

MOUNTAINS  
&  
MOLEHILLS

FRANCES CORNFORD

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# **MOUNTAINS & MOLEHILLS**

by  
**FRANCES CORNFORD**

**Illustrated with woodcuts**  
by  
**GWEN RAVERAT**



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To  
F. M. C.

*From*  
F. C. and G. R.

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F. C.  
G. R.

*September 1934*

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## **Mountain Path**

How high the achieved fir-cones are held up  
And reached into the mist. The mist droops down,  
Encompasses, so still. The squirrels have gone.

With greater peace than is in human prayer,  
With more fidelity than is in praise,  
These dark hieratic trees their branches raise  
And lift their burnished cones, and testify  
Of their November stillness to the sky.

How dark their greenness, as deserved sleep,  
Which to the wearied woodman comes at last—  
He who all day in the uprising woods  
Wrought bare-armed, whilst that old enchanted bird,  
King Woodpecker, alone looked down, and heard  
(Brightheaded in the silver beeches rare)  
His far-off axe. The time of work is past  
And I alone, no living creature sees,  
Admitted share, in the slow-leaving light,  
The meditation of the mountain trees  
Before the winter, and before the night.

Quiet as sleep this universe of mist.  
Gone the fair crests, snow-pearled in flawless skies,  
Those giant kings, with cohorts of dark trees  
Climbing their unembarrassed greatness. Gone  
Those chasms rent by cold torrential streams  
And dawn-loved heights, unreachable as dreams.

The mist droops down, and slow the daylight dies.  
Yet far beneath the unembroidered earth  
The certainty of summer sleeping lies  
Safe-stored for resurrection; and is known  
As to a mother, brooding and alone,  
Her guarded treasure, that awaits his birth.

Your roots can tell the resurrection sure,  
O still, awaiting trees, who must endure,  
Before its thousand tender buds unfold,  
The coming of the prehistoric cold—  
Resistless cold and iron ice-gray airs  
Such as the giants breathed, the empty-eyed,  
Who lived in caves, and with the fierce brown bears  
Danced naked through the night in staggering routs,  
With icicles for clubs, before Christ died.  
And only your high fir-cones and the moon  
Looked down and saw. Will you remember soon  
The echo of their cries? their barbarous shouts?

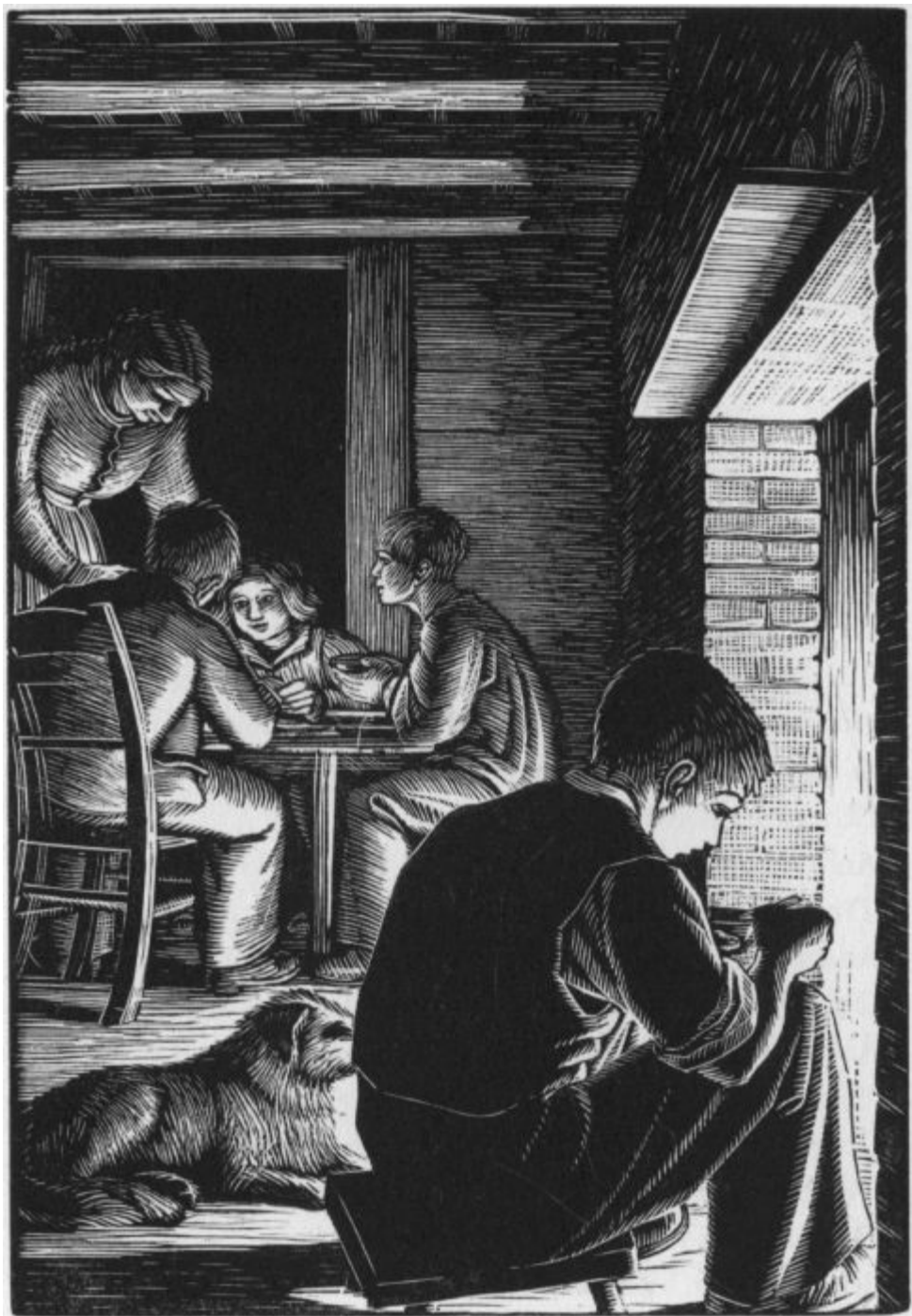
Your very tree-trunks, like the mist, are gray.  
Yet through them, down the rocky winding way,  
Might not an old dwarf come with humpèd back,  
With beard like lichen, and a yellow hood,  
And precious jewels jolting in his sack?

With trustless eyeballs searching through the wood  
He'll stoop and kneel beside the shelvèd crags.  
There where the secret rotting leaves are black,  
There he'll undo his little safe-tied bags  
Of leather older than Europa's bull,  
And peer within, and find them full.

