

# THE PIXIES' PLOT

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# PIXIES' PLOT

By

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of

*As the Wind Blows; Evander*

*Pan & the Twins*

*&c.*

LONDON  
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*To*  
GRANT RICHARDS

In beauty manifold are wrought  
Your gardens, full of charm and grace,  
That hold the best in every sort  
But entrance yield to nothing base.  
And 'mid their lawns, austere and bright,  
Though statues gleam and fountains play,  
There's one wild dingle where half light  
Of faery never dies away.

There hang your wreath within a glade  
Ere berries shrink and blossoms pine;  
For pixy blooms too quickly fade  
Plucked by this clumsy hand of mine.  
Yet, howsoever swift their end,  
They hold a more enduring seed  
And bring you, from a kindly friend,  
Good will, to dignify the deed.

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## THE PIXIES' PLOT

*(A pleasant maxim of old time directed the gardener to leave one corner as nature planned it, for the little people. Thus welcomed, they might be trusted to show their human hosts goodwill, friendship, and service.)*

You have it, or you have it not:  
The cantle of the Pixies' plot,  
Where never spade nor hoe shall ply  
To break that treasured sanctity.  
Touch no bloom there; uproot no weed;  
Let what will blow.  
Suffer the thistle, briar and thorn to grow,  
The dandelion to seed.

Though full the garden of your mind,  
Well planted on a soil that's kind;  
Your hedges gay, your borders clean,

Your seasons fair, your clime serene,  
 Yet trammel not the Pixies' mite,  
 For well-coming  
 Chance little, wandering, weary, fairy thing  
 Lost in the dim owl-light.

Still virgin, free and set apart,  
 Ordain one dingle of your heart,  
 Where visions home and wing to you  
 The golden dreams that might come true.  
 Herein a gentler dawn than day  
 Shall often break  
 For foot-sore spirits, tired of reason's ache,  
 And children come to play.

## THE CHARM

When chafers drone their litany  
 And pray, "Oh, Father, grant that we  
 From airy-mouse delivered be,"  
 Go seek the charm.

Under the sky, when a star shoots,  
 Beneath an oak, when the owl hoots,  
 Gather ye simples, dig ye roots  
 For the rare charm.

That glassy ghost upon a thorn—  
 The raiment of a snake outworn—  
 Must backward through the dark be borne  
 To feed the charm.

A glow-worm—she whose gentle light  
 Glimmers green-gold through a blue night  
 Beside the churchyard aconite—

Shall help the charm.

One willow from the cradle take  
Where a boy baby lies awake,  
And splinters off a coffin break  
To build the charm.

A tarnished silver chalice bring,  
Dead gossips gave at christening,  
And dip the moonlight from a spring  
To crown the charm.

This much, God wot, a child might do,  
Yet all must fail if haply you  
Lack a child's faith, so trusting, true,  
To bless the charm.

Many the spells of high degree  
And fruitful happiness I see  
All lost, for faith to set them free  
And work the charm.

## JOE'S DONKEY

The harp of night had silver strings,  
The moon was low, the stars burned dim,  
When from a wood, with roaring wings,  
Joe flushed a brace of cherubim.

His eye did bulge at sign so brave  
To see the shining angels pass;  
Then, happening beside her grave,  
He met his dead and buried ass!

She'd broke a leg and so was slain

And buried here a week ago;  
Now, all alive and sound again,  
She brayed with joy to welcome Joe!

A holy cross that donkeys bear,  
Since Jesus Christ did deign to ride,  
The cherubs tempted to repair  
That ancient beast in bone and hide.

The harp of morn had golden strings  
Ere home they came—Joe's ass and he;  
And when their neighbours heard these things  
They praised the Lord right heartily.

## DIANA

Look not upon a moon that's new,  
For with her bitter sickle keen  
She comes between, she comes between,  
And cuts the tender from the true.

Look not upon a white full moon:  
Her stiff-starched pudency doth shame  
The throbbing pulse, the leaping flame,  
And freezes passion at its noon.

Look not upon a moon that's old  
With fallen breast and shadowy eyes,  
Till the last hope of loving dies,  
And heart's outworn and blood run cold.

