

Classic Poetry Series

Isabella Valancy Crawford

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Camp of Souls, The

1 My white canoe, like the silvery air
2 O'er the River of Death that darkly rolls
3 When the moons of the world are round and fair,
4 I paddle back from the "Camp of Souls."
5 When the wishton-wish in the low swamp grieves
6 Come the dark plumes of red "Singing Leaves."

7 Two hundred times have the moons of spring
8 Rolled over the bright bay's azure breath
9 Since they decked me with plumes of an eagle's wing,
10 And painted my face with the "paint of death,"
11 And from their pipes o'er my corpse there broke
12 The solemn rings of the blue "last smoke."

13 Two hundred times have the wintry moons
14 Wrapped the dead earth in a blanket white;
15 Two hundred times have the wild sky loons
16 Shrieked in the flush of the golden light
17 Of the first sweet dawn, when the summer weaves
18 Her dusky wigwam of perfect leaves.

19 Two hundred moons of the falling leaf
20 Since they laid my bow in my dead right hand
21 And chanted above me the "song of grief"
22 As I took my way to the spirit land;
23 Yet when the swallow the blue air cleaves
24 Come the dark plumes of red "Singing Leaves."

25 White are the wigwams in that far camp,
26 And the star-eyed deer on the plains are found;
27 No bitter marshes or tangled swamp
28 In the Manitou's happy hunting-ground!
29 And the moon of summer forever rolls
30 Above the red men in their "Camp of Souls."

31 Blue are its lakes as the wild dove's breast,
32 And their murmurs soft as her gentle note;
33 As the calm, large stars in the deep sky rest,
34 The yellow lilies upon them float;
35 And canoes, like flakes of the silvery snow,
36 Thro' the tall, rustling rice-beds come and go.

37 Green are its forests; no warrior wind
38 Rushes on war trail the dusk grove through,
39 With leaf-scalps of tall trees mourning behind;
40 But South Wind, heart friend of Great Manitou,
41 When ferns and leaves with cool dews are wet,
42 Bows flowery breaths from his red calumet.

43 Never upon them the white frosts lie,
44 Nor glow their green boughs with the "paint of death";
45 Manitou smiles in the crystal sky,

46 Close breathing above them His life-strong breath;
47 And He speaks no more in fierce thunder sound,
48 So near is His happy hunting-ground.

49 Yet often I love, in my white canoe,
50 To come to the forests and camps of earth:
51 'Twas there death's black arrow pierced me through;
52 'Twas there my red-browed mother gave me birth;
53 There I, in the light of a young man's dawn,
54 Won the lily heart of dusk "Springing Fawn."

55 And love is a cord woven out of life,
56 And dyed in the red of the living heart;
57 And time is the hunter's rusty knife,
58 That cannot cut the red strands apart:
59 And I sail from the spirit shore to scan
60 Where the weaving of that strong cord began.

61 But I may not come with a giftless hand,
62 So richly I pile, in my white canoe,
63 Flowers that bloom in the spirit land,
64 Immortal smiles of Great Manitou.
65 When I paddle back to the shores of earth
66 I scatter them over the white man's hearth.

67 For love is the breath of the soul set free;
68 So I cross the river that darkly rolls,
69 That my spirit may whisper soft to thee
70 Of thine who wait in the "Camp of Souls."
71 When the bright day laughs, or the wan night grieves,
72 Come the dusky plumes of red "Singing Leaves."

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Canoe, The

1 My masters twain made me a bed
2 Of pine-boughs resinous, and cedar;
3 Of moss, a soft and gentle breeder
4 Of dreams of rest; and me they spread
5 With furry skins, and laughing said,
6 "Now she shall lay her polish'd sides,
7 As queens do rest, or dainty brides,
8 Our slender lady of the tides!"

9 My masters twain their camp-soul lit,
10 Streamed incense from the hissing cones,
11 Large, crimson flashes grew and whirl'd
12 Thin, golden nerves of sly light curl'd
13 Round the dun camp, and rose faint zones,
14 Half way about each grim bole knit,
15 Like a shy child that would bedeck
16 With its soft clasp a Brave's red neck;
17 Yet sees the rough shield on his breast,
18 The awful plumes shake on his crest,
19 And fearful drops his timid face,
20 Nor dares complete the sweet embrace.

21 Into the hollow hearts of brakes,
22 Yet warm from sides of does and stags,
23 Pass'd to the crisp dark river flags;
24 Sinuous, red as copper snakes,
25 Sharp-headed serpents, made of light,
26 Glided and hid themselves in night.

27 My masters twain, the slaughter'd deer
28 Hung on fork'd boughs—with thongs of leather.
29 Bound were his stiff, slim feet together—
30 His eyes like dead stars cold and drear;
31 The wand'ring firelight drew near
32 And laid its wide palm, red and anxious,
33 On the sharp splendor of his branches;
34 On the white foam grown hard and sere
35 On flank and shoulder.
36 Death—hard as breast of granite boulder,
37 And under his lashes
38 Peer'd thro' his eyes at his life's gray ashes.

39 My masters twain sang songs that wove
40 (As they burnish'd hunting blade and rifle)
41 A golden thread with a cobweb trifle—
42 Loud of the chase, and low of love.

43 "O Love, art thou a silver fish ?
44 Shy of the line and shy of gaffing,
45 Which we do follow, fierce, yet laughing,
46 Casting at thee the light-wing'd wish,
47 And at the last shall we bring thee up

48 From the crystal darkness under the cup
49 Of lily folden,
50 On broad leaves golden ?

51 "O Love! art thou a silver deer,
52 Swift thy starr'd feet as wing of swallow,
53 While we with rushing arrows follow;
54 And at the last shall we draw near,
55 And over thy velvet neck cast thongs—
56 Woven of roses, of stars, of songs ?
57 New chains all molden
58 Of rare gems olden!"

59 They hung the slaughter'd fish like swords
60 On saplings slender—like scimitars
61 Bright, and ruddied from new-dead wars,
62 Blaz'd in the light--the scaly hordes.

63 They pil'd up boughs beneath the trees,
64 Of cedar-web and green fir tassel;
65 Low did the pointed pine tops rustle,
66 The camp fire blush'd to the tender breeze.

67 The hounds laid dew-laps on the ground,
68 With needles of pine sweet, soft, and rusty—
69 Dream'd of the dead stag stout and lusty;
70 A bat by the red flames wove its round.

71 The darkness built its wigwam walls
72 Close round the camp, and at its curtain
73 Press'd shapes, thin woven and uncertain,
74 As white locks of tall waterfalls.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Dark Stag, The

1 A startled stag, the blue-grey Night,
2 Leaps down beyond black pines.
3 Behind--a length of yellow light--
4 The hunter's arrow shines:
5 His moccasins are stained with red,
6 He bends upon his knee,
7 From covering peaks his shafts are sped,
8 The blue mists plume his mighty head,--
9 Well may the swift Night flee!

10 The pale, pale Moon, a snow-white doe,
11 Bounds by his dappled flank:
12 They beat the stars down as they go,
13 Like wood-bells growing rank.
14 The winds lift dewlaps from the ground,
15 Leap from the quaking reeds;
16 Their hoarse bays shake the forests round,
17 With keen cries on the track they bound,--
18 Swift, swift the dark stag speeds!

19 Away! his white doe, far behind,
20 Lies wounded on the plain;
21 Yells at his flank the nimblest wind,
22 His large tears fall in rain;
23 Like lily-pads, small clouds grow white
24 About his darkling way;
25 From his bald nest upon the height
26 The red-eyed eagle sees his flight;
27 He falters, turns, the antlered Night,--
28 The dark stag stands at bay!

