This is her picture as she was:

It seems a thing to wonder on,  
As though mine image in the glass  
Should tarry when myself am gone.  
I gaze until she seems to stir,--  
Until mine eyes almost aver  
That now, even now, the sweet lips part  
To breathe the words of the sweet heart:--  
And yet the earth is over her.

Alas! even such the thin-drawn ray  
That makes the prison-depths more rude,--  
The drip of water night and day  
Giving a tongue to solitude.  
Yet only this, of love's whole prize,  
Remains; save what in mournful guise  
Takes counsel with my soul alone,--  
Save what is secret and unknown,  
Below the earth, above the skies.

In painting her I shrin'd her face  
Mid mystic trees, where light falls in  
Hardly at all; a covert place  
Where you might think to find a din  
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame  
Wandering, and many a shape whose name  
Not itself knoweth, and old dew,  
And your own footsteps meeting you,  
And all things going as they came.

A deep dim wood; and there she stands  
As in that wood that day: for so  
Was the still movement of her hands  
And such the pure line's gracious flow.  
And passing fair the type must seem,  
Unknown the presence and the dream.  
'Tis she: though of herself, alas!  
Less than her shadow on the grass  
Or than her image in the stream.

That day we met there, I and she  
One with the other all alone;  
And we were blithe; yet memory  
Saddens those hours, as when the moon  
Looks upon daylight. And with her  
I stoop'd to drink the spring-water,  
Athirst where other waters sprang;  
And where the echo is, she sang,--  
My soul another echo there.

But when that hour my soul won strength  
For words whose silence wastes and kills,

Dull raindrops smote us, and at length  
Thunder'd the heat within the hills.  
That eve I spoke those words again  
Beside the pelted window-pane;  
And there she hearken'd what I said,  
With under-glances that survey'd  
The empty pastures blind with rain.

Next day the memories of these things,  
Like leaves through which a bird has flown,  
Still vibrated with Love's warm wings;  
Till I must make them all my own  
And paint this picture. So, 'twixt ease  
Of talk and sweet long silences,  
She stood among the plants in bloom  
At windows of a summer room,  
To feign the shadow of the trees.

And as I wrought, while all above  
And all around was fragrant air,  
In the sick burthen of my love  
It seem'd each sun-thrill'd blossom there  
Beat like a heart among the leaves.  
O heart that never beats nor heaves,  
In that one darkness lying still,  
What now to thee my love's great will  
Or the fine web the sunshine weaves?

For now doth daylight disavow  
Those days,--nought left to see or hear.  
Only in solemn whispers now  
At night-time these things reach mine ear;  
When the leaf-shadows at a breath  
Shrink in the road, and all the heath,  
Forest and water, far and wide,  
In limpid starlight glorified,  
Lie like the mystery of death.

Last night at last I could have slept,  
And yet delay'd my sleep till dawn,  
Still wandering. Then it was I wept:  
For unawares I came upon  
Those glades where once she walk'd with me:  
And as I stood there suddenly,  
All wan with traversing the night,  
Upon the desolate verge of light  
Yearn'd loud the iron-bosom'd sea.

Even so, where Heaven holds breath and hears  
The beating heart of Love's own breast,--  
Where round the secret of all spheres  
All angels lay their wings to rest,--

How shall my soul stand rapt and aw'd,  
When, by the new birth borne abroad  
    Throughout the music of the suns,  
    It enters in her soul at once  
And knows the silence there for God!

Here with her face doth memory sit  
    Meanwhile, and wait the day's decline,  
Till other eyes shall look from it,  
    Eyes of the spirit's Palestine,  
Even than the old gaze tenderer:  
While hopes and aims long lost with her  
    Stand round her image side by side,  
    Like tombs of pilgrims that have died  
About the Holy Sepulchre.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The Sea Limits**

Consider the sea's listless chime;  
Time's self it is, made audible -  
The murmur of the earth's own shell.  
Secret continuance sublime  
Is the sea's end: our sight may pass  
No furlong further. Since time was,  
This sound hath told the lapse of time.