## THE MOUSE AND THE EPITAPH



In moonlight grey the hungry church-yard mouse  
 Sat on old William Blee—his narrow house.  
 Climbing the mound, an ancient slate he read,  
 Then spoke, with rustic frankness, to the dead.  
 "A husband and a father dear': What then?  
 So much is true of mice as well as men.  
 'Friend to the poor'? That's humbug, Billy Blee!  
 When did you ever spare a crumb for me?"

## ECHO AND NARCISSUS

Through the green dell she went,  
 Bright haired, with cheeks that burned;  
 Her passion hardly pent;  
 Her eyes upon him turned.  
 Her crocus-coloured gown  
 Over her white, young breast beat up and down.

Adream, he did not guess,  
 But dwelt upon his thought  
 Of perfect loveliness,  
 Nor heeded when she caught  
 A sigh his bosom breathed,  
 And murmured it again with music wreathed.

Oh, wasted wealth of love;  
 While Echo's heart will break,  
 Narcissus from above,  
 Within a glassy lake,  
 Beholds perfection lie  
 And, for the vision of himself, must die.

Now, hid in bare-ribbed rock  
 With crocus-coloured veins,  
 She guards from windy shock,

She shields from wild March rains,  
 Where grass and granite meet,  
 The daffodil that's budding at her feet.

## THE SANDHILLS

Oh, naked-footed boy, with the wild hair  
 And laughing eyes, is it so long ago  
 Among these windy dunes you made your lair,  
 Beside the immutable sea's unwearied ebb and flow?

Above you sings the horrent bent; the sun  
 Finds you and burns your budding limbs to brown;  
 You race the waves and wade and leap and run,  
 Then in the sweet, hot sand, contented, cuddle down

You dream great dreams, while all the upper air  
 Is musical with mews; and round about,  
 Upon the flats among the sea-ways there,  
 The dim sea-lavender spreads her purple fingers out.

And still the sandhills roll and still the sea  
 Flings a straight line of everlasting blue  
 Athwart their shining hillocks; solemnly  
 The ships go by, but not the wondrous ships you knew.

When first your path among the sand dunes fell—  
 The dunes that stretched as now and shone of yore  
 In their bright nakedness—a magic spell  
 Of mystery they wove along the shining shore.

This poppy with the horn, this bindweed white  
 And salicornia in its crimson bands  
 Meant more, far more than beauty and delight:  
 They stood for treasure torn from drowning pirates' hands.

These amber weeds were then a garment brave;  
 These agate stones were gems of splendid size  
 Once decked a mermaid in a deep sea cave,  
 Lit by gigantic fish from their green, glimmering eyes.

The sandhills were your giants, cruel or kind;  
 Each falling billow told another tale;  
 Fairies and goblins flew upon the wind;  
 There lurked a tragedy in every sea-bird's wail.

And now the watchful sea doth bid me say;  
 The salt air whispers me to speak and tell  
 Where is that little boy from yesterday  
 Whom wind and wave and sand and sunshine knew so well?

"He was our playmate; us he understood  
 And ran to us with glory in his eyes;  
 We loved him and we wrought to work his good;  
 We made him strong and brave and with our wisdom wise.

"Will he not come again? The flowerets small  
 Have opened for his eager hands once more;  
 Among the yellow whins the linnets call,  
 The wrack and shells he sought still drift along the shore.

"He climbed the crests of all our ridges grey  
 And sang to us and paddled where our foam  
 Thins to a crystal film. But yesterday  
 A happy sprite was he; where now does our boy roam?

"Deep of the many voices, on whose face  
 No seal is set through all the centuries fled,  
 Laugh on at time, nor know the hurricane race  
 Of his few, hurtling years above a human head.

"And thou, old dune; the stars of heaven shall rove,  
 The galaxies break up to wheel about  
 And in new, glittering constellations move  
 Before thine hour-glass grey hath run its measure out.

"Your yesterday, you immemorial things,  
Whereon the ages yet no shadow cast,  
For me the hurrying and sleepless wings  
Of year on stormy year have swept into the past.