O full

Of green-sparked emeralds, topaz leopard-eyed,  
Crystals like early rain and tears and pride,  
Blue-welling sapphires, dark carbuncles found  
In the old Toad King's palace underground,  
And dragon-blooded rubies, and red gold—  
All to be hidden in the rooted mould,

Most deeply hidden where the tall trees rise  
Safe from the search of wicked enemy eyes.



Till, in the fairest of fair April eves  
His greedy fingers grub them out again  
Among the lily-of-the-valley leaves;  
And who shall hear,—shall not a child hear plain,  
Who wanders in the wood when sap is springing—  
His old cracked voice, like Rumpelstiltskin, singing,  
And see the wood-smoke of his little fire  
Rise through the fir-green softly high and higher?

This is the hour when the children come  
Each from the school to his especial home.  
Far off they call, or chatter by the way  
Of near-approaching wonders that they know,  
Or ponder those they have not words to say:—  
The first hard hoarfrost of a winter's day,  
And dove-gray darkness that precedes the snow,  
A night to be of falling flakes, and then  
Eternity upon the roofs of men,  
And even the homely haystacks coifed like nuns;  
Then morning bright as with a thousand suns,  
And you, O trees, uprising in a night  
Out of the curvèd loveliness of white,  
As great pagodas myriad-roofed in snow.

Or is it otherwise their quick thoughts go  
To still more magic dream-fulfilling trees  
Only one festival of winter sees?  
Strange trees, that draw no sap from earthly roots  
To feed their red and green and purple fruits,  
Dark, bright and lit, and dazzling to the eyes

And incense-smelling, as in Paradise  
The trees of God are usually found,  
With singing angels dancing round and round.

With legs that toil, but not with hearts that tire  
They, heavy-booted in the fall of night,  
Fare, like December shepherds towards the star,  
Up wet-leaved paths to where their homesteads are,  
Their cheeks though cold with mist, already bright  
As with the coming radiance of fire.

Red-embered fire, securely kept aglow,  
And onion-savoured soup—how well they know  
Each certain thing that waits them where they go:  
Ranged beehives in the cabbaged garden small,  
The sleeping sledge, the vines upon the wall,  
The nosing welcome of the wolfish dog,  
The winter's wood, stored log on log on log  
Beneath the mothering roof, the cobbles hard,  
And the brown smell of dung about the yard  
(That rich dark smell through which the Magi came,  
White-bearded, wise, with jewelled cups aflame),  
The silver water in the moss-dark trough  
Whose liquid voice for ever, like a friend,  
Accompanies their nightly dreams. And then,  
Then with the strangeness of the mist shed off  
They have entered in, and found their journey's end:  
The brown safe shadows, and warm light of men.

So soon they'll sit beneath the ceiling low,  
Each with his soup, in his allotted chair,  
Shadow-surrounded, munching calm and slow.

And bright their faces in the orange glow,  
And bright and warm like fruits their foreheads fair;  
Yet behind these what is it that they know?

For deep inside each secret flower-faced head  
There is more knowledge than of soup and bread.  
They know the very wood-smoke of their homes  
Rises to join the dark hieratic trees,  
The ever-mounting trees, whose roots down-grow  
To where dwell goblins and the earth-wise gnomes,  
And where are streams, whose voices never cease  
With the dark branches prophesying peace,  
And caves the giants roared in long ago.

Then as with darkness all the valley fills,  
And as with sleep their sealèd lids are kissed,  
Old thoughts come near to children, and they know  
Those ceaseless voices say: The strength of the hills,  
And we who fall asleep, are his also.





## **Fool's Song**

If you want to be warm  
Go into the sun;  
Your heart will be happy  
Your cares will be done.

If you want to be cold  
There's the light of the moon,

Where your heart will become  
What we all shall be soon—

Ashes and ashes.

But shall I be wise?

Yes, like a skull

Who has holes for his eyes.

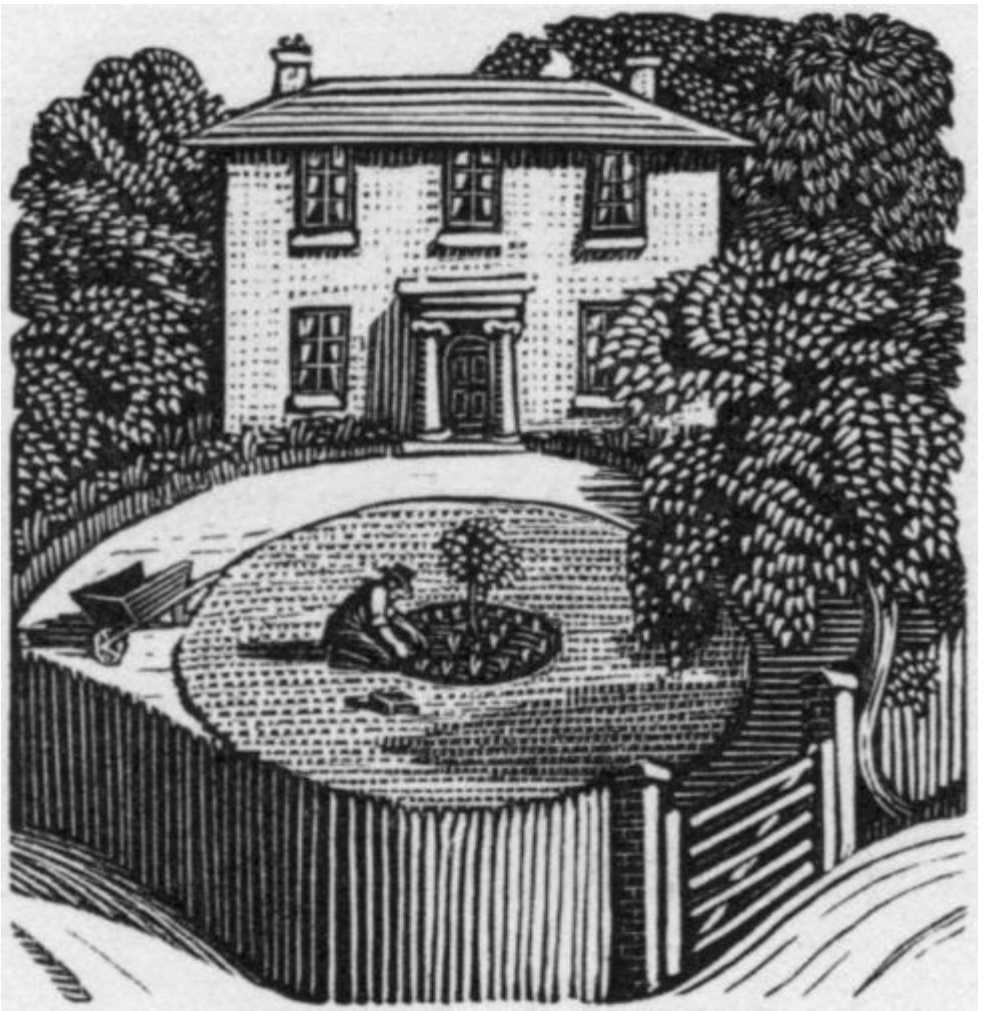
Of your two lights,

The sun for me,

Where seeds can flower,

And sap run free

And morning birds sing Twiddledy-dee.



