

The Stranger at the Gate

John G. Neihardt

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The Stranger at the Gate

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The Stranger at the Gate

I. THE WEAVERS

SUNS flash, stars drift,
Comes and goes the moon;
Ever through the wide miles
Corn fields croon
Patiently, hopefully,
A low, slow tune.

Lovingly, longingly,
Labors without rest
Every happy cornstalk,
Weaving at its breast
Such a cozy cradle
For the coming guest.

In the flowing pastures,
Where the cattle feed,
Such a hidden love—storm,
Dying into seed —
Blue grass, slough grass,
Wild flower, weed!
Mark the downy flower—coats
In the hollyhocks!
Hark, the cooing Wheat—Soul
Weaving for her flocks!
Croon time, June time,
Moon of baby frocks!

Rocking by the window,
Wrapt in visionings,
Lo, the gentle mother
Sews and sings,
Shaping to a low song
Wee, soft things!

Patiently, hopefully,
Early, late,
How the wizard fingers
Weave with Fate
For the naked youngling
Crying at the Gate!

The Stranger at the Gate

Sound, sight, day, night
Fade, flee thence;
Vanished is the brief, hard
World of sense:
Hark! Is it the plump grape
Crooning from the fence?

Droning of the surf where
Far seas boom?
Chanting of the weird stars
Big with Doom?
Humming of the god-flung
Shuttles of a loom?

O'er the brooding Summer
A green hush clings,
Save the sound of weaving
Wee, soft things:
Everywhere a mother
Weaves and sings.

II. THE STORY

YEARLY thrilled the plum tree
With the mother-mood;
Every June the rose stock
Bore her wonder-child:
Every year the wheatlands
Reared a golden brood:
World of praying Rachels,
Heard and reconciled!

"Poet," said the plum tree's
Singing white and green,
"What avails your mooning,
Can you fashion plums?"
"Dreamer," crooned the wheatland's
Rippling vocal sheen,
"See my golden children
Marching as with drums!"

"By a god begotten,"
Hymned the sunning vine,
"In my lyric children
Purple music flows!"
"Singer," breathed the rose bush,
"Are they not divine?
Have you any daughters
Mighty as a rose?"

Happy, happy mothers!
Cruel, cruel words!
Mine are ghostly children,
Haunting all the ways;
Latent in the plum bloom,
Calling through the birds,
Romping with the wheat brood
In their shadow-plays!

Gotten out of star-glint,
Mothered of the Moon;
Nurtured with the rose scent,
Wild, elusive throng!

The Stranger at the Gate

Something of the vine's dream
Crept into a tune;
Something of the wheat—drone
Echoed in a song.

Once again the white fires
Smoked among the plums;
Once again the world—joy
Burst the crimson bud;
Golden bannered wheat broods
Marched to fairy drums;
Once again the vineyard
Felt the Bacchic blood.
"Lo, he comes — the dreamer — "
Crooned the whitened boughs,
"Quick with vernal love—fires —
Oh, at last, he knows!
See the bursting plum bloom
There above his brows!"
"Boaster!" breathed the rose bush,
"'Tis a budding rose!"

Droned the glinting acres,
"In his soul, mayhap,
Something like a wheat—dream
Quickens into shape!"
Sang the sunning vineyard,
"Lo, the lyric sap
Sets his heart a—throbbing
Like a purple grape!"

Mother of the wheatlands,
Mother of the plums,
Mother of the vineyard —
All that loves and grows —
Such a living glory
To the dreamer comes,
Mystic as a wheat—song,
Mighty as a rose!

Star—glint, moon—glow,
Gathered in a mesh!
Spring—hope, white fire

By a kiss beguiled!
Something of the world—joy

II. THE STORY

The Stranger at the Gate

Dreaming into flesh!
Bird-song, vine-thrill
Quickened to a child!

III. THE NEWS

LITTLE Breezes, lurking in the green-roofed covers,
Where the dappled gloaming keeps the cool night dews,
Up, and waft the wonder of it unto countless lovers!
Set the tiger lily bells a-tolling out the news!

Down the eager rivers make the glory of the story roll!
Waken joyful shivers in the green gold hush!
Set it to the warble of the early morning oriole!
Fill it with the tender, kissing rapture of the thrush!

Take a little sorrow from the night rain pattering,
Drowning in a black flood stars and moon;
Take a little terror from the zigzag, shattering,
Blue sword-flash of a storm-struck noon!

Breathing through the green-aisled orchard chapels,
Learn the holy music of the world-old dream;
Borrow from the still scarlet singing of the apples;
Weave it in the weird tale's gloom and gleam!
Hasten with the woven music, make the Summer lyrical,
Sweet as with the odors of a southeast rain!
Set the corn a-chatter o'er the glad, impending miracle!
A little Stranger whimpers at the Gate of Pain!