29 His feet are in the waves of space;
30 His antlers broad and dun
31 He lowers; he turns his velvet face
32 To front the hunter, Sun;
33 He stamps the liliated clouds, and high
34 His branches fill the west.
35 The lean stork sails across the sky,
36 The shy loon shrieks to see him die,
37 The winds leap at his breast.

38 Roar the rent lakes as thro' the wave
39 Their silver warriors plunge,
40 As vaults from core of crystal cave
41 The strong, fierce muskallunge;
42 Red torches of the sumach glare,
43 Fall's council-fires are lit;
44 The bittern, squaw-like, scolds the air;
45 The wild duck splashes loudly where
46 The rustling rice-spears knit.

47 Shaft after shaft the red Sun speeds:

48 Rent the stag's dappled side,
49 His breast, fanged by the shrill winds, bleeds,
50 He staggers on the tide;
51 He feels the hungry waves of space
52 Rush at him high and blue;
53 Their white spray smites his dusky face,
54 Swifter the Sun's fierce arrows race
55 And pierce his stout heart thro'.

56 His antlers fall; once more he spurns
57 The hoarse hounds of the day;
58 His blood upon the crisp blue burns,
59 Reddens the mounting spray;
60 His branches smite the wave--with cries
61 The loud winds pause and flag--
62 He sinks in space--red glow the skies,
63 The brown earth crimsons as he dies,
64 The strong and dusky stag.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

His Mother

In the first dawn she lifted from her bed
The holy silver of her noble head,
And listened, listened, listened for his tread.
'Too soon, too soon !' she murmured, 'Yet I'll keep
My vigil longer- thou, O tender Sleep,
Art but the joy of those who wake and weep!

'Joy's self hath keen, wide eyes. O flesh of mine,
And mine own blood and bone, the very wine
Of my aged heart, I see thy dear eyes shine!

'I hear thy tread; thy light, loved footsteps run
Along the way, eager for that 'Well done !'
We'll weep and kiss to thee, my soldier son!

'Blest mother I- he lives! Yet had he died
Blest were I still, - I sent him on the tide
Of my full heart to save his nation's pride!

'O God, if that I tremble so to-day,
Bowed with such blessings that I cannot pray
By speech- a mother prays, dear Lord, always

'In some far fibre of her trembling mind!
I'll up- I thought I heard a bugle bind
Its silver with the silver of the wind. '

Isabella Valancy Crawford

His Sweetheart

Sylvia's lattices were dark-
Roses made them narrow.
In the dawn there came a Spark,
Armèd with an arrow:
Blithe he burst by dewy spray,
Winged by bud and blossom,
All undaunted urged his way
Straight to Sylvia's bosom.
'Sylvia! Sylvia! Sylvia!' he
Like a bee kept humming,
'Wake, my sweeting; waken thee,
For thy Soldier's coming!'
Sylvia sleeping in the dawn,
Dreams that Cupid's trill is
Roses singing on the lawn,
Courting crested lilies.
Sylvia smiles and Sylvia sleeps,
Sylvia weeps and slumbers;
Cupid to her pink ear creeps,
Pipes his pretty numbers.
Sylvia dreams that bugles play,
Hears a martial drumming;
Sylvia springs to meet the day
With her Soldier coming.

Happy Sylvia, on thee wait
All the gracious graces!
Venus mild her cestus plait
Round thy lawns and laces!
Flora fling a flower most fair,
Hope a rainbow lend thee!
All the nymphs to Cupid dear
On this day befriend thee!
'Sylvia! Sylvia! Sylvia!' hear
How he keeps a-humming,
Laughing in her jewelled ear,
'Sweet, thy Soldier's coming!'

Isabella Valancy Crawford

His Wife and Baby

In the lone place of the leaves,
Where they touch the hanging eaves,
There sprang a spray of joyous song that sounded sweet and sturdy;
 And the baby in the bed
 Raised the shining of his head,
And pulled the mother's lids apart to wake and watch the birdie.
 She kissed lip-dimples sweet,
 The red soles of his feet,
The waving palms that patted hers as wind-blown blossoms wander;
 He twined her tresses silk
 Round his neck as white as milk-
'Now, baby, say what birdie sings upon his green spray yonder.'

 'He sings a plenty things-
 Just watch him wash his wings!
He says Papa will march to-day with drums home through the city.
 Here, birdie, here's my cup.
 You drink the milk all up;
I'll kiss you, birdie, now you're washed like baby clean and pretty.'

 She rose, she sought the skies
 With the twin joys of her eyes;
She sent the strong dove of her soul up through the dawning's glory;
 She kissed upon her hand
 The glowing golden band
That bound the fine scroll of her life and clasped her simple story.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Lily Bed, The

His cedar paddle, scented, red,
He thrust down through the lily bed;

Cloaked in a golden pause he lay,
Locked in the arms of the placid bay.

Trembled alone his bark canoe
As shocks of bursting lilies flew

Thro' the still crystal of the tide,
And smote the frail boat's birchen side;

Or, when beside the sedges thin
Rose the sharp silver of a fin;

Or when, a wizard swift and cold,
A dragon-fly beat on in gold

And jewels all the widening rings
Of waters singing to his wings;

Or, like a winged and burning soul,
Dropped from the gloom an oriole

On the cool wave, as to the balm
Of the Great Spirit's open palm

The freed soul flies. And silence clung
To the still hours, as tendrils hung,

In darkness carven, from the trees,
Sedge-buried to their burly knees.

Stillness sat in his lodge of leaves;
Clung golden shadows to its eaves,

And on its cone-sped floor, like maize,
Red-ripe, fell sheaves of knotted rays.

The wood, a proud and crested brave;
Bead-bright, a maiden, stood the wave.

And he had spoke his soul of love
With voice of eagle and of dove.

Of loud, strong pines his tongue was made;
His lips, soft blossoms in the shade,

That kissed her silver lips--hers cool
As lilies on his inmost pool--

Till now he stood, in triumph's rest,

His image painted in her breast.

One isle 'tween blue and blue did melt,--
A bead of wampum from the belt

Of Manitou--a purple rise
On the far shore heaved to the skies.

His cedar paddle, scented, red,
He drew up from the lily bed;

All lily-locked, all lily-locked,
His light bark in the blossoms rocked.

Their cool lips round the sharp prow sang,
Their soft clasp to the frail sides sprang,

With breast and lip they wove a bar.
Stole from her lodge the Evening Star;

With golden hand she grasped the mane
Of a red cloud on her azure plain.

It by the peaked, red sunset flew;
Cool winds from its bright nostrils blew.

They swayed the high, dark trees, and low
Swept the locked lilies to and fro.

With cedar paddle, scented, red,
He pushed out from the lily bed.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story

PART I

Max plac'd a ring on little Katie's hand,
A silver ring that he had beaten out
From that same sacred coin--first well-priz'd wage
For boyish labour, kept thro' many years.
"See, Kate," he said, "I had no skill to shape
Two hearts fast bound together, so I grav'd
Just K. and M., for Katie and for Max."
"But, look; you've run the lines in such a way,
That M. is part of K., and K. of M.,"
Said Katie, smiling. "Did you mean it thus?
I like it better than the double hearts."
"Well, well," he said, "but womankind is wise!
Yet tell me, dear, will such a prophecy
Not hurt you sometimes, when I am away?
Will you not seek, keen ey'd, for some small break
In those deep lines, to part the K. and M.
For you? Nay, Kate, look down amid the globes
Of those large lilies that our light canoe
Divides, and see within the polish'd pool
That small, rose face of yours,--so dear, so fair,--
A seed of love to cleave into a rock,
And bourgeon thence until the granite splits
Before its subtle strength. I being gone--
Poor soldier of the axe--to bloodless fields,
(Inglorious battles, whether lost or won)
That sixteen summer'd heart of yours may say:
"I but was budding, and I did not know
My core was crimson and my perfume sweet;
I did not know how choice a thing I am;
I had not seen the sun, and blind I sway'd
To a strong wind, and thought because I sway'd,
'Twas to the wooer of the perfect rose--
That strong, wild wind has swept beyond my ken--
The breeze I love sighs thro' my ruddy leaves,"
"O, words!" said Katie, blushing, "only words!
You build them up that I may push them down;
If hearts are flow'rs, I know that flow'rs can root--
Bud, blossom, die--all in the same lov'd soil;
They do so in my garden. I have made
Your heart my garden. If I am a bud
And only feel unfoldment--feebly stir
Within my leaves; wait patiently; some June,
I'll blush a full-blown rose, and queen it, dear,
In your lov'd garden. Tho' I be a bud,
My roots strike deep, and torn from that dear soil
Would shriek like mandrakes--those witch things I read
Of in your quaint old books. Are you content?"
"Yes--crescent-wise--but not to round, full moon.
Look at yon hill that rounds so gently up
From the wide lake; a lover king it looks,
In cloth of gold, gone from his bride and queen;

And yet delay'd, because her silver locks
 Catch in his gilded fringes; his shoulders sweep
 Into blue distance, and his gracious crest,
 Not held too high, is plum'd with maple groves;--
 One of your father's farms. A mighty man,
 Self-hewn from rock, remaining rock through all."
 "He loves me, Max," said Katie: "Yes, I know--
 A rock is cup to many a crystal spring.
 Well, he is rich; those misty, peak-roof'd barns--
 Leviathans rising from red seas of grain--
 Are full of ingots, shaped like grains of wheat.
 His flocks have golden fleeces, and his herds
 Have monarchs worshipful, as was the calf
 Aaron call'd from the furnace; and his ploughs,
 Like Genii chained, snort o'er his mighty fields.
 He has a voice in Council and in Church--"
 "He work'd for all," said Katie, somewhat pain'd.
 "Aye, so, dear love, he did; I heard him tell
 How the first field upon his farm was ploughed.
 He and his brother Reuben, stalwart lads,
 Yok'd themselves, side by side, to the new plough;
 Their weaker father, in the grey of life
 (But rather the wan age of poverty
 Than many winters), in large, gnarl'd hands
 The plunging handles held; with mighty strains
 They drew the ripping beak through knotted sod,
 Thro' tortuous lanes of blacken'd, smoking stumps;
 And past great flaming brush heaps, sending out
 Fierce summers, beating on their swollen brows.
 O, such a battle! had we heard of serfs
 Driven to like hot conflict with the soil,
 Armies had march'd and navies swiftly sail'd
 To burst their gyves. But here's the little point--
 The polish'd di'mond pivot on which spins
 The wheel of Difference--they OWN'D the rugged soil,
 And fought for love--dear love of wealth and pow'r,
 And honest ease and fair esteem of men;
 One's blood heats at it!" "Yet you said such fields
 Were all inglorious," Katie, wondering, said.
 "Inglorious? yes; they make no promises
 Of Star or Garter, or the thundering guns
 That tell the earth her warriors are dead.
 Inglorious! aye, the battle done and won
 Means not--a throne propp'd up with bleaching bones;
 A country sav'd with smoking seas of blood;
 A flag torn from the foe with wounds and death;
 Or Commerce, with her housewife foot upon
 Colossal bridge of slaughter'd savages,
 The Cross laid on her brawny shoulder, and
 In one sly, mighty hand her reeking sword;
 And in the other all the woven cheats
 From her dishonest looms. Nay, none of these.

It means--four walls, perhaps a lowly roof;
Kine in a peaceful pasture; modest fields;
A man and woman standing hand in hand
In hale old age, who, looking o'er the land,
Say: `Thank the Lord, it all is mine and thine!'
It means, to such thew'd warriors of the Axe
As your own father;--well, it means, sweet Kate,
Outspreading circles of increasing gold,
A name of weight; one little daughter heir,
Who must not wed the owner of an axe,
Who owns naught else but some dim, dusky woods
In a far land; two arms indifferent strong--"
"And Katie's heart," said Katie, with a smile;
For yet she stood on that smooth, violet plain,
Where nothing shades the sun; nor quite believed
Those blue peaks closing in were aught but mist
Which the gay sun could scatter with a glance.
For Max, he late had touch'd their stones, but yet
He saw them seam'd with gold and precious ores,
Rich with hill flow'rs and musical with rills.
"Or that same bud that will be Katie's heart,
Against the time your deep, dim woods are clear'd,
And I have wrought my father to relent."
"How will you move him, sweet? why, he will rage
And fume and anger, striding o'er his fields,
Until the last-bought king of herds lets down
His lordly front, and rumbling thunder from
His polish'd chest, returns his chiding tones.
How will you move him, Katie, tell me how?"
"I'll kiss him and keep still--that way is sure,"
Said Katie, smiling. "I have often tried."
"God speed the kiss," said Max, and Katie sigh'd,
With pray'rful palms close seal'd, "God speed the axe!"

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Mother's Soul, The

When the moon was horned the mother died,
And the child pulled at her hand and knee,
And he rubbed her cheek and loudly cried:

'O mother, arise, give bread to me!'

But the pine tree bent its head,
And the wind at the door-post said:

'O child, thy mother is dead !'

The sun set his loom to weave the day;

The frost bit sharp like a silent cur;

The child by her pillow paused in his play:

'Mother, build up the sweet fire of fir !'

But the fir tree shook its cones,
And loud cried the pitiful stones:

'Wolf Death has thy mother's bones!'

They bore the mother out on her bier;
Their tears made warm her breast and shroud;

The smiling child at her head stood near;

And the long, white tapers shook and bowed,

And said with their tongues of gold,
To the ice lumps of the grave mold:

'How heavy are ye and cold!'

They buried the mother; to the feast
They flocked with the beaks of unclean crows.

The wind came up from the red-eyed east

And bore in its arms the chill, soft snows.

They said to each other: 'Sere
Are the hearts the mother held dear;

Forgotten, her babe plays here!'

The child with the tender snowflakes played,

And the wind on its fingers twined his hair;

And still by the tall, brown grave he stayed,

Alone in the churchyard lean and bare.

The sods on the high grave cried

To the mother's white breast inside:

'Lie still; in thy deep rest bide!'

Her breast lay still like a long-chilled stone,

Her soul was out on the bleak, grey day;

She saw her child by the grave alone,

With the sods and snow and wind at play.

Said the sharp lips of the rush,

'Red as thy roses, O bush,

With anger the dead can blush !'

A butterfly to the child's breast flew,*

Fluttered its wings on his sweet, round cheek,

Danced by his fingers, small, cold and blue.

The sun strode down past the mountain peak.

The butterfly whispered low

To the child: 'Babe, follow me; know,
Cold is the earth here below.'

The butterfly flew; followed the child,
Lured by the snowy torch of its wings;
The wind sighed after them soft and wild
Till the stars wedded night with golden rings
Till the frost upreared its head,
And the ground to it groaned and said:
'The feet of the child are lead!'

The child's head drooped to the brown, sere mold,
On the crackling cones his white breast lay;
The butterfly touched the locks of gold,
The soul of the child sprang from its clay.
The moon to the pine tree stole,
And silver-lipped, said to its bole:
'How strong is the mother's soul !'

The wings of the butterfly grew out
To the mother's arms, long, soft and white;
She folded them warm her babe about,
She kissed his lips into berries bright,
She warmed his soul on her breast;
And the east called out to the west:
'Now the mother's soul will rest!'

Under the roof where the burial feast
Was heavy with meat and red with wine,
Each crossed himself as out of the east
A strange wind swept over oak and pine.
The trees to the home-roof said:
' 'Tis but the airy rush and tread
Of angels greeting thy dead.'

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Old Spookses' Pass

I.

WE'D camped that night on Yaller Bull Flat,--
Thar was Possum Billy, an' Tom, an' me.
Right smart at throwin' a lariat
Was them two fellers, as ever I see;
An' for ridin' a broncho, or argyin' squar
With the devil roll'd up in the hide of a mule,
Them two fellers that camp'd with me thar
Would hev made an' or'nary feller a fool.

II.

Fur argyfyin' in any way,
Thet hed to be argy'd with sinew an' bone,
I never see'd fellers could argy like them;
But just right har I will hev to own
Thet whar brains come in in the game of life,
They held the poorest keerds in the lot;
An' when hands was shown, some other chap
Rak'd in the hull of the blamed old pot!

III.

We was short of hands, the herd was large,
An' watch an' watch we divided the night;
We could hear the coyotes howl an' whine,
But the darned critters kept out of sight
Of the camp-fire blazin'; an' now an' then
Thar cum a rustle an' sort of rush--
A rattle a-sneakin' away from the blaze,
Thro' the rattlin', cracklin' grey sage bush.

IV.

We'd chanc'd that night on a pootyish lot,
With a tol'ble show of tall, sweet grass--
We was takin' Speredo's drove across
The Rockies, by way of "Old Spookses' Pass"--
An' a mite of a creek went crinklin' down,
Like a "pocket" bust in the rocks overhead,
Consid'able shrunk, by the summer drought,
To a silver streak in its gravelly bed.

V.

'Twas a fairish spot fur to camp a' night;
An' chipper I felt, tho' sort of skeer'd
That them two cowboys with only me,
Couldn't boss three thousand head of a herd.
I took the fust of the watch myself;
An' as the red sun down the mountains sprang,
I roll'd a fresh quid, an' got on the back
Of my peart leetle chunk of a tough mustang.

VI.

An' Possum Billy was sleepin' sound
Es only a cowboy knows how to sleep;
An' Tommy's snores would hev made a old
Buffalo bull feel kind o' cheap.
Wal, pard, I reckon thar's no sech time
For dwind'lin' a chap in his own conceit,

Es when them mountains an' awful stars,
Jest hark to the tramp of his mustang's feet.

VII.

It 'pears to me that them solemn hills
Beckin' them stars so big an' calm,
An' whisper, "Make tracks this way, my friends,
We've ringed in here a specimen man;
He's here alone, so we'll take a look
Thro' his ganzy an' vest, an' his blood an' bone,
An post ourselves as to whether his heart
Is flesh, or a rotten, made-up stone."

VIII.

An' it's often seemed, on a midnight watch,
When the mountains blacken'd the dry, brown sod,
That a chap, if he shut his eyes, might grip
The great kind hand of his Father-God.
I rode round the herd at a sort of walk--
The shadders come stealin' thick an' black;
I'd jest got to leave tew that thar chunk
Of a mustang tew keep in the proper track.

IX.

Ever see'd a herd ring'd in at night?
Wal, it's sort of cur'us,-- the watchin' sky,
The howl of coyotes a great black mass,
With thar an' thar the gleam of a eye
An' the white of a horn an', now an' then,
An' old bull liftin' his shaggy head,
With a beller like a broke-up thunder growl--
An' the summer lightnin', quick an' red,

X.

Twistin' an' turnin' amid the stars,
Silent as snakes at play in the grass,
An' plungin' thar fangs in the bare old skulls
Of the mountains, frownin' above the Pass.
An' all so still, that the leetle crick,
Twinklin' an' crinklin' frum stone to stone,
Grows louder an' louder, an' fills the air
With a cur'us sort of a singin' tone.

It ain't no matter wharever ye be,
(I'll 'low it's a cur'us sort of case)
Whar thar's runnin' water, it's sure to speak
Of folks tew home an' the old home place;

XI.

An' yer bound tew listen an' hear it talk,
Es yer mustang crunches the dry, bald sod;
Fur I reckon' the hills, an' stars, an' creek
Are all of 'em preachers sent by God.
An' them mountains talk tew a chap this way:
"Climb, if ye can, ye degenerate cuss!"
An' the stars smile down on a man, an say,
"Come higher, poor critter, come up tew us!"

XII.

An' I reckon, pard, thar is One above
The highest old star that a chap can see,
An' He says, in a solid, eternal way,
"Ye never can stop till ye get to ME!"
Good fur Him, tew! fur I calculate
HE ain't the One to dodge an' tew shirk,
Or waste a mite of the things He's made,
Or knock off till He's finished His great day's work!

XIII.

We've got to labor an' strain an' snort
Along thet road thet He's planned an' made;
Don't matter a mite He's cut His line
Tew run over a 'tarnal tough up-grade;
An' if some poor sinner ain't built tew hold
Es big a head of steam es the next,
An' keeps slippin' an' slidin' 'way down hill,
Why, He don't make out thet He's awful vex'd.

XIV.

Fur He knows He made Him in thet thar way,
Sumwhars tew fit in His own great plan;
An' He ain't the Bein' tew pour His wrath
On the head of thet slimpsy an' slippery man,
An' He says tew the feller, "Look here, my son,
You're the worst hard case that ever I see,
But be thet it takes ye a million y'ars,
Ye never can stop till ye git tew ME!"

XV.

Them's my idees es I pann'd them out;
Don't take no stock in them creeds that say,
Thar's a chap with horns thet's took control
Of the rollin' stock on thet up-grade way,
Thet's free to tote up es ugly a log
Es grows in his big bush grim an' black,
An' slyly put it across the rails,
Tew hist a poor critter clar off the track.

XVI.

An' when he's pooty well busted an' smashed,
The devil comes smilin' an' bowin' round,
Says tew the Maker, "Guess ye don't keer
Tew trouble with stock thet ain't parfactly sound;
Lemme tote him away--best ye can do--
Neglected, I guess, tew build him with care;
I'll hide him in hell--better thet folks
Shouldn't see him laid up on the track for repair!"

XVII.

Don't take no stock in them creeds at all;
Ain't one of them cur'us sort of moles
Thet think the Maker is bound to let
The devil git up a "corner" in souls.
Ye think I've put up a biggish stake?
Wal, I'll bet fur all I'm wuth, d'ye see?
He ain't wuth shucks thet won't dar tew lay

All his pile on his own idee!

XVIII.

Ye bet yer boots I am safe tew win,
Es the chap that's able tew smilin' smack
The ace he's been hidin' up his sleeve
Kerslap on top of a feller's jack!
Es I wus sayin', the night wus dark,
The lightnin' skippin' from star to star;
Thar wa'n't no clouds but a thread of mist,
No sound but the coyotes yell afar,

XIX.

An' the noise of the creek as it called tew me,
"Pard, don't ye mind the mossy, green spot
Whar a creek stood still fur a drowzin' spell
Right in the midst of the old home lot?
Whar, right at sundown on Sabba'day,
Ye skinn'd yerself of yer meetin' clothes,
An dove, like a duck, whar the water clar
Shone up like glass through the lily-blows?

XX.

Yer soul wus white es yer skin them days,
Yer eyes es clar es the creek at rest;
The wust idee in yer head thet time
Wus robbin' a bluebird's swingin' nest.
Now ain't ye changed? declar fur it, pard;
Thet creek would question, it 'pears tew me,
Ef ye looked in its waters agin tew night,
'Who may this old cuss of a sinner be?'"

XXI.

Thet wus the style thet thet thar creek
In "Old Spookses' Pass" in the Rockies, talked;
Drowzily list'nin' I rode round the herd,
When all of a sudden the mustang balked,
An' shied with a snort; I never know'd
Thet tough leetle critter tew show a scare
In storm or dark; but he jest scrouch'd down,
With his nostrils snuffin' the damp, cool air,

XXII.

An' his flanks a-quiver. Shook up? Wal, yas
Guess'd we hev heaps uv tarnation fun;
I calculated quicker'n light
That the herd would be off on a healthy run.
But thar wan't a stir tew horn or hoof;
The herd, like a great black mist, lay spread,
While har an' thar a grazin' bull
Loomed up, like a mighty "thunder head."

XXIII.

I riz in my saddle an' star'd around--
On the mustang's neck I felt the sweat;
Thar wus nuthin' tew see--sort of felt the har
Commencin' tew crawl on my scalp, ye bet!
Felt kind of cur'us--own up I did;

Felt sort of dry in my mouth an' throat.
Sez I, "Ye ain't goin' tew scare, old hoss,
At a prowlin' cuss of a blamed coyote?"
XXIV.

But 'twan't no coyote nor prowlin' beast,
Nor rattle a-wrigglin' through the grass,
Nor a lurkin' red-skin--twan't my way
In a game like that to sing out, "I pass!"
But I know'd when I glimps'd the rollin' whites,
The sparks from the black of the mustang's eye,
Thar wus somethin' waltzin' up thet way
Thet would send them critters off on the fly!
XXV.

In the night-air's tremblin', shakin' hands
Felt it beatin' kerslap onto me,
Like them waves thet chas'd thet President chap
Thet went on the war-trail in old Judee.
The air wus bustin'--but silent es death;
An' lookin' up, in a second I seed
The sort of sky thet allers looks down
On the rush an' the roar of a night stampede.
XXVI.

Tearin' along the indigo sky
Wus a drove of clouds, snarl'd an' black;
Scuddin' along to'ards the risin' moon,
Like the sweep of a darn'd hungry pack
Of preairie wolves to'ard a bufferler,
The heft of the herd left out of sight;
I dror'd my breath right hard, fur I know'd
We wus in fur a 'tarnal run thet night.
XXVII.

Quiet? Ye bet! The mustang scrouch'd,
His neck stretch'd out an' his nostrils wide;
The moonshine swept, a white river down,
The black of the mighty mountain's side,
Lappin' over an' over the stuns an' brush
In whirls an' swirls of leapin' light,
Makin' straight fur the herd, whar black an' still,
It stretch'd away to the left an' right
XXVIII.

On the level lot,--I tell ye, pard,
I know'd when it touch'd the first black hide,
Me an' the mustang would hev a show
Fur a breezy bit of an' evenin' ride!
One! it flow'd over a homely pine
Thet riz from a cranny, lean an' lank,
A cleft of the mountain;--reck'nin' two,
It slapp'd onto an' old steer's heavin' flank,
XXIX.

Es sound he slept on the skirt of the herd,
Dreamin' his dreams of the sweet blue grass
On the plains below; an' afore it touched

The other wall of "Old Spookses' Pass"
The herd wus up--not one at a time,
Thet ain't the style in a midnight run,
They wus up an' off like es all thair minds
Wus roll'd in the hide of only one!

XXX.

I've fit in a battle, an' heerd the guns
Blaspheming God with their devils' yell;
Heerd the stuns of a fort like thunder crash
In front of the scream of a red-hot shell;
But thet thar poundin' of iron hoofs,
The clatter of horns, the peltin' sweep
Of three thousand head of a runnin' herd,
Made all of them noises kind of cheap.

XXXI.

The Pass jest open'd its giant throat
An' its lips of granite, an' let a roar
Of answerin' echoes; the mustang buck'd,
Then answer'd the bridle; an', pard, afore
The twink of a fire-bug, lifted his legs
Over stuns an' brush, like a lopin' deer--
A smart leetle critter! An' thar wus I
'Longside of the plungin' leadin' steer!

XXXII.

A low-set critter, not much account
For heft or looks, but one of them sort
Thet kin fetch a herd at his darn'd heels
With a toss of his horns or a mite of a snort,
Fur a fight or a run; an' thar wus I,
Pressin' clus to the steel of his heavin' flank,
An' cussin' an' shoutin'--while overhead
The moon in the black clouds tremblin' sank,

XXXIII.

Like a bufferler overtook by the wolves
An' pull'd tew the ground by the scuddin' pack.
The herd rush'd on with a din an' crash,
Dim es a shadder, vast an' black;
Couldn't tell ef a hide wus black or white,
But from the dim surges a-roarin' by
Bust long red flashes--the flamin' light
From some old steer's furious an' scareful eye.

XXXIV.

Thet pass in the Rockies fairly roar'd;
An sudden' es winkin' came the bang
An rattle of thunder. Tew see the grit
Of thet peart little chunk of a tough mustang!
Not a buck nor a shy!--he gev a snort
Thet shook the foam on his steamin' hide,
An' leap'd along. Wal, pard, ye bet
I'd a healthy show fur a lively ride.

XXXV.

An' them cowboys slept in the leetle camp,

Calm es three kids in a truckle bed;
Declar the crash wus enough tew put
Life in the dust of the sleepin' dead!
The thunder kept droppin' its awful shells,
One at a minute, on mountain an' rock:
The pass with its stone lips thunder'd back;
An' the rush an' roar an' whirlin' shock
Of the runnin' herd wus fit tew bust
A tenderfoot's heart hed he chanc'd along;
But I jest let out of my lungs an' throat
A rippin' old verse of a herdsman's song,
XXXVI.

An' sidl'd the mustang closer up,
'Longside of the leader, an' hit him flat
On his steamin' flank with a lightsome stroke
Of the end of my limber lariat;
He never swerv'd, an' we thunder'd on,
Black in the blackness, red in the red
Of the lightnin' blazin' with ev'ry clap
That bust from the black guns overhead!
XXXVII.

The mustang wus shod, an' the lightnin' bit
At his iron shoes each step he run,
Then plung'd in the yearth--we rode in flame,
Fur the flashes roll'd inter only one,
Same es the bellers made one big roar;
Yet thro' the whirl of din an' flame
I sung an' shouted, an' call'd the steer
I sidl'd agin by his own front name,
XXXVIII.

An' struck his side with my fist an' foot--
'Twas jest like hittin' a rushin' stone,
An' he thunder'd ahead--I couldn't boss
The critter a mossel, I'm free tew own.
The sweat come a-pourin' down my beard;
Ef ye wonder wharfor, jest ye spread
Yerself fur a ride with a runnin' herd,
A yawnin' gulch half a mile ahead.
XXXIX.

Three hundred foot from its grinnin' lips
Tew the roarin' stream on its stons below.
Once more I hurl'd the mustang up
Agin the side of the cuss call'd Joe;
'Twan't a mite of use--he riz his heels
Up in the air, like a scuddin' colt;
The herd mass'd closer, an' hurl'd down
The roarin' Pass, like a thunderbolt.
XL.

I couldn't rein off--seem'd swept along
In the rush an' roar an' thunderin' crash;
The lightnin' struck at the runnin' herd
With a crack like the stroke of a cowboy's lash.

Thar! I could see it;--I tell ye, pard,
Things seem'd whittl'd down sort of fine--
We wusn't five hundred feet from the gulch,
With its mean little fringe of scrubby pine.
XLI.

What could stop us? I grit my teeth;
Think I pray'd,--ain't sartin of thet;
When, whizzin' an' singin', thar came the rush
Right past my face of a lariat!
"Bully fur you, old pard!" I roar'd,
Es it whizz'd roun' the leader's steamin' chest,
An' I wheel'd the mustang fur all he was wuth
Kerslap on the side uv the old steer's breast.
XLII.

He gev a snort, an' I see him swerve--
I foller'd his shoulder clus an' tight;
Another swerve, an' the herd begun
To swing around--Shouts I, "All right
"Ye've fetch'd 'em now!" The mustang gave
A small, leettle whinny. I felt him flinch.
Sez I, "Ye ain't goin' tew weaken now,
Old feller, an' me in this darn'd pinch?"
XLIII.

"No," sez he, with his small, prickin' ears,
Plain es a human could speak; an' me--
I turn'd my head tew glimpse ef I could,
Who might the chap with the lariat be.
Wal, pard, I weaken'd--ye bet yer life!
Thar wan't a human in sight around,
But right in front of me come the beat
Of a hoss's hoofs on the tremblin' ground--
XLIV.

Steddy an' heavy--a slingin' lope;
A hefty critter with biggish bones
Might make jest sich--could hear the hoofs
Es they struck on the rattlin', rollin' stones--
The jingle of bit--an' clar an' shrill
A whistle es ever left cowboy's lip,
An' cuttin' the air, the long, fine hiss
Of the whirlin' lash of a cowboy's whip.
XLV.

I crowded the mustang back, ontill
He riz on his haunches--an' I sed,
"In the Maker's name, who may ye be?"
Sez a vice, "Old feller, jest ride ahead!"
"All right!" sez I, an' I shook the rein.
"Ye've turn'd the herd in a hansum style--
Whoever ye be, I'll not back down!"
An' I didn't, neither--ye bet yer pile!
XLVI.

Clus on the heels of that unseen hoss,
I rode on the side of the turnin' herd,

An' once in a while I answer'd back
A shout or a whistle or cheerin' word--
From lips no lightnin' was strong tew show.
'Twas sort of scareful, that midnight ride;
But we'd got our backs tew the gulch--fur that
I'd hev foller'd a curiouser sort of guide!
XLVII.

'Twas kind of scareful tew watch the herd,
Es the plugin' leaders squirm'd an' shrank--
Es I heerd the flick of the unseen lash
Hiss on the side of a steamin' flank.
Guess the feller was smart at the work!
We work'd them leaders round, ontill
They overtook the tail of the herd,
An' the hull of the crowd begun tew "mill."
XLVIII.

Round spun the herd in a great black wheel,
Slower an' slower--ye've seen beneath
A biggish torrent a whirlpool spin,
Its waters black es the face of Death?
'Pear'd sort of like that the "millin'" herd.
We kept by the leaders--HIM and me,
Neck by neck, an' he sung a tune,
About a young gal, nam'd Betsey Lee!
XLIX.

Jine in the chorus? Wal, yes, I did.
He sung like a regilar mockin' bird,
An' us cowboys allus sing out ef tew calm
The scare, ef we can, of a runnin' herd.
Slower an' slower wheel'd round the "mill";
The maddest old steer of a leader slow'd;
Slower an' slower sounded the hoofs
Of the hoss that HIM in front of me rode.

L.
Fainter an' fainter grow'd that thar song
Of Betsey Lee an' her har of gold;
Fainter an' fainter grew the sound
Of the unseen hoofs on the tore-up mold.
The leadin' steer, that cuss of a Joe
Stopp'd an' shook off the foam an' the sweat,
With a stamp an a beller--the run was done,
Wus glad of it, tew, yer free tew bet!

LI.
The herd slow'd up--an' stood in a mass
Of blackness lit by the lightnin's eye;
An' the mustang cower'd es something swept
Clus to his wet flank in passin' by.
"Good night tew ye, Pard!" "Good night," sez I,
Strainin' my sight on the empty air;
The har riz rustlin' up on my head,
Now that I hed time tew scare.
LII.

The mustang flinch'd till his saddle girth
Scrap'd on the dust of the tremblin' ground--
There cum a laugh--the crack of a whip,
A whine like the cry of a well pleas'd hound,
The noise of a hoss that rear'd an' sprang
At the touch of a spur--then all was still;
But the sound of the thunder dyin' down
On the stony breast of the nighest hill!

LIII.

The herd went back to its rest an' feed,
Es quiet a crowd es ever wore hide;
An' them boys in camp never heerd a lisp
Of the thunder an' crash of that run an' ride.
An' I'll never forget, while a wild cat claws,
Or a cow loves a nibble of sweet blue grass,
The cur'us pardner that rode with me
In the night stampede in "Old Spookses Pass!"

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Rose, The

The Rose was given to man for this:
He, sudden seeing it in later years,
Should swift remember Love's first lingering kiss
And Grief's last lingering tears;
Or, being blind, should feel its yearning soul
Knit all its piercing perfume round his own,
Till he should see on memory's ample scroll
All roses he had known;

Or, being hard, perchance his finger-tips
Careless might touch the satin of its cup,
And he should feel a dead babe's budding lips
To his lips lifted up;

Or, being deaf and smitten with its star,
Should, on a sudden, almost hear a lark
Rush singing up-the nightingale afar
Sing through the dew-bright dark;

Or, sorrow-lost in paths that round and round
Circle old graves, its keen and vital breath
Should call to him within the yew's bleak bound
Of Life, and not of Death.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Said the West Wind

1 I love old earth! Why should I lift my wings,
2 My misty wings, so high above her breast
3 That flowers would shake no perfumes from their hearts,
4 And waters breathe no whispers to the shores?
5 I love deep places builded high with woods,
6 Deep, dusk, fern-closed, and starred with nodding blooms,
7 Close watched by hills, green, garlanded and tall.

8 On hazy wings, all shot with mellow gold,
9 I float, I float thro' shadows clear as glass;
10 With perfumed feet I wander o'er the seas,
11 And touch white sails with gentle finger-tips;
12 I blow the faithless butterfly against
13 The rose-red thorn, and thus avenge the rose;
14 I whisper low amid the solemn boughs,
15 And stir a leaf where not my loudest sigh
16 Could move the emerald branches from their calm,--
17 Leaves, leaves, I love ye much, for ye and I
18 Do make sweet music over all the earth!

19 I dream by glassy ponds, and, lingering, kiss
20 The gold crowns of their lilies one by one,
21 As mothers kiss their babes who be asleep
22 On the clear gilding of their infant heads,
23 Lest if they kissed the dimple on the chin,
24 The rose flecks on the cheek or dewy lips,
25 The calm of sleep might feel the touch of love,
26 And so be lost. I steal before the rain,
27 The longed-for guest of summer; as his fringe
28 Of mist drifts slowly from the mountain peaks,
29 The flowers dance to my fairy pipe and fling
30 Rich odours on my wings, and voices cry,
31 'The dear West Wind is damp, and rich with scent;
32 We shall have fruits and yellow sheaves for this.'

33 At night I play amidst the silver mists,
34 And chase them on soft feet until they climb
35 And dance their gilded plumes against the stars;
36 At dawn the last round primrose star I hide
37 By wafting o'er her some small fleck of cloud,
38 And ere it passes comes the broad, bold Sun
39 And blots her from the azure of the sky,
40 As later, toward his noon, he blots a drop
41 Of pollen-gilded dew from violet cup
42 Set bluely in the mosses of the wood.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

Songs for the Soldiers

IF songs be sung let minstrels strike their harps
To large and joyous strains, all thunder-winged
To beat along vast shores. Ay, let their notes
Wild into eagles soaring toward the sun,
And voiced like bugles bursting through the dawn
When armies leap to life! Give them such breasts
As hold immortal fires, and they shall fly,
Swept with our little sphere through all the change
That waits a whirling world.

Joy's an immortal;
She hath a fiery fibre in her flesh
That will not droop or die; so let her chant
The pæans of the dead, where holy Grief
Hath, trembling, thrust the feeble mist aside
That veils her dead, and in the wondrous clasp
Of re-possession ceases to be Grief.
Joy's ample voice shall still roll over all,
And chronicle the heroes to young hearts
Who knew them not.....

There's glory on the sword
That keeps its scabbard-sleep, unless the foe
Beat at the wall, then freely leaps to light
And thrusts to keep the sacred towers of Home
And the dear lines that map the nation out upon the world.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

The Camp of Souls

1 My white canoe, like the silvery air
2 O'er the River of Death that darkly rolls
3 When the moons of the world are round and fair,
4 I paddle back from the 'Camp of Souls.'
5 When the wishton-wish in the low swamp grieves
6 Come the dark plumes of red 'Singing Leaves.'

7 Two hundred times have the moons of spring
8 Rolled over the bright bay's azure breath
9 Since they decked me with plumes of an eagle's wing,
10 And painted my face with the 'paint of death,'
11 And from their pipes o'er my corpse there broke
12 The solemn rings of the blue 'last smoke.'

13 Two hundred times have the wintry moons
14 Wrapped the dead earth in a blanket white;
15 Two hundred times have the wild sky loons
16 Shrieked in the flush of the golden light
17 Of the first sweet dawn, when the summer weaves
18 Her dusky wigwam of perfect leaves.

19 Two hundred moons of the falling leaf
20 Since they laid my bow in my dead right hand
21 And chanted above me the 'song of grief'
22 As I took my way to the spirit land;
23 Yet when the swallow the blue air cleaves
24 Come the dark plumes of red 'Singing Leaves.'

25 White are the wigwams in that far camp,
26 And the star-eyed deer on the plains are found;
27 No bitter marshes or tangled swamp
28 In the Manitou's happy hunting-ground!
29 And the moon of summer forever rolls
30 Above the red men in their 'Camp of Souls.'

31 Blue are its lakes as the wild dove's breast,
32 And their murmurs soft as her gentle note;
33 As the calm, large stars in the deep sky rest,
34 The yellow lilies upon them float;
35 And canoes, like flakes of the silvery snow,
36 Thro' the tall, rustling rice-beds come and go.

37 Green are its forests; no warrior wind
38 Rushes on war trail the dusk grove through,
39 With leaf-scalps of tall trees mourning behind;
40 But South Wind, heart friend of Great Manitou,
41 When ferns and leaves with cool dews are wet,
42 Bows flowery breaths from his red calumet.

43 Never upon them the white frosts lie,
44 Nor glow their green boughs with the 'paint of death';
45 Manitou smiles in the crystal sky,

46 Close breathing above them His life-strong breath;
47 And He speaks no more in fierce thunder sound,
48 So near is His happy hunting-ground.

49 Yet often I love, in my white canoe,
50 To come to the forests and camps of earth:
51 'Twas there death's black arrow pierced me through;
52 'Twas there my red-browed mother gave me birth;
53 There I, in the light of a young man's dawn,
54 Won the lily heart of dusk 'Springing Fawn.'

55 And love is a cord woven out of life,
56 And dyed in the red of the living heart;
57 And time is the hunter's rusty knife,
58 That cannot cut the red strands apart:
59 And I sail from the spirit shore to scan
60 Where the weaving of that strong cord began.

61 But I may not come with a giftless hand,
62 So richly I pile, in my white canoe,
63 Flowers that bloom in the spirit land,
64 Immortal smiles of Great Manitou.
65 When I paddle back to the shores of earth
66 I scatter them over the white man's hearth.

67 For love is the breath of the soul set free;
68 So I cross the river that darkly rolls,
69 That my spirit may whisper soft to thee
70 Of thine who wait in the 'Camp of Souls.'
71 When the bright day laughs, or the wan night grieves,
72 Come the dusky plumes of red 'Singing Leaves.'

Isabella Valancy Crawford

The Canoe

My masters twain made me a bed

2 Of pine-boughs resinous, and cedar;
3 Of moss, a soft and gentle breeder
4 Of dreams of rest; and me they spread
5 With furry skins, and laughing said,
6 'Now she shall lay her polish'd sides,
7 As queens do rest, or dainty brides,
8 Our slender lady of the tides!'

9 My masters twain their camp-soul lit,
10 Streamed incense from the hissing cones,
11 Large, crimson flashes grew and whirl'd
12 Thin, golden nerves of sly light curl'd
13 Round the dun camp, and rose faint zones,
14 Half way about each grim bole knit,
15 Like a shy child that would bedeck
16 With its soft clasp a Brave's red neck;
17 Yet sees the rough shield on his breast,
18 The awful plumes shake on his crest,
19 And fearful drops his timid face,
20 Nor dares complete the sweet embrace.

21 Into the hollow hearts of brakes,
22 Yet warm from sides of does and stags,
23 Pass'd to the crisp dark river flags;
24 Sinuous, red as copper snakes,
25 Sharp-headed serpents, made of light,
26 Glided and hid themselves in night.

27 My masters twain, the slaughter'd deer
28 Hung on fork'd boughs—with thongs of leather.
29 Bound were his stiff, slim feet together—
30 His eyes like dead stars cold and drear;
31 The wand'ring firelight drew near
32 And laid its wide palm, red and anxious,
33 On the sharp splendor of his branches;
34 On the white foam grown hard and sere
35 On flank and shoulder.
36 Death—hard as breast of granite boulder,
37 And under his lashes
38 Peer'd thro' his eyes at his life's gray ashes.

39 My masters twain sang songs that wove
40 (As they burnish'd hunting blade and rifle)
41 A golden thread with a cobweb trifle—
42 Loud of the chase, and low of love.

43 'O Love, art thou a silver fish ?
44 Shy of the line and shy of gaffing,
45 Which we do follow, fierce, yet laughing,
46 Casting at thee the light-wing'd wish,
47 And at the last shall we bring thee up

48 From the crystal darkness under the cup
49 Of lily folden,
50 On broad leaves golden ?

51 'O Love! art thou a silver deer,
52 Swift thy starr'd feet as wing of swallow,
53 While we with rushing arrows follow;
54 And at the last shall we draw near,
55 And over thy velvet neck cast thongs—
56 Woven of roses, of stars, of songs ?
57 New chains all molden
58 Of rare gems olden!'

59 They hung the slaughter'd fish like swords
60 On saplings slender—like scimitars
61 Bright, and ruddied from new-dead wars,
62 Blaz'd in the light--the scaly hordes.

63 They pil'd up boughs beneath the trees,
64 Of cedar-web and green fir tassel;
65 Low did the pointed pine tops rustle,
66 The camp fire blush'd to the tender breeze.

67 The hounds laid dew-laps on the ground,
68 With needles of pine sweet, soft, and rusty—
69 Dream'd of the dead stag stout and lusty;
70 A bat by the red flames wove its round.

71 The darkness built its wigwam walls
72 Close round the camp, and at its curtain
73 Press'd shapes, thin woven and uncertain,
74 As white locks of tall waterfalls.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

The Dark Stag

1 A startled stag, the blue-grey Night,
2 Leaps down beyond black pines.
3 Behind--a length of yellow light--
4 The hunter's arrow shines:
5 His moccasins are stained with red,
6 He bends upon his knee,
7 From covering peaks his shafts are sped,
8 The blue mists plume his mighty head,--
9 Well may the swift Night flee!

10 The pale, pale Moon, a snow-white doe,
11 Bounds by his dappled flank:
12 They beat the stars down as they go,
13 Like wood-bells growing rank.
14 The winds lift dewlaps from the ground,
15 Leap from the quaking reeds;
16 Their hoarse bays shake the forests round,
17 With keen cries on the track they bound,--
18 Swift, swift the dark stag speeds!