No quiet, which is death's -it hath  
The mournfulness of ancient life,  
Enduring always at dull strife.  
As the world's heart of rest and wrath,  
Its painful pulse is in the sands.  
Last utterly, the whole sky stands  
Grey and not known, along its path.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## The Sonnet

A sonnet is a moment's monument, --  
Memorial from the Soul's eternity  
To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,  
Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,  
Of its own arduous fulness reverent:  
Carve it in ivory or in ebony,  
As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see  
Its flowering crest impearled and orient.

A Sonnet is a coin: its face reveals  
The soul, -- its converse, to what Power 'tis due: --  
Whether for tribute to the august appeals  
Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,  
It serve, or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,  
In Charon's palm it pay the toll of Death.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## The Stream's Secret

What thing unto mine ear  
Wouldst thou convey,--what secret thing,  
O wandering water ever whispering?  
Surely thy speech shall be of her.  
Thou water, O thou whispering wanderer,  
What message dost thou bring?

Say, hath not Love leaned low  
This hour beside thy far well-head,  
And there through jealous hollowed fingers said  
The thing that most I long to know--  
Murmuring with curls all dabbled in thy flow  
And washed lips rosy red?

He told it to thee there  
Where thy voice hath a louder tone;  
But where it welters to this little moan  
His will decrees that I should hear.  
Now speak: for with the silence is no fear,  
And I am all alone.

Shall Time not still endow  
One hour with life, and I and she  
Slake in one kiss the thirst of memory?  
Say, streams, lest Love should disavow  
Thy service, and the bird upon the bough  
Sing first to tell it me.

What whisperest thou? Nay, why  
Name the dead hours? I mind them well.  
Their ghosts in many darkened doorways dwell  
With desolate eyes to know them by.  
That hour must still be born ere it can die  
Of that I'd have thee tell.

But hear, before thou speak!  
Withhold, I pray, the vain behest  
That while the maze hath still its bower for quest  
My burning heart should cease to seek.  
Be sure that Love ordained for souls more meek  
His roadside dells of rest.

Stream, when this silver thread  
In flood-time is a torrent brown,  
May any bulwark bind thy foaming crown?  
Shall not the waters surge and spread  
And to the crannied boulders of their bed  
Still shoot the dead drift down

Let no rebuke find place  
In speech of thine: or it shall prove  
That thou dost ill expound the words of Love.

Even as thine eddy's rippling race  
Would blur the perfect image of his face  
I will have none thereof.

O learn and understand  
That 'gainst the wrongs himself did wreak  
Love sought her aid; until her shadowy cheek  
And eyes beseeching gave command;  
And compassed in her close compassionate hand  
My heart must burn and speak.

For then at last we spoke  
What eyes so oft had told to eyes  
Through that long-lingering silence whose half-sighs  
Alone the buried secret broke,  
Which with snatched hands and lips' reverberate stroke  
Then from the heart did rise.

But she is far away  
Now; nor the hours of night grown hoar  
Bring yet to me, long gazing from the door,  
The wind-stirred robe of roseate gray  
And rose-crown of the hour that leads the day  
When we shall meet once more.

Dark as thy blinded wave  
When brimming midnight floods the glen,--  
Bright as the laughter of thy runnels when  
The dawn yields all the light they crave;  
Even so these hours to wound and that to save  
Are sisters in Love's ken.

Oh sweet her bending grace  
Then when I kneel beside her feet;  
And sweet her eyes' o'erhanging heaven; and sweet  
The gathering folds of her embrace;  
And her fall'n hair at last shed round my face  
When breaths and tears shall meet.

Beneath her sheltering hair,  
In the warm silence near her breast,  
Our kisses and our sobs shall sink to rest;  
As in some still trance made aware  
That day and night have wrought to fulness there  
And Love has built our nest.

And as in the dim grove,  
When the rains cease that hushed them long,  
'Mid glistening boughs the song-birds wake to song,--  
So from our hearts deep-shrined in love,  
While the leaves throb beneath, around, above,  
The quivering notes shall throng.

Till tenderest words found vain  
Draw back to wonder mute and deep,  
And closed lips in closed arms a silence keep,  
Subdued by memory's circling strain,--  
The wind-rapt sound that the wind brings again  
While all the willows weep.