"Yet think not I have lost that faith and joy  
Felt when my world was young and I a part.  
Oh, sea and sand and wild, west wind, your boy  
Lies hidden safe within my steadfast, changeless heart."

## THE GHOST

Night-foundered to the ruin he came  
Nor recked of its uncanny fame;  
A haunt of slumber opened here,  
And weariness, that casts out fear,  
His footsteps led.  
The moon swam low; the woods were still;  
Dog foxes barked upon the hill;  
With zig-zag wing a flitter-mouse  
Flew in and out the haunted house  
And overhead.

Within, decaying wood and lime  
Lifted their incense up to time;  
The foot fell hollow; echoes woke,  
And whispering, half-heard voices spoke  
Behind the dark.  
Aloft, the drowsy wanderer found  
A chamber far above the ground;  
Whose casement, rusty-ironed and high,  
Gaped ivy-clad upon the sky,  
Starlit and stark.

White-fingered now the moonbeams ran

To ripple on the resting man.  
 He saw their stealthy silver creep  
 As it would drown him in his sleep  
 With splendour mild.  
 And then a subtle shadow moved,  
 A spirit that the dead had loved:  
 For wanly limned against the gloom  
 Of that forbid, forgotten room  
 There ran a child.

She twinkled in her candid shift,  
 Light as a moth, so silent, swift,  
 And peeped and peered for what might be  
 Hid in that ancient nursery—  
 A babe of joy.  
 But something called the busy wight:  
 She faded sudden from his sight;  
 And, as her little glimmer paled  
 Like a glass bell, the ghostling wailed,  
 "Where is my toy?"

## A TEST

*He*

"I'll bring bright rainbow gold—  
 The rainbow too, a gown for you  
 In glorious fold on fold.

"A necklace of white stars  
 About your throat shall hang and gloat;  
 And, for an ear-ring, Mars.

"Unto the ends of earth,  
 Oh, dearest Heart, will I depart

To glean their utmost worth.

”Until, with great amaze  
At all I do, my Soul, for you,  
The good round world shall gaze!”

*She*

”But these are gifts of dust,  
Unfit to prove a hero’s love  
Or win a maiden’s trust.

”To love’s supreme degree  
If you would come, then bide at home  
And never tire of me.”

## DREAMS

When I have won to rest once more  
In sanctity of night and sleep,  
Drift visions from the shadow shore—  
Small, patient forms that creep.  
They move in drab; they wear no wings;  
They are the dreams that might come true—  
Meek phantoms of the modest things  
That I have power to do.

Like azure shadows in the snow,  
Or bloom upon the sun-kissed grape,  
Sweep lovelier shapes, that gleam and glow  
And don a rarer shape.  
They smile with eyes of queens and kings;  
They call on me to make them true—  
The lordly, gracious, sovereign things

I have no power to do.

Remain such waking dreams as limn  
 Upon reality and truth,  
 Flying like holy seraphim  
 Whose rainbow wings drop ruth.  
 Born of the human sorrowings  
 That pierce our common nature through,  
 They challenge to the mightiest things  
 All men have power to do.

## THE FIRE-DRAKE

An' it should be you'd make,  
 All for your sweetheart's joy,  
 A jewelly fire-drake,  
 This goes unto the toy:  
 A dragon-fly that's blue,  
 With little glow-worms two,  
 And morning drops of dew  
 Upon a spider's thread.

All these are simple things  
 And easy to be got,  
 But now the fire-drake's wings  
 Will puzzle you, God wot.  
 The flash that in them lies  
 Shall come not from the skies,  
 But lights the diamond eyes  
 In your dear sweetheart's head.

Lacking that pearly gleam,  
 So magical to see,  
 Your gift is but a dream:  
 The fire-drake cannot be.

But if the maiden pout  
 And anger peepeth out,  
 Ere she your heart would flout  
 Fly to the priest and wed.

Better to love she turn  
 At her fond lover's side  
 Than for the fire-drake burn  
 And ever be denied.  
 Go husband and go wife,  
 Without one thought of strife,  
 In blessing of shared life  
 The marriage way to tread.