19 Away! his white doe, far behind,
20 Lies wounded on the plain;
21 Yells at his flank the nimblest wind,
22 His large tears fall in rain;
23 Like lily-pads, small clouds grow white
24 About his darkling way;
25 From his bald nest upon the height
26 The red-eyed eagle sees his flight;
27 He falters, turns, the antlered Night,--
28 The dark stag stands at bay!

29 His feet are in the waves of space;
30 His antlers broad and dun
31 He lowers; he turns his velvet face
32 To front the hunter, Sun;
33 He stamps the liliated clouds, and high
34 His branches fill the west.
35 The lean stork sails across the sky,
36 The shy loon shrieks to see him die,
37 The winds leap at his breast.

38 Roar the rent lakes as thro' the wave
39 Their silver warriors plunge,
40 As vaults from core of crystal cave
41 The strong, fierce muskallunge;
42 Red torches of the sumach glare,
43 Fall's council-fires are lit;
44 The bittern, squaw-like, scolds the air;
45 The wild duck splashes loudly where
46 The rustling rice-spears knit.

47 Shaft after shaft the red Sun speeds:

48 Rent the stag's dappled side,
49 His breast, fanged by the shrill winds, bleeds,
50 He staggers on the tide;
51 He feels the hungry waves of space
52 Rush at him high and blue;
53 Their white spray smites his dusky face,
54 Swifter the Sun's fierce arrows race
55 And pierce his stout heart thro'.

56 His antlers fall; once more he spurns
57 The hoarse hounds of the day;
58 His blood upon the crisp blue burns,
59 Reddens the mounting spray;
60 His branches smite the wave--with cries
61 The loud winds pause and flag--
62 He sinks in space--red glow the skies,
63 The brown earth crimson as he dies,
64 The strong and dusky stag.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

The Lily Bed

His cedar paddle, scented, red,
2 He thrust down through the lily bed;

3 Cloaked in a golden pause he lay,
4 Locked in the arms of the placid bay.

5 Trembled alone his bark canoe
6 As shocks of bursting lilies flew

7 Thro' the still crystal of the tide,
8 And smote the frail boat's birchen side;

9 Or, when beside the sedges thin
10 Rose the sharp silver of a fin;

11 Or when, a wizard swift and cold,
12 A dragon-fly beat out in gold

13 And jewels all the widening rings
14 Of waters singing to his wings;

15 Or, like a winged and burning soul,
16 Dropped from the gloom an oriole

17 On the cool wave, as to the balm
18 Of the Great Spirit's open palm

19 The freed soul flies. And silence clung
20 To the still hours, as tendrils hung,

21 In darkness carven, from the trees,
22 Sedge-buried to their burly knees.

23 Stillness sat in his lodge of leaves;
24 Clung golden shadows to its eaves,

25 And on its cone-spiced floor, like maize,
26 Red-ripe, fell sheaves of knotted rays.

27 The wood, a proud and crested brave;
28 Bead-bright, a maiden, stood the wave.

29 And he had spoke his soul of love
30 With voice of eagle and of dove.

31 Of loud, strong pines his tongue was made;
32 His lips, soft blossoms in the shade,

33 That kissed her silver lips--her's cool
34 As lilies on his inmost pool--

35 Till now he stood, in triumph's rest,

36 His image painted in her breast.
37 One isle 'tween blue and blue did melt,--
38 A bead of wampum from the belt
39 Of Manitou--a purple rise
40 On the far shore heaved to the skies.
41 His cedar paddle, scented, red,
42 He drew up from the lily bed;
43 All lily-locked, all lily-locked,
44 His light bark in the blossoms rocked.
45 Their cool lips round the sharp prow sand,
46 Their soft clasp to the frail sides sprang,
47 With breast and lip they wove a bar.
48 Stole from her lodge the Evening Star;
49 With golden hand she grasped the mane
50 Of a red cloud on her azure plain.
51 It by the peaked, red sunset flew;
52 Cool winds from its bright nostrils blew.
53 They swayed the high, dark trees, and low
54 Swept the locked lilies to and fro.
55 With cedar paddle, scented, red,
56 He pushed out from the lily bed.

Isabella Valancy Crawford

The Mother's Soul

When the moon was horned the mother died,
And the child pulled at her hand and knee,
And he rubbed her cheek and loudly cried:

'O mother, arise, give bread to me!'

But the pine tree bent its head,
And the wind at the door-post said:

'O child, thy mother is dead !'

The sun set his loom to weave the day;
The frost bit sharp like a silent cur;
The child by her pillow paused in his play:

'Mother, build up the sweet fire of fir !'

But the fir tree shook its cones,
And loud cried the pitiful stones:

'Wolf Death has thy mother's bones!'

They bore the mother out on her bier;
Their tears made warm her breast and shroud;
The smiling child at her head stood near;

And the long, white tapers shook and bowed,
And said with their tongues of gold,

To the ice lumps of the grave mold:

'How heavy are ye and cold!'

They buried the mother; to the feast
They flocked with the beaks of unclean crows.

The wind came up from the red-eyed east
And bore in its arms the chill, soft snows.

They said to each other: 'Sere
Are the hearts the mother held dear;

Forgotten, her babe plays here!'

The child with the tender snowflakes played,
And the wind on its fingers twined his hair;
And still by the tall, brown grave he stayed,
Alone in the churchyard lean and bare.

The sods on the high grave cried
To the mother's white breast inside:

'Lie still; in thy deep rest bide!'

Her breast lay still like a long-chilled stone,
Her soul was out on the bleak, grey day;

She saw her child by the grave alone,
With the sods and snow and wind at play.

Said the sharp lips of the rush,

'Red as thy roses, O bush,
With anger the dead can blush !'

A butterfly to the child's breast flew,*
Fluttered its wings on his sweet, round cheek,
Danced by his fingers, small, cold and blue.

The sun strode down past the mountain peak.

The butterfly whispered low

To the child: 'Babe, follow me; know,
Cold is the earth here below.'

The butterfly flew; followed the child,
Lured by the snowy torch of its wings;
The wind sighed after them soft and wild
Till the stars wedded night with golden rings
Till the frost upreared its head,
And the ground to it groaned and said:
'The feet of the child are lead!'

The child's head drooped to the brown, sere mold,
On the crackling cones his white breast lay;
The butterfly touched the locks of gold,
The soul of the child sprang from its clay.
The moon to the pine tree stole,
And silver-lipped, said to its bole:
'How strong is the mother's soul !'

The wings of the butterfly grew out
To the mother's arms, long, soft and white;
She folded them warm her babe about,
She kissed his lips into berries bright,
She warmed his soul on her breast;
And the east called out to the west:
'Now the mother's soul will rest!'

Under the roof where the burial feast
Was heavy with meat and red with wine,
Each crossed himself as out of the east
A strange wind swept over oak and pine.
The trees to the home-roof said:
' 'Tis but the airy rush and tread
Of angels greeting thy dead.'

Isabella Valancy Crawford

The Rose

The Rose was given to man for this:
He, sudden seeing it in later years,
Should swift remember Love's first lingering kiss
And Grief's last lingering tears;
Or, being blind, should feel its yearning soul
Knit all its piercing perfume round his own,
Till he should see on memory's ample scroll
All roses he had known;

Or, being hard, perchance his finger-tips
Careless might touch the satin of its cup,
And he should feel a dead babe's budding lips
To his lips lifted up;

Or, being deaf and smitten with its star,
Should, on a sudden, almost hear a lark
Rush singing up-the nightingale afar
Sing through the dew-bright dark;

Or, sorrow-lost in paths that round and round
Circle old graves, its keen and vital breath
Should call to him within the yew's bleak bound
Of Life, and not of Death.

Isabella Valancy Crawford