Classic Poetry Series

Edna St. Vincent Millay

- poems -

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Edna St. Vincent Millay (February 22, 1892 – October 19, 1950)

Edna St. Vincent Millay was an American lyrical poet, playwright and feminist. She received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, and was known for her activism and her many love affairs. She used the pseudonym Nancy Boyd for her prose work.

Early Life

Millay was born in Rockland, Maine to Cora Lounella, a nurse, and Henry Tollman Millay, a schoolteacher who would later become superintendent of schools. Her middle name derives from St. Vincent's Hospital in New York, where her uncle's life had been saved just before her birth. The family's house was "between the mountains and the sea where baskets of apples and drying herbs on the porch mingled their scents with those of the neighboring pine woods." In 1904, Cora officially divorced Millay's father for financial irresponsibility, but they had already been separated for some years. Cora and her three daughters, Edna (who called herself "Vincent"), Norma, and Kathleen, moved from town to town, living in poverty. Cora travelled with a trunk full of classic literature, including Shakespeare and Milton, which she read to her children. The family settled in a small house on the property of Cora's aunt in Camden, Maine, where Millay would write the first of the poems that would bring her literary fame.

The three sisters were independent and spoke their minds, which did not always sit well with the authority figures in their lives. Millay's grade school principal, offended by her frank attitudes, refused to call her Vincent. Instead, he called her by any woman's name that started with a V. At Camden High School, Millay began developing her literary talents, starting at the school's literary magazine, The Megunticook. At 14 she won the St. Nicholas Gold Badge for poetry, and by 15 she had published her poetry in the popular children's magazine St. Nicholas, the Camden Herald, and the high-profile anthology Current Literature. While at school she had several relationships with women, including Edith Wynne Matthison, who would go on to become an actress in silent films. Millay entered Vassar College at 21, later than usual, and had relationships with several fellow students during her time there.

Millay’s fame began in 1912 when she entered her poem “Renascence” in a poetry contest in The Lyric Year. The poem was widely considered the best submission and when it was ultimately awarded fourth place, it created a scandal which brought Millay publicity. The first-place winner Orrick Johns was among those who felt that “Renascence” was the best poem, and stated that “the award was as much an embarrassment to me as a triumph." A second-prize winner offered Millay his $250 prize money. In the immediate

aftermath of the Lyric Year controversy, Caroline B. Dow heard Millay reciting her poetry and playing the piano at the Whitehall Inn in Camden, Maine, and was so impressed that she offered to pay for Millay's education at Vassar College. Millay moved to New York City after her graduation in 1917.

Career

Millay lived in a number of places in Greenwich Village, including a house owned by the Cherry Lane Theatre, renowned for being the smallest in New York City. The critic Floyd Dell wrote that the red-haired and beautiful Millay was "a frivolous young woman, with a brand-new pair of dancing slippers and a mouth like a valentine." Millay described her life in New York as "very, very poor and very, very merry." Openly bisexual, she counted among her close friends the writers Witter Bynner, Arthur Davison Ficke, and Susan Glaspell, as well as Floyd Dell and the critic Edmund Wilson, both of whom proposed marriage to her and were refused.

Her 1920 collection A Few Figs From Thistles drew controversy for its novel exploration of female sexuality and feminism. In 1919 she wrote the anti-war play Aria da Capo which starred her sister Norma Millay at the Provincetown Playhouse in New York City. Millay won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1923 for "The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver"; she was the third woman to win the poetry prize.

In 1923 she married 43-year-old Eugen Jan Boissevain (1880–1949), the widower of the labor lawyer and war correspondent Inez Milholland, a political icon Millay had met during her time at Vassar. A self-proclaimed feminist, Boissevain supported her career and took primary care of domestic responsibilities. Both Millay and Boissevain had other lovers throughout their twenty-six-year marriage. Millay's most significant such relationship during this time was with the poet George Dillon, who was fourteen years her junior, and for whom she wrote a number of her sonnets.

In 1925, Boissevain and Millay bought Steepletop near Austerlitz, New York, which had been a 635-acre (257 ha) blueberry farm. The couple built a barn (from a Sears Roebuck kit), and then a writing cabin and a tennis court. Millay grew her own vegetables in a small garden. The couple later bought Ragged Island in Casco Bay, Maine, as a summer retreat.

Millay's reputation was damaged by the poetry she wrote about the Allied war effort during World War II. Merle Rubin noted: "She seems to have caught more flak from the literary critics for supporting democracy than Ezra Pound did for championing fascism." In the New York Times Millay mourned the Czechoslovak city of Lidice, the site of a Nazi massacre:

> The whole world holds in its arms today
>
> The murdered village of Lidice,
>
> Like the murdered body of a little child.

In 1943 Millay was the sixth person and the second woman to be awarded the Frost Medal for her lifetime contribution to American poetry. Boissevain died in 1949 of lung cancer, and Millay lived alone for the last year of her life.

Death and Steepletop Legacy

Millay died at her home on October 19, 1950. She had fallen down stairs and was found approximately eight hours after her death. Her physician reported that she had had a heart attack following a coronary occlusion. She was 58 years old.

Millay's sister Norma and her husband, the painter and actor Charles Frederick Ellis, moved to Steepletop after Millay's death. In 1973 they established Millay Colony for the Arts on the seven acres (2.8 ha) around the house and barn. After the death of her husband in 1976, Norma continued to

run the program until her death in 1986. The poet Mary Oliver visited Steepletop and became a close friend of Norma. Oliver eventually lived there for seven years and helped to organize Millay's papers.Mary Oliver herself went on to become a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, greatly inspired by Millay's work. In 2006, the state of New York paid $1.69 million to acquire 230 acres (0.93 km2) of Steepletop, with the intention to add the land to a nearby state forest preserve. The proceeds of the sale were to be used by the Edna St. Vincent Millay Society to restore the farmhouse and grounds and turn it into a museum. Since summer, 2010 the museum has been open to the public. Parts of the grounds of Steepletop, including a Poet's Walk that leads to Millay's grave, are now open to the public year-round. From the final weekend of May through the middle of October each year guided tours of Steepletop and Millay's gardens are available.

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Poetry Collections

Renascence, and Other Poems (title poem first published under name E. Vincent Millay in The Lyric Year, 1912; collection includes God's World), M. Kennerley, 1917. reprinted, Books for Libraries Press, 1972.

A Few Figs From Thistles: Poems and Four Sonnets, F. Shay, 1920, second [enlarged] edition published as A Few Figs From Thistles: Poems and Sonnets,F. Shay, 1921.

Second April (poems; includes Spring, Ode to Silence,and The Beanstalk), M. Kennerley, 1921. reprinted, Harper, 1935

The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver, F. Shay, 1922, reprinted as The Harp-Weaver, in The Harp-Weaver, and Other Poems (includes The Concert, Euclid Alone has Looked on Beauty Bare, and Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree), Harper, 1923.

Poems, M. Secker, 1923.

(Under pseudonym Nancy Boyd) Distressing Dialogues, preface by Edna St. Vincent Millay, Harper, 1924.

The Buck in the Snow, and Other Poems (includes The Buck in the Snow [also see below] and On Hearing a Symphony of Beethoven), Harper, 1928.

Fatal Interview (sonnets), Harper, 1931.

Wine from These Grapes (poems; includes Epitaph for the Race of Man and In the Grave No Flower), Harper, 1934.

(Translator with George Dillon; and author of introduction) Charles Baudelaire, Flowers of Evil, Harper, 1936.

Conversation at Midnight (narrative poem), Harper, 1937.

Huntsman, What Quarry? (poems), Harper, 1939.

There Are No Islands, Any More: Lines Written in Passion and in Deep Concern for England, France, and My Own Country, Harper, 1940.

Make Bright the Arrows: 1940 Notebook (poems), Harper, 1940.

The Murder of Lidice (poem), Harper, 1942.

Second April [and] The Buck in the Snow, introduction by William Rose Benét, Harper, 1950.

Mine the Harvest (poems), edited by Norma Millay, Harper, 1954.

Take Up the Song, Harper, 1986, reprinted with music by William Albright as

Take Up the Song: Soprano Solo, Mixed Chorus, and Piano, Henmar Press, 1994.

Selected Poems/The Centenary Edition, edited by Colin Falck, Harper Perennial, 1992.

Plays

(And director) Aria da capo (one-act play in verse; first produced in Greenwich Village, NY, December 5, 1919), M. Kennerley, 1921 (also see below).

The Lamp and the Bell (five-act play; first produced June 18, 1921), F. Shay, 1921 (also see below).

Two Slatterns and a King: A Moral Interlude (play), Stewart Kidd, 1921.

Three Plays (contains Two Slatterns and a King, Aria da capo, and The Lamp and the Bell), Harper, 1926.

(Author of libretto) The King's Henchman (three-act play; first produced in New York, February 17, 1927), Harper, 1927.

The Princess Marries the Page (one-act play), Harper, 1932.

Letters

Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay, edited by Allan Ross Macdougall, Harper, 1952.

[Four Sonnets (1922)]

I1.
Love, though for this you riddle me with darts,
.
And drag me at your chariot till I die, --
.
Oh, heavy prince! Oh, panderer of hearts! --
.
Yet hear me tell how in their throats they lie
.
Who shout you mighty: thick about my hair,
.
Day in, day out, your ominous arrows purr,
.
Who still am free, unto no querulous care
.
A fool, and in no temple worshiper!
.
I, that have bared me to your quiver's fire,
.
Lifted my face into its puny rain,
.
Do wreathe you Impotent to Evoke Desire
.
As you are Powerless to Elicit Pain!
.
(Now will the god, for blasphemy so brave,
.
Punish me, surely, with the shaft I crave!) II2.
I think I should have loved you presently,
.
And given in earnest words I flung in jest;
.
And lifted honest eyes for you to see,
.
And caught your hand against my cheek and breast;
.
And all my pretty follies flung aside
.
That won you to me, and beneath your gaze,
.
Naked of reticence and shorn of pride,
.
Spread like a chart my little wicked ways.
.
I, that had been to you, had you remained,
.

But one more waking from a recurrent dream,

Cherish no less the certain stakes I gained,

And walk your memory's halls, austere, supreme,

A ghost in marble of a girl you knew

Who would have loved you in a day or two. III3.
Oh, think not I am faithful to a vow!

Faithless am I save to love's self alone.

Were you not lovely I would leave you now:

After the feet of beauty fly my own.

Were you not still my hunger's rarest food,

And water ever to my wildest thirst,

I would desert you -- think not but I would! --

And seek another as I sought you first.

But you are mobile as the veering air,

And all your charms more changeful than the tide,

Wherefore to be inconstant is no care:

I have but to continue at your side.

So wanton, light and false, my love, are you,

I am most faithless when I most am true. IV4.
I shall forget you presently, my dear,

So make the most of this, your little day,

Your little month, your little half a year,

Ere I forget, or die, or move away,

.
And we are done forever; by and by
.
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
.
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
.
I will protest you with my favorite vow.
.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
.
And vows were not so brittle as they are,
.
But so it is, and nature has contrived
.
To struggle on without a break thus far, --
.
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
.
Is idle, biologically speaking.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

A Visit To The Asylum

Once from a big, big building,
When I was small, small,
The queer folk in the windows
Would smile at me and call.

And in the hard wee gardens
Such pleasant men would hoe:
"Sir, may we touch the little girl's hair!"—
It was so red, you know.

They cut me coloured asters
With shears so sharp and neat,
They brought me grapes and plums and pears
And pretty cakes to eat.

And out of all the windows,
No matter where we went,
The merriest eyes would follow me
And make me compliment.

There were a thousand windows,
All latticed up and down.
And up to all the windows,
When we went back to town,

The queer folk put their faces,
As gentle as could be;
"Come again, little girl!" they called, and I
Called back, "You come see me!"

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Afternoon on a Hill

I will be the gladdest thing
   Under the sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
   And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds
   With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bow down the grass,
   And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show
   Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,
   And then start down!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Alms

My heart is what it was before,
A house where people come and go;
But it is winter with your love,
The sashes are beset with snow.

I light the lamp and lay the cloth,
I blow the coals to blaze again;
But it is winter with your love,
The frost is thick upon the pane..

I know a winter when it comes:
The leaves are listless on the boughs;
I watched your love a little while,
And brought my plants into the house.

I water them and turn them south,
I snap the dead brown from the stem;
But it is winter with your love,
I only tend and water them.

There was a time I stood and watched
The small, ill-natured sparrows' fray;
I loved the beggar that I fed,
I cared for what he had to say,

I stood and watched him out of sight:
Today I reach around the door
And set a bowl upon the step;
My heart is what it was before,

But it is winter with your love;
I scatter crumbs upon the sill,
And close the window, —and the birds
May take or leave them, as they will.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

An Ancient Gesture

I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:
Penelope did this too.
And more than once: you can't keep weaving all day
And undoing it all through the night;
Your arms get tired, and the back of your neck gets tight;
And along towards morning, when you think it will never be light,
And your husband has been gone, and you don't know where, for years.
Suddenly you burst into tears;
There is simply nothing else to do.

And I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:
This is an ancient gesture, authentic, antique,
In the very best tradition, classic, Greek;
Ulysses did this too.
But only as a gesture,—a gesture which implied
To the assembled throng that he was much too moved to speak.
He learned it from Penelope...
Penelope, who really cried.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

And do you think that love itself

And do you think that love itself,
Living in such an ugly house,
Can prosper long?
We meet and part;
Our talk is all of heres and nows,
Our conduct likewise; in no act
Is any future, any past;
Under our sly, unspoken pact,
I KNOW with whom I saw you last,
But I say nothing; and you know
At six-fifteen to whom I go—
Can even love be treated so?

I KNOW, but I do not insist,
Having stealth and tact, thought not enough,
What hour your eye is on your wrist.

No wild appeal, no mild rebuff
Deflates the hour, leaves the wine flat—

Yet if YOU drop the picked-up book
To intercept my clockward look—
Tell me, can love go on like that?

Even the bored, insulted heart,
That signed so long and tight a lease,
Can BREAK it CONTRACT, slump in peace.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

And you as well must die, belovèd dust

And you as well must die, belovèd dust,
And all your beauty stand you in no stead;
This flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,
This body of flame and steel, before the gust
Of Death, or under his autumnal frost,
Shall be as any leaf, be no less dead
Than the first leaf that fell,this wonder fled,
Altered, estranged, disintegrated, lost.
Nor shall my love avail you in your hour.
In spite of all my love, you will arise
Upon that day and wander down the air
Obscurely as the unattended flower,
It mattering not how beautiful you were,
Or how belovèd above all else that dies.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Apostrophe To Man

(On reflecting that the world
 is ready to go to war again)

Detestable race, continue to expunge yourself, die out.
Breed faster, crowd, encroach, sing hymns, build
        bombing airplanes;
Make speeches, unveil statues, issue bonds, parade;
Convert again into explosives the bewildered ammonia
and the distracted cellulose;
Convert again into putrescent matter drawing flies
The hopeful bodies of the young; exhort,
Pray, pull long faces, be earnest,
be all but overcome, be photographed;
Confer, perfect your formulae, commercialize
Bacateria harmful to human tissue,
Put death on the market;
Breed, crowd, encroach,
expand, expunge yourself, die out,
Homo called sapiens.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Ashes Of Life

Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike;
Eat I must, and sleep I will,—and would that night were here!
But ah!—to lie awake and hear the slow hours strike!
Would that it were day again!—with twilight near!

Love has gone and left me and I don't know what to do;
This or that or what you will is all the same to me;
But all the things that I begin I leave before I'm through,—
There's little use in anything as far as I can see.

Love has gone and left me,—and the neighbors knock and borrow,
And life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse,—
And to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
There's this little street and this little house.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Assault

I

I had forgotten how the frogs must sound
After a year of silence, else I think
I should not so have ventured forth alone
At dusk upon this unfrequented road.

II

I am waylaid by Beauty. Who will walk
Between me and the crying of the frogs?
Oh, savage Beauty, suffer me to pass,
That am a timid woman, on her way
From one house to another!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Autumn Daybreak

Cold wind of autumn, blowing loud
At dawn, a fortnight overdue,
Jostling the doors, and tearing through
My bedroom to rejoin the cloud,
I know—for I can hear the hiss
And scrape of leaves along the floor—
How may boughs, lashed bare by this,
Will rake the cluttered sky once more.
Tardy, and somewhat south of east,
The sun will rise at length, made known
More by the meagre light increased
Than by a disk in splendour shown;
When, having but to turn my head,
Through the stripped maple I shall see,
Bleak and remembered, patched with red,
The hill all summer hid from me.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Being Young And Green

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

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

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Blight

Hard seeds of hate I planted
   That should by now be grown,—
Rough stalks, and from thick stamens
   A poisonous pollen blown,
And odors rank, unbreathable,
   From dark corollas thrown!