**On August thirteenth,  
At the Mount, Marsden, Bucks**

Out of this seemliness, this solid order,  
At half-past four to-day,

When down below  
Geraniums were bright  
In the contented glow,  
And Jones was planting seedlings all about,  
Supremely,  
Geometrically right  
For all to see  
In your herbaceous border,  
You had to go,  
Who always liked to stay.  
Before Louisa sliced the currant roll,  
And re-arranged the zinnias in the bowl,  
All in a rhythm reachless by modernity,  
Correct and slow,  
And brought the tea  
And tray,  
At half-past four on Friday you went out:  
To the unseemly, seemly,  
Dateless, whole  
Light of Eternity  
You went away.



## Sir Philip Sidney

Still through the ages' intervening gloom  
You are fair, you glow.  
Faceless you are, and yet your face I know;  
Your gestures even, on a gala night,  
And how you screwed your eyes against the light;  
And bent your head to listen; your young hair;  
Your young man's, great man's, secret, poet's air;  
And the heart's sudden twist that you were there,  
That you were in the room.

And later how it spread—  
The unbelievable truth that you were dead.

## Nurse

I cannot but believe, though you were dead,  
Lying stone-still, and I came in, and said  
(Having been out perhaps in storm and rain):—  
"O dear, O look, I have torn my skirt again",  
That you would rise with the old simple ease,  
And say, "Yes, child", and come to me.

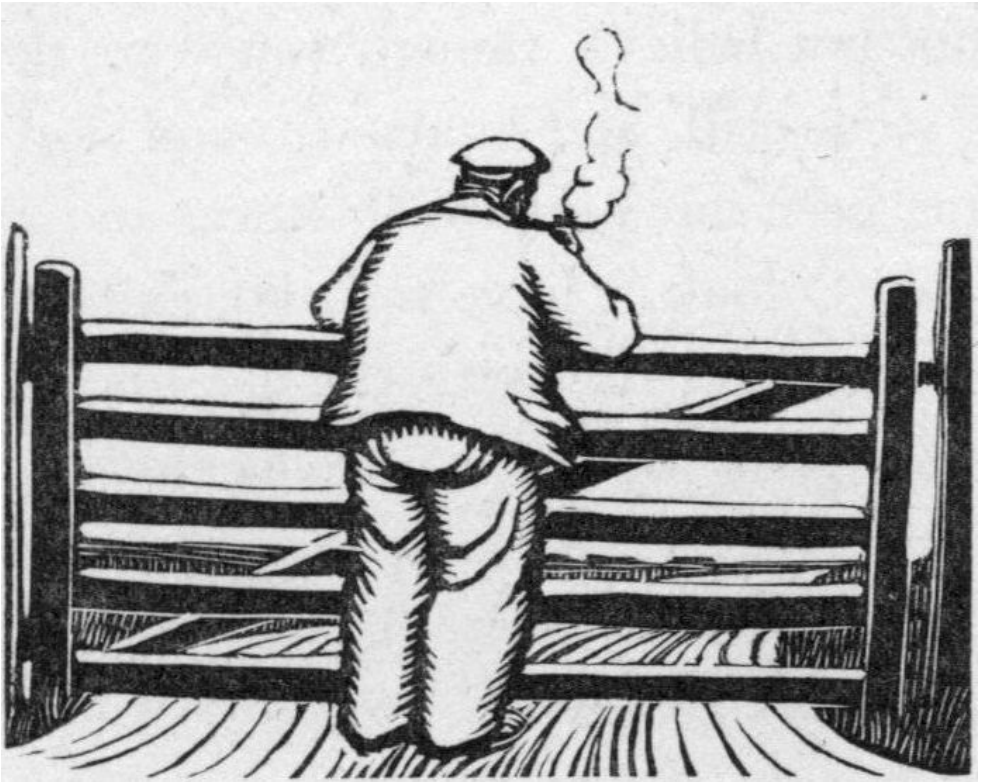
And

there

In your white crackling apron, on your knees,  
With your quick hands, rough with the washing-up  
Of every separate tended spoon and cup,  
And with bent head, coiled with the happy hair  
Your own child should have pulled for you (But no,  
Your child who might have been, you did not bear,  
Because the bottomless riches of your care  
Were all for us) you would mend and heal my tear—  
Mend, touch and heal; and stitching all the while,  
Your cottons on your lap, look up and show  
The sudden light perpetual of your smile—

And only then, you dear one, being dead  
Go back and lie, like stone, upon your bed.