## THE SEVEN MAIDENS

In far away and olden times  
 Sped from their hamlet seven maids  
 To dim and moonlit heather glades,  
 Upon the hour of midnight chimes.  
 One passion drew them secretly;  
 One master joy their little feet  
 Called to that desolate retreat,  
 Where never mortal man might see.  
 'Twas blue-eyed Dian who led the dance,  
 With Linnette, Bethkin, Jennifer,  
 Avis, Petronell and Nance.

Unknown they kept their nightly cheer;  
 Unguessed beneath the moon they kept  
 Brave frolic, while the village slept,  
 Nor dreamed the danger drawing near;  
 For on a holy Sabbath even,  
 When pirouette had been a shame,  
 Walking sedate, strange music came



To tempt the toes of all the seven—  
Of blue-eyed Dian, who led the dance,  
Of Linnette, Bethkin, Jennifer,  
Avisa, Petronell and Nance.

The demon Piper tuned his reed  
To madden each light-footed maid.  
They listened, wondering, unafraid,  
Nor thought upon the sorry speed  
Awaiting any wanton one  
Who'd sport upon the Lord's own Day;  
Then, tripping through that dimpsy grey,  
Quick fingers joined—the deed was done!  
For blue-eyed Dian had dared to dance  
With Linnette, Bethkin, Jennifer,  
Avisa, Petronell and Nance.

Their eyes like emeralds through the gloom,  
Leapt elves and fairies, gnomes and imps,  
In fearful haste to win a glimpse  
Of the unhappy maidens' doom;  
For sudden rang a thunder-shock  
And flashed blue lightning-fork, to show  
Beneath its grim and baleful glow,  
Each flying girl turned to a rock!  
Alas for Dian, who led the dance,  
For Linnette, Bethkin, Jennifer,  
Avisa, Petronell and Nance.

And now, at every Hunter's moon,  
That haggard cirque of stones so still  
Awakens to immortal thrill,  
And seven small maids in silver shoon,  
'Twixt dark of night and white of day,  
Twinkle upon the sere, old heath,  
Like living blossoms in a wreath,  
Then shrink again to granite grey.  
So blue-eyed Dian shall ever dance  
With Linnette, Bethkin, Jennifer,

Avisa, Petronell and Nance.

## THE HERON

Where leaps the burn by granite stairs  
Into an eddying pool, he stood,  
Personifying solitude  
And meditating his affairs.

A bird august beyond belief  
Distinguished in his way of thought,  
Yet the sworn enemy of sport—  
A "poacher," "vagabond," and "thief."

Creation's lord, the heron knew,  
Denied his right to fish for trout—  
A fact that often made him doubt  
Of justice on a general view.

Then me he saw, and, guessing not  
I held him innocent to be,  
He spread slow pinions heavily  
And drifted to a lonelier spot;

But left a feather by the stream,  
Deep in the plume, fair, silver grey,  
With which I'll write upon the day:  
"Live and let live" shall be my theme.

## THE GRIEF

A grief came unto me at noon of night  
 Blown on a breath of silky, southern air  
 With scent of myrtles and a crown of light  
 For aureole: vanished loveliness was there  
 And old, lost, magical things, all gracious and all rare.

Wings of cloud-purple from the Inland Sea,  
 Foam-tipped, my Grief outspread; the southern sun  
 Burned for a diadem, and mystery,  
 From the dim smoke of olive orchards won,  
 Arrayed that delicate shape in silver they had spun.

How little, little 'twixt our joy and woe!  
 Not sorrow then, but glad epiphanies  
 Of treasured happiness from long ago,  
 Had been my dreaming; but in bitter wise  
 The Grief looked on my face with a dead woman's eyes.

## ON THE EBB

The tide fell fast and foaming, the empty sand shone bright,  
 And by the ocean roaming, upon the edge of night,  
 I found a something stranded with sea-fowl mewing high—  
 A wondrous atom landed and left all high and dry.

Whoever yet suspected mer-babies on a beach?  
 Yet here, by tide neglected, lay one within my reach—  
 A dainty, winsome creature as pink as any rose,  
 His golden tail a feature to take the place of toes.

And through the billows splashing, the sunset in her hair,  
 Over the white foam flashing, there rode a lady fair.  
 His blue-eyed, wild mer-mother swam wailing on the sea.  
 She sparkled through the smother and clamoured mournfully.

In gentle hands and steady, I lifted her delight,  
 Made sure that she was ready, then flung with all my might.  
 She sprang, like salmon leaping; she laughed in radiant  
 And gathered to safe keeping her rosy, golden boy.

I'd earned a mother's blessing—a good thing any day;  
 But now one fell to guessing what Science had to say:  
 For such authentic wonders, upon an ebbing tide,  
 Show zoologic blunders that cannot be denied.

## SCANDAL

An owl alighted in the yew  
 Beside a poet's little house;  
 The hour was nearly half-past two,  
 And, as he ate his juicy mouse,  
 A cuckoo clock made cheerful chime  
 Within and shouted out the time.

"O gracious God!" the owl began,  
 And rolled his round eyes at the moon,  
 "What a black piece of work is man—  
 Well might we miss cuckoo in June.  
 How mad, misguided, inhumane  
 To keep cuckoo upon a chain!

"But all the feathered folk must know;  
 This infamy I'll bring to light,  
 And hoot the horror high and low  
 And scream the crime by day and night.  
 No bird shall sing to him again

Who keeps a cuckoo on a chain.”

## TO A BAT

The sickle moon is in the west  
 And where, against the fading green,  
 A thicket darkles shall be seen  
 The humming chafers on their quest.  
 Come, leather-bird, rise up and gird!

Round sunset eaves there boom again  
 Great beetles on their sharded wings  
 And many air-borne lesser things  
 Are tapping at the window pane.  
 Come, flitter-mouse, and haunt my house.

But where the stygian water broods,  
 Dim twilight homes for evermore,  
 And bats beat up the dusky shore  
 For white, ghost-moths in phantom woods.  
 Come, pipistrelle, be off to hell.

## MOON-MOTH

Beyond the sun, beside a crystal sea  
 She ruled her isle of lapis lazuli.  
 Her palaces of marble, agate, jade  
 Rose like a sheaf of savage flowers and laid  
 A splendour on the waves that only night could fade.

And for her nameless sins and cruelties,

Murders of love-mad men and lusts and lies,  
 Her sentence fell and she was swept away  
 From flaming pomps and crimes and royal sway,  
 Hurl'd from the joy of life, rapt from the light of day.

Yet, being fairest far and loveliest  
 Of any in a woman's body drest,  
 Fate banished not her beauty from the earth—  
 Only her evil happiness and mirth,  
 And left her living dead, doomed to eternal dearth.

The Shadows that do mould our destiny  
 Willed her a moon-moth evermore to be—  
 Woman and insect one in mingled state,  
 A chimera without a peer, or mate,  
 To ancient Night inscribed and Darkness dedicate.

By day she sleeps, even as the vampires sleep,  
 Behind her sombre wings, that fold and keep  
 Her body's glory hidden: they are brown,  
 Grizzled and amber, jagged and slashed adown  
 With faded serecloth grey—a winding-sheet for gown.

And while she hides within some tawny brake  
 Her shard but echoes the dead leaf and snake,  
 Where, tranced in slumber, through the long day's prime  
 Her motley coverings harmonious chime  
 With sad, crepuscular shades in dusky, twilight rhyme.

Invisible thus; but when returning night  
 Drowns with a purple torrent all the light,  
 She rises woman high and spreads her wing,  
 A rare, unparagoned, unearthly thing  
 Beyond the dream of joy or grief's imagining.

Upon her head two radiant feathery rays  
 Of crocus fire flash upward; but the gaze  
 From her dim, poisonous, and anguished eyes  
 Throbs out with passionate, violet miseries,  
 In hate that never fades and woe that never dies.

Her body, like the heart of a white rose,  
 Shines in the petals of her wings and glows;  
 Her pinions—azure, lilac, marigold—  
 Wide on the dark deliciously unfold  
 As any rainbow bright, as any glacier cold.