At dawn from my damp garden
   I shook the chilly dew;
The thin boughs locked behind me
   That sprang to let me through;
The blossoms slept,—I sought a place
   Where nothing lovely grew.

And there, when day was breaking,
   I knelt and looked around:
The light was near, the silence
   Was palpitant with sound;
I drew my hate from out my breast

   And thrust it in the ground.

Oh, ye so fiercely tended,
   Ye little seeds of hate!
I bent above your growing
   Early and noon and late,
Yet are ye drooped and pitiful,—
   I cannot rear ye straight!

The sun seeks out my garden,
   No nook is left in shade,
No mist nor mold nor mildew
   Endures on any blade,
Sweet rain slants under every bough:
   Ye falter, and ye fade.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Bluebeard

This door you might not open, and you did;
   So enter now, and see for what slight thing
You are betrayed... Here is no treasure hid,
   No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring
The sought-for truth, no heads of women slain
   For greed like yours, no writhings of distress,
But only what you see... Look yet again—
   An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless.
Yet this alone out of my life I kept
   Unto myself, lest any know me quite;
And you did so profane me when you crept
   Unto the threshold of this room to-night
That I must never more behold your face.
   This now is yours. I seek another place.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Burial

Mine is a body that should die at sea!
And have for a grave, instead of a grave
Six feet deep and the length of me,
All the water that is under the wave!
And terrible fishes to seize my flesh,
Such as a living man might fear,
And eat me while I am firm and fresh,—
Not wait till I've been dead for a year!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Chorus

Give away her gowns,
Give away her shoes;
She has no more use
For her fragrant gowns;
Take them all down,
Blue, green, blue,
Lilac, pink, blue,
From their padded hangers;
She will dance no more
In her narrow shoes;
Sweep her narrow shoes
From the closet floor.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

City Trees

The trees along this city street,
Save for the traffic and the trains,
Would make a sound as thin and sweet
As trees in country lanes.

And people standing in their shade
Out of a shower, undoubtedly
Would hear such music as is made
Upon a country tree.

Oh, little leaves that are so dumb
Against the shrieking city air,
I watch you when the wind has come,—
I know what sound is there.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Conscientious Objector

I shall die, but
that is all that I shall do for Death.
I hear him leading his horse out of the stall;
I hear the clatter on the barn-floor.
He is in haste; he has business in Cuba,
business in the Balkans, many calls to make this morning.
But I will not hold the bridle
while he clinches the girth.
And he may mount by himself:
I will not give him a leg up.

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip,
I will not tell him which way the fox ran.
With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where
the black boy hides in the swamp.
I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death;
I am not on his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabout of my friends
nor of my enemies either.
Though he promise me much,
I will not map him the route to any man's door.
Am I a spy in the land of the living,
that I should deliver men to Death?
Brother, the password and the plans of our city
are safe with me; never through me Shall you be overcome.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Counting-Out Rhyme

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

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

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

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

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Daphne

Why do you follow me?—
Any moment I can be
Nothing but a laurel-tree.

Any moment of the chase
I can leave you in my place
A pink bough for your embrace.

Yet if over hill and hollow
Still it is your will to follow,
I am off;—to heel, Apollo!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Departure

It's little I care what path I take,
And where it leads it's little I care;
But out of this house, lest my heart break,
I must go, and off somewhere.

It's little I know what's in my heart,
What's in my mind it's little I know,
But there's that in me must up and start,
And it's little I care where my feet go.

I wish I could walk for a day and a night,
And find me at dawn in a desolate place
With never the rut of a road in sight,
Nor the roof of a house, nor the eyes of a face.

I wish I could walk till my blood should spout,
And drop me, never to stir again,
On a shore that is wide, for the tide is out,
And the weedy rocks are bare to the rain.

But dump or dock, where the path I take
Brings up, it's little enough I care:
And it's little I'd mind the fuss they'll make,
Huddled dead in a ditch somewhere.

'Is something the matter, dear,' she said,
'That you sit at your work so silently?'
'No, mother, no, 'twas a knot in my thread.
There goes the kettle, I'll make the tea.'

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Dirge

Boys and girls that held her dear,
Do your weeping now;
All you loved of her lies here.

Brought to earth the arrogant brow,
And the withering tongue
Chastened; do your weeping now.

Sing whatever songs are sung,
Wind whatever wreath,
For a playmate perished young,

For a spirit spent in death.
Boys and girls that held her dear,
All you loved of her lies here.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Dirge Without Music

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

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

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

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

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Doubt No More That Oberon

Doubt no more that Oberon—
Never doubt that Pan
Lived, and played a reed, and ran
After nymphs in a dark forest,
In the merry, credulous days,—
Lived, and led a fairy band
Over the indulgent land!
Ah, for in this dourest, sorest
Age man's eye has looked upon,
Death to fauns and death to fays,
Still the dog-wood dares to raise—
Healthy tree, with trunk and root—
Ivory bowls that bear no fruit,
And the starlings and the jays—
Birds that cannot even sing—
Dare to come again in spring!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Ebb

I know what my heart is like
Since your love died:
It is like a hollow ledge
Holding a little pool
Left there by the tide,
A little tepid pool,
Drying inward from the edge.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Eel-Grass

No matter what I say,
All that I really love
Is the rain that flattens on the bay,
And the eel-grass in the cove;
The jingle-shells that lie and bleach
At the tide-line, and the trace
Of higher tides along the beach:
Nothing in this place.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Elegy

Let them bury your big eyes
In the secret earth securely,
Your thin fingers, and your fair,
Soft, indefinite-colored hair,—
All of these in some way, surely,
From the secret earth shall rise;
Not for these I sit and stare,
Broken and bereft completely;
Your young flesh that sat so neatly
On your little bones will sweetly
Blossom in the air.

But your voice,—never the rushing
Of a river underground,
Not the rising of the wind
In the trees before the rain,
Not the woodcock's watery call,
Not the note the white-throat utters,
Not the feet of children pushing
Yellow leaves along the gutters
In the blue and bitter fall,
Shall content my musing mind
For the beauty of that sound
That in no new way at all
Ever will be heard again.

Sweetly through the sappy stalk
Of the vigorous weed,
Holding all it held before,
Cherished by the faithful sun,
On and on eternally
Shall your altered fluid run,
Bud and bloom and go to seed;
But your singing days are done;
But the music of your talk
Never shall the chemistry
Of the secret earth restore.
All your lovely words are spoken.
Once the ivory box is broken,
Beats the golden bird no more.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Elegy Before Death

There will be rose and rhododendron
When you are dead and under ground;
Still will be heard from white syringas
Heavy with bees, a sunny sound;

Still will the tamaracks be raining
After the rain has ceased, and still
Will there be robins in the stubble,
Brown sheep upon the warm green hill.

Spring will not ail nor autumn falter;
Nothing will know that you are gone,
Saving alone some sullen plough-land
None but yourself sets foot upon;

Saving the may-weed and the pig-weed
Nothing will know that you are dead,—
These, and perhaps a useless wagon
Standing beside some tumbled shed.

Oh, there will pass with your great passing
Little of beauty not your own,—
Only the light from common water,
Only the grace from simple stone!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Epitaph

Heap not on this mound
Roses that she loved so well:
Why bewilder her with roses,
That she cannot see or smell?

She is happy where she lies
With the dust upon her eyes.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Euclid Alone

Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of Beauty hold their peace,
And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.
O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Exiled

Searching my heart for its true sorrow,
This is the thing I find to be:
That I am weary of words and people,
Sick of the city, wanting the sea;

Wanting the sticky, salty sweetness
Of the strong wind and shattered spray;
Wanting the loud sound and the soft sound
Of the big surf that breaks all day.

Always before about my dooryard,
Marking the reach of the winter sea,
Rooted in sand and dragging drift-wood,
Straggled the purple wild sweet-pea;

Always I climbed the wave at morning,
Shook the sand from my shoes at night,
That now am caught beneath great buildings,
Stricken with noise, confused with light.

If I could hear the green piles groaning
Under the windy wooden piers,
See once again the bobbing barrels,
And the black sticks that fence the weirs,

If I could see the weedy mussels
Crusting the wrecked and rotting hulls,
Hear once again the hungry crying
Overhead, of the wheeling gulls,

Feel once again the shanty straining
Under the turning of the tide,
Fear once again the rising freshet,
Dread the bell in the fog outside,—

I should be happy,—that was happy
All day long on the coast of Maine!
I have a need to hold and handle
Shells and anchors and ships again!

I should be happy, that am happy
Never at all since I came here.
I am too long away from water.
I have a need of water near.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Feast

I drank at every vine.
The last was like the first.
I came upon no wine
So wonderful as thirst.

I gnawed at every root.
I ate of every plant.
I came upon no fruit
So wonderful as want.

Feed the grape and bean
To the vintner and monger:
I will lie down lean
With my thirst and my hunger.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

First Fig

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Fontaine, Je Ne Boirai Pas De Ton Eau!

I know I might have lived in such a way
As to have suffered only pain:
Loving not man nor dog;
Not money, even; feeling
Toothache perhaps, but never more than an hour away
From skill and novocaine;
Making no contacts, dealing with life through Agents, drinking
one cocktail, betting two dollars, wearing raincoats in the
rain.
Betrayed at length by no one but the fog
Whispering to the wing of the plane.

"Fountain," I have cried to that unbubbling well, "I will not
drink of thy water!" Yet I thirst
For a mouthful of—not to swallow, only to rinse my mouth in
—peace.
And while the eyes of the past condemn,
The eyes of the present narrow into assignation. And—
worst—
The young are so old, they are born with their fingers crossed;
I shall get no help from them.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

God's World

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
   Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
   Thy mists that roll and rise!
Thy woods this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,
   But never knew I this;
   Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart, -- Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me, -- let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Grown-up

Was it for this I uttered prayers,
And sobbed and cursed and kicked the stairs,
That now, domestic as a plate,
I should retire at half-past eight?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Here Is A Wound That Never Will Heal, I Know

Here is a wound that never will heal, I know,
Being wrought not of a dearness and a death,
But of a love turned ashes and the breath
Gone out of beauty; never again will grow
The grass on that scarred acre, though I sow
Young seed there yearly and the sky bequeath
Its friendly weathers down, far Underneath
Shall be such bitterness of an old woe.
That April should be shattered by a gust,
That August should be levelled by a rain,
I can endure, and that the lifted dust
Of man should settle to the earth again;
But that a dream can die, will be a thrust
Between my ribs forever of hot pain.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Humoresque

"Heaven bless the babe!" they said.
"What queer books she must have read!"
(Love, by whom I was beguiled,
Grant I may not bear a child.)
"Little does she guess to-day
What the world may be!" they say.
(Snow, drift deep and cover
Till the spring my murdered lover.)

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I do but ask that you be always fair

I do but ask that you be always fair
That I forever may continue kind;
Knowing me what I am, you should not dare
To lapse from beauty ever, nor seek to bind
My alterable mood with lesser cords;
Weeping and such soft matters must invite
To further vagrancy; and bitter words
Chafe soon to irremediable flight,
Wherefore I pray you if you love me dearly,
Less dear to hold me than your own bright charms,
Whence it may fall that until death, or nearly,
I shall not move to struggle from your arms:
Fade if you must,--I would but bid you be
Like the sweet year, doing all things graciously.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I Dreamed I Moved Among The Elysian Fields

I dreamed I moved among the Elysian fields,
In converse with sweet women long since dead;
And out of blossoms which that meadow yields
I wove a garland for your living head.
Danai, that was the vessel for a day
Of golden Jove, I saw, and at her side,
Whom Jove the Bull desired and bore away,
Europa stood, and the Swan's featherless bride.
All these were mortal women, yet all these
Above the ground had had a god for guest;
Freely I walked beside them and at ease,
Addressing them, by them again addressed,
And marvelled nothing, for remembering you,
Wherefore I was among them well I knew.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I Know I Am But Summer To Your Heart

I know I am but summer to your heart,
And not the full four seasons of the year;
And you must welcome from another part
Such noble moods as are not mine, my dear.
No gracious weight of golden fruits to sell
Have I, nor any wise and wintry thing;
And I have loved you all too long and well
To carry still the high sweet breast of Spring.
Wherefore I say: O love, as summer goes,
I must be gone, steal forth with silent drums,
That you may hail anew the bird and rose
When I come back to you, as summer comes.
Else will you seek, at some not distant time,
Even your summer in another clime.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I Know The Face Of Falsehood And Her Tongue

I know the face of Falsehood and her Tongue
Honeyed with unction, Plausible with guile,
Are dear to men, whom count me not among,
That owe their daily credit to her smile;
Such have been succoured out of great distress
By her contriving, if accounts be true:
Their deference now above the board, I guess,
Dishcharges what beneath the board is due.
As for myself, I'd liefer lack her aid
Than eat her presence; let this building fall:
But let me never lift my latch, afraid
To hear her simpering accents in the hall,
Nor force an entrance past mephitic airs
Of stale patchoulie hanging on my stairs.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I Shall Go Back

I shall go back again to the bleak shore
And build a little shanty on the sand
In such a way that the extremest band
Of brittle seaweed shall escape my door
But by a yard or two; and nevermore
Shall I return to take you by the hand.
I shall be gone to what I understand,
And happier than I ever was before.
The love that stood a moment in your eyes,
The words that lay a moment on your tongue,
Are one with all that in a moment dies,
A little under-said and over-sung.
But I shall find the sullen rocks and skies
Unchanged from what they were when I was young.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I, Being Born a Woman and Distressed

I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
To bear your body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.
Think not for this, however, the poor treason
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn wtih pity, -- let me make it plain:
I find this frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

If I Should Learn, In Some Quite Casual Way

IF I should learn, in some quite casual way,
  That you were gone, not to return again—
Read from the back-page of a paper, say,
  Held by a neighbor in a subway train,
How at the corner of this avenue
  And such a street (so are the papers filled)
A hurrying man—who happened to be you—
  At noon to-day had happened to be killed,
I should not cry aloud—I could not cry
  Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place—
I should but watch the station lights rush by
  With a more careful interest on my face,
Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

If Still Your Orchards Bear

Brother, that breathe the August air
Ten thousand years from now,
And smell—if still your orchards bear
Tart apples on the bough—

The early windfall under the tree,
And see the red fruit shine,
I cannot think your thoughts will be
Much different from mine.

Should at that moment the full moon
Step forth upon the hill,
And memories hard to bear at noon,
By moonlight harder still,
Form in the shadow of the trees, —
Things that you could not spare
And live, or so you thought, yet these
All gone, and you still there,

A man no longer what he was,
Nor yet the thing he'd planned,
The chilly apple from the grass
Warmed by your living hand—

I think you will have need of tears;
I think they will not flow;
Supposing in ten thousand years
Men ache, as they do now.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Indifference

I said,—for Love was laggard, O, Love was slow to come,—
"I'll hear his step and know his step when I am warm in
bed;
But I'll never leave my pillow, though there be some
As would let him in—and take him in with tears!" I said.
I lay,—for Love was laggard, O, he came not until dawn,—
I lay and listened for his step and could not get to sleep;
And he found me at my window with my big cloak on,
All sorry with the tears some folks might weep!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Inland

People that build their houses inland,
People that buy a plot of ground
Shaped like a house, and build a house there,
Far from the sea-board, far from the sound

Of water sucking the hollow ledges,
Tons of water striking the shore,—
What do they long for, as I long for
One salt smell of the sea once more?

People the waves have not awakened,
Spanking the boats at the harbour's head,
What do they long for, as I long for,—
Starting up in my inland bed,

Beating the narrow walls, and finding
Neither a window nor a door,
Screaming to God for death by drowning,—
One salt taste of the sea once more?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Intention To Escape From Him

I think I will learn some beautiful language, useless for commercial
Purposes, work hard at that.
I think I will learn the Latin name of every songbird, not only in
America but wherever they sing.
(Shun meditation, though; invite the controversial:
Is the world flat? Do bats eat cats?) By digging hard I might
deflect that river, my mind, that uncontrollable thing,
Turgid and yellow, srong to overflow its banks in spring,
carrying away bridges
A bed of pebbles now, through which there trickles one clear
narrow stream, following a course henceforth nefast—

Dig, dig; and if I come to ledges, blast.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Interim

The room is full of you!—As I came in
And closed the door behind me, all at once
A something in the air, intangible,
Yet stiff with meaning, struck my senses sick!—

Sharp, unfamiliar odors have destroyed
Each other room's dear personality.
The heavy scent of damp, funereal flowers,—
The very essence, hush-distilled, of Death—
Has strangled that habitual breath of home
Whose expiration leaves all houses dead;
And wheresoe'er I look is hideous change.
Save here. Here 'twas as if a weed-choked gate
Had opened at my touch, and I had stepped
Into some long-forgot, enchanted, strange,
Sweet garden of a thousand years ago
And suddenly thought, "I have been here before!"