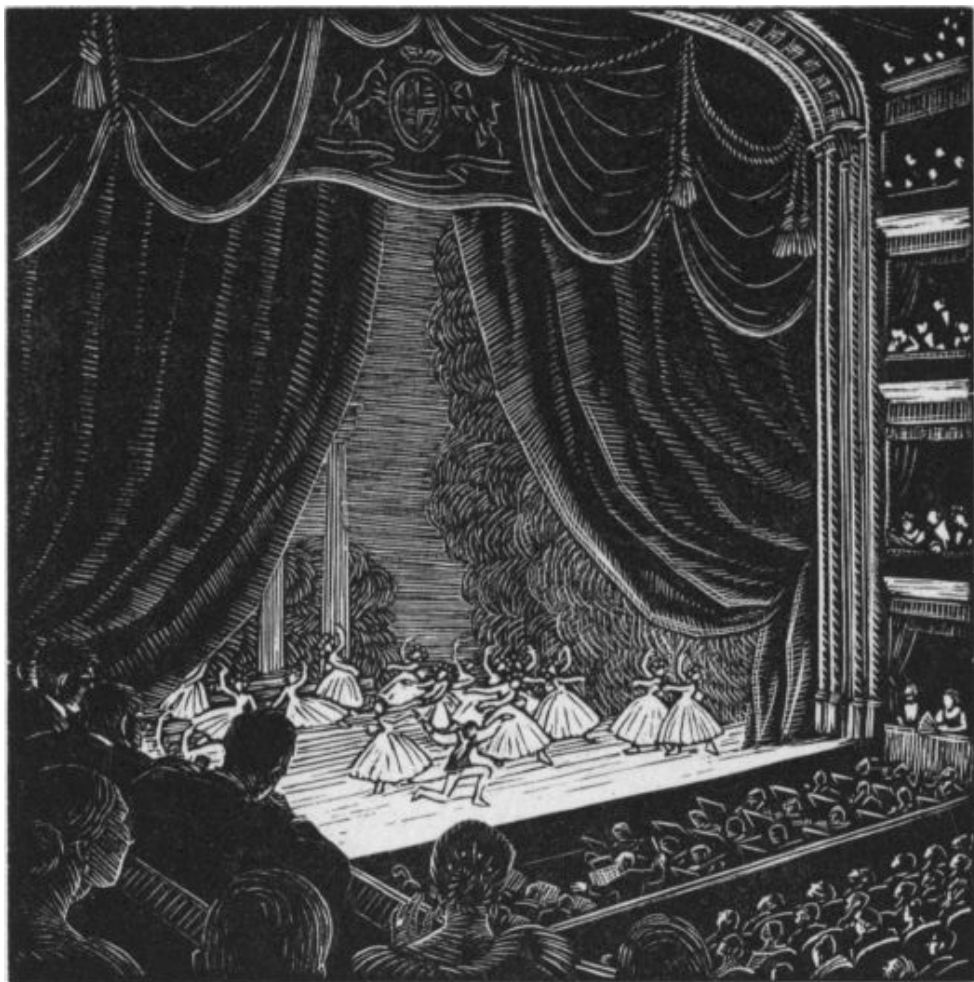


## **A Back View**

Now when his hour shall strike  
For this old man,  
And he arrives in Heaven late,  
He can  
To Peter and the Angel Gabriel,  
Having completely known,  
Completely tell  
What it was like



To lean upon a gate;  
And knowing one thing well  
He need not fear his fate.



## Grand Ballet

I saw you dance that summer before the war.  
One thunderous night it was, at Covent Garden,  
When we, who walked, beneath the weighted trees,  
Hot metropolitan pavements, might have smelt  
Blood in the dust, and heard the traffic's cry  
Ceaseless and savage like a prophecy.

As by a sunrise sea I saw you stand,  
Your sylphides round you on the timeless strand,  
White, pure, delicious poisèd butterflies,  
The early nineteenth century in their eyes,  
And Chopin ready for their silver toes.  
(O sighs unsatisfied, and one red rose!)

The fountain of all movement ready to flow  
Seemed prisoned in your entrancèd body. So  
You stood, their Prince, most elegantly fair,  
Swan-sleeved, black-jacketed, with falling hair  
And hands half-raised in ravishment. O there,  
You Grecian arrow fitted to the bow,  
You beech-tree in a legendary wood,  
You panther in a velvet bolero,  
There you for one immortal moment stood—

One moment like a wave before it flows,  
Frozen in perfectness. Then one hand rose  
And tossed a silver curl, demurely light  
(O grace, O rose, O Chopin and all delight),

And the enchantment broke.

That thunderous night

We saw Nijinsky dance.

Thereafter fell

On the awaiting world the powers of Hell,

Chaos, and irremediable pain;

And utter darkness on your empty brain,

Not even grief to say, No more, no more.

But tell me, when my mortal memories wane

As death draws near, and peace is mine and pardon,

Where will it like an escapèd dove repair?

To what Platonic happy heaven—where?—

Untouchable by Fate and free of Time,

That one immortal moment of the mime

We saw Nijinsky dance at Covent Garden?





## **Ode on the Whole Duty of Parents**

The spirits of children are remote and wise,  
They must go free  
Like fishes in the sea  
Or starlings in the skies,  
Whilst you remain

The shore where they can lightly come again.

Yes, children have integrity like flowers,  
But when pain comes, and fear,  
Why then you must be powerful and near  
In those bewildering hours.

You who are dust must yet become a tree,  
In whose unending heights of flowering green  
The heart-distracting plumaged birds are seen,  
And golden fruits and silver-sounding bells  
And everything a fairy story tells;  
But more than this, O then you must possess  
Deep roots that drink the sustenance of earth,  
And strong and wrinkled and consoling bark  
To kiss.

And yes,  
Each night,  
At dark,  
When on the pillow lies the upgazing head,  
And in the candle's comfortable light  
The drinking holy eyes  
Are fixed on you,  
And from the curious cupboards of the heart  
The memories come to birth,  
The questions rise  
Of everything that you have ever said  
And whether it is true  
(So many whys  
Of suns and snakes and parallelograms and flies,  
Of learning and of art,

Like clustering stars that through the window show  
In winter skies),  
O then you must put on  
The robes of Solomon,  
Then you must grow  
A Presence, must be more  
Than any harbouring shore,  
Or archetypal tree  
In safety spread,  
Then you must be  
The Magus Zoroaster sitting on the bed.



## Mother to Child Asleep

These tiny, fringed eyes  
Must look on all that dies;  
In some strange dawn with bleeding tears perceive  
This house they now believe  
Coeval with its dome  
Of arching sky, this home  
Which an unending tabernacle seems,  
Dissolve like dreams—  
This tree-tall clock, that sempiternal door,  
The table white for dinner, all no more.

Ah, though I might, no magic must be willed  
On your vexed waters, vexed when mine are stilled.  
On that strange morning you must sail alone,  
My utterly-sleeping own.

## Constant

When you awake at dawn in Paradise,  
Who sheltered all men like an apple-tree,  
What, after many years and pain unknown,  
In dew-gray fields beneath celestial skies,  
What would your first desired fulfilment be?

That he who loved you and who died alone,  
Should on your warm lap lie,



To faint and die;  
The lovely hair fallen back upon your knee;  
The eyes that shut alone closed by your kiss  
And washed by your own tears. It would be this.



**After a Latin Epitaph in  
 Madingley Church**

*(The monument bears no name or date)*

Bring roses, singing girls, soft pansies strew  
To decorate these little ashes new;  
Nor with one cry or longing tears invade  
The sleeping stillness of an infant maid,  
Who in one showery day was here and gone,  
To God's invariable peace passed on.  
He whispered to her soul; without a stain,  
She, to his goodness, gave it back again.