Lit with her own and inner gleam, she shines  
 Like a low meteor through the lians and vines,  
 Flies upward high beyond the forest towers,  
 Then swoops and hawks along night-hidden bowers,  
 To hang on murmuring plumes and drink the livid flowers.

Most fair, most foul, at Moira's stern decree  
 The radiant monster wanders wretchedly  
 Haunting each strand and isle of that lone shore  
 Where never human eye may see her more,  
 Or sentient soul delight and tremble and adore.

Yet deep in dreams I often faintly hear,  
 Like a sad wind that strokes my sleeping ear,  
 By fairy waters of that far lagoon,  
 The moon-moth wailing, wailing to the moon  
 Through many a silver night at hour of plenilune.

## THE HUNTING

When red sun fox steals down the sky,  
 And darkness dims the heavens high,  
 There leap again upon his tracks  
 The eager, starry, hunting packs.  
     They glitter, glitter, gold and green,  
     With sparks of frosty fire between,  
     And Dian bright as day;  
     While in the gloaming, far below,  
     Brown owl doth shout "Hi! Tally Ho!

Sun fox hath gone away!"

To music of the spheres they sweep  
 Over the western world asleep;  
 Then in the east, with sudden rush,  
     Sun fox shall whisk his white-tipped brush.  
     The field is fading, gold and green,  
     With sparks of frosty fire between,  
     And Dian growing grey;  
     While morning leaps the hither hill  
     And herald lark shouts with a will,  
     "Sun fox hath gone away!"

Oh, Huntress fond and silly stars—  
 White Venus, fiery, futile Mars,  
 In vain your pack ye whirl and cast  
 Upon the marches of the vast;  
     In vain ye glitter, gold and green,  
     With sparks of frosty fire between,  
     And Dian's arrows fly  
     In silver shafts of broken light;  
     For ne'er shall day be caught by night,  
     And sun fox cannot die.

## THE GOOD GIRL

When you were born, a shooting star did sunder  
 The nightly void, and flashed to earth and brought  
 Endowment of rare magic and sweet wonder  
 And gifts beyond your mother's highest thought.

Oh, blessed be your soul of cheerfulness,  
 Your mind content and steadfast set, to hold  
 Such level journeying through storm and stress  
 Of life's rough weather and hope's heat and cold.



You come, a restful breath of evening wind  
 Upon the parched day, and cannot see  
 Your winning humour hearten many a mind  
 Where you bestow yourself unconsciously.

Never the violet her own fragrance knew:  
 Even such a flowery innocent are you.

## THE LOVER

Under the silver thatch, where dwells my love,  
 About her dormer window, in the straw,  
 The sparrows build, and with their morning talk  
 Often awaken her.

And by the lattice climbs a crimson rose,  
 Who, if he could but see my dinky dear,  
 Before her loveliness, so wonderful,  
 Would pale with jealousy.

When the first glow of honeysuckle dawn  
 Cuddles her cottage in the dayspring light,  
 I pass upon my woodland road to work  
 And whistle as I come.

And if she hear me and twinkle out of bed  
 To wave a kiss, then all my toil goes well;  
 But if she heed me not, for weariness,  
 How long the working day!

## THE MOTOR CAR

Owlet sat, so quiet and good,  
At the edge of Yarner Wood,  
While a mother owl hard by  
Sought his supper silently.

Sudden came two hideous screams,  
Wakened owlet from his dreams;  
Down the road, on unseen wing,  
Swept a vast and awful thing.

Twice he heard the monster shriek,  
Saw its head and shining beak  
Twixt huge eyes, that burned the night,  
Brighter than the moon was bright.

Hooting horribly it fled—  
Where the water-meadows spread.  
"He will catch," thought owlet now,  
"That red thing they call the cow."

Came his parent presently:  
Heard him squeak with fearful glee,  
"Mother dear, I've seen and heard  
Such a devil of a bird!"