Then by her summoning art  
Shall memory conjure back the sere  
Autumnal Springs, from many a dying year  
Born dead; and, bitter to the heart,  
The very ways where now we walk apart  
Who then shall cling so near.

And with each thought new-grown,  
Some sweet caress or some sweet name  
Low-breathed shall let me know her thought the same:  
Making me rich with every tone  
And touch of the dear heaven so long unknown  
That filled my dreams with flame.

Pity and love shall burn  
In her pressed cheek and cherishing hands;  
And from the living spirit of love that stands  
Between her lips to soothe and yearn,  
Each separate breath shall clasp me round in turn  
And loose my spirit's bands.

Oh passing sweet and dear,  
Then when the worshipped form and face  
Are felt at length in darkling close embrace;  
Round which so oft the sun shone clear,  
With mocking light and pitiless atmosphere,  
In many an hour and place.

Ah me! with what proud growth  
Shall that hour's thirsting race be run;  
While, for each several sweetness still begun  
Afresh, endures love's endless drouth;  
Sweet hands, sweet hair, sweet cheeks, sweet eyes, sweet mouth,  
Each singly wooed and won.

Yet most with the sweet soul  
Shall love's espousals then be knit;  
What time the governing cloud sheds peace from it  
O'er tremulous wings that touch the goal,  
And on the unmeasured height of Love's control  
The lustral fires are lit.

Therefore, when breast and cheek  
Now part, from long embraces free,--

Each on the other gazing shall but see  
A self that has no need to speak:  
All things unsought, yet nothing more to seek,--  
One love in unity.

O water wandering past,--  
Albeit to thee I speak this thing,  
O water, thou that wanderest whispering,  
Thou keep'st thy counsel to the last.  
What spell upon thy bosom should Love cast,  
Its secret thence to wring?

Nay, must thou hear the tale  
Of the past days,--the heavy debt  
Of life that obdurate time withholds,--ere yet  
To win thine ear these prayers prevail,  
And by thy voice Love's self with high All-hail  
Yield up the amulet?

How should all this be told?--  
All the sad sum of wayworn days,--  
Heart's anguish in the impenetrable maze;  
And on the waste uncoloured wold  
The visible burthen of the sun grown cold  
And the moon's labouring gaze?

Alas! shall hope be nurs'd  
On life's all-succouring breast in vain,  
And made so perfect only to be slain?  
Or shall not rather the sweet thirst  
Even yet rejoice the heart with warmth dispers'd  
And strength grown fair again?

Stands it not by the door!--  
Love's Hour--Till she and I shall meet  
With bodiless form and unapparent feet  
That cast no shadow yet before,  
Though round its head the dawn begins to pour  
The breath that makes day sweet?

Its eyes invisible  
Watch till the dial's thin-thrown shade  
Be born,--yea, till the journeying line be laid  
Upon the point that wakes the spell,  
And there in lovelier light than tongue can tell  
Its presence stands array'd.

Its soul remembers yet  
Those sunless hours that passed it by;  
And still it hears the night's disconsolate cry,  
And feels the branches wringing wet  
Cast on its brow, that may not once forget,

Dumb tears from the blind sky.

But oh! when now her foot  
Draws near, for whose sake night and day  
Were long in weary longing sighed away,--  
The hour of Love, 'mid airs grown mute,  
Shall sing beside the door, and Love's own lute  
Thrill to the passionate lay.

Thou know'st, for Love has told  
Within thine ear, O stream, how soon  
That song shall lift its sweet appointed tune.  
O tell me, for my lips are cold,  
And in my veins the blood is waxing old  
Even while I beg the boon.

So, in that hour of sighs  
Assuaged, shall we beside this stone  
Yield thanks for grace; while in thy mirror shown  
The twofold image softly lies,  
Until we kiss, and each in other's eyes  
Is imaged all alone.

Still silent? Can no art  
Of Love's then move thy pity? Nay,  
To thee let nothing come that owns his sway:  
Let happy lovers have no part  
With thee; nor even so sad and poor a heart  
As thou hast spurned to-day.

To-day? Lo! night is here.  
The glen grows heavy with some veil  
Risen from the earth or fall'n to make earth pale;  
And all stands hushed to eye and ear,  
Until the night-wind shake the shade like fear  
And every covert quail.