You are not here. I know that you are gone,
And will not ever enter here again.
And yet it seems to me, if I should speak,
Your silent step must wake across the hall;
If I should turn my head, that your sweet eyes
Would kiss me from the door.—So short a time
To teach my life its transposition to
This difficult and unaccustomed key!—
The room is as you left it; your last touch—
A thoughtless pressure, knowing not itself
As saintly—hallows now each simple thing;
Hallows and glorifies, and glows between
The dust's grey fingers like a shielded light.

There is your book, just as you laid it down,
Face to the table,—I cannot believe
That you are gone!—Just then it seemed to me
You must be here. I almost laughed to think
How like reality the dream had been;
Yet knew before I laughed, and so was still.
That book, outspread, just as you laid it down!
Perhaps you thought, "I wonder what comes next,
And whether this or this will be the end";
So rose, and left it, thinking to return.

Perhaps that chair, when you arose and passed
Out of the room, rocked silently a while
Ere it again was still. When you were gone
Forever from the room, perhaps that chair,
Stirred by your movement, rocked a little while,
Silently, to and fro...

And here are the last words your fingers wrote,
Scrawled in broad characters across a page

In this brown book I gave you. Here your hand,
Guiding your rapid pen, moved up and down.
Here with a looping knot you crossed a "t,"
And here another like it, just beyond
These two eccentric "e's." You were so small,
And wrote so brave a hand!
How strange it seems
That of all words these are the words you chose!
And yet a simple choice; you did not know
You would not write again. If you had known—
But then, it does not matter,—and indeed
If you had known there was so little time
You would have dropped your pen and come to me
And this page would be empty, and some phrase
Other than this would hold my wonder now.
Yet, since you could not know, and it befell
That these are the last words your fingers wrote,
There is a dignity some might not see
In this, "I picked the first sweet-pea to-day."
To-day! Was there an opening bud beside it
You left until to-morrow?—O my love,
The things that withered,—and you came not back
That day you filled this circle of my arms
That now is empty. (O my empty life!)
That day—that day you picked the first sweet-pea,—
And brought it in to show me! I recall
With terrible distinctness how the smell
Of your cool gardens drifted in with you.
I know, you held it up for me to see
And flushed because I looked not at the flower,
But at your face; and when behind my look
You saw such unmistakable intent
You laughed and brushed your flower against my lips.
(You were the fairest thing God ever made,
I think.) And then your hands above my heart
Drew down its stem into a fastening,
And while your head was bent I kissed your hair.
I wonder if you knew. (Beloved hands!
Somehow I cannot seem to see them still.
Somehow I cannot seem to see the dust
In your bright hair.) What is the need of Heaven
When earth can be so sweet?—If only God
Had let us love,—and show the world the way!
Strange cancellings must ink th' eternal books
When love-crossed-out will bring the answer right!
That first sweet-pea! I wonder where it is.
It seems to me I laid it down somewhere,
And yet,—I am not sure. I am not sure,
Even, if it was white or pink; for then
'Twas much like any other flower to me
Save that it was the first. I did not know
Then, that it was the last. If I had known—

But then, it does not matter. Strange how few,
After all's said and done, the things that are
Of moment.
    Few indeed! When I can make
Of ten small words a rope to hang the world!
"I had you and I have you now no more."
There, there it dangles,—where's the little truth
That can for long keep footing under that
When its slack syllables tighten to a thought?
Here, let me write it down! I wish to see
Just how a thing like that will look on paper!

"I had you and I have you now no more."

O little words, how can you run so straight
Across the page, beneath the weight you bear?
How can you fall apart, whom such a theme
Has bound together, and hereafter aid
In trivial expression, that have been
So hideously dignified?—Would God
That tearing you apart would tear the thread
I strung you on! Would God—O God, my mind
Stretches asunder on this merciless rack
Of imagery! O, let me sleep a while!
Would I could sleep, and wake to find me back
In that sweet summer afternoon with you.
Summer? Tis summer still by the calendar!
How easily could God, if He so willed,
Set back the world a little turn or two!
Correct its griefs, and bring its joys again!

We were so wholly one I had not thought
That we could die apart. I had not thought
That I could move,—and you be stiff and still!
That I could speak,—and you perforce be dumb!
I think our heart-strings were, like warp and woof
In some firm fabric, woven in and out;
Your golden filaments in fair design
Across my duller fibre. And to-day
The shining strip is rent; the exquisite
Fine pattern is destroyed; part of your heart
Aches in my breast; part of my heart lies chilled
In the damp earth with you. I have been tom
In two, and suffer for the rest of me.
What is my life to me? And what am I
To life,—a ship whose star has guttered out?
A Fear that in the deep night starts awake
Perpetually, to find its senses strained
Against the taut strings of the quivering air,
Awaiting the return of some dread chord?

Dark, Dark, is all I find for metaphor;

All else were contrast,—save that contrast's wall
Is down, and all opposed things flow together
Into a vast monotony, where night
And day, and frost and thaw, and death and life,
Are synonyms. What now—what now to me
Are all the jabbering birds and foolish flowers
That clutter up the world? You were my song!
Now, let discord scream! You were my flower!
Now let the world grow weeds! For I shall not
Plant things above your grave—(the common balm
Of the conventional woe for its own wound!)
Amid sensations rendered negative
By your elimination stands to-day,
Certain, unmixed, the element of grief;
I sorrow; and I shall not mock my truth
With travesties of suffering, nor seek
To effigy its incorporeal bulk
In little wry-faced images of woe.

I cannot call you back; and I desire
No utterance of my immaterial voice.
I cannot even turn my face this way
Or that, and say, "My face is turned to you";
I know not where you are, I do not know
If Heaven hold you or if earth transmute,
Body and soul, you into earth again;
But this I know:—not for one second's space
Shall I insult my sight with visionings
Such as the credulous crowd so eager-eyed
Beholds, self-conjured, in the empty air.
Let the world wail! Let drip its easy tears!
My sorrow shall be dumb!

—What do I say?
God! God!—God pity me! Am I gone mad
That I should spit upon a rosary?
Am I become so shrunken? Would to God
I too might feel that frenzied faith whose touch
Makes temporal the most enduring grief;
Though it must walk a while, as is its wont,
With wild lamenting! Would I too might weep
Where weeps the world and hangs its piteous wreaths
For its new dead! Not Truth, but Faith, it is
That keeps the world alive. If all at once
Faith were to slacken,—that unconscious faith
Which must, I know, yet be the corner-stone
Of all believing,—birds now flying fearless
Across would drop in terror to the earth;
Fishes would drown; and the all-governing reins
Would tangle in the frantic hands of God
And the worlds gallop headlong to destruction!

O God, I see it now, and my sick brain
Staggers and swoons! How often over me
Flashes this breathlessness of sudden sight
In which I see the universe unrolled
Before me like a scroll and read thereon
Chaos and Doom, where helpless planets whirl
Dizzily round and round and round and round,
Like tops across a table, gathering speed
With every spin, to waver on the edge
One instant—looking over—and the next
To shudder and lurch forward out of sight—

* * * * * * *

Ah, I am worn out—I am wearied out—
It is too much—I am but flesh and blood,
And I must sleep. Though you were dead again,
I am but flesh and blood and I must sleep.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Invocation To The Muses

Read by the poet at The Public Ceremonial of The Naional Institute
of Arts and Letters at Carnegie Hall, New York, January 18th, 1941.

Great Muse, that from this hall absent for long
Hast never been,
Great Muse of Song,
Colossal Muse of mighty Melody,
Vocal Calliope,
With thine august and contrapuntal brow
And thy vast throat builded for Harmony,
For the strict monumental pure design,
And the melodic line:
Be thou tonight with all beneath these rafters—be with me.
If I address thee in archaic style—
Words obsolete, words obsolescent,
It is that for a little while
The heart must, oh indeed must from this angry and out-rageous present
Itself withdraw
Into some past in which most crooked Evil,
Although quite certainly conceived and born, was not as yet the Law.

Archaic, or obsolescent at the least,
Be thy grave speaking and the careful words of thy clear song,
For the time wrongs us, and the words most common to our speech today
Salute and welcome to the feast
Conspicuous Evil— or against him all day long
Cry out, telling of ugly deeds and most uncommon wrong.

Be thou tonight with all beneath these rafters—be with me
But oh, be more with those who are not free.
Who, herded into prison camps all shame must suffer and all outrage see.
Where music is not played nor sung,
Though the great voice be there, no sound from the dry throat across the thickened tongue
Comes forth; nor has he heart for it.
Beauty in all things—no, we cannot hope for that; but some place set apart for it.
Here it may dwell;
And with your aid, Melpomene
And all thy sister-muses (for ye are, I think, daughters of Memory)
Within the tortured mind as well.

Reaped are those fields with dragon's-teeth so lately sown;
Many the heaped men dying there - so close, hip touches thigh; yet each man dies alone.
Music, what overtone
For the soft ultimate sigh or the unheeded groan
Hast thou—to make death decent, where men slip
Down blood to death, no service of grieved heart or ritual lip
Transferring what was recently a man and still is warm—
Transferring his obedient limbs into the shallow grave where not again a friend shall greet him,

Nor hatred do him harm . . .
Nor true love run to meet him?

In the last hours of him who lies untended
On a cold field at night, and sees the hard bright stars
Above his upturned face, and says aloud "How strange . . . my life is ended."—
If in the past he loved great music much, and knew it well,
Let not his lapsing mind be teased by well-beloved but ill- remembered bars —
Let the full symphony across the blood-soaked field
By him be heard, most pure in every part,
The lonely horror of whose painful death is thus repealed,
Who dies with quiet tears upon his upturned face, making to glow with softness the hard stars.

And bring to those who knew great poetry well
Page after page that they have loved but have not learned by heart!
We who in comfort to well-lighted shelves
Can turn for all the poets ever wrote,
Beseech you: Bear to those
Who love high art no less than we ourselves,
Those who lie wounded, those who in prison cast
Strive to recall, to ease them, some great ode, and every stanza save the last.

Recall—oh, in the dark, restore them
The unremembered lines; make bright the page before them!
Page after page present to these,
In prison concentrated, watched by barbs of bayonet and wire,
Give ye to them their hearts' intense desire—
The words of Shelley, Virgil, Sophocles.

And thou, O lovely and not sad,
Euterpe, be thou in this hall tonight!
Bid us remember all we ever had
Of sweet and gay delight—
We who are free,
But cannot quite be glad,
Thinking of huge, abrupt disaster brought
Upon so many of our kind
Who treasure as do we the vivid look on the unfrightened face,
The careless happy stride from place to place,
And the unbounded regions of untrammelled thought
Open as interstellar space
To the exploring and excited mind.

O Muses, O immortal Nine!—
Or do ye languish? Can ye die?
Must all go under?—
How shall we heal without your help a world
By these wild horses torn asunder?
How shall we build anew? — How start again?
How cure, how even moderate this pain
Without you, and you strong?

And if ye sleep, then waken!
And if ye sicken and do plan to die,
Do not that now!

Hear us, in what sharp need we cry!
For we have help nowhere
If not in you!
Pity can much, and so a mighty mind, but cannot all things do!—
By you forsaken,
We shall be scattered, we shall be overtaken!
Oh, come! Renew in us the ancient wonder,
The grace of life, its courage, and its joy!
Weave us those garlands nothing can destroy!
Come! with your radiant eyes! — with your throats of thunder!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Journey

Ah, could I lay me down in this long grass
And close my eyes, and let the quiet wind
Blow over me—I am so tired, so tired
Of passing pleasant places! All my life,
Following Care along the dusty road,
Have I looked back at loveliness and sighed;
Yet at my hand an unrelenting hand
Tugged ever, and I passed. All my life long
Over my shoulder have I looked at peace;
And now I fain would lie in this long grass
And close my eyes.
Yet onward!
Cat birds call
Through the long afternoon, and creeks at dusk
Are guttural. Whip-poor-wills wake and cry,
Drawing the twilight close about their throats.
Only my heart makes answer. Eager vines
Go up the rocks and wait; flushed apple-trees
Pause in their dance and break the ring for me;
And bayberry, that through sweet bevies thread
Of round-faced roses, pink and petulant,
Look back and beckon ere they disappear.
Only my heart, only my heart responds.
Yet, ah, my path is sweet on either side
All through the dragging day,—sharp underfoot
And hot, and like dead mist the dry dust hangs—
But far, oh, far as passionate eye can reach,
And long, ah, long as rapturous eye can cling,
The world is mine: blue hill, still silver lake,
Broad field, bright flower, and the long white road
A gateless garden, and an open path:
My feet to follow, and my heart to hold.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Justice Denied In Massachusetts

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

Let us go home, and sit in the sitting room.
Not in our day
Shall the cloud go over and the sun rise as before,
Beneficent upon us
Out of the glittering bay,
And the warm winds be blown inward from the sea
Moving the blades of corn
With a peaceful sound.

Forlorn, forlorn,
Stands the blue hay-rack by the empty mow.
And the petals drop to the ground,
Leaving the tree unfruited.
The sun that warmed our stooping backs and withered the weed uprooted—
We shall not feel it again.
We shall die in darkness, and be buried in the rain.

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

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

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Kin To Sorrow

Am I kin to Sorrow,
   That so oft
Falls the knocker of my door——
   Neither loud nor soft,
But as long accustomed,
   Under Sorrow's hand?
Marigolds around the step
   And rosemary stand,
And then comes Sorrow—
   And what does Sorrow care
For the rosemary
   Or the marigolds there?
Am I kin to Sorrow?
   Are we kin?
That so oft upon my door—
   Oh, come in!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Lament

Listen, children:
Your father is dead.
From his old coats
I'll make you little jackets;
I'll make you little trousers
From his old pants.
There'll be in his pockets
Things he used to put there,
Keys and pennies
Covered with tobacco;
Dan shall have the pennies
To save in his bank;
Anne shall have the keys
To make a pretty noise with.
Life must go on,
And the dead be forgotten;
Life must go on,
Though good men die;
Anne, eat your breakfast;
Dan, take your medicine;
Life must go on;
I forget just why.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Lines for a Grave-Stone

Man alive, that mournst thy lot,
Desiring what thou hast not got,
Money, beauty, love, what not;

Deeming it blesseder to be
A rotted man, than live to see
So rude a sky as covers thee;

Deeming thyself of all unblest
And wretched souls the wretchedest,
Longing to die and be at rest;

Know: that however grim the fate
Which sent thee forth to meditate
Upon my enviable state,

Here lieth one who would resign
Gladly his lot, to shoulder thine.
Give me thy coat; get into mine.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Lines Written In Recapitulation

I could not bring this splendid world nor any trading beast
In charge of it, to defer, no, not to give ear, not in the least
Appearance, to my handsome prophecies,
which here I ponder and put by.

I am left simpler, less encumbered, by the consciousness
that I shall by no pebble in my dirty sling
avail To slay one purple giant four feet high and distribute arms
among his tall attendants, who spit at his name
when spitting on the ground:
They will be found one day Prone where they fell, or dead sitting
—and pock-marked wall
Supporting the beautiful back straight as an oak
before it is old.

I have learned to fail. And I have had my say.
Yet shall I sing until my voice crack
(this being my leisure, this my holiday)
That man was a special thing, and no commodity,
a thing improper to be sold.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Love Is Not All

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.
It well may be that in a difficult hour,
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,
Or trade the memory of this night for food.
It well may be. I do not think I would.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Low-Tide

These wet rocks where the tide has been,
Barnacled white and weeded brown
And slimed beneath to a beautiful green,
These wet rocks where the tide went down
Will show again when the tide is high
Faint and perilous, far from shore,
No place to dream, but a place to die,—
The bottom of the sea once more.
There was a child that wandered through
A giant's empty house all day,—
House full of wonderful things and new,
But no fit place for a child to play.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Make Bright The Arrows

Make bright the arrows
Gather the shields:
Conquest narrows
The peaceful fields.

Stock well the quiver
With arrows bright:
The bowman feared
Need never fight.

Make bright the arrows,
O peaceful and wise!
Gather the shields
Against surprise.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Mariposa

Butterflies are white and blue
In this field we wander through.
Suffer me to take your hand.
Death comes in a day or two.

All the things we ever knew
Will be ashes in that hour,
Mark the transient butterfly,
How he hangs upon the flower.

Suffer me to take your hand.
Suffer me to cherish you
Till the dawn is in the sky.
Whether I be false or true,
Death comes in a day or two.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Memorial To D.C.

(Vassar College, 1918)

O, loveliest throat of all sweet throats,
Where now no more the music is,
With hands that wrote you little notes
I write you little elegies!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Menses

(He speaks, but to himself, being aware how it is with her)
Think not I have not heard.
Well-fanged the double word
And well-directed flew.

I felt it. Down my side
Innocent as oil I see the ugly venom slide:
Poison enough to stiffen us both, and all our friends;
But I am not pierced, so there the mischief ends.

There is more to be said: I see it coiling;
The impact will be pain.
Yet coil; yet strike again.
You cannot riddle the stout mail I wove
Long since, of wit and love.

As for my answer . . . stupid in the sun
He lies, his fangs drawn:
I will not war with you.

You know how wild you are. You are willing to be turned
To other matters; you would be grateful, even.
You watch me shyly. I (for I have learned
More things than one in our few years together)
Chafe at the churlish wind, the unseasonable weather.

"Unseasonable?" you cry, with harsher scorn
Than the theme warrants; "Every year it is the same!
'Unseasonable!' they whine, these stupid peasants!—and never since they were born
Have they known a spring less wintry! Lord, the shame,
The crying shame of seeing a man no wiser than the beasts he feeds—
His skull as empty as a shell!"

("Go to. You are unwell.")

Such is my thought, but such are not my words.

"What is the name," I ask, "of those big birds
With yellow breast and low and heavy flight,
That make such mournful whistling?"

"Meadowlarks,"
You answer primly, not a little cheered.
"Some people shoot them." Suddenly your eyes are wet
And your chin trembles. On my breast you lean,
And sob most pitifullly for all the lovely things that are not and have been.

"How silly I am!—and I know how silly I am!"
You say; "You are very patient. You are very kind.

I shall be better soon. Just Heaven consign and damn
To tedious Hell this body with its muddy feet in my mind!"

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Midnight Oil

Cut if you will, with Sleep's dull knife,
Each day to half its length, my friend,—
The years that Time take off my life,
He'll take from off the other end!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Mist In The Valley

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

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

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

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

(Just in the way
The harbour met the bay)

Stricken too sore for tears,
I stand, remembering the Islands and the sea's lost sound—
Life at its best no longer than the sand-peep's cry,
And I two years, two years,
Tilling an upland ground!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Modern Declaration

I, having loved ever since I was a child a few things, never having wavered
In these affections; never through shyness in the houses of the rich or in the presence of clergymen having denied these loves;
Never when worked upon by cynics like chiropractors having grunted or clicked a vertebra to the discredit of those loves;
Never when anxious to land a job having diminished them by a conniving smile; or when befuddled by drink
Jeered at them through heartache or lazily fondled the fingers of their alert enemies; declare

That I shall love you always.
No matter what party is in power;
No matter what temporarily expedient combination of allied interests wins the war;
Shall love you always.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

My Most Distinguished Guest And Learned Friend

My most Distinguished Guest and Learned Friend,
The pallid hare that runs before the day
Having brought your earnest counsels to an end
Now have I somewhat of my own to say:
That it is folly to be sunk in love,
And madness plain to make the matter known,
There are no mysteries you are verger of;
Everyman's wisdoms these are, and my own.
If I have flung my heart unto a hound
I have done ill, it is a certain thing;
Yet breathe I freer, walk I the more sound
On my sick bones for this brave reasoning?
Soon must I say, " 'Tis prowling Death I hear!"
Yet come no better off, for my quick ear.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Night Is My Sister, And How Deep In Love

Night is my sister, and how deep in love,
How drowned in love and weedily washed ashore,
There to be fretted by the drag and shove
At the tide's edge, I lie—these things and more:
Whose arm alone between me and the sand,
Whose voice alone, whose pitiful breath brought near,
Could thaw these nostrils and unlock this hand,
She could advise you, should you care to hear.
Small chance, however, in a storm so black,
A man will leave his friendly fire and snug
For a drowned woman's sake, and bring her back
To drip and scatter shells upon the rug.
No one but Night, with tears on her dark face,
Watches beside me in this windy place.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

No rose that in a garden ever grew

No rose that in a garden ever grew,
In Homer's or in Omar's or in mine,
Though buried under centuries of fine
Dead dust of roses, shut from sun and dew
Forever, and forever lost from view,
But must again in fragrance rich as wine
The grey aisles of the air incarnadine
When the old summers surge into a new.
Thus when I swear, "I love with all my heart,"
'Tis with the heart of Lilith that I swear,
'Tis with the love of Lesbia and Lucrece;
And thus as well my love must lose some part
Of what it is, had Helen been less fair,
Or perished young, or stayed at home in Greece.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Not Even My Pride Shall Suffer Much

Not even my pride shall suffer much;
Not even my pride at all, maybe,
If this ill-timed, intemperate clutch
Be loosed by you and not by me,
Will suffer; I have been so true
A vestal to that only pride
Wet wood cannot extinguish, nor
Sand, nor its embers scattered, for,
See all these years, it has not died.

And if indeed, as I dare think,
You cannot push this patient flame,
By any breath your lungs could store,
Even for a moment to the floor
To crawl there, even for a moment crawl,
What can you mix for me to drink
That shall deflect me? What you do
Is either malice, crude defense
Of ego, or indifference:
I know these things as well as you;
You do not dazzle me at all—

Some love, and some simplicity,
Might well have been the death of me—

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Not In A Silver Casket Cool With Pearls

Not in a silver casket cool with pearls
Or rich with red corundum or with blue,
Locked, and the key withheld, as other girls
Have given their loves, I give my love to you;
Not in a lovers'-knot, not in a ring
Worked in such fashion, and the legend plain—
Semper fidelis, where a secret spring
Kennels a drop of mischief for the brain:
Love in the open hand, no thing but that,
Ungemmed, unhidden, wishing not to hurt,
As one should bring you cowslips in a hat
Swung from the hand, or apples in her skirt,
I bring you, calling out as children do:
"Look what I have!—And these are all for you."

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Ode To Silence

Aye, but she?
Your other sister and my other soul
Grave Silence, lovelier
Than the three loveliest maidens, what of her?
Clio, not you,
Not you, Calliope,
Nor all your wanton line,
Not Beauty's perfect self shall comfort me
For Silence once departed,
For her the cool-tongued, her the tranquil-hearted,
Whom evermore I follow wistfully,
Wandering Heaven and Earth and Hell and the four seasons through;
Thalia, not you,
Not you, Melpomene,
Not your incomparable feet, O thin Terpsichore, I seek in this great hall,
But one more pale, more pensive, most beloved of you all.
I seek her from afar,
I come from temples where her altars are,
From groves that bear her name,
Noisy with stricken victims now and sacrificial flame,
And cymbals struck on high and strident faces
Obstreperous in her praise
They neither love nor know,
A goddess of gone days,
Departed long ago,
Abandoning the invaded shrines and fanes
Of her old sanctuary,
A deity obscure and legendary,
Of whom there now remains,
For sages to decipher and priests to garble,
Only and for a little while her letters wedged in marble,
Which even now, behold, the friendly mumbling rain erases,
And the inarticulate snow,
Leaving at last of her least signs and traces
None whatsoever, nor whither she is vanished from these places.
"She will love well," I said,
"If love be of that heart inhabiter,
The flowers of the dead;
The red anemone that with no sound
Moves in the wind, and from another wound
That sprang, the heavily-sweet blue hyacinth,
That blossoms underground,
And sallow poppies, will be dear to her.
And will not Silence know
In the black shade of what obsidian steep
Stiffens the white narcissus numb with sleep?
(Seed which Demeter's daughter bore from home,
Uptorn by desperate fingers long ago,
Reluctant even as she,
Undone Persephone,
And even as she set out again to grow
In twilight, in perdition's lean and inauspicious loam).

She will love well," I said,
"The flowers of the dead;
Where dark Persephone the winter round,
Uncomforted for home, uncomforted,
Lacking a sunny southern slope in northern Sicily,
With sullen pupils focussed on a dream,
Stares on the stagnant stream
That moats the unequivocable battlements of Hell,
There, there will she be found,
She that is Beauty veiled from men and Music in a swound."

"I long for Silence as they long for breath
Whose helpless nostrils drink the bitter sea;
What thing can be
So stout, what so redoubtable, in Death
What fury, what considerable rage, if only she,
Upon whose icy breast,
Unquestioned, uncaressed,
One time I lay,
And whom always I lack,
Even to this day,
Being by no means from that frigid bosom weaned away,
If only she therewith be given me back?"
I sought her down that dolorous labyrinth,
Wherein no shaft of sunlight ever fell,
And in among the bloodless everywhere
I sought her, but the air,
Breathed many times and spent,
Was fretful with a whispering discontent,
And questioning me, importuning me to tell
Some slightest tidings of the light of day they know no more,
Plucking my sleeve, the eager shades were with me where I went.
I paused at every grievous door,
And harked a moment, holding up my hand,—and for a space
A hush was on them, while they watched my face;
And then they fell a-whispering as before;
So that I smiled at them and left them, seeing she was not there.
I sought her, too,
Among the upper gods, although I knew
She was not like to be where feasting is,
Nor near to Heaven's lord,
Being a thing abhorred
And shunned of him, although a child of his,
(Not yours, not yours; to you she owes not breath,
Mother of Song, being sown of Zeus upon a dream of Death).
Fearing to pass unvisited some place
And later learn, too late, how all the while,
With her still face,
She had been standing there and seen me pass, without a smile,
I sought her even to the sagging board whereat
The stout immortals sat;
But such a laughter shook the mighty hall

No one could hear me say:
Had she been seen upon the Hill that day?
And no one knew at all
How long I stood, or when at last I sighed and went away.

There is a garden lying in a lull
Between the mountains and the mountainous sea,
I know not where, but which a dream diurnal
Paints on my lids a moment till the hull
Be lifted from the kernel
And Slumber fed to me.
Your foot-print is not there, Mnemosene,
Though it would seem a ruined place and after
Your lichenous heart, being full
Of broken columns, caryatides
Thrown to the earth and fallen forward on their jointless knees,
And urns funereal altered into dust
Minuter than the ashes of the dead,
And Psyche's lamp out of the earth up-thrust,
Dripping itself in marble wax on what was once the bed
Of Love, and his young body asleep, but now is dust instead.

There twists the bitter-sweet, the white wisteria Fastens its fingers in the strangling wall,
And the wide crannies quicken with bright weeds;
There dumbly like a worm all day the still white orchid feeds;
But never an echo of your daughters' laughter
Is there, nor any sign of you at all
Swells fungous from the rotten bough, grey mother of Pieria!

Only her shadow once upon a stone
I saw,—and, lo, the shadow and the garden, too, were gone.

I tell you you have done her body an ill,
You chatterers, you noisy crew!
She is not anywhere!
I sought her in deep Hell;
And through the world as well;
I thought of Heaven and I sought her there;
Above nor under ground
Is Silence to be found,
That was the very warp and woof of you,
Lovely before your songs began and after they were through!
Oh, say if on this hill
Somewhere your sister's body lies in death,
So I may follow there, and make a wreath
Of my locked hands, that on her quiet breast
Shall lie till age has withered them!

(Ah, sweetly from the rest
I see

Turn and consider me
Compassionate Euterpe!)
"There is a gate beyond the gate of Death,
Beyond the gate of everlasting Life,
Beyond the gates of Heaven and Hell," she saith,
"Whereon but to believe is horror!
Whereon to meditate engendereth
Even in deathless spirits such as I
A tumult in the breath,
A chilling of the inexhaustible blood
Even in my veins that never will be dry,
And in the austere, divine monotony
That is my being, the madness of an unaccustomed mood.

This is her province whom you lack and seek;
And seek her not elsewhere.
Hell is a thoroughfare
For pilgrims,—Herakles,
And he that loved Euridice too well,
Have walked therein; and many more than these;
And witnessed the desire and the despair
Of souls that passed reluctantly and sicken for the air;
You, too, have entered Hell,
And issued thence; but thence whereof I speak
None has returned;—for thither fury brings
Only the driven ghosts of them that flee before all things.
Oblivion is the name of this abode: and she is there."

Oh, radiant Song! Oh, gracious Memory!
Be long upon this height
I shall not climb again!
I know the way you mean,—the little night,
And the long empty day,—never to see
Again the angry light,
Or hear the hungry noises cry my brain!
Ah, but she,
Your other sister and my other soul,
She shall again be mine;
And I shall drink her from a silver bowl,
A chilly thin green wine,
Not bitter to the taste,
Not sweet,
Not of your press, oh, restless, clamorous nine,—
To foam beneath the frantic hoofs of mirth—
But savoring faintly of the acid earth,
And trod by pensive feet
From perfect clusters ripened without haste
Out of the urgent heat
In some clear glimmering vaulted twilight under the odorous vine

. Lift up your lyres! Sing on!
But as for me, I seek your sister whither she is gone.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Oh, my belovèd, have you thought of this

Oh, my belovèd, have you thought of this:
How in the years to come unscrupulous Time,
More cruel than Death, will tear you from my kiss,
And make you old, and leave me in my prime?
How you and I, who scale together yet
A little while the sweet, immortal height
No pilgrim may remember or forget,
As sure as the world turns, some granite night
Shall lie awake and know the gracious flame
Gone out forever on the mutual stone;
And call to mind that on the day you came
I was a child, and you a hero grown ?
And the night pass, and the strange morning break
Upon our anguish for each other's sake !

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Oh, Oh, You Will Be Sorry

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
Give me back my book and take my kiss instead.
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard,
"What a big book for such a little head!"
Come, I will show you now my newest hat,
And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!
Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that.
I never again shall tell you what I think.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
You will not catch me reading any more:
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
And some day when you knock and push the door,
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Only until this cigarette is ended

Only until this cigarette is ended,
A little moment at the end of all,
While on the floor the quiet ashes fall,
And in the firelight to a lance extended,
Bizarrely with the jazzing music blended,
The broken shadow dances on the wall,
I will permit my memory to recall
The vision of you, by all my dreams attended.
And then adieu,--farewell!--the dream is done.
Yours is a face of which I can forget
The colour and the features, every one,
The words not ever, and the smiles not yet;
But in your day this moment is the sun
Upon a hill, after the sun has set.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Passer Mortuus Est

Death devours all lovely things;
Lesbia with her sparrow
Shares the darkness,—presently
Every bed is narrow.

Unremembered as old rain
Dries the sheer libation,
And the little petulant hand
Is an annotation.

After all, my erstwhile dear,
My no longer cherished,
Need we say it was not love,
Now that love is perished?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Pastoral

If it were only still!—
With far away the shrill
Crying of a cock;
Or the shaken bell
From a cow's throat
Moving through the bushes;
Or the soft shock
Of wizened apples falling
From an old tree
In a forgotten orchard
Upon the hilly rock!

Oh, grey hill,
Where the grazing herd
Licks the purple blossom,
Crops the spiky weed!
Oh, stony pasture,
Where the tall mullein
Stands up so sturdy
On its little seed!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Pity Me Not Because The Light Of Day

Pity me not because the light of day
At close of day no longer walks the sky;
Pity me not for beauties passed away
From field and thicket as the the year goes by;
Pity me not the waning of the moon,
Nor that the ebbing tide goes out to sea,
Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon,
And you no longer look with love on me.
This have I known always: Love is no more
Than the wide blossom which the wind assails,
Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,
Strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales:
Pity me that the heart is slow to learn
What the swift mind beholds at ever turn.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Portrait By A Neighbour

Before she has her floor swept
Or her dishes done,
Any day you'll find her
A-sunning in the sun!

It's long after midnight
Her key's in the lock,
And you never see her chimney smoke
Til past ten o'clock!

She digs in her garden
With a shovel and a spoon,
She weeds her lazy lettuce
By the light of the moon,

She walks up the walk
Like a woman in a dream,
She forgets she borrowed butter
Any pays you back in cream!

Her lawn looks like a meadow,
And if she mows the place
She leaves the clover standing
And the Queen Anne's lace!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Prayer To Persephone

Be to her, Persephone,
All the things I might not be:
Take her head upon your knee.
She that was so proud and wild,
Flippant, arrogant and free,
She that had no need of me,
Is a little lonely child
Lost in Hell,—Persephone,
Take her head upon your knee:
Say to her, "My dear, my dear,
It is not so dreadful here."