## THE SEA SCOUTS

While all alone I wandered  
At even by the sea,  
Where winds and water pondered  
Of how they came to be;  
Where kittiwakes were crying  
And salty spindrift flying  
Through daylight slowly dying  
A Shape confronted me.

She faced the broad Atlantic—  
 That maid of stately mien,  
 Purer than foam, gigantic  
 As Amazonian Queen.  
 Her billowy robe, unknowing,  
 How wild the wind was blowing,  
 Showed not a throb or flowing,  
 Hung steady and serene.

It was no fellow being  
 For she stood ten feet high,  
 And seaward gazed, unseeing  
 The human passer-by;  
 But only billows roaming,  
 And wide-winged sea-fowl homing  
 Through crepuscule and gloaming  
 Beneath an ashen sky.

The spectre rose before me  
 Most woeful, wan and white  
 Upon that foreshore stormy  
 Between the day and night;  
 And such an apparition  
 In this unique position,  
 Despite her sad condition  
 Awoke my wild delight.

Then came three youthful creatures,  
 And them I bade with awe  
 Behold the mournful features  
 Of phantom on the shore.  
 They laughed and said she'd drifted  
 To land with bosom rifted—  
 A figure-head uplifted  
 From wreck of "Margery Dawe."

They dared, those sea-scout shavers  
 Who watched this lonely coast,  
 Assert in treble quavers  
 We stood before a post;

They treated as a fiction  
My gratified conviction  
That, in her pale affliction,  
We'd met a salt-sea ghost!

Thus hard-eyed youth advances  
By shadowless, stark way  
Our middle-aged romances  
To slight and scorn and slay;  
Our make-believe to tatter;  
Our gallant dreams to scatter;  
To flout our faiths and shatter  
Our twilight in their day.

## SONG FOR THE SPHERES

A drop of fire from a flying sun—  
Sing, old stars, the World's begun.

An ocean warm where electrons strive—  
Sing, old stars, the World's alive.

Age upon age and link upon link—  
Shout, old stars, the World can think.

War's red knife hisses home to the haft—  
Mourn, old stars, the World runs daft.

Reason and Love shall conquer and reign—  
Sing, old stars, the World grows sane.

Liberty, Liberty, Liberty!

Shout, old stars, the World is free.

## THE CIRCLE

When shepherd darkness folds the fading day  
 And faints the West beneath the world's wide brim,  
 There stands a brotherhood, remote and dim,  
 Of cowed and hooded wights rolled up in granite grey.

Spirits of dusk from out a far-off prime  
 Beyond the shadowy pale of bygone eld,  
 Immutable and constant and unquelled,  
 They hold their everlasting state and tryst with Time.

These stones have seen the red-eyed wolf pack throng  
 To slay the fleeting elk upon the waste,  
 And they have marked the cave bear's clumsy haste,  
 Shuffling great golden furse and ragged rocks among.

O cirque, what meanest thou? Sepulchral lore,  
 Or ritual of the quick? Did thirsty god  
 Drink blood of sacrifice upon this sod?  
 Art thou a temple wrought for deities of yore?

What dread, what joy, what Neolithic rule,  
 What shouts of agony or pæans of praise  
 Awoke, ye stones, the morning of your days?  
 They answer not, but seek the shadowy crepuscule.

The Stone Man lifted them; his hairy hand  
 They felt and knew, when Night's eternal brow  
 Gleamed with another diadem than now  
 Ere Egypt's mountain graves pressed on the desert sand.

Bowed but enduring, Time hath failed to break

That emblem of eternity they trace  
 Upon the bosom of this desolate place;  
 And holy shall it be for their most ancient sake.

They have withdrawn upon the unseen light  
 Of immemorial time; the vanished past  
 Receives them once again to haunt her vast—  
 A sanctity beyond wild Chaos and old Night.

## TO ANTHEA'S BOSOM

When that I went, a little lad, to school—  
 One half a cherub and one half a fool—  
 The weary pedant dinned upon my ears  
 That all the world is but two hemispheres.

Maybe I doubted then, for I was born  
 To laugh the wisdom of the wise to scorn;  
 But now, indeed, most surely it appears  
 That all the world is but two hemispheres.