Ah! by another wave  
On other airs the hour must come  
Which to thy heart, my love, shall call me home.  
Between the lips of the low cave  
Against that night the lapping waters lave,  
And the dark lips are dumb.

But there Love's self doth stand,  
And with Life's weary wings far flown,  
And with Death's eyes that make the water moan,  
Gathers the water in his hand:  
And they that drink know nought of sky or land  
But only love alone.

O soul-sequestered face

Far off,--O were that night but now!  
So even beside that stream even I and thou  
Through thirsting lips should draw Love's grace,  
And in the zone of that supreme embrace  
Bind aching breast and brow.

O water whispering  
Still through the dark into mine ears,--  
As with mine eyes, is it not now with hers?--  
Mine eyes that add to thy cold spring,  
Wan water, wandering water weltering,  
This hidden tide of tears.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **The Woodspurge**

The wind flapp'd loose, the wind was still,  
Shaken out dead from tree and hill:  
I had walk'd on at the wind's will,--  
I sat now, for the wind was still.

Between my knees my forehead was,--  
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!  
My hair was over in the grass,  
My naked ears heard the day pass.

My eyes, wide open, had the run  
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;  
Among those few, out of the sun,  
The woodspurge flower'd, three cups in one.

From perfect grief there need not be  
Wisdom or even memory:  
One thing then learnt remains to me,--  
The woodspurge has a cup of three.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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## **XCVII A Superscription**

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;  
I am also call'd No-more, Too-late, Farewell;  
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell  
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;  
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen  
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell  
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,  
Of ultimate things unutter'd the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart  
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise  
Of that wing'd Peace which lulls the breath of sighs,--  
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart  
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart  
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **XIX Lilent Noon**

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,--  
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:  
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms  
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.  
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,  
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge  
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.  
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-search'd growths the dragon-fly  
Hangs like a blue thread loosen'd from the sky:--  
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.  
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,  
This close-companion'd inarticulate hour  
When twofold silence was the song of love.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **XLI Through Death To Love**

Like labour-laden moonclouds faint to flee  
From winds that sweep the winter-bitten wold,--  
Like multiform circumfluence manifold  
Of night's flood-tide,--like terrors that agree  
Of hoarse-tongued fire and inarticulate sea,--  
Even such, within some glass dimm'd by our breath,  
Our hearts discern wild images of Death,  
Shadows and shoals that edge eternity.

Howbeit athwart Death's imminent shade doth soar  
One Power, than flow of stream or flight of dove  
Sweeter to glide around, to brood above.  
Tell me, my heart,--what angel-greeted door  
Or threshold of wing-winnow'd threshing-floor  
Hath guest fire-fledg'd as thine, whose lord is Love?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

## **XXIX Heart's Heaven**

Sometimes she is a child within mine arms,  
    Cowering beneath dark wings that love must chase,--  
    With still tears showering and averted face,  
Inexplicably fill'd with faint alarms:  
And oft from mine own spirit's hurtling harms  
    I crave the refuge of her deep embrace,--  
    Against all ills the fortified strong place  
And sweet reserve of sovereign counter-charms.

And Love, our light at night and shade at noon,  
    Lulls us to rest with songs, and turns away  
    All shafts of shelterless tumultuous day.  
Like the moon's growth, his face gleams through his tune;  
And as soft waters warble to the moon,  
    Our answering spirits chime one roundelay.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

### **XXXVI Life-In-Love**

Not in thy body is thy life at all  
    But in this lady's lips and hands and eyes;  
    Through these she yields thee life that vivifies  
What else were sorrow's servant and death's thrall.  
Look on thyself without her, and recall  
    The waste remembrance and forlorn surmise  
    That liv'd but in a dead-drawn breath of sighs  
O'er vanish'd hours and hours eventual.

Even so much life hath the poor tress of hair  
    Which, stor'd apart, is all love hath to show  
    For heart-beats and for fire-heats long ago;  
Even so much life endures unknown, even where,  
    'Mid change the changeless night environeth,  
    Lies all that golden hair undimm'd in death.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti