

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Augusta Webster

Table of Contents

<u>Lilian Gray: a Poem</u>	1
<u>Augusta Webster</u>	1
<u>LILIAN GRAY</u>	1

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LILIAN GRAY.

YES, rosebud sister, smiling into bloom
Beneath the sunshine of a happy love,
I hold with you there is indeed no shame
To any woman-soul to say "I love;"
But rather is she perfected therein,
And sets a crown upon her womanhood,
And is more high that she hath humbled her
As they who kneel upon raised altar-steps.
You must not think because I have no smiles
More warm than moonbeams on a frosty night,
To thank the flattery of love-sick prayers,
I set my glory in a self-filled heart.
Nor, Amy, do I doubt that Philip Leigh
Is threefold worthy of the trust he seeks
He must be somewhat, dearest, since you hold
Him only second to your peerless Frank:
I prize him; but, sweet pleader, you must give
Your client no delusive hopes from me.
Indeed, I do not love him; and I think
That he and you, as I, would hold it sin
Were I to deck me with the name of wife,
Being no wife in heart, or else not his.

What, Amy, you can read my riddle now
By the heart wisdom of your new-learned lore?
Last week you were to me a little child,
And we were parted off by all the years
That mark sixteen from graver twenty-two;
Now you are womaned by your day of love,
Too early were it not so very fair,
And you can read me with a wakened sense,
And with an equal eye feel into mine.

Well, little sister, I will tell you all,
Or rather, I will tell you but the end,
And you must image for yourself the rest
The first low whispers, and the happy dread,
The tremulous happy dread of the waked heart

Lilian Gray: a Poem

First following them into a fairy world;
The first long looks from eyes all sad with love;
The first dear silences; the first sweet tears
That tremble on the cheek for too much joy;
The hours that seemed too full of happiness,
Hours almost burdened with their happiness.
I know that they are lying in my heart,
As far-off hill-tops float upon a stream,
Though weary leagues stretch wide from it to them:
I could recall them, even as you recall
The words that were your music but this morn,
But that such dreaming of a faded dream
Were too unwise, and in its end must leave me
Like one who, wandering on a wintry shore,
Growing to feel no chillness in the blast,
And learning in frost-sparkles to see beauty,
Should wile himself a moment by a spell
To some bright land all rich with summer breath,
And, backwards thrown again, should find the snows
A winding-sheet to shroud his unnerved frame.

This was the end Amy, you never knew,
(For when our brother married Ellen Hope,
Four years ago, you were a child at school,)
You never knew him Walter Hope I mean
He went abroad ere the next winter came,
And you have hardly heard me speak of him;
But he it was I think he meant no wrong
You must not blame too much, for it may be
His fault in the telling takes a harsher shape
Than you would judge it had you seen the whole.

You know our brother married in the spring,
The early spring, while yet the buds were hard;
But I, they would not let me go, I stayed
And saw the summer flush light up the earth,
And plucked June roses still at Hopetoun Hall.
His mother answered me, whene'er I spake
Of home, "She would not have me leave her yet,
Since I must fill her stolen Ellen's place
And be her daughter for a while at least,
If not for always;" and Alice and sweet Clare
Would weep and call me cruel while they smiled,
"What need had I," they said, "to leave their love?
Not for my brother he had Ellen now;
Nor little Amy she was safe at school:
What need that they should ever lose me now?"
And Walter Sister, wind your arm round me,
And let me feel your true heart beat with mine;
Your hand in mine, dear Amy so We sat
One sunset evening, he and I alone,
(For Clare and Alice had strolled out of sight,
Hunting for ferns that grew in the wide caves

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Whose weed-rimmed thresholds the long ebb left bare,)
But we sat dream-eyed, listening to the sea,
Till Walter uttered slowly, "Margaret!"
How did he speak my name, the name he loved,
That there shot through me that strange warning pang
Of sorrow-knowledge suddenly aroused
As when a mother, waking in the night,
Hears one wind-sigh wail sadder than the rest,
And knows that, far away, her sailor son
Breathes his long death-gasp in the seething waves,
Whose next week's coming was the happy thought
That smiled upon her lips in her first sleep?
I starting as he spoke, two quiet tears,
That in my trance of sad sweet sunset thoughts
Had lurked among the lashes, broke their bounds,
And touched my cheeks. "O Margaret, not tears!
You do not know what pain they stir in me,
Dreading that I some day might make you weep;
But surely now I do not make you weep?"
And I said, smiling, "Though you made me weep,
There were no harm; for they were pleasant tears,
And I should thank you for them." But he sighed
In an unwilling murmur, as of one
Who loathes his forced-out words, "I ought to wish
No power to cost you sweet or bitter tears."
Then I rose angered, thinking that he spoke
The moment's rudeness of some idle pique
Unworthy earnest love, and would have gone
Wordless yet went not; for he took my hand,
And, when I turned to look his boldness down
With scornful eyes, his met me with such gaze
Of mournful pleadings mild with love-rebukes,
That mine fell shamed before it while he spoke:
"O my proud Margaret, bear with me a while,
Until I give you meaning for my words,
And do not crush me wholly with your scorn;
But let me speak, you sitting by my side;
And let me hold your hand, that I may feel,
This first time it has lain within my clasp,
Some of the noble strength that warms your nature
Pulse through me from its touch." And I obeyed,
And waited for some blow I felt at hand.
But he spoke of the reddening sunset clouds,
And the calm clearness of the wide-bayed sea;
Till I, impatient, said, "But I stay here
Because you have some sterner word to speak
That I would hear." "Yes; I will tell you all.
But I would wait would wait O Margaret,
You will not spurn me in your haughty truth?
Yet even that were something like a hope
My hope for you is worse despair for me.