## DUST

A cone of dust is dancing at the lane end,  
 Caught from the surface of the thirsty trackway  
 And dropped again, into annihilation,  
 By gusts from nowhere.

Upon the wheel of little whirlwind moulded,  
 It billows in a wreath of spiral beauty,  
 But, swifter than the smoke of fire dislimning,

Endures no longer.

So I, intrinsic one slippery moment  
 Share with my brief, grey brother at the lane end  
 His buffet into being, then, unfettered,  
 A like dismissal.

Dust of the cosmos, you alone eternal  
 Immutable behind a myriad garments,  
 Your stars grow ripe upon the boughs of heaven;  
 But you bate nothing.

All one to you the forms and the reforming,  
 The fashion of the man, or mouse, or mountain:  
 So order be declared and conquered chaos  
 Dethroned for ever.

## YOUNG NIGHT

When flitter-mice with zigzag flight  
 Specked the green sky at twilight dim;  
 When the wise bird from out the brim  
 Of forest darkness to the light  
 Floated and perched upon a height,  
 With mellow voice to welcome night;

When day was stolen from the dale  
 To leave, where little river goes,  
 One farewell, dusky gleam of rose;  
 When down the purple of the vale  
 A wingèd beetle boomed his tale  
 And night-moth drank from night-flow'r pale;

When grey churn-owl within a glade  
 Purred through the gloaming, till the sky

Throbbled with his goblin melody;  
 When, by her stone, the glow-worm played  
 And with an emerald lamp betrayed  
 The new-born dew-drops on the blade;

When young Night's self in starry dress  
 Came timid to her throne again—  
 Sweet anodyne for dead day's pain  
 And fire and wound and fevered stress—  
 With heart to soothe and will to bless,  
 Then how I loved her loveliness!

## JILL BASSETT

Jill Bassett, she was dancing mad,  
 And any lad  
 Who'd win that most amazing maid  
 Must needs be a light-footed blade.

So said the folk; but I had pelf,  
 And when the elf  
 Found she might reign at Chadley Wood,  
 Though I weren't young, she thought it good.

She danced into my arms, and then,  
 Along of men  
 And some harsh words I'd got to say,  
 One autumn time she danced away.

She vanished, like a bow on rain,  
 And, to be plain,  
 I didn't feel no mighty wrench  
 Nor much bewail the giglet wench.

Then came a bit of funny news



From Billy Bewes:  
 He'd seen the wretch at Christmas time  
 Dancing in Plymouth pantomime!

For five good year no more was heard  
 Of the rash bird;  
 Then danced she back; but not to I:  
 Her mother took her in to die.

Her breathing parts was nearly gone,  
 Her dancing done.  
 She wilted, like a davered rose;  
 But I forgave her at the close.

With Bassett folk they dug her pit;  
 It wasn't fit  
 That she should lie where I shall go:  
 Her mother granted that was so.

Then, passing New Year's night, I saw  
 Upon the hoar  
 Of moony frost in churchyard ground  
 The woman dancing on her mound!

I'll take my oath afore my God  
 She swept the sod  
 With naked feet and showed her charms  
 And twirled about her twinkling arms.

A brace of owls that saw her too  
 Made their hulloo,  
 To which she danced so wondrous brave  
 Over the silver on her grave.

Mayhap the cold got in her bones  
 Under the stones,  
 And up the wilful ghostey came  
 To warm herself at her old game.

And I was on my hoss's back—

I'd had my whack,  
But only just the usual three,  
And no man ever doubted me.

## TAILPIECE

At turn of night the wild geese fly  
And waken drowsy wonder  
Beneath their wingèd thunder;  
Then silence falls again,  
Until the homing barn-owls cry  
And ring with hollow laughter,  
From ivy-tod and rafter,  
The farm upon the plain.

The lark's aloft, a bead of gold;  
While yet the earth lies darkling,  
His little body's sparkling:  
The sun has risen for him.  
A dotted track on dew-grey fold  
The weary fox is leaving;  
I hear the plovers peeving;  
The morning star grows dim.

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