## **The End**

This effigy that was a man, reposes;  
All questions cease.  
Yet fire, and snakes, and roses,  
Jungles of pain, and sudden pools of peace  
Were in this packed tumultuous heart, that here  
Unbeating lies beneath the purple of the bier.

And so much more, much more, much more,  
So strange a medley and so infinite a store  
No thought can compass and no music say  
Upon his burial day.

# The Spirit of Man

Not age, or creed,  
Or Fate,  
Can separate  
Those who, more surely than with eyes  
Or thought,  
Can recognize  
(As a bird can, who in the house was caught,  
The sudden skies)  
Each in the other the same need,  
The same  
Clear undescribable flame.



## **Tapestry Song**

O here is Paradise for me  
With white Does bounding,  
And here the fair immortal Tree

With various fruits abounding.

Hesperidean apples gold,  
And apples red as wine,  
And gourds that show like moons below,  
And silver pears that shine.

O sweeter, sweeter, every one  
Than mead the Gods have drunk,  
And all are for the Shepherd's Son  
Who leans against the trunk.

And there he'll stay, the timeless day,  
Where no harsh wind can find him,  
His crook among the strawberry leaves,  
And dark, dark woods behind him.

There roam the strange and savage beasts;  
No peace their fear will grant them  
Until he play his roundelay  
And music shall enchant them.

See where the Tiger to destroy  
Doth roam with ebon stripes.  
O Shepherd, O Arcadian boy,  
Play, play your pipes!—



*How sweet the shepherd his pipes doth blow—  
Sing Ut Hoy, Tirlee, Tirlow—  
How silverly, silverly whistle and play  
Like drops of dew at the break of the day.*

*Like drops of dew where cowslips are,  
Sing Ut Hoy and echo it far,  
Drops of dew where periwinkles blow  
Ut Hoy, Tirlee, Tirlow.*

*Ut Hoy, and echo it high,  
Larks are lost in the light of the sky,  
Echo it all the valleys through,  
Periwinkles, periwinkles, periwinkles blue.*

*Sing Ut Hoy, at dawn of the day,  
Fear, Fear is fled away,  
The sun on the meadows, the lark in the morn,  
Joy, Joy, Joy is born.*



*Tirlee, Tirlow and Ut Hoy,  
Born, born, born is Joy;  
Sing Ut Hoy, Tirlee, Tirlow  
So sweet the shepherd his pipes doth blow.*

Now, in the dark arcaded wood  
Every creature still is stood;  
Each one pricks a happy ear,  
Tirlee, Tirlow, this song to hear.

Out of the branchèd wood come they  
All for his silver roundelay,  
Out of the wood on dancing feet  
All to obey his music sweet.

Here the gentled Tiger goes  
By the delicate, dancing Does;  
Here the Stag with golden horns  
And the prancing Unicorns.





Spotted Pard with agate stare  
Frights no more the Fawn so fair;  
Capering Kids spring high in air  
Round the blunder-footed Bear.

Conies gambol out of the rocks,  
Leveret with tawny Fox;  
Leaping Lambs desert their folds,  
Frogs dance out of the marigolds.

Here appear in lumbering bounds  
Great King Theseus' dew-lapped Hounds;  
Here his white, escapèd Steed  
Comes curvetting over the mead.

Here with jewelled tails aglow  
Peacocks gloriously go;  
Here the swinging Monkey gets  
Purple grapes for castanets.



Here the Lion, King of Beasts,  
On the golden apples feasts;  
Whilst my lady's Brachet rare  
Rollicks with a silver pear.

Caterpillars striped and green  
Measuring up the twigs are seen;  
Asp with spotted Adder weaves,  
Harmless, in and out the leaves.

Dove and Hawk with folded wing  
On the fruited branches swing;  
Hovering, dipping, dancing rise  
Honey-bees and Butterflies.

All Creation, safe and free,  
Sings around the Happy Tree.  
Tirlee, Tirlow, and Ut Hoy,  
Play for ever, Shepherd Boy.

## Neighbours

Old Mrs Thompson down the road is dead.  
The maids knew first from what the milkman said  
(He heard on Sunday she was very bad)  
And as they work they are sorry, stirred, and glad.

One day soon I shall die,  
As still as Mrs Thompson I shall lie;  
And in her house that April day  
The maids of the new family will say  
That Mrs Jones—who was me—has passed away.  
They will know first, because the fish-boy heard;  
And as they dust, be sorry, glad, and stirred.



## **The Madman and the Child**

"Where have you been? you look queer,  
You look black." "O my dear,  
All alone to Hell and back,  
By my known, my desert track;  
Though once I might, like you, have gone  
By candlelight to Babylon."

"What have you seen?" "No flames or fires,  
But such a stream of terrors and desires.  
O my child, nothing's there  
Like your fingers, like your hair,  
Nor this table, nor this chair;  
Nothing certain but despair."