Lilian Gray: a Poem

If you and I chased down a sudden slope
That broke off sharply in a black abyss,
And you stood highest, then my warning voice
Might timely check your course, though not my own;
So hear me, and despise me, Margaret."

"Vague, vague," I said; "and I would hear full truth.

Walter, it is my due to hear the truth."

"Wait, it is sorrow" "Therefore I would hear."

And silence came between us for a while;
Till he, not looking at me, tore his words
Out from unwilling depths, and dashed at once
Like one who fears to linger, lest he lose
His long-sought courage in a mist of doubts
Into his cruel theme. "Last year I came
To spend in study here two quiet months.
My mother and the girls had gone abroad;
But I delayed to join them, having formed
A plan to hive much learning here alone.
And all a summer fortnight saw me live,
As one unknowing of an outer world,
Only to look on books, to think of books,
To walk with books, to dream at night of books;
Until my head grew dizzy with its lore,
And I, all wearied with my over zeal,
Lapsed sudden into languid summer moods,
With no fixed bent except to have no bent,
And full of lazy longings all unshaped.
And so I seemed to dream, and was not glad,
Nor yet unhappy, but all vaguely moved,
And knew not what I would, as though I waited
Some change to bring me back my former self
Or wake new being in me. Then one morn
I said, 'Now what is this? I lose the sense
Of happy sunshine, mellow August hours,
And ponder, mindless, over shapes of words,
That mark no meaning to my torpid thought;
And so the days are barren, and the nights
Are fevered with unrest, and the sweet pride
Of summer-gloried earth is lost to me.
I'll toil no more, lest I grow dead at heart.'

"So, rod in hand, I loitered idly forth,
And followed down a little leaping stream,
In all its windings, through the beechen grove,
And past the slopes of wheat, and through our valley,
Till it had led me many a crooked mile;
And when the sunset reddened on our woods,
I came upon a pathway fringed with ferns,
That led through brushwood to a little dell,
All dreamy with its stillness 'mid the hills.
Through sundered crags, half clothed with tangled growth,
My brook had slipped, and, with a little fall,

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Plashed lightly down, and stole before me there,
A silver serpent, flashing back the beams
That slanted eastward from the lingering sun.
A knotted bridge, its rail all ivy-hung
And ivy-fettered to a solemn elm,
Led, low above the water, to a door
Set in a grass-grown bramble-trailing wall,
And shadowed by a feathery mountain-ash,
Scarlet with fiery clusters on its boughs;
And, ranged behind, five spreading sycamores
Made pleasant darkness on the brook, and screened
All sign of home or life, save one smoke wreath,
That, curling high, betrayed the hidden hearth.

"And now," I said, "if I were but some prince,
The youngest prince of three, just wandered forth
To seek my fairy fortune, here might wait
Its upshot in some elfin mystery,
Or long enchantment to be burst by love.
But, woe is me, I am a common man,
Fallen on common days, and I shall find
A square-eyed cottage staring at a walk;
A portly master, with a crimson face
And fat-closed eyes and pulpy blubber lips
That pass more oaths than H's; a trim wife,
With stiff false curls, worn for her evening best;
A troop of flat-nosed brats; a greasy maid,
Her broad pink cheeks, set round with pinker bows,
Stretched with a vacant grin of wonderment
To hear a stranger speak." "I raised the latch
And passed into a weedy box-set walk
That wound beside a ragged hedge of laurels
High with wild arms unpruned." "My steps were stayed;
For all at once a treble voice rang out,
Fresh as a child's, yet with a sweetness more
Than childhood holds and yet perhaps a child's;
I knew not; but I listened happily
While some one sung:

"Oh, love me! love me!
The sea-maid sings on the pebbly shore Love me! oh, love me!
The tears they gather, the tears run o'er;
She looks to the sea, she looks to the hill,
But no one comes, and the night is still Oh, love me! love me!

"Oh, love me! love me!
Singing so sadly, singing so long Love me! oh, love me!
I would give true love, so deep, so strong,
To him who would give true love to me.
Nought on the hill, and nought on the sea Oh, love me! love me!

Lilian Gray: a Poem

"Love me! oh, love me!
Singing so long, and singing so late Love me! oh, love me!
My heart is lone, I weep while I wait.
She looks to the sea, she looks to the hill,
But no one comes, and the night is still Oh, love me! love me!"
"The sweet voice rang more distant ere it ceased;
And I passed onward through the walk and came,
By a sudden turn, out on an open plot,
And saw the nest that held the singing-bird
Not as I pictured it, but creeper-wreathed,
And rich in rustic grace. But, as I looked,
There came to me a prim well-worded dame
A lady it might be, but with a touch
Of over-fineness something underbred
And what I had to ask was quickly told,
A homeward road less devious than my brook
Had brought me there by. 'Well,' she said, 'my way
Had been a winding one; she need but show
A lane that led into the common highway,
And I should have scarce five straight miles to go,
And be at Hopetoun.' "It was clear enough;
And yet I lingered, asking all once more,
In hopes to see what little bird had sung,
And trying to link converse with the dame,
Who gave me little help till some chance word
Told who I was, and then her hard-lined face
Was wreathed to one great network by her smiles,
The while she prayed I'd rest me there, and called,
With eager voice, 'Come, Lilian.' "And she came,
The wild dove Lilian with soft hazel eyes;
And I remained that evening; and the moon
Was high and yellow when it lit me home.
"How shall I tell you, stately Margaret?
I linger with my story to delay
The bitter truth. Yet hear it. I **must** speak.
"Through all that night a voice rang in my ears,
'Oh, love me! love me!' and soft hazel eyes
Looked 'love me, love me' through that summer night,
And through the day, and through the after night,
And through the day and through the night again.
And when the third day came, I once more passed
Along the laurel walk towards her door.
"We talked alone together: then I said,
'Through these three nights and days I heard and heard
A sea-maid singing, from some far-off shore,
"Oh, love me! love me!" and her singing is
Like yours, her eyes like yours. Oh, do you think
That she would love me for my gift of love?'
And on that moment love looked from her eyes,
And from that moment love was ever there.
"And soon I grew to be a daily guest

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Her mother chid me when I doubted welcome;
And Lilian Gray would wander out with me
Her mother said she'd trust me, but none else,
To be her guardian and our days would pass
In happy love-talk, we two and the brook.

"Yet at the first, although I thought I loved,
I knew at heart I scarcely loved enough
You snatch away your hand? Well, it is just;
And yet you might have left it to me still
A little while; Margaret, a little while!
Be merciful." And so I gave it him
Again in silence. He spoke on, "I grew
To love her dearly in all truth. I think,
Though I have learned since then a different love
And deeper, yet I have scarce loved her less,
Loving another more; and I so loved
As one should love her whom he seeks for wife.

"But when my father died he prayed of me
Never to vex my mother with a bride
Whom she was loath to welcome, and I knew
That she would sorrow at my lowly choice;
And so I planned that she should see her first,
Not knowing of my love, and so, clear-eyed,
Know her a lady in her simple grace,
And come to call her daughter without pain.

"But scarce a lady born is Lilian Gray:
Her father was the pastor, self-elect,
Of a small flock that found the Church's fold
Too narrow for their range, who, having gift
To win his hearers' hearts by eloquence,
Had, half unknowing, won himself a wife
Of higher birth than his and some small dower.
And when he died his widow, little fain
To live 'mong kin who held her less than they,
Had, with her Lilian, sought out other home,
And often changed; until a year before,
They sheltered in the little hill-set nook
Where I had found them. There they lived in calm,
And had not many friends, for Mistress Gray
Would mix among her gossip a false tone
That jarred upon her puzzled neighbours' ears,
And with her stories of her gentle kin
And studied casual mention of great names
Vex them **me** more, bringing me sense of shame
Through her, but vexing chiefly by the thought
How all my mother's quiet dignity
And keen-edged sense of fitness and of grace
Would shrink revolted when she met with her,
My Lilian's, who should be my mother too.
Therefore I lingered, waiting some kind chance
To seize and bring my mother face to face

Lilian Gray: a Poem

With Lilian only, ere she dreamed of aught
To make her see her with unwilling eyes.
I should have been more bold, perhaps; and yet
I did it for the best. "Then sudden came
The crimsoning autumn passing through the woods,
And broke my summer dream. And I went back
To end my college days, and had not done
That which I longed to do, and crowned our love
With happy promise by a plighted troth.
But Lilian Gray was trustful in my faith,
And I in hers. "Not oft, but now and then
Her mother sanctioned it sweet letters came.
Her very self in them, and gladdened me,
Deepening by her pure faith my faith in her.
And, as my love grew prouder, I grew bold
And set it in my heart that, when I came
Again to Hopetoun, Lilian should be known
To all who loved me she whom I loved most.
But even then the weeks were drawing near
To my return there came an undertone
Of vexing meaning through her words, not like
Her own, light hints of 'over-trustfulness,'
And 'wasted love that women gave to men,'
And that they 'turned from those who loved them best
To others colder, making life a blank.'
I thought I heard through them her mother's turns
Of threadbare platitudes. Then there would be
Mention, as though in jest, of a new friend
Whose talk to her was over sweet with praise;
'But he was kind,' 'her mother liked him well,'
'The richest farmer in ten parishes,
And gently bred.' "And yet through all I felt,
Though I was troubled at her altered style,
That it was forced from an unwilling pen;
And ever there would come some simple touch
Of the old faith, that spoke through all my heart.
"You scarce will blame me, Margaret, that my pride,
Was waked within me and I would not stoop
To clear me from a hinted blame, nor show
I felt the change; but, thinking 'we meet soon,
And all will then be shown,' made cold replies:
Moreover, had I known what now I know,
Then only vaguely guessed, her mother's scheme
To sting me into passion with the fear
Of losing Lilian by my much delay,
I had just cause for anger: for should she
Have yielded to it? though indeed she pleaded,
With weeping pleaded her belief in me.
But yet she did it. Was she free from blame?
Yet, ah, my Lilian! she has suffered much;
And I and I Oh had she not set strife

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Between us by that yielding! had the day
Not dawned that led me to her cottage first!
Or had I died before I saw you, Margaret!
Oh! I to find myself dishonoured, false,
Torn by two loves, unlike, yet each a crime,
Being not single! Oh! to be so plunged
Into dishonour, that there is for me
No right unfouled with wrong, no way to truth
But through a treachery! Which way to follow?
Good heavens! both ways disgraced!" Then he made pause;
And silence was between us like to death.
I could not speak. Amy, I think I tell you
Thus echo-like almost his very words;
Could I forget them? for they are the bridge
Between one who was happy, with a name
Like mine, a face like mine, one Margaret
Glad and well loved who comes to me in dreams,
And this still Margaret whose sadder life
Is not all sad but very hushed and cold.
Could I forget them, think you? for they rang
Low in my ears, like an unceasing knell,
Long, long, so long. Yet, as I heard them come,
They seemed the uncertain murmurs of a dream
To which I listened with a deadened sense,
As conscious of their import but no more,
Having no power to think. And all the while
You scarce would think it, dearest I had watched
The changing flushes in the sky, the lights
That woke and died upon the quiet sea,
The deepening shadows on the sloping woods,
With clear observance, as of one whose thoughts
Chimed with the sunset beauty, and had heard
Each whisper-voice of eve, each little plash
Of ebbing surges, every leafy sigh
That cadenced with an undulating rhyme
To the light winds, and known them each from each.
And in the silence then I saw the clouds,
Paled from their fever-red, die into gray,
And twilight sadness creeping over all;
I heard among the rocks the whispered glee
Of Clare and Alice, stealing out of sight,
Back from their stroll, to leave us to our talk.
And yet I did not move, but waited still
And wordless, till he spoke. I think I could
Have waited till I died, but only waited.
"Then the time came" he said, and spoke
As one who had but rested to take breath,
"For my home coming; and I wrote to say
What morning I should see her face to face.
I came to Hopetoun Hall; my mother's eyes
Were sad on me, the girls gave anxious looks;

Lilian Gray: a Poem

I learned the wherefore ere the evening passed:
Some gossip tongue had blundered out vague talk
Of Lilian Gray and me. My mother spoke
Grave words of no ungentle wisdom, touched
With wonted tenderness. 'She would not think,'
She said, 'her Walter could have made his sport
To mock a simple woman with false love;
But, if my fancy had been lightly caught,
And what she heard were true, she prayed me then,
Although it brought me some brief touch of pain,
To have enough right judgment, pride enough
To free myself.' 'But yet, if this were true,
And I had won her love, you would not have me
Cloud all her life,' I said, 'by breaking faith?'
'But that,' she answered, 'would not be the end,
Since even now the suit of Farmer Pearce
(Our neighbour, whom they nickname Handsome Hugh)
Is not all hopeless. Do not think, my Walter,
I echo gossip prate to change your bent;
But I perforce must gather she is loath
To check a wealthy suitor, lest she find
In losing him, not being sure of you,
She loses her best market.' "She had struck
A key wherein were measured all my doubts;
Therefore I would not tell my purpose then,
Thinking, 'to-morrow will make all things clear;'
And I replied, 'Well, it may be, some day
We'll speak of this again. **Now** let it pass;
And trust me, mother, you shall learn from me
If I pledge faith to her or any else.'
So was she fain to leave it, though I knew
Her heart was heavy in her for my sake,
And she was weeping when I kissed her forehead
And left her to her saddened rest. And I
Through the long night was torn with many fears.
"The hour was cadenced from the village church,
That I had fixed to be at Lilian's home,
And I was there, but she her mother said,
She did but wander by the frozen brook
While the noon sun was bright, she would come soon.
And then she talked, and talked, and wound along
A web of words all latticed to one point;
'Lilian,' she said, 'was pale and sometimes sad,
Though young Hugh Pearce at times could make her laugh
Hugh Pearce came often well, she could not say
What yet might come of it, although, indeed,
Her daughter did but count him as a friend
Lilian was very young, she had not learned
To know how men could love with half a heart
And leave the love they took such pains to win;
She had her fancies: still she had such pride

Lilian Gray: a Poem

As every girl with gentle blood should have,
And no mock lover, were he faint or false,
Could dazzle her for ever to all worth
In truer suitor Lilian could love well,
Perhaps too well, 'twas not for her to say
Yet love words were not all for her own part
She thought young Pearce a very fitting match
Well, time would shew.' "Thus she meandered on,
While I, much inly chafed, made vague replies,
As though her talk had been of gossip news
Wherein I had no part, and eager watched
Through the low casement o'er the whitened dell
For Lilian's coming. All the while I heard
That 'Love me, love me,' echo from the eve
When first we met. "Through the bared trees I saw her
Crossing the rustic bridge and not alone!
They came together to the leafless ash,
Yet when she passed from out the hidden walk
Behind the laurel screen, he was not there.
"I could have killed that man nay, almost her,
To see those dovelike eyes, tender with tears,
Look into mine so full of love and trust,
And think they looked a lie, a shameless lie!
I longed that looks could slay, then had I died
And, dying, slain her with the scorn in mine.
The scorn? I looked in scorn, I spoke in scorn,
But was there aught but maddened love in me?
I would have struck the man that called her false,
Though she showed doubly false. I took the hand
She offered, with loose hold. 'Though I have come,'
I said, 'to greet you after many months,
I trust you have not left your morning walk
Too early for my sake. 'Twould be too much
If I should keep you longer from your friend;
I grieve that I have parted you thus long.'
And so I turned to go. Yet ere I went
A sudden tempest rushed on me and tore
My passion from my heart. "'And now,' I said,
'You whom I thought my bride, as being pledged
By every word of love, will you be false,
And dream no curse will come? Oh, did you think
You could play lightly a well-balanced game,
Heart against heart? Will **he** be always blind?
Yet, though he love to blindness till he die,
He loves not more than I, it may be less.
And now, farewell for ever, Lilian Gray!
I came this morn, not having lost all trust
In you, to ask you but to give me right
To claim a mother's love from mine for you:
Thus much I say, that you may know your taunts,
Flung from your mother's tongue, false as the love

Lilian Gray: a Poem

On your own lips. And know you do such sin
As shames your woman—nature, being won
To other wooing, you that **should** be mine
Are mine in Heaven's truth, as I am yours,
Though I will never see your face gain!"

"And thus I left her, though I heard her cry,
Like a faint death—wail from a helpless child,
A cry for mercy, for a moment's grace;
And though her mother's voice rang shrill, behind
My hurried steps, to pray me turn and hear,
I left her. "Have you ever tried to fancy
What it must be in a time of plague to find,
On a sudden just when the unhappy wretch
Thought himself safe the plague spot on his flesh
All over, then! and yet no other change
It seems a dream, but such mad ghastly dreaming
As is despair? I think my agony,
My numb mazed agony, was such as his;
And now I know why the plague—struck went mad,
It was the suddenness of the blow. "And yet
Through all I hoped, not knowing that I hoped.

"A day or two, and then a letter came;
One moment's faith woke in me, 'This will prove
Her all that love and truth she seemed to be.'
I tore the folds apart. Her mother wrote
How I had wronged her: 'Did I think to cloke
My falsehood with false anger? Did I think
That Lilian's mother patiently had looked
Upon my suit had she not thought indeed
I wooed her with true honour for my wife?
And was it well, or worthy of my name,
To leave her for a feigned or fancied spite?
And, if Hugh Pearce had waked my jealousy,
This she would say, to prove its little cause,
For near a month he had not sought their home;
Her child had not talked with him, even seen him,
Since one bright morn, a fortnight now ago,
When chance had brought him as she walked alone.
But since that day' "Did I not know it false?
I threw the lying paper to the flames.
A tiny folded page fell to the ground:
'Twas Lilian's; but I shrank from it, as one
Who dreads a poison in the perfumed scroll,
For 'through its saddened tenderness,' I thought,
'Will lurk this taint and curse of black deceit.'
'Mid the quick blaze I read one smouldering line,
'Your true and trusting Lilian,' ere it passed
In flickering fire. 'Oh, rather had we died!
Not true! not trusting! never mine again!
I cried: 'This is the end. For nevermore
Can Lilian Gray be aught to me, or I

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Seem to her one who loves.' "Gloom fell on me;
Oh, many weary days I walked in gloom,
And lived on poisonous sorrow. Darkness lay
Upon my being, till I failed to see
The higher worth and purport of our life,
And meted it in all its height and breadth
By measure of my own grief-straitened mind;
And, sick with peevishness, grew ever less
Than my past self. "Margaret, then **you** came."

Because he paused and looked, I answered him:
"Oh yes, I know, I waked you from the dream
Wherein men fall who, being less than fate,
Think themselves more because they chafe and rage,
And mock their Maker, twitting at His world
Because the good in it is not their good,
And they through evil eyes see all things ill.
Scarce knowing it, I waked you. Then you seemed
To love me. Yet for long I feared your love,
It was as though a shadow stood between,
Not seen and scarcely felt, and through your words,
Despite my faith, the echo of a doubt
Came to me though I would not think it came.
And now I see that vague unreasoning sense
Whereby the true can dimly guess the false
Stirred in me then. And now I surely know
Your love for Lilian often moved your heart
When most you loved me." "But not so," he cried;
"Because you, inly greater, nobler souled,
Even more beautiful, awoke in me
A deeper thought if not a deeper love.
And yet indeed, I will not speak aught false
Often at happy moments when I dared
To think you half my own I heard the voice
Of my lost Lilian, with its sighing chant
Of 'Love me' murmuring a dying wail,
And a sweet face grown very pale and sad
Looked long reproach at me. "But **you** were there;
You near me. "Once I saw her stand alone
(One cold spring morning as we left the church,
I last) beside the elm-tree at the porch;
I saw her mournful face plead for one word,
Heard her half utter 'Walter.' "'Twas ill done;
Yes false and cruel, that I would not see;
But fear grew more than hope that she should prove
Her injured truth, since truth made clear in her
Must prove **me** false, or sunder me from you.
Yes, I did ill; and you, you look my blame
From grieved proud eyes. O you, who are so true,
Be merciful. You have in you no power
To comprehend this wrong, you cannot know,
Scarcely believe, these perils never yours:

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Be merciful." And I cried, "Tell me all.
O Walter, tell me all for there is more,
Not come upon your tongue, but in your eyes;
Tell me, for I will bear it and forgive.
Your love for her was wakened! Tell me all!"
 "Wakened!" he answered, "wakened! Yes, as one
Who wakens from his frenzy—fit to know
He has brought death to those he loved, and wakes
From madness to grow mad with black remorse.
 "But yesterday it was, towards the town
I rode to find that song I heard you wish for;
On Comber Hill I met young Farmer Pearce:
Give me a hearing, for I long have sought
Some chance to tell you something you should know,'
He cried, and I drew rein. "His is true love.
A brave great heart, holy with tenderness.
His life beats all for Lilian; but she weeps,
More drooping daily with her weight of love
Borne all alone. They say that she will die
Of grief; and Pearce loves her more than his love.
He told me all his hopeless wooing; all
Her mother's wavering lures to keep him still,
Another haven if she missed my port,
And Lilian's timid firmness baffling her;
How he had watched her, saddening, seem to share
Her mother's doubts of me, while he himself
Thought surely that my love was little worth.
Still, checked by Lilian's ever colder mood,
He schooled himself to leave her; yet one morn,
Hearing that I had come to Hopetoun Hall,
And meeting her by chance, or half by chance
For truly he had watched her coming forth
He poured his bootless prayers in her vexed ears,
In the fond hope that, though she loved not him,
She might be something guarded by the thought
Of his true worship from a falser suit.
But she, in anxious haste, seemed scarce to hear,
Yet left him lorn of hope by her few words.
And so they parted sadly at the gate
Where I had seen them. "But he loved her still;
And when he heard of other bride for me,
He sought again to win her, ignorant
How he was adding to her other grief
Her mother's daily angers. Then at last
She, sad and weary, having none to help,
Knelt at his feet for mercy, weeping long,
And shewed him all her heart. "And by his tale
I knew that she, too timid, had not dared
To tell the beldame what that morning passed
'Twixt Hugh and her on the bridge, which had that dupe
Of her own scheming written me instead