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Recuerdo

We were very tired, we were very merry --
We had gone back and forth all night upon the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable --
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on the hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.
We were very tired, we were very merry --
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We hailed, "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and the pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Renascence

All I could see from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood;
I turned and looked another way,
And saw three islands in a bay.
So with my eyes I traced the line
Of the horizon, thin and fine,
Straight around till I was come
Back to where I'd started from;
And all I saw from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood.
Over these things I could not see;
These were the things that bounded me;
And I could touch them with my hand,
Almost, I thought, from where I stand.
And all at once things seemed so small
My breath came short, and scarce at all.
But, sure, the sky is big, I said;
Miles and miles above my head;
So here upon my back I'll lie
And look my fill into the sky.
And so I looked, and, after all,
The sky was not so very tall.
The sky, I said, must somewhere stop,
And -- sure enough! -- I see the top!
The sky, I thought, is not so grand;
I 'most could touch it with my hand!
And, reaching up my hand to try,
I screamed to feel it touch the sky.

I screamed, and -- lo! -- Infinity
Came down and settled over me;
And, pressing of the Undefined
The definition on my mind,
Held up before my eyes a glass
Through which my shrinking sight did pass
Until it seemed I must behold
Immensity made manifold;
Whispered to me a word whose sound
Deafened the air for worlds around,
And brought unmuffled to my ears
The gossiping of friendly spheres,
The creaking of the tented sky,
The ticking of Eternity.
I saw and heard, and knew at last
The How and Why of all things, past,
And present, and forevermore.
The universe, cleft to the core,
Lay open to my probing sense
That, sick'ning, I would fain pluck thence
But could not, -- nay! But needs must suck
At the great wound, and could not pluck
My lips away till I had drawn

All venom out. -- Ah, fearful pawn!
For my omniscience paid I toll
In infinite remorse of soul.
All sin was of my sinning, all
Atoning mine, and mine the gall
Of all regret. Mine was the weight
Of every brooded wrong, the hate
That stood behind each envious thrust,
Mine every greed, mine every lust.
And all the while for every grief,
Each suffering, I craved relief
With individual desire, --
Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire
About a thousand people crawl;
Perished with each, -- then mourned for all!
A man was starving in Capri;
He moved his eyes and looked at me;
I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,
And knew his hunger as my own.
I saw at sea a great fog-bank
Between two ships that struck and sank;
A thousand screams the heavens smote;
And every scream tore through my throat.
No hurt I did not feel, no death
That was not mine; mine each last breath
That, crying, met an answering cry
From the compassion that was I.
All suffering mine, and mine its rod;
Mine, pity like the pity of God.
Ah, awful weight! Infinity
Pressed down upon the finite Me!
My anguished spirit, like a bird,
Beating against my lips I heard;
Yet lay the weight so close about
There was no room for it without.
And so beneath the Weight lay I
And suffered death, but could not die.

Long had I lain thus, craving death,
When quietly the earth beneath
Gave way, and inch by inch, so great
At last had grown the crushing weight,
Into the earth I sank till I
Full six feet under ground did lie,
And sank no more, -- there is no weight
Can follow here, however great.
From off my breast I felt it roll,
And as it went my tortured soul
Burst forth and fled in such a gust
That all about me swirled the dust.

Deep in the earth I rested now;

Cool is its hand upon the brow
And soft its breast beneath the head
Of one who is so gladly dead.
And all at once, and over all,
The pitying rain began to fall;
I lay and heard each pattering hoof
Upon my lowly, thatched roof,
And seemed to love the sound far more
Than ever I had done before.
For rain it hath a friendly sound
To one who's six feet underground;
And scarce the friendly voice or face:
A grave is such a quiet place.

The rain, I said, is kind to come
And speak to me in my new home.
I would I were alive again
To kiss the fingers of the rain,
To drink into my eyes the shine
Of every slanting silver line,
To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze
From drenched and dripping apple-trees.
For soon the shower will be done,
And then the broad face of the sun
Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth
Until the world with answering mirth
Shakes joyously, and each round drop
Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top.
How can I bear it; buried here,
While overhead the sky grows clear
And blue again after the storm?
O, multi-colored, multiform,
Beloved beauty over me,
That I shall never, never see
Again! Spring-silver, autumn-gold,
That I shall never more behold!
Sleeping your myriad magics through,
Close-sepulchred away from you!
O God, I cried, give me new birth,
And put me back upon the earth!
Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd
And let the heavy rain, down-poured
In one big torrent, set me free,
Washing my grave away from me!

I ceased; and, through the breathless hush
That answered me, the far-off rush
Of herald wings came whispering
Like music down the vibrant string
Of my ascending prayer, and -- crash!
Before the wild wind's whistling lash
The startled storm-clouds reared on high

And plunged in terror down the sky,
And the big rain in one black wave
Fell from the sky and struck my grave.

I know not how such things can be
I only know there came to me
A fragrance such as never clings
To aught save happy living things;
A sound as of some joyous elf
Singing sweet songs to please himself,
And, through and over everything,
A sense of glad awakening.
The grass, a-tiptoe at my ear,
Whispering to me I could hear;
I felt the rain's cool finger-tips
Brushed tenderly across my lips,
Laid gently on my sealed sight,
And all at once the heavy night
Fell from my eyes and I could see, --
A drenched and dripping apple-tree,
A last long line of silver rain,
A sky grown clear and blue again.
And as I looked a quickening gust
Of wind blew up to me and thrust
Into my face a miracle
Of orchard-breath, and with the smell, --
I know not how such things can be! --
I breathed my soul back into me.
Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I
And hailed the earth with such a cry
As is not heard save from a man
Who has been dead, and lives again.
About the trees my arms I wound;
Like one gone mad I hugged the ground;
I raised my quivering arms on high;
I laughed and laughed into the sky,
Till at my throat a strangling sob
Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb
Sent instant tears into my eyes;
O God, I cried, no dark disguise
Can e'er hereafter hide from me
Thy radiant identity!
Thou canst not move across the grass
But my quick eyes will see Thee pass,
Nor speak, however silently,
But my hushed voice will answer Thee.
I know the path that tells Thy way
Through the cool eve of every day;
God, I can push the grass apart
And lay my finger on Thy heart!

The world stands out on either side

No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky, --
No higher than the soul is high.
The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand;
The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through.
But East and West will pinch the heart
That cannot keep them pushed apart;
And he whose soul is flat -- the sky
Will cave in on him by and by.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Rosemary

For the sake of some things
That be now no more
I will strew rushes
On my chamber-floor,
I will plant bergamot
At my kitchen-door.

For the sake of dim things
That were once so plain
I will set a barrel
Out to catch the rain,
I will hang an iron pot
On an iron crane.

Many things be dead and gone
That were brave and gay;
For the sake of these things
I will learn to say,
"An it please you, gentle sirs,"
"Alack!" and "Well-a-day!"

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Scrub

If I grow bitterly,
Like a gnarled and stunted tree,
Bearing harshly of my youth
Puckered fruit that sears the mouth;
If I make of my drawn boughs
An Inshospitable House,
Out of which I nevery pry
Towards the water and the sky,
Under which I stand and hide
And hear the day go by outside;
It is that a wind to strong
Bent my back when I was young,
It is that I fear the rain
Lest it blister me again.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Second Fig

Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand:
Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Song Of A Second April

April this year, not otherwise
Than April of a year ago,
Is full of whispers, full of sighs,
Of dazzling mud and dingy snow;
Hepaticas that pleased you so
Are here again, and butterflies.

There rings a hammering all day,
And shingles lie about the doors;
In orchards near and far away
The grey wood-pecker taps and bores;
The men are merry at their chores,
And children earnest at their play.

The larger streams run still and deep,
Noisy and swift the small brooks run
Among the mullein stalks the sheep
Go up the hillside in the sun,
Pensively,—only you are gone,
You that alone I cared to keep.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet (Women Have Loved Before As I Love Now)

Women have loved before as I love now;
At least, in lively chronicles of the past—
Of Irish waters by a Cornish prow
Or Trojan waters by a Spartan mast
Much to their cost invaded—here and there,
Hunting the amorous line, skimming the rest,
I find some woman bearing as I bear
Love like a burning city in the breast.
I think however that of all alive
I only in such utter, ancient way
Do suffer love; in me alone survive
The unregenerate passions of a day
When treacherous queens, with death upon the tread,
Heedless and willful, took their knights to bed.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet 01: Thou Art Not Lovelier Than Lilacs,—No

Thou art not lovelier than lilacs,—no,
   Nor honeysuckle; thou art not more fair
   Than small white single poppies,—I can bear
Thy beauty; though I bend before thee, though
From left to right, not knowing where to go,
   I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there
   Find any refuge from thee, yet I swear
So has it been with mist,—with moonlight so.

Like him who day by day unto his draught
   Of delicate poison adds him one drop more
Till he may drink unharmed the death of ten,
Even so, inured to beauty, who have quaffed
  Each hour more deeply than the hour before,
I drink—and live—what has destroyed some men.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet 02: Time Does Not Bring Relief; You All Have Lied

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
   Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
   I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
   And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
   But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide

There are a hundred places where I fear
   To go,—so with his memory they brim
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
   And so stand stricken, so remembering him!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet 03: Mindful Of You The Sodden Earth In Spring

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring,
   And all the flowers that in the springtime grow,
   And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow
Rising of the round moon, all throats that sing
The summer through, and each departing wing,
   And all the nests that the bared branches show,
   And all winds that in any weather blow,
And all the storms that the four seasons bring.

You go no more on your exultant feet
   Up paths that only mist and morning knew,
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat
   Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,—
But you were something more than young and sweet
   And fair,—and the long year remembers you.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet 04: Not In This Chamber Only At My Birth

Not in this chamber only at my birth—
   When the long hours of that mysterious night
   Were over, and the morning was in sight—
I cried, but in strange places, steppe and firth
I have not seen, through alien grief and mirth;
   And never shall one room contain me quite
   Who in so many rooms first saw the light,
Child of all mothers, native of the earth.

So is no warmth for me at any fire
   To-day, when the world's fire has burned so low;
I kneel, spending my breath in vain desire,
At that cold hearth which one time roared so strong,
And straighten back in weariness, and long
   To gather up my little gods and go.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet 05: If I Should Learn, In Some Quite Casual Way

If I should learn, in some quite casual way,
  That you were gone, not to return again—
Read from the back-page of a paper, say,
  Held by a neighbor in a subway train,
How at the corner of this avenue
  And such a street (so are the papers filled)
A hurrying man—who happened to be you—
  At noon to-day had happened to be killed,
I should not cry aloud—I could not cry
  Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place—
I should but watch the station lights rush by
  With a more careful interest on my face,
Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
  Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet 06: Bluebeard

This door you might not open, and you did;
So enter now, and see for what slight thing
You are betrayed.... Here is no treasure hid
No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring
The sought-for truth, no heads of women slain
For greed like yours, no writhings of distress
But only what you see.... Look yet again—
An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless
Yet this alone out of my life I kept
Unto myself, lest any know me quite;
And you did so profane me when you crept
Unto the threshold of this room to-night
That I must never more behold your face.
This now is yours. I seek another place.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet I: Thou art not lovelier than lilacs

Thou art not lovelier than lilacs,--no,
  Nor honeysuckle; thou art not more fair
  Than small white single poppies,--I can bear
Thy beauty; though I bend before thee, though
From left to right, not knowing where to go,
  I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there
  Find any refuge from thee, yet I swear
So has it been with mist,--with moonlight so.
Like him who day by day unto his draught
  Of delicate poison adds him one drop more
Till he may drink unharmed the death of ten,
Even so, inured to beauty, who have quaffed
  Each hour more deeply than the hour before,
I drink--and live--what has destroyed some men.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet II: Time does not bring relief

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
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I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go - so with his memory they brim.
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, 'There is no memory of him here!'
And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet III: Mindful of you the sodden earth

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring,
  And all the flowers that in the springtime grow,
  And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow
Rising of the round moon, all throats that sing
The summer through, and each departing wing,
  And all the nests that the bared branches show,
  And all winds that in any weather blow,
And all the storms that the four seasons bring.
You go no more on your exultant feet
  Up paths that only mist and morning knew,
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat
  Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,--
But you were something more than young and sweet
  And fair,--and the long year remembers you.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet IV: Not in this chamber

Not in this chamber only at my birth--
  When the long hours of that mysterious night
  Were over, and the morning was in sight--
I cried, but in strange places, steppe and firth
I have not seen, through alien grief and mirth;
  And never shall one room contain me quite
  Who in so many rooms first saw the light,
Child of all mothers, native of the earth.
So is no warmth for me at any fire
  To-day, when the world's fire has burned so low;
I kneel, spending my breath in vain desire,
At that cold hearth which one time roared so strong,
And straighten back in weariness, and long
  To gather up my little gods and go.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet V: If I should learn

If I should learn, in some quite casual way,
  That you were gone, not to return again--
Read from the back-page of a paper, say,
  Held by a neighbor in a subway train,
How at the corner of this avenue
  And such a street (so are the papers filled)
A hurrying man--who happened to be you--
  At noon to-day had happened to be killed,
I should not cry aloud--I could not cry
  Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place--
I should but watch the station lights rush by
  With a more careful interest on my face,
Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnet VI: This door you might not open

This door you might not open, and you did;
  So enter now, and see for what slight thing
You are betrayed.... Here is no treasure hid,
  No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring
The sought-for truth, no heads of women slain
  For greed like yours, no writhings of distress,
But only what you see.... Look yet again--
  An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless.
Yet this alone out of my life I kept
  Unto myself, lest any know me quite;
And you did so profane me when you crept
  Unto the threshold of this room to-night
That I must never more behold your face.
  This now is yours. I seek another place.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets (1923)

VIII8.
Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
.
Give back my book and take my kiss instead.
.
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard,
.
"What a big book for such a little head!"
.
Come, I will show you now my newest hat,
.
And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!
.
Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that.
.
I never again shall tell you what I think.
.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
.
You will not catch me reading any more:
.
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
.
And some day when you knock and push the door,
.
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
.
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me. IX9.
Here is a wound that never will heal, I know,
.
Being wrought not of a dearness and a death,
.
But of a love turned ashes and the breath
.
Gone out of beauty; never again will grow
.
The grass on that scarred acre, though I sow
.
Young seed there yearly and the sky bequeath
.
Its friendly weathers down, far underneath
.
Shall be such bitterness of an old woe.
.
That April should be shattered by a gust,
.

That August should be levelled by a rain,

I can endure, and that the lifted dust

Of man should settle to the earth again;

But that a dream can die, will be a thrust

Between my ribs forever of hot pain. XVIII18.
I, being born a woman and distressed

By all the needs and notions of my kind,

Am urged by your propinquity to find

Your person fair, and feel a certain zest

To bear your body's weight upon my breast:

So subtly is the fume of life designed,

To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,

And leave me once again undone, possessed.

Think not for this, however, the poor treason

Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,

I shall remember you with love, or season

My scorn with pity, -- let me make it plain:

I find this frenzy insufficient reason

For conversation when we meet again. XIX19.
What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,

I have forgotten, and what arms have lain

Under my head till morning; but the rain

Is full of ghosts to-night, that tap and sigh

.
Upon the glass and listen for reply,
.
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
.
For unremembered lads that not again
.
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.
.
Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,
.
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
.
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
.
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,
.
I only know that summer sang in me
.
A little while, that in me sings no more.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 01: We Talk Of Taxes, And I Call You Friend

We talk of taxes, and I call you friend;
Well, such you are,—but well enough we know
How thick about us root, how rankly grow
Those subtle weeds no man has need to tend,
That flourish through neglect, and soon must send
Perfume too sweet upon us and overthrow
Our steady senses; how such matters go
We are aware, and how such matters end.
Yet shall be told no meagre passion here;
With lovers such as we forevermore
Isolde drinks the draught, and Guinevere
Receives the Table's ruin through her door,
Francesca, with the loud surf at her ear,
Lets fall the colored book upon the floor.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 02: Into The Golden Vessel Of Great Song

Into the golden vessel of great song
Let us pour all our passion; breast to breast
Let other lovers lie, in love and rest;
Not we,—articulate, so, but with the tongue
Of all the world: the churning blood, the long
Shuddering quiet, the desperate hot palms pressed
Sharply together upon the escaping guest,
The common soul, unguarded, and grown strong.
Longing alone is singer to the lute;
Let still on nettles in the open sigh
The minstrel, that in slumber is as mute
As any man, and love be far and high,
That else forsakes the topmost branch, a fruit
Found on the ground by every passer-by.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 03: Not With Libations, But With Shouts And Laughter

Not with libations, but with shouts and laughter
We drenched the altars of Love's sacred grove,
Shaking to earth green fruits, impatient after
The launching of the colored moths of Love.
Love's proper myrtle and his mother's zone
We bound about our irreligious brows,
And fettered him with garlands of our own,
And spread a banquet in his frugal house.
Not yet the god has spoken; but I fear
Though we should break our bodies in his flame,
And pour our blood upon his altar, here
Henceforward is a grove without a name,
A pasture to the shaggy goats of Pan,
Whence flee forever a woman and a man.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 04: Only Until This Cigarette Is Ended

Only until this cigarette is ended,
A little moment at the end of all,
While on the floor the quiet ashes fall,
And in the firelight to a lance extended,
Bizarrely with the jazzing music blended,
The broken shadow dances on the wall,
I will permit my memory to recall
The vision of you, by all my dreams attended.
And then adieu,—farewell!—the dream is done.
Yours is a face of which I can forget
The color and the features, every one,
The words not ever, and the smiles not yet;
But in your day this moment is the sun
Upon a hill, after the sun has set.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 05: Once More Into My Arid Days Like Dew

Once more into my arid days like dew,
Like wind from an oasis, or the sound
Of cold sweet water bubbling underground,
A treacherous messenger, the thought of you
Comes to destroy me; once more I renew
Firm faith in your abundance, whom I found
Long since to be but just one other mound
Of sand, whereon no green thing ever grew.
And once again, and wiser in no wise,
I chase your colored phantom on the air,
And sob and curse and fall and weep and rise
And stumble pitifully on to where,
Miserable and lost, with stinging eyes,
Once more I clasp,—and there is nothing there.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 06: No Rose That In A Garden Ever Grew

No rose that in a garden ever grew,
In Homer's or in Omar's or in mine,
Though buried under centuries of fine
Dead dust of roses, shut from sun and dew
Forever, and forever lost from view,
But must again in fragrance rich as wine
The grey aisles of the air incarnadine
When the old summers surge into a new.
Thus when I swear, "I love with all my heart,"
'Tis with the heart of Lilith that I swear,
'Tis with the love of Lesbia and Lucrece;
And thus as well my love must lose some part
Of what it is, had Helen been less fair,
Or perished young, or stayed at home in Greece.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 07: When I Too Long Have Looked Upon Your Face

When I too long have looked upon your face,
Wherein for me a brightness unobscured
Save by the mists of brightness has its place,
And terrible beauty not to be endured,
I turn away reluctant from your light,
And stand irresolute, a mind undone,
A silly, dazzled thing deprived of sight
From having looked too long upon the sun.
Then is my daily life a narrow room
In which a little while, uncertainly,
Surrounded by impenetrable gloom,
Among familiar things grown strange to me
Making my way, I pause, and feel, and hark,
Till I become accustomed to the dark.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 08: And You As Well Must Die, Beloved Dust

And you as well must die, beloved dust,
And all your beauty stand you in no stead;
This flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,
This body of flame and steel, before the gust
Of Death, or under his autumnal frost,
Shall be as any leaf, be no less dead
Than the first leaf that fell,--this wonder fled.
Altered, estranged, disintegrated, lost.
Nor shall my love avail you in your hour.
In spite of all my love, you will arise
Upon that day and wander down the air
Obscurely as the unattended flower,
It mattering not how beautiful you were,
Or how beloved above all else that dies.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 09: Let You Not Say Of Me When I Am Old

Let you not say of me when I am old,
In pretty worship of my withered hands
Forgetting who I am, and how the sands
Of such a life as mine run red and gold
Even to the ultimate sifting dust, "Behold,
Here walketh passionless age!"—for there expands
A curious superstition in these lands,
And by its leave some weightless tales are told.

In me no lenten wicks watch out the night;
I am the booth where Folly holds her fair;
Impious no less in ruin than in strength,
When I lie crumbled to the earth at length,
Let you not say, "Upon this reverend site
The righteous groaned and beat their breasts in prayer."

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 10: Oh, My Beloved, Have You Thought Of This

Oh, my beloved, have you thought of this:
How in the years to come unscrupulous Time,
More cruel than Death, will tear you from my kiss,
And make you old, and leave me in my prime?
How you and I, who scale together yet
A little while the sweet, immortal height
No pilgrim may remember or forget,
As sure as the world turns, some granite night
Shall lie awake and know the gracious flame
Gone out forever on the mutual stone;
And call to mind that on the day you came
I was a child, and you a hero grown?—
And the night pass, and the strange morning break
Upon our anguish for each other's sake!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 11: As To Some Lovely Temple, Tenantless

As to some lovely temple, tenantless
Long since, that once was sweet with shivering brass,
Knowing well its altars ruined and the grass
Grown up between the stones, yet from excess
Of grief hard driven, or great loneliness,
The worshiper returns, and those who pass
Marvel him crying on a name that was,—
So is it now with me in my distress.
Your body was a temple to Delight;
Cold are its ashes whence the breath is fled,
Yet here one time your spirit was wont to move;
Here might I hope to find you day or night,
And here I come to look for you, my love,
Even now, foolishly, knowing you are dead.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets 12: Cherish You Then The Hope I Shall Forget

Cherish you then the hope I shall forget
At length, my lord, Pieria?—put away
For your so passing sake, this mouth of clay
These mortal bones against my body set,
For all the puny fever and frail sweat
Of human love,—renounce for these, I say,
The Singing Mountain's memory, and betray
The silent lyre that hangs upon me yet?
Ah, but indeed, some day shall you awake,
Rather, from dreams of me, that at your side
So many nights, a lover and a bride,
But stern in my soul's chastity, have lain,
To walk the world forever for my sake,
And in each chamber find me gone again!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sonnets From An Ungrafted Tree

XLI

I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
To bear you body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clairfy the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.
Think not for this, however, the poor treason
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn with pity,—let me make it plain:
I find ths frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sorrow

Sorrow like a ceaseless rain
   Beats upon my heart.
People twist and scream in pain,—
Dawn will find them still again;
This has neither wax nor wane,
   Neither stop nor start.

People dress and go to town;
   I sit in my chair.
All my thoughts are slow and brown:
Standing up or sitting down
Little matters, or what gown
   Or what shoes I wear.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Souvenir

Just a rainy day or two
In a windy tower,
That was all I had of you—
Saving half an hour.

Marred by greeting passing groups
In a cinder walk,
Near some naked blackberry hoops
Dim with purple chalk.
I remember three or four
Things you said in spite,
And an ugly coat you wore,
Plaided black and white.

Just a rainy day or two
And a bitter word.
Why do I remember you
As a singing bird?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Spring

To what purpose, April, do you return again?
Beauty is not enough.
You can no longer quiet me with the redness
Of little leaves opening stickily.
I know what I know.
The sun is hot on my neck as I observe
The spikes of the crocus.
The smell of the earth is good.
It is apparent that there is no death.
But what does that signify?
Not only under ground are the brains of men
Eaten by maggots.
Life in itself
Is nothing,
An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.
It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
April
Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sweet Love, Sweet Thorn, When Lightly To My Heart

Sweet love, sweet thorn, when lightly to my heart
I took your thrust, whereby I since am slain,
And lie disheveled in the grass apart,
A sodden thing bedrenched by tears and rain,
While rainy evening drips to misty night,
And misty night to cloudy morning clears,
And clouds disperse across the gathering light,
And birds grow noisy, and the sun appears
Had I bethought me then, sweet love, sweet thorn,
How sharp an anguish even at the best,
When all's requited and the future sworn,
The happy Hour can leave within the breast,
I had not so come running at the call
Of one whoe loves me little, if at all.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Tavern

I'll keep a little tavern
   Below the high hill's crest,
Wherein all grey-eyed people
   May set them down and rest.

There shall be plates a-plenty,
   And mugs to melt the chill
Of all the grey-eyed people
   Who happen up the hill.

There sound will sleep the traveller,
   And dream his journey's end,
But I will rouse at midnight
   The falling fire to tend.

Aye, 'tis a curious fancy—
   But all the good I know
Was taught me out of two grey eyes
   A long time ago.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Ballad Of The Harp-Weaver

"Son," said my mother,
When I was knee-high,
"you've need of clothes to cover you,
and not a rag have I.

"There's nothing in the house
To make a boy breeches,
Nor shears to cut a cloth with,
Nor thread to take stitches.

"There's nothing in the house
But a loaf-end of rye,
And a harp with a woman's head
Nobody will buy,"
And she began to cry.

That was in the early fall.
When came the late fall,
"Son," she said, "the sight of you
Makes your mother's blood crawl,—

"Little skinny shoulder-blades
Sticking through your clothes!
And where you'll get a jacket from
God above knows.

"It's lucky for me, lad,
Your daddy's in the ground,
And can't see the way I let
His son go around!"
And she made a queer sound.

That was in the late fall.
When the winter came,
I'd not a pair of breeches
Nor a shirt to my name.

I couldn't go to school,
Or out of doors to play.
And all the other little boys
Passed our way.

"Son," said my mother,
"Come, climb into my lap,
And I'll chafe your little bones
While you take a nap."

And, oh, but we were silly
For half and hour or more,
Me with my long legs,
Dragging on the floor,

A-rock-rock-rocking
To a mother-goose rhyme!
Oh, but we were happy
For half an hour's time!

But there was I, a great boy,
And what would folks say
To hear my mother singing me
To sleep all day,
In such a daft way?

Men say the winter
Was bad that year;
Fuel was scarce,
And food was dear.

A wind with a wolf's head
Howled about our door,
And we burned up the chairs
And sat upon the floor.

All that was left us
Was a chair we couldn't break,
And the harp with a woman's head
Nobody would take,
For song or pity's sake.

The night before Christmas
I cried with cold,
I cried myself to sleep
Like a two-year old.

And in the deep night
I felt my mother rise,
And stare down upon me
With love in her eyes.

I saw my mother sitting
On the one good chair,
A light falling on her
From I couldn't tell where.

Looking nineteen,
And not a day older,
And the harp with a woman's head
Leaned against her shoulder.

Her thin fingers, moving
In the thin, tall strings,
Were weav-weav-weaving
Wonderful things.

Many bright threads,
From where I couldn't see,
Were running through the harp-strings
Rapidly,

And gold threads whistling
Through my mother's hand.
I saw the web grow,
And the pattern expand.

She wove a child's jacket,
And when it was done
She laid it on the floor
And wove another one.

She wove a red cloak
So regal to see,
"She's made it for a king's son,"
I said, "and not for me."
But I knew it was for me.

She wove a pair of breeches
Quicker than that!
She wove a pair of boots
And a little cocked hat.

She wove a pair of mittens,
Shw wove a little blouse,
She wove all night
In the still, cold house.

She sang as she worked,
And the harp-strings spoke;
Her voice never faltered,
And the thread never broke,
And when I awoke,—

There sat my mother
With the harp against her shoulder,
Looking nineteeen,
And not a day older,

A smile about her lips,
And a light about her head,
And her hands in the harp-strings
Frozen dead.

And piled beside her
And toppling to the skies,
Were the clothes of a king's son,
Just my size.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Bean-Stalk

Ho, Giant! This is I!
I have built me a bean-stalk into your sky!
La,—but it's lovely, up so high!

This is how I came,—I put
Here my knee, there my foot,
Up and up, from shoot to shoot—
And the blessed bean-stalk thinning
Like the mischief all the time,
Till it took me rocking, spinning,
In a dizzy, sunny circle,
Making angles with the root,
Far and out above the cackle
Of the city I was born in,
Till the little dirty city
In the light so sheer and sunny
Shone as dazzling bright and pretty
As the money that you find
In a dream of finding money—
What a wind! What a morning!—

Till the tiny, shiny city,
When I shot a glance below,
Shaken with a giddy laughter,
Sick and blissfully afraid,
Was a dew-drop on a blade,
And a pair of moments after
Was the whirling guess I made,—
And the wind was like a whip

Cracking past my icy ears,
And my hair stood out behind,
And my eyes were full of tears,
Wide-open and cold,
More tears than they could hold,
The wind was blowing so,
And my teeth were in a row,
Dry and grinning,
And I felt my foot slip,
And I scratched the wind and whined,
And I clutched the stalk and jabbered,
With my eyes shut blind,—
What a wind! What a wind!

Your broad sky, Giant,
Is the shelf of a cupboard;
I make bean-stalks, I'm
A builder, like yourself,
But bean-stalks is my trade,
I couldn't make a shelf,
Don't know how they're made,
Now, a bean-stalk is more pliant—

La, what a climb!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Betrothal

Oh, come, my lad, or go, my lad,
And love me if you like.
I shall not hear the door shut
Nor the knocker strike.
Oh, bring me gifts or beg me gifts,
And wed me if you will.
I'd make a man a good wife,
Sensible and still.
And why should I be cold, my lad,
And why should you repine,
Because I love a dark head
That never will be mine?

I might as well be easing you
As lie alone in bed
And waste the night in wanting
A cruel dark head.

You might as well be calling yours
What never will be his,
And one of us be happy.
There's few enough as is.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Blue Flag in the Bog

God had called us, and we came;
Our loved Earth to ashes left;
Heaven was a neighbor's house,
Open flung to us, bereft.

Gay the lights of Heaven showed,
And 'twas God who walked ahead;
Yet I wept along the road,
Wanting my own house instead.

Wept unseen, unheeded cried,
"All you things my eyes have kissed,
Fare you well! We meet no more,
Lovely, lovely tattered mist!

Weary wings that rise and fall
All day long above the fire !"
Red with heat was every wall,
Rough with heat was every wire

"Fare you well, you little winds
That the flying embers chase!
Fare you well, you shuddering day,
With your hands before your face!

And, ah, blackened by strange blight,
Or to a false sun unfurled,
Now forevermore goodbye,
All the gardens in the world!

On the windless hills of Heaven,
That I have no wish to see,

White, eternal lilies stand,
By a lake of ebony.

But the Earth forevermore
Is a place where nothing grows,
Dawn will come, and no bud break;
Evening, and no blossom close.

Spring will come, and wander slow
Over an indifferent land,
Stand beside an empty creek,
Hold a dead seed in her hand."

God had called us, and we came,
But the blessed road I trod
Was a bitter road to me,
And at heart I questioned God.

"Though in Heaven," I said, "be all

That the heart would most desire,
Held Earth naught save souls of sinners
Worth the saving from a fire?

Withered grass,the wasted growing!
Aimless ache of laden boughs!"
Little things God had forgotten
Called me, from my burning house.

"Though in Heaven," I said, "be all
That the eye could ask to see,
All the things I ever knew
Are this blaze in back of me."

"Though in Heaven," I said, "be all
That the ear could think to lack,

All the things I ever knew
Are this roaring at my back."

It was God who walked ahead,
Like a shepherd to the fold;
In his footsteps fared the weak,
And the weary and the old,

Glad enough of gladness over,
Ready for the peace to be,
But a thing God had forgotten
Was the growing bones of me.

And I drew a bit apart,
And I lagged a bit behind,
And I thought on Peace Eternal,
Lest He look into my mind;

And I gazed upon the sky,
And I thought of Heavenly Rest,
And I slipped away like water
Through the fingers of the blest!

All their eyes were fixed on Glory,
Not a glance brushed over me;
"Alleluia ! Alleluia !"
Up the road,and I was free.

And my heart rose like a freshet,
And it swept me on before,
Giddy as a whirling stick,
Till I felt the earth once more.

All the Earth was charred and black,
Fire had swept from pole to pole;

And the bottom of the sea
Was as brittle as a bowl;

And the timbered mountain-top
Was as naked as a skull,
Nothing left, nothing left,
Of the Earth so beautiful!

"Earth," I said, "how can I leave you?"
"You are all I have," I said;
"What is left to take my mind up,
Living always, and you dead?"

"Speak!" I said, "Oh, tell me something!
Make a sign that I can see!
For a keepsake! To keep always!
Quick! Before God misses me!"

And I listened for a voice;
But my heart was all I heard;
Not a screech-owl, not a loon,
Not a tree-toad said a word.

And I waited for a sign;
Coals and cinders, nothing more;
And a little cloud of smoke
Floating on a valley floor.

And I peered into the smoke
Till it rotted, like a fog:
There, encompassed round by fire,
Stood a blue-flag in a bog!

Little flames came wading out,
Straining, straining towards its stem,

But it was so blue and tall
That it scorned to think of them!

Red and thirsty were their tongues,
As the tongues of wolves must be,
But it was so blue and tall
Oh, I laughed, I cried, to see!

All my heart became a tear,
All my soul became a tower,
Never loved I anything
As I loved that tall blue flower!

It was all the little boats
That had ever sailed the sea,

It was all the little books
That had gone to school with me;

On its roots like iron claws
Rearing up so blue and tall,
It was all the gallant Earth
With its back against a wall!

In a breath, ere I had breathed,
Oh, I laughed, I cried, to see!
I was kneeling at its side,
And it leaned its head on me!

Crumbling stones and sliding sand
Is the road to Heaven now;
Icy at my straining knees
Drags the awful under-tow;

Soon but stepping-stones of dust
Will the road to Heaven be,

Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Reach a hand and rescue me!

"Therethere, my blue-flag flower;
Hushhushgo to sleep;
That is only God you hear,
Counting up His folded sheep!

Lullabyelullabye
That is only God that calls,
Missing me, seeking me,
Ere the road to nothing falls!

He will set His mighty feet
Firmly on the sliding sand;
Like a little frightened bird
I will creep into His hand;

I will tell Him all my grief,
I will tell Him all my sin;
He will give me half His robe
For a cloak to wrap you in.

Lullabyelullabye"
Rocks the burnt-out planet free!
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Reach a hand and rescue me!

Ah, the voice of love at last !
Lo, at last the face of light !
And the whole of His white robe

For a cloak against the night!

And upon my heart asleep
All the things I ever knew!

"Holds Heaven not some cranny, Lord,
For a flower so tall and blue?"

All's well and all's well!
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Edna St. Vincent Millay

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That had ever sailed the sea,
It was all the little books
That had gone to school with me;

On its roots like iron claws

Rearing up so blue and tall,—
It was all the gallant Earth
With its back against a wall!

In a breath, ere I had breathed,—
Oh, I laughed, I cried, to see!—
I was kneeling at its side,
And it leaned its head on me!

Crumbling stones and sliding sand
Is the road to Heaven now;
Icy at my straining knees
Drags the awful under-tow;

Soon but stepping-stones of dust
Will the road to Heaven be,—
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Reach a hand and rescue me!

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Hush—hush—go to sleep;
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Like a little frightened bird
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And upon my heart asleep
All the things I ever knew!—
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For a flower so tall and blue?"

All's well and all's well!
Gay the lights of Heaven show!
In some moist and Heavenly place
We will set it out to grow.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Concert

No, I will go alone.
I will come back when it's over.
Yes, of course I love you.
No, it will not be long.
Why may you not come with me?—
You are too much my lover.
You would put yourself
Between me and song.

If I go alone,
Quiet and suavely clothed,
My body will die in its chair,
And over my head a flame,
A mind that is twice my own,
Will mark with icy mirth
The wise advance and retreat
Of armies without a country,
Storming a nameless gate,
Hurling terrible javelins down
From the shouting walls of a singing town

Where no women wait!
Armies clean of love and hate,
Marching lines of pitiless sound
Climbing hills to the sun and hurling
Golden spears to the ground!
Up the lines a silver runner
Bearing a banner whereon is scored
The milk and steel of a bloodless wound
Healed at length by the sword!

You and I have nothing to do with music.
We may not make of music a filigree frame,
Within which you and I,
Tenderly glad we came,
Sit smiling, hand in hand.

Come now, be content.
I will come back to you, I swear I will;
And you will know me still.
I shall be only a little taller
Than when I went.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Curse

Oh, lay my ashes on the wind
That blows across the sea.
And I shall meet a fisherman
Out of Capri,

And he will say, seeing me,
"What a Strange Thing!
Like a fish's scale or a
Butterfly's wing."

Oh, lay my ashes on the wind
That blows away the fog.
And I shall meet a farmer boy
Leaping through the bog,

And he will say, seeing me,
"What a Strange Thing!
Like a peat-ash or a
Butterfly's wing."

And I shall blow to YOUR house
And, sucked against the pane,
See you take your sewing up
And lay it down again.

And you will say, seeing me,
"What a strange thing!
Like a plum petal or a
Butterfly's wing."

And none at all will know me
That knew me well before.
But I will settle at the root
That climbs about your door,

And fishermen and farmers
May see me and forget,
But I'll be a bitter berry
In your brewing yet.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Death Of Autumn

When reeds are dead and a straw to thatch the marshes,
And feathered pampas-grass rides into the wind
Like aged warriors westward, tragic, thinned
Of half their tribe, and over the flattened rushes,
Stripped of its secret, open, stark and bleak,
Blackens afar the half-forgotten creek,—
Then leans on me the weight of the year, and crushes
My heart. I know that Beauty must ail and die,
And will be born again,—but ah, to see
Beauty stiffened, staring up at the sky!
Oh, Autumn! Autumn!—What is the Spring to me?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Dream

Love, if I weep it will not matter,
  And if you laugh I shall not care;
Foolish am I to think about it,
  But it is good to feel you there.

Love, in my sleep I dreamed of waking,—
  White and awful the moonlight reached
Over the floor, and somewhere, somewhere,
  There was a shutter loose,—it screeched!

Swung in the wind,—and no wind blowing!—
  I was afraid, and turned to you,
Put out my hand to you for comfort,—
  And you were gone! Cold, cold as dew,

Under my hand the moonlight lay!
  Love, if you laugh I shall not care,
But if I weep it will not matter,—
  Ah, it is good to feel you there!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Fawn

There it was I saw what I shall never forget
And never retrieve.
Monstrous and beautiful to human eyes, hard to
        believe,
He lay, yet there he lay,
Asleep on the moss, his head on his polished cleft
        small ebony hoves,
The child of the doe, the dappled child of the deer.

Surely his mother had never said, "Lie here
Till I return," so spotty and plain to see
On the green moss lay he.
His eyes had opened; he considered me.

I would have given more than I care to say
To thrifty ears, might I have had him for my friend
One moment only of that forest day:

Might I have had the acceptance, not the love
Of those clear eyes;
Might I have been for him in the bough above
Or the root beneath his forest bed,
A part of the forest, seen without surprise.

Was it alarm, or was it the wind of my fear lest he
        depart
That jerked him to his jointy knees,
And sent him crashing off, leaping and stumbling
On his new legs, between the stems of the white
        trees?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Fledgling

So, art thou feahered, art thou flown,
Thou naked thing?—and canst alone
Upon the unsolid summer air
Sustain thyself, and prosper there?
Shall no more with anxious note
Advise thee through the happy day,
Thrusting the worm into thy throat,
Bearing thine excrement away?
Alas, I think I see thee yet,
Perched on the windy parapet,
Defer thy flight a moment still
To clean thy wing with careful bill.
And thou are feathered, thou art flown;
And hast a project of thine own.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Goose-Girl

Spring rides no horses down the hill,
But comes on foot, a goose-girl still.
And all the loveliest things there be
Come simply, so, it seems to me.
If ever I said, in grief or pride,
I tired of honest things, I lied:
And should be cursed forevermore
With Love in laces, like a whore,
And neighbours cold, and friends unsteady,
And Spring on horseback, like a lady!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Leaf And The Tree

When will you learn, myself, to be
a dying leaf on a living tree?
Budding, swelling, growing strong,
Wearing green, but not for long,
Drawing sustenance from air,
That other leaves, and you not there,
May bud, and at the autumn's call
Wearing russet, ready to fall?
Has not this trunk a deed to do
Unguessed by small and tremulous you?
Shall not these branches in the end
To wisdom and the truth ascend?
And the great lightning plunging by
Look sidewise with a golden eye
To glimpse a tree so tall and proud
It sheds its leaves upon a cloud?

Here, I think, is the heart's grief:
The tree, no mightier than the leaf,
Makes firm its root and spreads it crown
And stands; but in the end comes down.
That airy top no boy could climb

Is trodden in a little time
By cattle on their way to drink.
The fluttering thoughts a leaf can think,
That hears the wind and waits its turn,
Have taught it all a tree can learn.
Time can make soft that iron wood.
The tallest trunk that ever stood,
In time, without a dream to keep,
Crawls in beside the root to sleep.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Little Ghost

I knew her for a little ghost
  That in my garden walked;
The wall is high—higher than most—
  And the green gate was locked.

And yet I did not think of that
  Till after she was gone—
I knew her by the broad white hat,
  All ruffled, she had on.

By the dear ruffles round her feet,
  By her small hands that hung
In their lace mitts, austere and sweet,
  Her gown's white folds among.

I watched to see if she would stay,
  What she would do—and oh!
She looked as if she liked the way
  I let my garden grow!

She bent above my favourite mint
  With conscious garden grace,
She smiled and smiled—there was no hint
  Of sadness in her face.

She held her gown on either side
  To let her slippers show,
And up the walk she went with pride,
  The way great ladies go.

And where the wall is built in new
  And is of ivy bare
She paused—then opened and passed through
  A gate that once was there.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Little Hill

Oh, here the air is sweet and still,
And soft's the grass to lie on;
And far away's the little hill
They took for Christ to die on.

And there's a hill across the brook,
And down the brook's another;
But, oh, the little hill they took,—
I think I am its mother!

The moon that saw Gethsemane,
I watch it rise and set:
It has so many things to see,
They help it to forget.

But little hills that sit at home
So many hundred years,
Remember Greece, remember Rome,
Remember Mary's tears.

And far away in Palestine,
Sadder than any other,
Grieves still the hill that I call mine,—
I think I am its mother!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Penitent

I had a little Sorrow,
Born of a little Sin,
I found a room all damp with gloom
And shut us all within;
And, "Little Sorrow, weep," said I,
"And, Little Sin, pray God to die,
And I upon the floor will lie
And think how bad I've been!"

Alas for pious planning—
It mattered not a whit!
As far as gloom went in that room,
The lamp might have been lit!
My little Sorrow would not weep,
My little Sin would go to sleep—
To save my soul I could not keep
My graceless mind on it!

So I got up in anger,
And took a book I had,
And put a ribbon on my hair
To please a passing lad,
And, "One thing there's no getting by—
I've been a wicked girl," said I:
"But if I can't be sorry, why,
I might as well be glad!"

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Philosopher

And what are you that, wanting you,
I should be kept awake
As many nights as there are days
With weeping for your sake?

And what are you that, missing you,
As many days as crawl
I should be listening to the wind
And looking at the wall?

I know a man that's a braver man
And twenty men as kind,
And what are you, that you should be
The one man in my mind?

Yet women's ways are witless ways,
As any sage will tell,—
And what am I, that I should love
So wisely and so well?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Plaid Dress

Strong sun, that bleach
The curtains of my room, can you not render
Colourless this dress I wear?—
This violent plaid
Of purple angers and red shames; the yellow stripe
Of thin but valid treacheries; the flashy green of kind deeds done
Through indolence high judgments given here in haste;
The recurring checker of the serious breach of taste?

No more uncoloured than unmade,
I fear, can be this garment that I may not doff;
Confession does not strip it off,
To send me homeward eased and bare;

All through the formal, unoffending evening, under the clean
Bright hair,
Lining the subtle gown. . .it is not seen,
But it is there.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Poet And His Book

Down, you mongrel, Death!
Back into your kennel!
I have stolen breath
In a stalk of fennel!
You shall scratch and you shall whine
Many a night, and you shall worry
Many a bone, before you bury
One sweet bone of mine!

When shall I be dead?
When my flesh is withered,
And above my head
Yellow pollen gathered
All the empty afternoon?
When sweet lovers pause and wonder
Whom am I that lie thereunder,
Hidden from the moon?

This my personal death?—
That my lungs be failing
To inhale the breath
Others are exhaling?
This my subtle spirit's end?—
Ah, when the thawed winter splashes
Over these chance dust and ashes,
Weep not me, my friend!

Me, by no means dead
In that hour, but surely
When this book, unread,
Rots to earth obscurely,
And no more to any breast,
Close against the clamorous swelling
Of the thing there is no telling,
Are these pages pressed!

When this book is mould,
And a book of many
Waiting to be sold
For a casual penny,
In a little open case,
In a street unclean and cluttered,
Where a heavy mud is spattered
From the passing drays,

Stranger, pause and look;
From the dust of ages
Lift this little book,
Turn the tattered pages,
Read me, do not let me die!
Search the fading letters, finding
Steadfast in the broken binding

All that once was I!

When these veins are weeds,
When these hollowed sockets
Watch the rooty seeds
Bursting down like rockets,
And surmise the spring again,
Or, remote in that black cupboard,
Watch the pink worms writhing upward
At the smell of rain,

Boys and girls that lie
Whispering in the hedges,
Do not let me die,
Mix me with your pledges;
Boys and girls that slowly walk
In the woods, and weep, and quarrel,
Staring past the pink wild laurel,
Mix me with your talk,

Do not let me die!
Farmers at your raking,
When the sun is high,
While the hay is making,
When, along the stubble strewn,
Withering on their stalks uneaten,
Strawberries turn dark and sweeten
In the lapse of noon;

Shepherds on the hills,
In the pastures, drowsing
To the tinkling bells
Of the brown sheep browsing;
Sailors cying through the storm;
Scholars at your study; hunters
Lost amid the whirling winter's
Whiteness uniform;

Men that long to sleep;
Men that wake and revel;—
If an old song leap
To your senses' level
At such moments, may it be
Sometimes, though a moment only,
Some forgotten, quaint and homely
Vehicle of me?

Women at your toil,
Women at your leisure,
Till the kettle boil,
Snatch of me your pleasure,
Where the broom-straw marks the leaf;

Women quiet with your weeping
Lest you wake a workman sleeping,
Mix me with your grief.

Boys and girls that steal
From the shocking laughter
Of the old, to kneel
By a dripping rafter
Under the discoloured eaves,
Out of trunks with hingeless covers
Lifting tales of saints and lovers,
Travellers, goblins, theives,

Suns that shine by night,
Mountains made from valleys,—
Bear me to the light,
Flat upon your bellies
By the webby window lie,
Where the little flies are crawling,
Read me, margin me with scrawling,
Do no let me die!

Sexton, ply your trade!
In a shower of gravel
Stamp upon your spade!
Many a rose shall ravel,
Many a metal wreath shall rust
In the rain, and I go singing
Through the lots where you are flinging
Yellow clay on dust!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Return From Town

As I sat down by Saddle Stream
To bathe my dusty feet there,
A boy was standing on the bridge
Any girl would meet there.

As I went over Woody Knob
A youth was coming up the hill
Any maid would follow.

Then in I turned at my own gate,—
And nothing to be sad for—
To such a man as any WIFE
Would pass a pretty lad for.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Shroud

Death, I say, my heart is bowed
   Unto thine,—O mother!
This red gown will make a shroud
   Good as any other!

(I, that would not wait to wear
   My own bridal things,
In a dress dark as my hair
   Made my answerings.

I, to-night, that till he came
   Could not, could not wait,
In a gown as bright as flame
   Held for them the gate.)

Death, I say, my heart is bowed
   Unto thine,—O mother!
This red gown will make a shroud
   Good as any other!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Singing-Woman From The Wood's Edge

What should I be but a prophet and a liar,
Whose mother was a leprechaun, whose father was a friar?
Teethed on a crucifix and cradled under water,
What should I be but the fiend's god-daughter?

And who should be my playmates but the adder and the frog,
That was got beneath a furze-bush and born in a bog?
And what should be my singing, that was christened at an altar,
But Aves and Credos and Psalms out of the Psalter?

You will see such webs on the wet grass, maybe,
As a pixie-mother weaves for her baby,
You will find such flame at the wave's weedy ebb
As flashes in the meshes of a mer-mother's web,

But there comes to birth no common spawn
From the love a a priest for a leprechaun,
And you never have seen and you never will see
Such things as the things that swaddled me!

After all's said and after all's done,
What should I be but a harlot and a nun?

In through the bushes, on any foggy day,
My Da would come a-swishing of the drops away,
With a prayer for my death and a groan for my birth,
A-mumbling of his beads for all that he was worth.

And there'd sit my Ma, with her knees beneath her chin,
A-looking in his face and a-drinking of it in,
And a-marking in the moss some funny little saying
That would mean just the opposite of all that he was praying!

He taught me the holy-talk of Vesper and of Matin,
He heard me my Greek and he heard me my Latin,
He blessed me and crossed me to keep my soul from evil,
And we watched him out of sight, and we conjured up the devil!

Oh, the things I haven't seen and the things I haven't known,
What with hedges and ditches till after I was grown,
And yanked both way by my mother and my father,
With a "Which would you better?" and a " Which would you rather?"

With him for a sire and her for a dam,
What should I be but just what I am?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Snow Storm

No hawk hangs over in this air:
The urgent snow is everywhere.
The wing adroiter than a sail
Must lean away from such a gale,
Abandoning its straight intent,
Or else expose tough ligament
And tender flesh to what before
Meant dampened feathers, nothing more.
Forceless upon our backs there fall
Infrequent flakes hexagonal,
Devised in many a curious style
To charm our safety for a while,
Where close to earth like mice we go
Under the horizontal snow.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Spring And The Fall

In the spring of the year, in the spring of the year,
I walked the road beside my dear.
The trees were black where the bark was wet.
I see them yet, in the spring of the year.
He broke me a bough of the blossoming peach
That was out of the way and hard to reach.

In the fall of the year, in the fall of the year,
I walked the road beside my dear.
The rooks went up with a raucous trill.
I hear them still, in the fall of the year.
He laughed at all I dared to praise,
And broke my heart, in little ways.