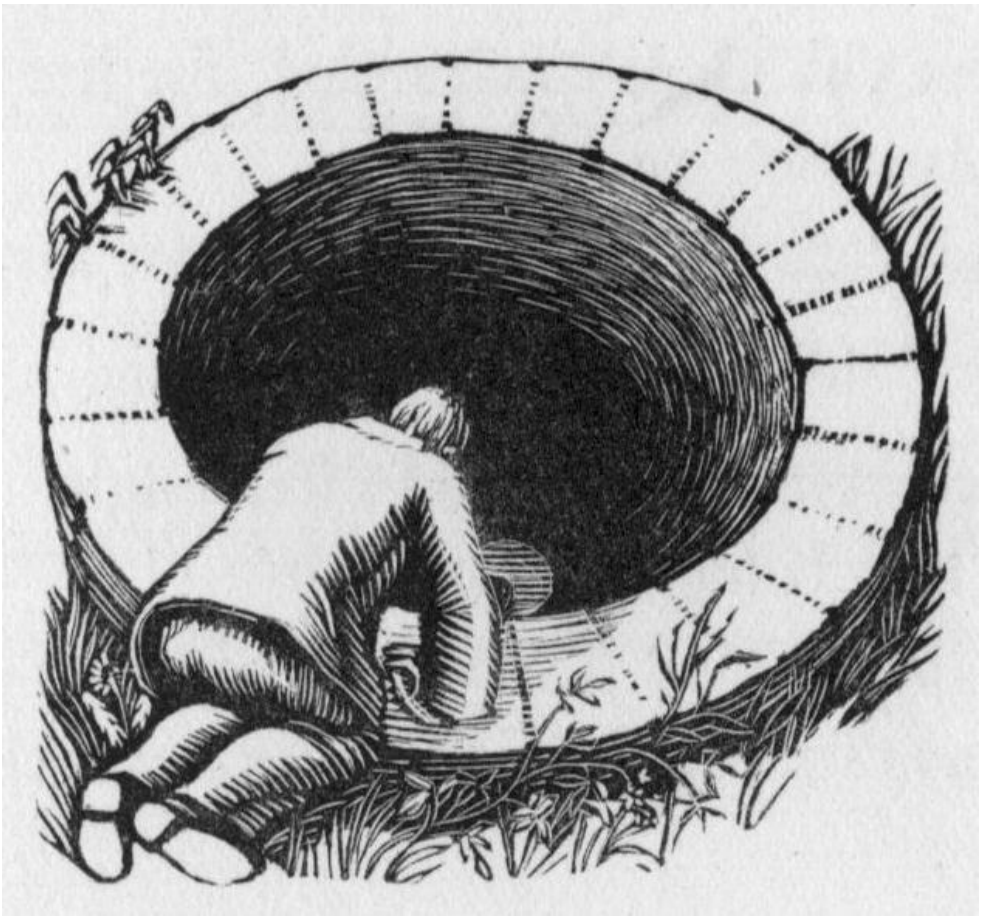
## **After the Eumenides**

Long ago, in stony Greece,  
The human heart knew no peace.  
In its darkness it was torn,  
And cursed, as now, the fate of being born;  
And tried to heal its agony with song.  
    O Lord, how long?

## **Near an old Prison**

When we would reach the anguish of the dead,  
Whose bones alone, irrelevant, are dust,  
Out of ourselves it seems we must, we must  
To some obscure but ever-bleeding thing  
Unreconciled, a needed solace bring,  
Like a resolving chord, like daylight shed.

Or through thick time must we reach back in vain  
To inaccessible pain?



## **Yama and Yami**

*(From the Veda)*

The first created pair possessed a world  
Where darkness was unknown;  
Till Yama died, and left in endless light

Yami, his twin, alone.

The high Gods tried to comfort her distress,  
But all in vain they tried.  
She would not listen to their wisest words;  
She said: "To-day he died".

Then were the Gods confounded, for her grief  
Troubled their equal sight;  
They said: "In this way she will not forget.  
We must create the Night".

So they created Night. And after Night  
Came into being Morrow;  
And she forgot him. Thus it is they say:—  
The days and nights make men forget their sorrow.

## **London Despair**

This endless gray-roofed city, and each heart—  
Each with its problems, urgent and apart—  
And hearts unborn that wait to come again,  
Each to its problems, urgent, and such pain.

Why cannot all of us together—why?—  
Achieve the one simplicity: to die?





## **After a Fever**

I have been out, to know again  
The lovely lakes of muddy rain  
    That cart-tracks hold;  
The intellectual branches, high  
In gray oases of the sky;  
    The uncaring cold.

And what distortion can withstand

The sanity of winter land?

## Recitative and Air

I heard a shepherd in the morning light,  
A piping shepherd leant against a tree,  
Who filled with music all the mountain height,  
And so sang he—

So sang he in a hollow of the hills  
To the cold rushing of the April rills,  
The rushing rills which down the pastures go  
From the high melting snow.

Cold, cold the waters splash  
And bare the branches of the mountain ash  
But strong as snakes his branches rise  
Bud-covered in the April, April skies.

Still from the burden of the snow the grass is brown,  
And bare and gray the unfrozen rocks look down;

But over the hollow and up the mound  
The new-born crocuses delight the ground,  
And every least and lovely one  
Is laden full of morning sun.

O, ships they are that sail the seas  
Whose joy rejoices all my mind;  
O ships that sail and hopes that dance,  
And pygmy armies that advance,  
And but the wind, the wind, the wind

Visits their golden hearts with the dark bees.



A thousand rushing, cold, and intersecting rills  
Pour down the chasmed hills,

Down, down descending till they reach  
The tall, bare woods of silver-branched beech.  
There on the grave enchanted ground  
No frolic shadows checker,  
By gathering children—all around—  
The blue anemones are found,  
The blue, the fair, the heaven-faced,  
There through the sky's blue lovely waste  
Laughs the woodpecker.

The children cry aloud to watch him go  
Over the woods where torrent waters flow,  
And the deep-sheltered villages below.  
There every pebble of the street  
Is happy in the early heat,  
There Mother Céline since the sun was hot  
Stood on the sill her cactus in a pot,  
And leaned her elbows on the balustrade  
Of sun-brown wood her father's father made,  
To see below her young white kid  
Who butted with his head and knew not why he did;  
Butted with his head and knew not why  
To hear the silvery streams go by.

Her aged eyes see further far  
Where the terraced vineyards are,  
Where the rushing torrents cease  
And in the opal lake their waters are at peace.  
O, where the waters lap below  
To dress the vines the women go.  
One has a basket, one has a hoe,  
One, one a kerchief red

Wrapt around her patient head,  
And everywhere the sun is shed.  
And soon from every tended root  
From barren earth the buds will shoot,  
Soon in the wealth of sun be seen  
The tendrilled Dionysian green,  
Till in a far October's gold  
The grapes, the abounding grapes behold!

So played a shepherd in the early light,  
A brown-faced spirit lolling by a tree,  
Who filled with music all the mountain height,  
O, so sang he—  
So sang he in a hollow of the hills  
To the cold rushing of the April rills,  
The rushing rills which down the pastures go  
From the high, melting snow.



## **Night-nursery Thoughts**

O sometimes when I wake at night  
I think the moon so round and bright  
That it must fall for very light.

That lovely, lovely liquid fall  
Would make the stars cry out and call,

But would not burn my hands at all.

Now even raindrops off the tip  
Of leaves and twigs, soft, softly drip;  
But if the moon should suddenly slip,

You'd never hear the softest sup  
And nobody could scrape it up;  
It would not stay in any cup.

The moon would fall without a sound  
Without a stain upon the ground,  
And in the morning, not be found.

## **On the Downs**

Only the harebells and the turf are near,  
The bumble booms, beseeching all around  
(Hark the eternal, hot, insistent sound),  
Even the flints, to rouse themselves and hear,  
But only more of peace her bumping seems  
To give their desolation, give my dreams.

Surely one indistinguishable day,  
A Roman sentinel, when times were slack,  
Heard the high larks, and lay upon his back;  
And heard the brown, unceasing bumble say  
How but for her the sky itself would fall.