IV. IN THE NIGHT

OVER the steep cloud-crag
The marching Day went down —
Bickering spears and flags,
Slant in a wind of Doom!
Blear in the huddled shadows
Glimmer the lights of the town;
Black pools mottle the meadows,
Swamped in a purple gloom.

Is it the night wind sobbing
Over the wheat in head?
Is it the world-heart throbbing,
Sad with the coming years?
Is it the lifeward creeping
Ghosts of the myriad dead,
Livid with wounds and weeping
Wild, unclesing tears?

'Twas not a lone loon calling
There in the darkling sedge,
Still as the prone moon's falling
Where in the gloom it slinks!

Hark to the low intoning
There at the hushed grove's edge —
Is it the pitiless, moaning
Voice of the timeless Sphinx?

Woven of dusk and quiet,
Winged with the dim starlight,
Hideous dream-sounds riot,
Couple and breed and grow;
Big with a dread to-morrow,
Flooding the hollow night
With more than a Thracian sorrow,
More than a Theban woe!

Dupe of a lying pleasure,
Dying slave of desire!

The Stranger at the Gate

Dreading the swift erasure,
The swoop of the grisly Jinn,
Lo, you have trammeled with dust
A spark of the slumbering Fire,
Given it nerves for lust
And feet for the shards of sin!

Woe to the dreamer waking,
When the Dream shall stalk before him,
With terrible thirsts for slaking
And hungers mad to be fed!
Oh, he shall sicken of giving,
Cursing the mother that bore him —
Earth, so lean for the living,
Earth, so fat with the dead!

Cease, O sounds that smother!
Peace, mysterious Flouter!
Lo, where the sacred mother
Sleeps in her starry bed,
Dreams of the blessed Comer,
A white awe flung about her,
Wrapped in the hopeful Summer,
The starlight round her head!

V. BREAK OF DAY

SILENT are the green looms
And the weavers sleep
Nestled in the piled glooms,
Deep on deep.

Gaunt, grim trees stand,
Etched on space,
Like a mirrored woodland
On a purple vase.

Faithful in the dun hour,
Like a praying priest,
Eagerly the sunflower
Scans the East.

Corn rows, far-hurled,
Mist-enthralled,
Vanish in a star world,
Sapphire-walled.

Leaning out of dim space
Over field and town,
Some hushed mother face
Peers, bends down;
Veiled in gleam-blurs,
Starry locked,
Brooding o'er the dreamers
Dawnward rocked.

Is a spirit walking?
On a sudden seem
All the sleepers talking
In a broken dream!

All along the corn rows,
O'er the glinting dews,
Hark! A muffled horn blows
Some wild news!

The Stranger at the Gate

Listen! From a plum–close,
Like a troubled soul,
Tremulous a voice goes —
'Tis the oriole!

Star–lorn, staring,
The East goes white!
Is a Terror faring
Up the steep of night?

Boldly, gladly,
Through the paling hush,
Wildly, madly,
Cries the thrush!
Tumbled are the piled glooms
And the weavers stir:
Once again the wild looms
Drone and whirl.

Glowing through the gray rack
Breaks the Day —
Like a burning haystack
Twenty farms away!

VI. DAWN SONG

TREADER of the blue steeps and the hollows under!
Day–Flinger, Hope–Singer, crowned with awful hair!
Battle Lord with burning sword to cleave the gloom asunder!
Plunger through the eyries of the eagles of the Thunder!
Stroller up the flame–arched air!

All–Beholder, very swift and tireless your pace is!
Now you snuff the guttered moon above the gray abyss,
Moaning with the sagging tide in shipless ocean spaces;
Now you gladden windless hollows thronged with daisy faces;
Now the corn salutes the Morn that sought Persepolis!

Searcher of the ocean and the islands and the straits,
The mountains and the rivers and the deserts and the dunes,
Saw you any little spirit foundling of the Fates,
Groping at the world–wall for the narrow gates
Guarded by the nine big moons?
Numberless and endlessly the living spirit tide rolls,
Like a serried ocean on a pleasant island hurled!
Sun–lured, rain–wooded, color–haunted wild souls,
Trooping with the love–thrilled, mother–seeking child souls,
Throng upon the good green world!

Surely you have seen it in your wide sky–going —
An eager little comrade of the spirits of the wheat;
All the hymning forests and the melody of growing,
All the ocean thunderings and all the rivers flowing,
Silenced by the music of its feet!

VII. END OF SUMMER

PURPLE o'er the tree tops
Wild grapes sprawl;
In the golden silence
Few birds call;
Heavy laden Summer
Ripens toward the Fall.

Weary with the seed pods
Droop the hollyhocks;
Up and down the wide miles,
Corn in shocks;
Silent is the Wheat Mother,
And her merry flocks

Go no more a-marching
Unto fairy drums.
Hark! Is it the footfall
Of the One who comes?
Silence — save the dropping
Of the purple plums!
Patient, stricken Summer
Feels the Odic Fires,
Awful in her ripe domes,
Mystic in her spires.
In a holy sadness
Fruit the Spring desires.

Last of all the awe-moons,
Three times three,
Glimmers down the sun track
Slenderly —
Omen of the Wonder
Soon to be.

Does the darkness listen
For a shout of Doom?
Hist! Was it a thin voice
Crying from a womb?
Silence — save a dry leaf's
Whisper down the gloom.

VIII. VISION

SOON shall you come as the dawn from the dumb abyss of night,
Traveler birthward, Hastener earthward out of the gloom!
Soon shall you rest on a soft white breast from the measureless mid-world flight;
Waken in fear at the miracle, light, in the pain-hushed room.

Lovingly fondled, fearfully guarded by hands that are tender,
Frail shall you seem as a dream that must fail in the swirl of the morrow:
Oh, but the vast, immemorial past of ineffable splendor,
Forfeited soon in the pangful surrender to Sense and to Sorrow!

Who shall unravel your tangle of travel, uncurtain your history?
Have you not run with the sun-gladdened feet of a thaw?
Lurked as a thrill in the will of the primal sea-mystery,
The drift of the cloud and the lift of the moon for a law?

Lost is the tale of the gulfs you have crossed and the veils you have lifted:
In many a tongue have been wrung from you outcries of pain:
You have leaped with the lightning from thunder-heads, hurricane-rifted,
And breathed in the whispering rain!

Latent in juices the April sun looses from capture,
Have you not blown in the lily and grown in the weed?
Burned with the flame of the vernal erotical rapture,
And yearned with the passion for seed?

Poured on the deeps from the steeps of the sky as a chalice,
Flung through the loom that is shuttled by tempests at play,
Myriad the forms you have taken for hovel or palace —
Broken and cast them away!

You who shall cling to a love that is fearful and pities,
Titans of flame were your comrades to blight and consume!
Have you not roared over song-hallowed, sword-stricken cities,
And fled in the smoke of their doom?

For, ancient and new, you are flame, you are dust, you are spirit and dew,
Swirled into flesh, and the winds of the world are your breath!

The Stranger at the Gate

The song of the thrush in the hush of the dawn is not younger than you —
And yet you are older than Death!

IX. TRIUMPH

SEE how the blue-girt hills are spread
With regal cloth of gold;
How, panoplied in haughty red,
The frosted maples stand;
The golden rod, with torch alight,
Makes glory up the wold —
As though a monarch's bannered might
Were marching up the land!

Now should ecstatic bugles fret
The hush, and drums should roll;
The shawms of all the breezes set
The scarlet leaves a-dance!
And now should flash in vatic rhyme
The battles of the Soul —
To welcome to the realm of Time
The Vanquisher of Chance!

For, though there rolls no gilded car
That spurns the shaken earth,
And shout no captains, flinging far
The law to parlous spears;
With throbbing hearts for smitten drums,
Up through the Gates of Birth —
The Victor comes! The Victor comes!
To claim the ripened years!

X. HERITAGE

OH, there are those, a sordid clan,
With pride in gaud and faith in gold,
Who prize the sacred soul of man
For what his hands have sold.

And these shall deem thee humbly bred:
They shall not hear, they shall not see
The kings among the lordly dead
Who walk and talk with thee!

A tattered cloak may be thy dole
And thine the roof that Jesus had:
The broidered garment of the soul
Shall keep thee purple-clad!

The blood of men hath dyed its brede,
And it was wrought by holy seers
With sombre dream and golden deed
And pearled with women's tears.

With Eld thy chain of days is one:
The seas are still Homeric seas;
Thy sky shall glow with Pindar's sun,
The stars of Socrates!
Unaged the ancient tide shall surge,
The old Spring burn along the bough:
For thee, the new and old converse
In one eternal Now!

I give thy feet the hopeful sod,
Thy mouth, the priceless boon of breath;
The glory of the search for God
Be thine in life and death!

Unto thy flesh, the soothing dust;
Thy soul, the gift of being free:
The torch my fathers gave in trust,
Thy father gives to thee!

XI. LULLABY

SUN-FLOOD, moon-gleam
Ebb and flow;
Twinkle-footed star flocks
Come and go:
Eager little Stranger,
Sleep and grow!

Yearning in the moon-lift
Surge the seas;
Southering, the sun-lured
Gray goose flees:
Eager with the same urge,
You and these!

Canopied in splendor —
Red, gold, blue —
With the tender Autumn
Cooing through;
Oh, the mighty cradle
Rocking you!

The Stranger at the Gate

THE POET'S TOWN

The Stranger at the Gate

I

'MID glad green miles of tillage
And fields where cattle graze,
A prosy little village,
You drowse away the days.

And yet — a wakeful glory
Clings round you as you doze;
One living lyric story
Makes music of your prose.

Here once, returning never,
The feet of song have trod;
And flashed — Oh, once forever! —
The singing Flame of God.

The Stranger at the Gate

II

These were his fields Elysian:
With mystic eyes he saw
The sowers planting vision,
The reapers gleaming awe.

Serfs to a sordid duty,
He saw them with his heart,
Priests of the Ultimate Beauty,
Feeding the flame of art.
The weird, untempled Makers
Pulsed in the things he saw;
The wheat through its virile acres
Billowed the Song of Law.

The epic roll of the furrow
Flung from the writing plow,
The dactyl phrase of the green-rowed maize
Measured the music of Now.

The Stranger at the Gate



Sipper of ancient flagons,
Often the lonesome boy
Saw in the farmers' wagons
The chariots hurled at Troy.

Trundling in dust and thunder
They rumbled up and down,
Laden with princely plunder,
Loot of the tragic Town.

And once when the rich man's daughter
Smiled on the boy at play,
Sword-storms, giddy with slaughter,
Swept back the ancient day!

War steeds shrieked in the quiet,
Far and hoarse were the cries;
And Oh, through the din and the riot,
The music of Helen's eyes!
Stabbed with the olden Sorrow,
He slunk away from the play,
For the Past and the vast To-morrow
Were wedded in his To-day.

The Stranger at the Gate

IV

Rich with the dreamer's pillage,
An idle and worthless lad,
Least in a prosy village,
And prince in Allahabad;

Lover of golden apples,
Munching a daily crust;
Haunter of dream-built chapels,
Worshipping in the dust;

Dull to the worldly duty,
Less to the town he grew,
And more to the God of Beauty
Than even the grocer knew!

The Stranger at the Gate

V

Corn for the buyers, and cattle —
But what could the dreamer sell?
Echoes of cloudy battle?
Music from heaven and hell?

Spices and bales of plunder,
Argosied over the sea?
Tapestry woven of wonder,
And myrrh from Araby?
None of your dream-stuffs, Fellow,
Looter of Samarcand!
Gold is heavy and yellow,
And value is weighed in the hand!

VI

And yet, when the years had humbled
The kings in the Realm of the Boy,
Song-built bastions crumbled,
Ash-heaps smothering Troy;

Thirsting for shattered flacons,
Quaffing a brackish cup,
With all of his chariots, wagons —
He never could quite grow up.

The debt to the ogre, To-morrow,
He never could comprehend:
Why should the borrowers borrow?
Why should the lenders lend?

Never an oak tree borrowed,
But took for its needs — and gave.
Never an oak tree sorrowed;
Debt was the mark of the slave.

Grass in the priceless weather
Sucked from the paps of the Earth,
And the hills that were lean it fleshed with its green —
Oh, what is a lesson worth?
But still did the buyers barter
And the sellers squint at the scales;
And price was the stake of the martyr,
And cost was the lock of the jails.

VII

Windflowers herald the Maytide,
Rendering worth for worth;
Ragweeds gladden the wayside,
Biting the dugs of the Earth;

Violets, scattering glories,
Feed from the dewy gem:
But dreamers are fed by the living and dead —
And what is the gift from them?

VIII

Never a stalk of the Summer
Dreams of its mission and doom:
Only to hasten the Comer —
Martyrdom unto the Bloom.

Ever the Mighty Chooser
Plucks when the fruit is ripe,
Scorning the mass and letting it pass,
Keen for the cryptic type.

Greece in her growing season
Troubled the lands and seas,
Plotted and fought and suffered and wrought —
Building a Sophocles!
Only a faultless temple
Stands for the vassal's groan;
The harlot's strife and the faith of the wife
Blend in a graven stone.

Ne'er do the stern gods cherish
The hope of the million lives;
Always the Fact shall perish
And only the Truth survives.

Gardens of roses wither,
Shaping the perfect rose:
And the poet's song shall live for the long,
Dumb, aching years of prose.

IX

King of a Realm of Magic,
He was the fool of the town,
Hiding the ache of the tragic
Under the grin of the clown.

Worn with the vain endeavor
To fit in the sordid plan;
Doomed to be poet forever,
He longed to be only a man;

To be freed from the god's enthralling,
Back with the reeds of the stream;
Deaf to the Vision calling,
And dead to the lash of the Dream.

The Stranger at the Gate

X

But still did the Mighty Makers
Stir in the common sod;
The corn through its awful acres
Trembled and thrilled with God!

More than a man was the sower,
Lured by a man's desire,
For a triune Bride walked close at his side —
Dew and Dust and Fire!

More than a man was the plowman,
Shouting his gee and haw;
For a something dim kept pace with him,
And ever the poet saw;

Till the winds of the cosmic struggle
made of his flesh a flute,
To echo the tune of a whirlwind rune
Unto the million mute.

The Stranger at the Gate

XI

Son of the Mother of mothers,
The womb and the tomb of Life,
With Fire and Air for brothers
And a clinging Dream for a wife;
Ever the soul of the dreamer
Strove with its mortal mesh,
And the lean flame grew till it fretted through
The last thin links of flesh.

Oh, rending the veil asunder,
He fled to mingle again
With the dread Orestean thunder,
The Lear of the driven rain!

The Stranger at the Gate

XII

Once in a cycle the comet
Doubles its lonesome track.
Enriched with the tears of a thousand years,
Aeschylus wanders back.

Ever inweaving, returning,
The near grows out of the far;
And Homer shall sing once more in a swing
Of the austere Polar Star.

Then what of the lonesome dreamer
With the lean blue flame in his breast?
And who was your clown for a day, O Town,
The strange, unbidden guest?

XIII

'Mid glad green miles of tillage
And fields where cattle graze;
A prosy little village,
You drowse away the days.
And yet — a wakeful glory
Clings round you as you doze;
One living, lyric story
Makes music of your prose!

PRAIRIE STORM RUNE

I

THE wild bee sips at the heat–drugged lips
Of the passionless lily a–nod;
The sunflowers stare through the hush at the glare
Of the face of their tutelar god, and the hair
Of the gossamer glints in the listless air.

Ragged and grim on the parched hill–rim,
The cottonwoods sulk in gray:
The guiding word of the plowman is heard
A dream–thralled mile away — half blurred,
Wounding the calm as a blunted sword.

Prophecy's minister, dolorous, sinister,
Hark to the raincrow! Incredible story!
For the clouds of fleece like banners in peace
Pine for the winds of glory. Cease,
Chanter of storm in the ancient peace!

The sick land lies as a man ere he dies,
Loosing his grip in a hush profound;
Save when the hidden insects scream
In jets of watery sound that seem
Taunts of thirst in a fever dream.

The Stranger at the Gate

II

What mean yon cries where the flat world dies
In hazy rotundity —
Tumult a-swoon, silence a-croon,
Lapped in profundity — bane or boon
Or only the drone of a fever rune?

No bird sings — but a grasshopper's wings
Snap in the meadow.
On the rim of the hill the cottonwoods spill
Stagnant puddles of shadow; and still —
The air is quick with a subtle thrill!

A cool, fresh puff! The meadows are rough,
The cottonwoods whiten and whisper together!
The plowman at gaze, knee-deep in the maize,
Judges the weather. A plow-horse neighs,
Faint and clear as a horn of the fays.

Haunting the distance with taunting insistence,
Fiery portents and mumblings of wonder!
In gardens of gloom, walled steep with doom,
Strange blue buds burst in thunder, and bloom
Dizzily, vividly, gaudily, lividly —
Death-flowers sown in a cannon-gloom!

The Stranger at the Gate

III

Lo, on a height hewn sheer out of night,
Where Mystery labors,

Through the Hadean heath from an awe beneath,
A sprouting of sabers lean from the sheath!
And bursting the husk of the travailing dusk,
The world-old crop of the dragon's teeth!

Banners of battle-might, spear-glint and sword-light
Over the dream-vague, frowning battalions!
Hark, the hoarse trumpets bray! Sensing the coming fray,
Wraith-ridden, thunder-hoofed stallions neigh
Terror into the glooming day!

A death-hush falls. The shadow sprawls
Sick in the failing noon.
The sun flies shorn, aghast, forlorn,
Like a spectral moon surprised at morn.
Deathly green is the meadow-sheen,
Ghastly green the corn.

The Stranger at the Gate

IV

Hark — at last — the burst of the blast —
The roar of the charge and howls of defiance!
The cottonwoods, grim on the bleared hill-rim,
Grapple with giants weird and dim —
Titan torsos, pedisonant horses —
Gods and demons and seraphim!

Bloody light from the sword-slashed night —
Shuddering darkness after!
Terrible feet trample the wheat!

Olympian laughter overhead!
Over the roofs rumble the hoofs,
Over the graves of the dead!

And yet — somewhere through the crystal air
A golden rain is swelling the oats,
And wild doves croon to the splendid noon
Of love too big for their throats; and there
Never the beat of terrible feet —
Somehow, somewhere.

Stark in the rain like a face of the slain
The gray land stares in the fitful light.
Is it a glimmer of some vague story —
The corn's green might, the wheatfield's shimmer,
The sunflower's glory?

The Stranger at the Gate

V

The war wind fails. A gray cloud trails
Over the sodden plain.
Swift and bright, the arrowy light
Smites the rear of the Rain in flight!
And lo, on high, spanning the sky,
The arch of a Victor's might!

Nothing is heard . . . Hark! — a bird
Calls from a green-gloomed, dripping cover!
Surely wrath rode not in the blast,
But some inscrutable Lover passed,
Aflame with the lust of the Dew for the Dust,
Out of the Vast into the Vast.
The wild bee slips from the housing lips
Of the lily a-nod.
Odors sweet in the humid heat!
A glimmer of God athwart the wheat!
Aglow with prayer, the sunflowers stare
At the face of their Paraclete.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

THE GHOSTLY BROTHER

BROTHER, Brother calling me
Like a distant surfy sea,
Like a wind that moans and grieves
All night long about the eaves;
Let me rest a little span;
Long I've followed, followed fast;
Now I wish to be a man,
Disconnected from the Vast!
Let me stop a little while,
Feel this snug world's pulses beat,
Glory in a baby's smile,
Hear it prattle round my feet;
Eat and sleep and love and live,
Thankful ever for the dawn;
Wanting what the world can give —
With the cosmic curtains drawn!

Brother, Brother, break the gyves!
Burst the prison, Son of Power!
Product of forgotten lives,
Seedling of the final flower!
What to you are nights and days,
Drifting snow or rainy flaw,

Love or hate or blame or praise —
Heir unto the Outer Awe?

I am breathless from the flight
Through the speed-cleft, awful night!
Panting, let me rest awhile
In this pleasant aether-isle.
Here, content with little things,
How the witless dweller sings!
Rears his brood and steers his plow,
Nursing at the breasts of Now.
Here the meanest, yea, the slave
Claims the heirloom of a grave!
Oh, this little world is blest —
Brother, Brother, let me rest!

The Stranger at the Gate

I am you and you are I!
When the world is cherished most,
You shall hear my haunting cry,
See me rising like a ghost.
I am all that you have been,
Are not now, but soon shall be!
Thralled awhile by dust and din —
Brother, Brother, follow me!

'Tis a lonesome, endless quest;
I am weary; I would rest.
Though I seek to fly from you,
Like a shadow, you pursue.

Do I love? You share the kiss,
Leaving only half the bliss.
Do I conquer? You are there,
Claiming half the victor's share.
When the night shades fray and lift,
'Tis your veiled face lights the rift.
In the sighing of the rain,
Your voice goads me like a pain.
Happy in a narrow trust,
Let me serve the lesser will
One brief hour — and then, to dust!
Oh, the dead are very still!

Brother, Brother, follow hence!
Ours the wild, unflagging speed!
Through the outer walls of sense,
Follow, follow where I lead!
Love and hate and grief and fear —
'Tis the geocentric dream!
Only shadows linger here,
Cast by the eternal Gleam!
Follow, follow, follow fast! —
Somewhere out of Time and Place,
You shall lift the veil at last,
You shall look upon my face!
Look upon my face and die,
Solver of the Mystery!
I am you and you are I —
Brother, Brother, follow me!

The Stranger at the Gate

THE POET'S ADVICE

The Stranger at the Gate

I

YOU wish to be a poet, Little Man?
More verses limping 'neath their big intent?
Well — one must be a poet if one can!
But do you know the way the others went?

Who buys of gods must pay a heavy fee.
The World loves not its dreamers overmuch.
And he who longs to drink at Castaly,
Must hobble there upon a broken crutch.

One sins by being different, it seems;
At least so in our human commonweal.
Who goes to market with his minted dreams,
Must buy and bear the Cross of the Ideal.

Lo, tall amid the forest, blackened, grim,
The lightning-riven pine! — God-kissed was he.
How all the little beeches jeer at him,
Safe in their snug arrays of greenery!

And who shall call the little beeches mad?
Not I, who know how big are little acts.

Want what you have, and cherish, O my Lad,
The downright, foursquare, geometric facts!

The Stranger at the Gate

II

But — Oh, the ancient glory in your eyes!
How bursts a dazzling wonder all around!
Wild tempests of ineffable surprise —
All color, dream and sound!

You lip the awful flagons of old time,
And mystic apples lure you to the bite!
Blown down the dizzy winds of woven rhyme,
Dead women come and woo you in the night!

You tread the myrtle woods past time and place,
Where shadows flit and splendid echoes croon;
And through the boughs some fatal storied face
Breathes muted music like a Summer moon!

I know the secret altars where you kneel.
I know what lips fling fever in your kiss.
That sorry little drab to whom you steal
Is Queen Semiramis!

The Bacchanalia of the sap now reigns!
Priapic fires burn yonder bough with blooms!
Lo, goat-songs warbled from the vineyard fanes!
Lo, Venus-nipples in the apple-glooms!
Ah, who is older than the vernal surge,
And who is wiser than the sap a-thrill?
Forever, he who feels the lyric urge
Shall do its will!

— Your rhymes? — Some nimbler footed have been worse.
What broken trumpet echoes from the van
Where march the cohorts of Immortal Verse!
Well — one must be a poet if one can.

The Stranger at the Gate

The Stranger at the Gate
MORNING GLORIES

DISTANT as a dream's flight
Lay an eerie plain,
Where the weary moonlight
Swooned into a moan;
Wailing after dead seed,
Came the ghost of rain;
There was I a wild weed
Growing all alone.

Like a doubted story
Came the thought of day;
God and all his glory
Lingered elsewhere,
Busy with the dawn—thrill
Many dreams away.
Could a little weed's will
Fling so far a prayer?

Oh, the sudden wonder!
(Is a prayer so fleet?)
From the desert under,
Morning glories grew!
Twined me, bound me
With caressing feet!

Wove song round me —
Pink, white, blue!

As a fog is rifted
By the eager breeze,
Darkness broke and lifted,
Tossing like a sea!
Lo, the dawn was flowering
Through the maple trees!
Oh — and you were showering
Kisses over me!

The Stranger at the Gate

The Stranger at the Gate

THE LYRIC

Give the good gaunt horse the rein,
Sting him with the steel!
Set his nervous thews astrain,
Let him feel the winner's pain,
Master—hand and—heel!
Fling him, hurl him at the wire
Though he sob and bleed!
Play upon him as a lyre —
Speed is music set on fire —
Oh, the splendid steed!

Hurl the lyric swift and true
Like a shaft of Doom!
Like the lightning's blade of blue
Letting all the heavens through,
And shuddering back to gloom!
Like the sudden river—thaw,
Like a sabered throng,
Give it fury clothed in awe —
Speed is half the lyric law —
Oh, the mighty song!

GLAUCUS

GLAUCUS, the fisher, sat his tossing craft:
The sun was dying on the Roman lake,
And, save where Day, departing, grimly laughed,
The skies were dim, as mourning for his sake.
Safe was it for the saucy fish to take
Its bite unnoticed; nor did Glaucus see
The boiling clouds that dogged the fierce winds' wake:
Far other stormier, gloomier thoughts had he
Than how his craft went mad upon the dizzy sea.

"Howl, O mad Winds! You can no stronger blow
Than blows despairing passion in my brain!
What care I where my futile soul may go,
Since our two souls must evermore be twain?
I am the poor rough toiler of the main,
A god's desires in a slave's bent form.
Full many a valiant hero in her vein
Rebreathes, and unborn kings in her are warm!"
He spoke, the while he breathed the frenzy of the storm.

"Some hand uncalloused shall unbind her zone.
Some soft, unweathered cheek shall she caress.
She is a god's soft song, and I a moan.
Her veins run day, and mine the dumb distress

Of dusk; yet I have felt her bosom press
Throughout the night against my peasant breast,
And disenchanting dawn hath left me less,
Less than a memory of what mocked my rest."
— Now Night had frowned the last sad glory from the west.

The sea crouched snarling like an ambushed beast,
And hissing, crashing, sprang upon the bark!
Still from the mad abysm of the east
Debouched the howling cohorts of the Dark!
Nor lulled the cloud-winged winds that they might hark
How gasped the struggling fisher in the sea.
Meanwhile in drowning Glaucus flashed a spark

The Stranger at the Gate

Of that swift flame that thrills infinity,
And through him ran a voice — "Thou art a deity!"

The pang of passing pinched his chilling frame;
The grin of death sat sullen on his face;
But o'er his soul a thrill exultant came!
Within the crystal glories of the place
He saw his form reflected, full of grace,
As though the sinuous beauty of the storm
Had breathed itself in one of mortal race!
Then as the god welled in him, wild and warm,
Cleaving the shaken deeps, he mounted in the storm!
To him the thunder was a pigmy's shout.
Above the roar of wind and wave he cried:
"Blow till the frenzied Earth shall toss about
Again with Titan-pangs! I ride, I ride,
God of the Wind and Master of the Tide!
Burst from AEolus' careful hand and shake
The ancient dusk and silence that abide
About the world's end, O ye Winds! Awake!
Breathe terror through the skies for poor mad Glaucus' sake!"

As some brain with a morbid dream distraught,
All night the Cosmos trembled with the rush
Of storm, that, like the darkling, flaring thought,
Found peace in self-destruction. Morning's blush
Lured Eos up the scarped east through a hush.
Afloat upon the dawn-stream, Glaucus knew
The soft Olympian ecstasies that gush
From hearts forever young. The world was new;
Blue was the sea beneath him, the sky about him blue.

Upon a couch of golden mist reclined
The new-born Wind-God, Glaucus. Near him crooned
Some unseen Zephyr like a soul that pined;
Its theme was love, its notes were sleepy-tuned.
Then grew on him the soft nights, argent-mooned,
When, as a mortal, he had crept anigh
Where she, his Princess, walked, the while he swooned

With the voluptuous pleasure of his eye.
— The unseen Zephyr sang; the Wind God heaved a sigh.

The lazy day strolled up the golden steep.
A tender vision thrilled the drowsed god's brain.

The Stranger at the Gate

There came an amorous woman in his sleep,
Wide-armed and panting as with gentle pain.
He knew the face, the form and the sweet strain
That was her voice: "O Glaucus, I am thine!
Teach me to die, to leave the flesh and vein
That make a prison! Oh, that thou wert mine!"
The god awoke: the day still climbed the long incline.

The amorous voice still echoed in his heart.
Beneath his cloud he bade the swift winds blow.
Scarce did the golden fleece-couch seem to start,
When spread a palace garden far below:
The languorous palms, the flashing founts — and Oh!
There slept the being of his sweetest thought!
So summoned he the various winds that blow
Sweet-burdened with the subtle incense caught
From Summer isles where suns their softest wiles have wrought:

And in the sleeper's blood he bade them creep
To brew warm passion in her pulse, and sing,
Weaving their music dreamlike through her sleep,
The love-begetting amour of their king.

Then close he crept unto her, whispering
Words of immortal meaning: "Come with me
And I shall make thee deathless! From the spring
That laves Olympus thou shalt drink, and be
Bride of the boundless Air and mistress of the Sea!

"All night our souls shall twine, while Dian's star
Pours out Elysium on our fleecy sleep.
And we shall sight the sunrise from afar,
And we shall thrill to see Apollo leap
Out of the Deep to plunge into the Deep!
The Horses of the Storm shall stoop to thee,
And thou shalt back them, queenlike, and shalt sweep
Into the unlocked depths of Mystery —
Bride of the boundless Air and mistress of the Sea!"

What said the sleeper's soul? Ah, who can know
What fond, unspoken vows were plighted then?
Did not the wind that day more gently blow,
And was the air not scented sweet, as when
Dates burst to make the desert glad again?
Ah, thankless task, to urge a modern shell

The Stranger at the Gate

To croon into the ears of hurried men
The music of the wonder that befell!
For cold her form was found. The rest the peasants tell.

The Stranger at the Gate

MONEY

A SON of Adam dug beside the way.
"Why, Brother, do you dig?" I stopped to ask.
Standing at stoop and pausing in his task,
From dreary eyes he wiped the sweat away.
"I work for money." "What is money, pray?"
"A foolish question, this you come to ask!"
Yet in that gray and worry-haunted mask
At hide-and-seek I saw my query play.

"It is the graven symbol of your ache,"
I said, " — the minted meaning of your blood;
And he who works not, robs you when he buys!
You are the vassal of a thing you make!"
I left him staring hard upon the mud,
The glimmer of a portent in his eyes.

THE RED WIND COMES!

TOO long mere words have thrall'd us. Let us think!
Oh ponder, are we "free and equal" yet?
That July bombast, writ with blood for ink,
Is blurred with floods of unavailing sweat!

An empty sound we won from Royal George!
Yea, till the last great fight of all is won,
A sentimental show was Valley Forge,
A mawkish, tawdry farce was Lexington!

No longer blindfold Justice reigns; but leers
A barefaced, venal strumpet in her stead!
The stolen harvests of a hundred years
Are lighter than a stolen loaf of bread!

O pious Nation, holding God in awe,
Where sacred human rights are duly priced!
Where men are beggared in the name of Law,
Where alms are given in the name of Christ!

The Country of the Free? — O wretched lie!
The Country of the Brave? — Yea, let it be!
One more good fight, O Brothers, ere we die,
And this shall be the Country of the Free!
What! Are we cowards? Are we doting fools?
Who built the cities, fructified the lands?
We make and use, but do we own the tools?
Who robbed us of the product of our hands?

A tiger-hearted Tyrant crowned with Law,
Whose flesh is custom and whose soul is greed!
Ubiquitous, a nothing clothed in awe,
We sweat for him and bleed!

Religion follows proudly in his train!
Daft Freedom raves her fealty at his side!
Surviving kingship, he eludes the vain,
Misguided dagger of the regicide!

The Stranger at the Gate

Yea, and we serve this Insult to our God!
Gnawing our crusts, we render Caesar toll!
We labor with the back beneath his rod,
His shackles on the soul!

He is a System — wrought for human hogs!
So long as we shall hug a hoary Lie,
And gulp the vocal swill of demagogues,
The Fat shall rule the sty!

Behold potential plenty for us all!
Behold the pauper and the plutocrat!
Behold the signs prophetic of thy fall,
O Dynast of the Fat!
Lo, even now the haunting, spectral scrawl!
Lo, even now the beat of hidden wings!
The ghosts of millions throng thy banquet-hall,
O guiltiest and last of all the kings!

Beware the Furies stirring in the gloom!
They mutter from the mines, the mills, the slums!
No lies shall stay or mitigate thy doom —
The Red Wind comes!

CRY OF THE PEOPLE

TREMBLE before thy chattels,
Lords of the scheme of things!
Fighters of all earth's battles,
Ours is the might of kings!
Guided by seers and sages,
The world's heart-beat for a drum,
Snapping the chains of ages,
Out of the night we come!

Lend us no ear that pities!
Offer no almoner's hand!
Alms for the builders of cities!
When will you understand?
Down with your pride of birth
And your golden gods of trade!
A man is worth to his mother, Earth,
All that a man has made!

We are the workers and makers!
We are no longer dumb!
Tremble, O Shirkers and Takers!
Sweeping the earth — we come!
Ranked in the world-wide dawn,
Marching into the day!
The night is gone and the sword is drawn
And the scabbard is thrown away!