Lilian Gray: a Poem

Of the lie she coined for Lilian had not failed
To tell her they had met, and that she thought
My sudden rage might come from seeing them;
But 'Stuff,' she said, 'he could not see,' and took
Her crooked policy had I learned this
It had been different. Yet I might have learned,
For Lilian, in those lines I gave unread
To the quick flames, had truly told me all.
And now what could she think but that my rage
Was hugged to gloze my falseness? "More Pearce spoke,
Wringing my heart with anguish: of her youth,
Shadowed by gloom, slow paling into death;
How, too soft-souled to wrestle with despair,
She sighs away her life with sad regrets,
To the end loving. "This she bade him do:
He should not seek me at my home, lest so
I might be angered, but, if we should meet,
Then he must bear her prayer that I would come
To her who loved me and speak one farewell,
That peace might rest upon her while she died.
"Her home was close at hand. Could I but go?
Patient she lay in languid rest, most fair,
With a sad life-lorn beauty white and cold,
Like a dead maiden sculptured on a tomb:
But when she saw me a quick colour burned
On her worn face; with a wild burst of love
She clung around my neck, 'O mine again;
Mine, only mine he has come back to me,
The proud rich beauty could not keep his love
From his own Lilian. Ah, you know me true!
But, love, you come so late; for I may die
Though you are come. But I will live, **will** live.'
"I found no answer. Ere my trembling heart
Could frame what I should say, her sudden strength
Rushed from her feeble frame, and in my arms
Lifeless she sank. And I, in awful dread
Lest this were death and I a murderer,
Could scarce uplift the child-like weight. Long, long
Corpse-like she lay; at length her eyes unclosed
One moment, then she dropped her moistened fringe,
And dreamy murmured, 'It was true. My God,
I thank Thee, it was true.' "Now it were best,
Good Doctor Bernard said, 'that you should go;
Else she may die of joy who, but for this,
Had surely died of grief. And even yet
Well we'll not blame you now, and we'll not croak,
Your penitence perhaps has come in time
And we shall see the broken bud revive.'
And hasty he dismissed me, lest the sight
Of me, or knowledge even I was near,
Should work some evil. 'But you'll come again

Lilian Gray: a Poem

To-morrow, or the next day at the least,
Parting he whispered. "I went not to-day,
But sent a messenger for news of her,
And staid to ponder in my troubled mind
What I should do." His face bowed on his hands,
Thick-breathing sobs torn from his quivering breast,
He turned from me. Ah me, the deadly pang
To see him thus him, strong as the old gods,
Wrung by his agony to tears! I fought
With my own nature; else my arms had been
Clasped round his neck, my kisses on his lips,
My tears upon his face; I should have clung
Around his feet, and poured out all my love
In wild fond words, and never risen up
Till he was comforted. Alas, I knew
One moment weak would leave us ever weak;
One such wild moment ere the last was said
Would make it never said, would make us both
Slaves to a love that now must hide itself,
Being to him dishonour, and to me,
If I should hold it to me knowing all.

Strange coldness chilled my tone, more than I willed,
Through my great effort not to lose all calm;
My eyes filled not. "What will you do?" I asked,
As one who speaks of things which touch not him.
"Nay, that," he said, "remains with you to judge;
For I have wooed you with an eager hope,
So pledging faith to you as once to her,
And loved with love " "No more," I broke his words
With sudden speech; "we speak not of **our** love.
Let it go now. And what have I to judge?
Is there a choice? Go back to Lilian Gray,
She has been yours through all, and you are hers
By your first pledge and by a second troth.
And, though you went not back, there is a bar
That now for ever sunders me from you.
Go back to her, keep faith as she to you;
You love her yet so well that you may kneel
With her nor mock God's altar by false vows."

"But you," he trembled, scarcely breathing "you?"
"But I," I said, "will hold it recompense
For all my wrong if you should thence learn truth
With other fulness than the common rules
And, having fallen, from the earth to rise
To greater height than was the first. Alas!
You have wronged each through each, right me through her:
For I will hold your honour mine in this."

What came? Amy, I know not how he poured
A burning torrent of impassioned words.
He held me to him, held me, and his lips
Closed upon mine in burning fire, his lips

Lilian Gray: a Poem

A hundred and a hundred times on mine.
I had no thought to tear me from his arms,
His life seemed mine, and both our lives drawn out
In a deep love—gasp "Should it be," he cried,
"That love itself should rob us of our love,
And bid us part? Has love not linked us more
Than me to her? Oh, she will surely learn
A colder thought of me!" His words awoke
My wildered mind. "Oh, loose me, or I grow
To hate you," I cried fiercely. "Never more
Must this weak love have being on our tongues.
This is the end for ever let me go!"
I touched his brow one moment with my lips
Could that be wrong? it was a last farewell
And tore me from him. Through the closing gloom
I hastened homewards, while he, keeping far,
Yet watching o'er me, followed to the Hall.
And Clare and Alice jested when we came
At our delay, and I laughed back again
Their merry taunts; but Walter, pale and stern,
Shrank in himself and spoke no word. That night
Ah me, that night! I will not speak of it
Lest I grow mad with memory, as I feared
With present torture then And through my pain
A longing shaped itself into sharp form,
To see this Lilian. And I went next morn,
And seemed like one who, in a troubled dream,
Is driven without his will on a vague bent
Towards some far—off dimly—shadowed dread,
And, though he knows he dreams, must still dream on,
And finds no rest and no return. I passed
By the broad highway, white with choking dust
That clogged my breath, on to the brier—grown lane
That twisted to the dell. A shudder ran
Throughout my frame to feel myself so near;
Yet I went onwards to the quiet dell,
And found the low—railed bridge, the solemn elm,
And, resting, let the echo in my heart
Speak Walter's tale again, and did not weep,
But prayed. I came upon her unawares,
From out the laurel walk. In a half—sleep
She lay on a low couch beneath the shade
Of a bending ash. Her folded robe of white,
Flecked with cool shadows, did not look more pure
Than her pale face. Her waves of loosened hair
(One parted tress had rippled to her waist)
Were scarce more dark than mine, but the long lash
That drooped deep shadow from it fringe was dark,
Amy, as yours. A sweet sad smile had wreathed
Around her pallid lips, and lingered there.
"Ah me!" I thought, "I know its father thought."

Lilian Gray: a Poem

I looked on her with love, for she was fair,
And dove-like, as he called her yes with love,
For she was his, and loved him. While I stood,
Fearing to wake her, learning her by heart,
Sudden her startled eyes flashed fire in mine,
And half she rose, and cried, "What, are you come
To take him from me? Oh, I know you well;
You are that Margaret Aubrey, whom I saw
That hateful morn in church, when I had come
To look on his new love. You haunt my dreams
Worse than his angry eyes that would not see.
You are his love but now he loves me more.
You shall not win him back." I answered, calm,
"Yes, I am Margaret Aubrey whom you saw,
But not his love, his sister now, and yours;
And, if I did you wrong, I knew it not.
You will forgive me, Lilian?" Then her eyes
Grew large with tears. "O Lilian Gray," I said,
"I would not hold him from you if I could.
Let him be yours, and be you to him all
I could have been and more, through your sweet self
Less proud, as loving. I am come to woo
Your pardon for him ere I say farewell
For him your pardon, and some love for me."
Sudden she drew me to her, as I bent,
And clung to me with sobs, and kissed my cheek,
Like a fond child fresh from a vanished fear.
"Oh, I could kneel to you for your sweet words,
Like a God's angel are you in your love.
And oh," she cried, "will you, so proud, so fair,
Will you bend thus to me? can you leave **him**?
Oh, then you have not loved him!" "Yes," I said,
"I love him: but love often asks hard things;
Sometimes, for love, to part with what we love."
"Alas!" she wept, "then you will die. Oh, best
That I, so frail, should die, not you." "Yet no,"
I said, "through grief I shall not die.
And though I died yet that were not more sad
Than a long life vexed with another's pain,
And shame of him I love. But I shall learn
God's peace on earth, and know a quiet rest.
And now farewell, dear Lilian; think sometimes
Kindly of Margaret Aubrey." As our hands
Lay linked in a long clasp, I saw her start:
Her Walter stood by us! He took my hand
One moment only so we three were linked.
Then I passed on and left them. And that week
I looked my last on Hopetoun Hall. But first
I, by long prayers, won back his mother's smile,
And gained her blessing for his marriage bond.
And they were wed ere long. But Lilian sleeps

Lilian Gray: a Poem

By the blue sea of sunny Italy,
And on his father's knee her pining boy
Wails for his mother in a foreign tongue.
She died two years ago. And once he wrote
Some words that scared me with a painful doubt,
Lest he should think to knot again the tie
For ever broken. Could he seem to me
Ever again the great one that I dreamed?
I seem more great than he, and should I wed,
Holding his nature less than mine? I wrote
A calm rebuke, and left his sad reply
Ever unanswered. Yet my heart aches much
For him so lonely. And I, too, am lone.
But black between us lies the burdened past.