And then he slept in the sun, and dreamed of Gaul.





## For a Madrigal

This hour,  
So lie,  
So lie as though your hair  
Were heavy weed  
Fallen back into the sea—  
The great sea's power.

So calm, so lie:  
So rest  
As though, where your warm arm is near your breast,  
A dove might be,  
Might downward fly,  
Might nest.

So lie,  
So rest indeed  
As though your heart,  
As though your heart had grown an evening pool,  
Among the safe surrounding hills apart,  
Among the trees,—  
Where all distracted things  
In peace repair  
To find their perfect images;  
And there,  
There heal their frantic wings  
In waters cool,

There heal their wings in waters wide and deep.

So lie,  
So blessed  
This hour,  
So lie and sleep.



## **The Bells of St Legier**

"Mon berger

Est L'Eternel!"  
The great bells say.  
"Mon berger,—  
Ring and sway  
    And swing us well,—  
Mon berger  
    Est L'Eternel."

The heavy limes  
    Are dark and sweet.  
How many times  
The heavy limes  
Have heard the chimes  
    And passing feet.  
The heavy limes  
    Are dark and sweet.

In Sunday best  
    The people pass.  
Though proudly dressed  
In Sunday best,  
They soon shall rest  
    Below the grass.  
In Sunday best  
    The people pass.

They all must die  
    Alone. Alone.  
Both low and high  
They all must die  
And come to lie  
    Beneath a stone.

They all must die  
Alone. Alone.

"L'Eternel  
Est mon berger",  
Cries each bell,  
"L'Eternel!"  
All is well,  
Their stone shall say:  
"L'Eternel  
Est mon berger".



## Coursegoules

Beside the road to Coursegoules  
Are shepherdess and sheep.

The sun is hot. The shade is cool  
Beside the road to Coursegoules,  
And every man's a fool, a fool  
    Who does not fall asleep  
Beside the road to Coursegoules,  
    And shepherdess and sheep.

## **Soliloquy**

Wide sands and seas,  
The rounded skies unstained,  
The waves,  
The language of the shores,  
All these  
Not only to exterior sense are yours,  
But are in you surrounded and contained  
And held, and given again,  
Like sleep to pain,  
Like strength to slaves,  
Like foliage to trees.

## **The Lake and the Instant**

Have you not seen

The dove-gray waters' undulating sheen  
Whereon a bird can rest  
Its rounded, slowly, slowly heaving breast,  
Whilst all the blue-aired delicate mountains round  
Attend, without a sound.  
So, freed from fear, man's first primeval crime,  
A heart might rest upon the lap of time.



## Cambridge Autumn

For long, so long, this timeless afternoon  
My body has lain in sun-receiving fields  
By the wood's border, by the bounteous elms,—  
An unbeliever in approaching night  
And the cold, winter-prophesying dew,—

Heedless of all, forgetting all but now.

So, when the far creak of a country cart  
Reaches my wind-hushed heart, my thought divines  
Its red and faded wheels, its Saxon self,  
But gropingly,—I have forgotten carts.  
The seated driver towering on its side,  
Who jolts at leisure down the long, low road  
Towards the dun-thatched village, goes too far  
For my lulled sense to follow; though at noon

I walked its very whiteness. Even the old,  
Old labourer sunning in a windsor chair,  
Patient as tree-roots and the stubbled fields,  
With pink and purple asters at his door,  
Whom but to pass this morning, stirred awake,  
Heart-deep, my father's fathers' loyalties—  
Our joint familiar never-spoken loves—  
Even his image is too hard to hold,  
Lapped as I lie in this Lethean gold.



This hushing wind on every side, as though  
The world's invisible sails swelled softly out  
And bore me to Eternity, laid low,  
Like the dead knights and nobles of the north,  
When their last battle had gone well with them,  
Among Northumbrian boulders quite at rest;  
Or as they lie, pure-effigied, in sleep,  
In stone, in shadowed churches. Yet these rays  
Pour through no windows, but from Heaven's springs,  
Directly blessing all created things.

Shall you not stir your sealèd lids at last?  
The whole autumnal earth is round you, vast,  
Serene, eventful. Watch at ease you may  
The dear progression of a country day,  
That friendliness which never had a name.  
Open your eyes and look. Two pheasants came  
To the wood's edge, among the thistles brown  
Footing it featly, pecking silver down.  
They sun their long, soft tails, they disappear  
Behind the elm-boles. Hips and haws are here  
Contented, so it seems they almost said,  
To have known another day of turning red.

Sudden, an echoing bang, a farmer's gun.  
The settled rooks rise circling, one by one  
From the tall elm. The unperturbèd skies  
Fill with an old cacophony of cries:—

I spy, I can,



A dog. A man.  
What? Where? Which one?  
A man. A gun.  
He's here. He's where?  
He's gone. Beware.  
Cry out. Cry on.  
He's gone.

Then, suavely slow, and gradually dumb,  
Back in a circling saraband they come  
Each to his elm-bough, neither fast nor soon,  
Black judges of the golden afternoon.

The new-born calf lies down to sleep again  
In the long, streaking shadows of the plain.  
His swing-tail mother feeds, and now and then  
To see his safety in a world of men  
Turns a slow, gazing head; whilst gazing I  
Amazed upon this rounded planet lie.

This planet soon from the benignant sun  
And so sure-seeming amplitude of light  
To turn away, and like a great horse plunge—  
Plunge in submerging lapping seas of cold  
And ever-darkening space.

I saw last night  
A streak of sunset over mounded stacks,  
Black as the eyes of ghosts. And mist comes soon.  
Even this last largess of blackberries  
Warm on the hedge, are purple-dark as storms,  
Storms that awake the safely-sleeping child  
In midnight terror, sway the blackened elms  
In gulfs of dark, and the clear stars devour.

And these red thorns tear like a sleeting shower.

O, I must raise myself and go, for now  
The sun sinks down, and that old labourer,  
That simple vision by the cottage door  
Which morning brought, returns; who soon must fare  
Alone into the dark of death, no more,  
Like this unconquered planet, to emerge  
On crystal April light, with daffodils.

His strange, eternal spring shall be elsewhere,  
Only the dead can tell how clear, and fair,  
And certain as the look their faces bear  
After the storm and ravage. Yet it seems  
Though all creation shares the departing light—  
Red cows and robins, and the rooks in flight,  
And the great elm-trees heavy with their dreams,  
And the great barns—that most of all to those  
Old, patient eyes no temporal spring shall bless,  
This vast, warm, earthly autumn tenderness  
Is come to say Amen, before they close.