Year be springing or year be falling,
The bark will drip and the birds be calling.
There's much that's fine to see and hear
In the spring of a year, in the fall of a year.
'Tis not love's going hurt my days.
But that it went in little ways.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Suicide

"Curse thee, Life, I will live with thee no more!
Thou hast mocked me, starved me, beat my body sore!
And all for a pledge that was not pledged by me,
I have kissed thy crust and eaten sparingly
That I might eat again, and met thy sneers
With deprecations, and thy blows with tears,—
Aye, from thy glutted lash, glad, crawled away,
As if spent passion were a holiday!
And now I go. Nor threat, nor easy vow
Of tardy kindness can avail thee now
With me, whence fear and faith alike are flown;
Lonely I came, and I depart alone,
And know not where nor unto whom I go;
But that thou canst not follow me I know."

Thus I to Life, and ceased; but through my brain
My thought ran still, until I spake again:

"Ah, but I go not as I came,—no trace
Is mine to bear away of that old grace
I brought! I have been heated in thy fires,
Bent by thy hands, fashioned to thy desires,
Thy mark is on me! I am not the same
Nor ever more shall be, as when I came.
Ashes am I of all that once I seemed.
In me all's sunk that leapt, and all that dreamed
Is wakeful for alarm,—oh, shame to thee,
For the ill change that thou hast wrought in me,
Who laugh no more nor lift my throat to sing
Ah, Life, I would have been a pleasant thing
To have about the house when I was grown
If thou hadst left my little joys alone!
I asked of thee no favor save this one:
That thou wouldst leave me playing in the sun!
And this thou didst deny, calling my name
Insistently, until I rose and came.
I saw the sun no more.—It were not well
So long on these unpleasant thoughts to dwell,
Need I arise to-morrow and renew
Again my hated tasks, but I am through
With all things save my thoughts and this one night,
So that in truth I seem already quite
Free,and remote from thee,—I feel no haste
And no reluctance to depart; I taste
Merely, with thoughtful mien, an unknown draught,
That in a little while I shall have quaffed."

Thus I to Life, and ceased, and slightly smiled,
Looking at nothing; and my thin dreams filed
Before me one by one till once again
I set new words unto an old refrain:

"Treasures thou hast that never have been mine!
Warm lights in many a secret chamber shine
Of thy gaunt house, and gusts of song have blown
Like blossoms out to me that sat alone!
And I have waited well for thee to show
If any share were mine,—and now I go
Nothing I leave, and if I naught attain
I shall but come into mine own again!"

Thus I to Life, and ceased, and spake no more,
But turning, straightway, sought a certain door
In the rear wall. Heavy it was, and low
And dark,—a way by which none e'er would go
That other exit had, and never knock
Was heard thereat,—bearing a curious lock
Some chance had shown me fashioned faultily,
Whereof Life held content the useless key,
And great coarse hinges, thick and rough with rust,
Whose sudden voice across a silence must,
I knew, be harsh and horrible to hear,—
A strange door, ugly like a dwarf.—So near
I came I felt upon my feet the chill
Of acid wind creeping across the sill.
So stood longtime, till over me at last
Came weariness, and all things other passed
To make it room; the still night drifted deep
Like snow about me, and I longed for sleep.

But, suddenly, marking the morning hour,
Bayed the deep-throated bell within the tower!
Startled, I raised my head,—and with a shout
Laid hold upon the latch,—and was without.

* * * *

Ah, long-forgotten, well-remembered road,
Leading me back unto my old abode,
My father's house! There in the night I came,
And found them feasting, and all things the same
As they had been before. A splendour hung
Upon the walls, and such sweet songs were sung
As, echoing out of very long ago,
Had called me from the house of Life, I know.
So fair their raiment shone I looked in shame
On the unlovely garb in which I came;
Then straightway at my hesitancy mocked:
"It is my father's house!" I said and knocked;
And the door opened. To the shining crowd
Tattered and dark I entered, like a cloud,
Seeing no face but his; to him I crept,
And "Father!" I cried, and clasped his knees, and wept.

* * * *

Ah, days of joy that followed! All alone
I wandered through the house. My own, my own,
My own to touch, my own to taste and smell,
All I had lacked so long and loved so well!
None shook me out of sleep, nor hushed my song,
Nor called me in from the sunlight all day long.

I know not when the wonder came to me
Of what my father's business might be,
And whither fared and on what errands bent
The tall and gracious messengers he sent.
Yet one day with no song from dawn till night
Wondering, I sat, and watched them out of sight.
And the next day I called; and on the third
Asked them if I might go,—but no one heard.
Then, sick with longing, I arose at last
And went unto my father,—in that vast
Chamber wherein he for so many years
Has sat, surrounded by his charts and spheres.
"Father," I said, "Father, I cannot play
The harp that thou didst give me, and all day
I sit in idleness, while to and fro
About me thy serene, grave servants go;
And I am weary of my lonely ease.
Better a perilous journey overseas
Away from thee, than this, the life I lead,
To sit all day in the sunshine like a weed
That grows to naught,—I love thee more than they
Who serve thee most; yet serve thee in no way.
Father, I beg of thee a little task
To dignify my days,—'tis all I ask
Forever, but forever, this denied,
I perish."
"Child," my father's voice replied,
"All things thy fancy hath desired of me
Thou hast received. I have prepared for thee
Within my house a spacious chamber, where
Are delicate things to handle and to wear,
And all these things are thine. Dost thou love song?
My minstrels shall attend thee all day long.
Or sigh for flowers? My fairest gardens stand
Open as fields to thee on every hand.
And all thy days this word shall hold the same:
No pleasure shalt thou lack that thou shalt name.
But as for tasks—" he smiled, and shook his head;
"Thou hadst thy task, and laidst it by," he said.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The True Encounter

"Wolf!" cried my cunning heart
At every sheep it spied,
And roused the countryside.

"Wolf! Wolf!"—and up would start
Good neighbours, bringing spade
And pitchfork to my aid.

At length my cry was known:
Therein lay my release.
I met the wolf alone
And was devoured in peace.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Unexplorer

There was a road ran past our house
Too lovely to explore.
I asked my mother once—she said
That if you followed where it led
It brought you to the milk-man's door.
(That's why I have not travelled more.)

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Wood Road

If I were to walk this way
Hand in hand with Grief,
I should mark that maple-spray
Coming into leaf.
I should note how the old burrs
Rot upon the ground.
Yes, though Grief should know me hers
While the world goes round,
It could not if truth be said
This was lost on me:
A rock-maple showing red,
Burrs beneath a tree.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Think Not, Not For A Moment Let Your Mind

Think not, not for a moment let your mind,
Wearied with thinking, doze upon the thought
That the work's done and the long day behind,
And beauty, since 'tis paid for, can be bought.
If in the moonlight from the silent bough
Suddenly with precision speak your name
The nightingale, be not assured that now
His wing is limed and his wild virtue tame.
Beauty beyond all feathers that have flown
Is free; you shall not hood her to your wrist,
Nor sting her eyes, nor have her for your own
In an fashion; beauty billed and kissed
Is not your turtle; tread her like a dove
She loves you not; she never heard of love.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Three Songs Of Shattering

I

The first rose on my rose-tree
   Budded, bloomed, and shattered,
During sad days when to me
         Nothing mattered.

Grief of grief has drained me clean;
   Still it seems a pity
No one saw,—it must have been
         Very pretty.

II

Let the little birds sing;
   Let the little lambs play;
Spring is here; and so 'tis spring;—
   But not in the old way!

I recall a place
   Where a plum-tree grew;
There you lifted up your face,
   And blossoms covered you.

If the little birds sing,
   And the little lambs play,
Spring is here; and so 'tis spring—
   But not in the old way!

III

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree!
   Ere spring was going—ah, spring is gone!
And there comes no summer to the like of you and me,—
   Blossom time is early, but no fruit sets on.

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree,
   Browned at the edges, turned in a day;
And I would with all my heart they trimmed a mound for me,
   And weeds were tall on all the paths that led that way!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Thursday

And if I loved you Wednesday,
Well, what is that to you?
I do not love you Thursday -
So much is true.

And why you come complaining
Is more than I can see.
I loved you Wednesday, - yes -but what
Is that to me?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

To A Poet That Died Young

Minstrel, what have you to do
With this man that, after you,
Sharing not your happy fate,
Sat as England's Laureate?
Vainly, in these iron days,
Strives the poet in your praise,
Minstrel, by whose singing side
Beauty walked, until you died.

Still, though none should hark again,
Drones the blue-fly in the pane,
Thickly crusts the blackest moss,
Blows the rose its musk across,
Floats the boat that is forgot
None the less to Camelot.

Many a bard's untimely death
Lends unto his verses breath;
Here's a song was never sung:
Growing old is dying young.
Minstrel, what is this to you:
That a man you never knew,
When your grave was far and green,
Sat and gossipped with a queen?

Thalia knows how rare a thing
Is it, to grow old and sing;
When a brown and tepid tide
Closes in on every side.
Who shall say if Shelley's gold
Had withstood it to grow old?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

To a Young Poet

Time cannot break the bird's wing from the bird.
Bird and wing together
Go down, one feather.

No thing that ever flew,
Not the lark, not you,
Can die as others do.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

To Kathleen

Still must the poet as of old,
In barren attic bleak and cold,
Starve, freeze, and fashion verses to
Such things as flowers and song and you;

Still as of old his being give
In Beauty's name, while she may live,
Beauty that may not die as long
As there are flowers and you and song.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

To The Not Impossible Him

How shall I know, unless I go
To Cairo and Cathay,
Whether or not this blessed spot
Is blest in every way?

Now it may be, the flower for me
Is this beneath my nose:
How shall I tell, unless I smell
The Carthaginian rose?

The fabric of my faithful love
No power shall dim or ravel
Whilst I stay here,—but oh, my dear,
If I should ever travel!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

To Those Without Pity

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

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Travel

The railroad track is miles away,
    And the day is loud with voices speaking,
Yet there isn't a train goes by all day
    But I hear its whistle shrieking.

All night there isn't a train goes by,
    Though the night is still for sleep and dreaming,
But I see its cinders red on the sky,
    And hear its engine steaming.

My heart is warm with friends I make,
    And better friends I'll not be knowing;
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
    No matter where it's going.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Two Sonnets In Memory

(Nicola Sacco -- Bartolomeo Vanzetti)
Executed August 23, 1927

I

As men have loved their lovers in times past
And sung their wit, their virtue and their grace,
So have we loved sweet Justice to the last,
That now lies here in an unseemly place.
The child will quit the cradle and grow wise
And stare on beauty till his senses drown;
Yet shall be seen no more by mortal eyes
Such beauty as here walked and here went down.
Like birds that hear the winter crying plain
Her courtiers leave to seek the clement south;
Many have praised her, we alone remain
To break a fist against the lying mouth
Of any man who says this was not so:
Though she be dead now, as indeed we know.

II

Where can the heart be hidden in the ground
And be at peace, and be at peace forever,
Under the world, untroubled by the sound
Of mortal tears, that cease from pouring never?
Well for the heart, by stern compassion harried,
If death be deeper than the churchmen say, --
Gone from this world indeed what's graveward carried,
And laid to rest indeed what's laid away.
Anguish enough while yet the indignant breather
Have blood to spurt upon the oppressor's hand;
Who would eternal be, and hang in ether
A stuffless ghost above his struggling land,
Retching in vain to render up the groan
That is not there, being aching dust's alone?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Underground System

Set the foot down with distrust upon the crust of the
world—it is thin.
Moles are at work beneath us; they have tunneled the
sub-soil
With separate chambers; which at an appointed knock
Could be as one, could intersect and interlock. We walk
on the skin
Of life. No toil
Of rake or hoe, no lime, no phosphate, no rotation of
crops, no irrigation of the land,
Will coax the limp and flattened grain to stand
On that bad day, or feed to strength the nibbled root's of
our nation.
Ease has demoralized us, nearly so, we know
Nothing of the rigours of winter: The house has a roof
against—the car a top against—the snow.
All will be well, we say, it is a bit, like the rising of the
sun,
For our country to prosper; who can prevail against us?
No one.
The house has a roof; but the boards of its floor are
rotting, and hall upon hall
The moles have built their palace beneath us, we have
not far to fall.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

We Talk of Taxes...

We talk of taxes, and I call you friend;
Well, such you are, -- but well enough we know
How thick about us root, how rankly grow
Those subtle weeds no man has need to tend,
That flourish through neglect, and soon must send
Perfume too sweet upon us and overthrow
Our steady senses; how such matters go
We are aware, and how such matters end.
Yet shall be told no meagre passion here;
With lovers such as we forevermore
Isolde drinks the draught, and Guinevere
Receives the Table's ruin through her door,
Francesca, with the loud surf at her ear,
Lets fall the coloured book upon the floor.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

What Lips My Lips Have Kissed, And Where, And Why (Sonnet XLIII)

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply,
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.
Thus in winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,
I only know that summer sang in me
A little while, that in me sings no more.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

When I Too Long Have Looked Upon Your Face

When I too long have looked upon your face,
Wherein for me a brightness unobscured
Save by the mists of brightness has its place,
And terrible beauty not to be endured,
I turn away reluctant from your light,
And stand irresolute, a mind undone,
A silly, dazzled thing deprived of sight
From having looked too long upon the sun.
Then is my daily life a narrow room
In which a little while, uncertainly,
Surrounded by impenetrable gloom,
Among familiar things grown strange to me
Making my way, I pause, and feel, and hark,
Till I become accustomed to the dark.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

When the Year grows Old

I cannot but remember
   When the year grows old --
October -- November --
   How she disliked the cold!

She used to watch the swallows
   Go down across the sky,
And turn from the window
   With a little sharp sigh.

And often when the brown leaves
   Were brittle on the ground,
And the wind in the chimney
   Made a melancholy sound,

She had a look about her
   That I wish I could forget --
The look of a scared thing
   Sitting in a net!

Oh, beautiful at nightfall
   The soft spitting snow!
And beautiful the bare boughs
   Rubbing to and fro!

But the roaring of the fire,
   And the warmth of fur,
And the boiling of the kettle
   Were beautiful to her!

I cannot but remember
   When the year grows old --
October -- November --
   How she disliked the cold!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

When We Are Old And These Rejoicing Veins

When we are old and these rejoicing veins
Are frosty channels to a muted stream,
And out of all our burning their remains
No feeblest spark to fire us, even in dream,
This be our solace: that it was not said
When we were young and warm and in our prime,
Upon our couch we lay as lie the dead,
Sleeping away the unreturning time.
O sweet, O heavy-lidded, O my love,
When morning strikes her spear upon the land,
And we must rise and arm us and reprove
The insolent daylight with a steady hand,
Be not discountenanced if the knowing know
We rose from rapture but an hour ago.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Whereas At Morning In A Jeweled Crown

Whereas at morning in a Jeweled Crown
I bit my fingers and was hard to please,
Having shook disaster till the fruit fell down
I feel tonight more happy and at ease:
Feet running in the corridors, men quick—
Buckling their sword-belts, bumping down the stair,
Challenge, and rattling bridge-chain, and the click
Of hooves on pavement—this will clear the air.
Private this chamber as it has not been
In many a month of muffled hours; almost,
Lulled by the uproar, I could lie serene
And sleep, until all's won, until all's lost,
And the door's opened and the issue shown,
And I walk forth Hell's Mistress—or my own.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Wild Swans

I looked in my heart while the wild swans went over.
And what did I see I had not seen before?
Only a question less or a question more:
Nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying.
Tiresome heart, forever living and dying,
House without air, I leave you and lock your door.
Wild swans, come over the town, come over
The town again, trailing your legs and crying!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Witch-Wife

She is neither pink nor pale,
And she never will be all mine;
She learned her hands in a fairy-tale,
And her mouth on a valentine.

She has more hair than she needs;
In the sun 'tis a woe to me!
And her voice is a string of coloured beads,
Or steps leading into the sea.

She loves me all that she can,
And her ways to my ways resign;
But she was not made for any man,
And she never will be all mine.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Wraith

"Thin Rain, whom are you haunting,
That you haunt my door?"
—Surely it is not I she's wanting;
Someone living here before—
"Nobody's in the house but me:
You may come in if you like and see."

Thin as thread, with exquisite fingers,—
Have you seen her, any of you?—
Grey shawl, and leaning on the wind,
And the garden showing through?

Glimmering eyes,—and silent, mostly,
Sort of a whisper, sort of a purr,
Asking something, asking it over,
If you get a sound from her.—

Ever see her, any of you?—
Strangest thing I've ever known,—
Every night since I moved in,
And I came to be alone.

"Thin Rain, hush with your knocking!
You may not come in!
This is I that you hear rocking;
Nobody's with me, nor has been!"

Curious, how she tried the window,—
Odd, the way she tries the door,—
Wonder just what sort of people
Could have had this house before . . .

Edna St. Vincent Millay