## 'The Trumpet Shall Sound'

*Messiah* (1742)

We who are met to celebrate  
Grandly to-day our God and King and State  
"We shall be changed"—but shall not change too far:  
Twice as superb will be, and twice as big  
Each fair, redundant, and immortal wig;  
And every button on our coats, a star.

Where Lords and Commons ever equal are  
Each regal coach will grow a wingèd car,  
Whose laurelled lackeys in triumphant light  
Sing their symmetrical delight,  
And link-boys with the flaming cherubim  
Dance in their buckled shoes and shout the morning hymn;  
Where coachmen crowned with asphodel and moly  
Echo the cries of Holy, Holy, Holy,  
And disembodied horses fly  
With golden trumpeters about the sky.

O we shall change, but with no pangs of birth,  
To glorious heaven from this glorious earth.

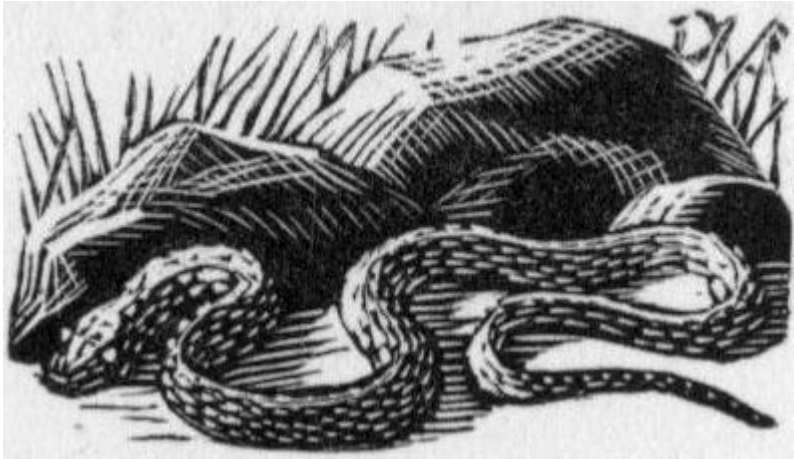


## **The Single Woman**

Now quenched each midnight window is. Now  
unimpeded  
Darkness indeed descends on roof and tree and slope;  
And in my heart the houses that you have not needed  
Put out their coloured lights of comfort and of hope.

## **The Conversation**

From my mind's cliff you knocked a stone away.  
There in the light, a full-born Purpose lay;  
And half in terror, half in glad surprise  
I saw his unknown coils, and sleeping eyes.



## **The Poet discouraged**

There is more power in a single bough  
Than all I fashion with the sweat of my brow;  
More freshness in its unimportant leaves  
Than any lyric that my heart conceives;

More wonder in a wood-louse, tightly curled,  
Than my whole epic on the rounded world.

## Fairy Tale for Two Voices

—O sing or tell a story.

—What shall I tell?

—There was a Princess woke at early dawn,  
A Princess in a castle, in the north,  
And saw the forests rising tree on tree  
Out of her little window, and ran forth  
To look for berries in the autumn woods.

—O sing of what she found in the woods as well.

—She must slip away before the kitchen stirs,  
With hooded golden hair, down garden walks,  
Past home-faced apples,

—Over the open ground

Where feed her father's herd of great cream cows,  
With swinging tails and delicate, peaceful feet  
Among the mountain crocuses,

—With bells

Like hope and dew,

—And come to the edge of the

woods.

—Brave she must be, for in the woods are bears;

—The noise of waters fills them like a breath

—And footsteps make no sound.

—At home they tell  
The king of the bears is an enchanted Prince  
Who waits release.

—But who shall break the  
spell?



The forests rise around her, tree on tree,  
To cloud-high crags;

—They rise round secret lawns



Where red ash-berries for no human hand  
Drop.

—And she listens.

—If she listens long

She hears clear voices,

—Voices of surprise,

Wonder, and argument, and prophecies  
Hid in the streams.

—For whom to understand?

—She can but tell a spirit in her bones

Tells her to climb,

—To climb and fear no ills,

—To fear no presence in the unpeopled woods  
Or hidden in the caverns of the hills.

—She can but tell how swiftly she must start

Up, up the paths where only hunters go,

—Running with silver shoes that make no mark,

—Quick with a purpose that she cannot know  
And singing unawares.

—Wet bilberries and scarlet cranberries,  
Green brionies,

—Four-leaved herb Paris with his sorcerer's heart  
Whose home is in the stillness under trees;

—Red ash-berries as well

And black strange cherries,

—Strange with double

stones,

—O, all of these,

Tell how she plucks them with her weaving hands  
To make a wreath of berries bright and dark,

—And some that shine like blood in the early sun

To make a wreath,

—A wreath for whom begun?

—To make a garland for the king of the bears.

—And then, O tell

How all at once her singing voice was dumb

And her heart fell.

—Fierce-eyed and hairy round a jutting rock,

—Dark, dark and softly footing he was there;

—The king of the woods—The black bewitchèd bear

—Unpassably, unconquerably come.

—But quickly, now tell this,

How she was brave, how she was not afraid.

—She flung the enchanted berries round his neck,

The ripple of her amber-yellow hair

Sweeping his claws and pouring from her hood,

Her young thin arms, her oval cheek in fur,

And made him captive,

—Captive with a kiss.

—And suddenly

—Suddenly

—There

Slant-eyed and smiling in the leaf-strewn light,

—Silent as moss, and all the streams his speech,

—A Prince was standing in the bilberry wood,

—Strong as the sun, and all the streams his power,

—Proud and delivered in the world of men.

—Right through the trees the sun ascending burned

In wealth of swaying gold his glorious way,

—And wrapped in light and shadow each to each

No spoken word need say,

—For in the arisen morning there he stands,

—Free from his cavern's airless echoing space,  
Free from the dark compulsion of his form.  
—Sing how he looked at her with eyes returned  
From exile to the harbour of her face,  
—To certainty from storm;  
And touched her shoulders with his stranger's hands,  
—With hands grown more familiar in an hour  
Than all her home and years of yesterday,  
—The unilluminated years before.  
—O sing and tell of this.

—And tell no more.

But how, as on the first created day  
All things were new.  
—And through the tall-stemmed forest, far below  
—Before they turned in harmony to go,  
The clustered berries round their shoulders wound,  
—Before they reached the fruitful open ground,  
They heard the bells of feeding flocks,

—The

sound  
Like hope and dew.



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[The end of *Mountains & Molehills* by Frances Cornford]