

AMORES

Poems

by

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TO

OTTOLINE MORRELL

IN TRIBUTE

TO HER NOBLE

AND INDEPENDENT SYMPATHY

AND HER GENEROUS UNDERSTANDING

THESE POEMS

ARE GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

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AMORES

TEASE

I WILL give you all my keys, You shall be my châtelaine, You shall
enter as you please, As you please shall go again.

When I hear you jingling through All the chambers of my
soul, How I sit and laugh at you In your vain housekeeping rôle.

Jealous of the smallest cover, Angry at the simplest door; Well,
you anxious, inquisitive lover, Are you pleased with what's in store?

You have fingered all my treasures, Have you not, most
curiously, Handled all my tools and measures And masculine
machinery?

Over every single beauty You have had your little rapture; You
have slain, as was your duty, Every sin-mouse you could capture.

Still you are not satisfied, Still you tremble faint
reproach; Challenge me I keep aside Secrets that you may not
broach.

Maybe yes, and maybe no, Maybe there *are* secret places, Altars
barbarous below, Elsewhere halls of high disgraces.

Maybe yes, and maybe no, You may have it as you please, Since
I choose to keep you so, Suppliant on your curious knees.

THE WILD COMMON

THE quick sparks on the gorse bushes are leaping, Little jets of sunlight-texture imitating flame; Above them, exultant, the pee-wits are sweeping: They are lords of the desolate wastes of sadness their screamings proclaim.

Rabbits, handfuls of brown earth, lie Low-rounded on the mournful grass they have bitten down to the quick. Are they asleep?—Are they alive?—Now see, when I Move my arms the hill bursts and heaves under their spurting kick.

The common flaunts bravely; but below, from the rushes Crowds of glittering king-cups surge to challenge the blossoming bushes; There the lazy streamlet pushes Its curious course mildly; here it wakes again, leaps, laughs, and gushes.

Into a deep pond, an old sheep-dip, Dark, overgrown with willows, cool, with the brook ebbing through so slow, Naked on the steep, soft lip Of the bank I stand watching my own white shadow quivering to and fro.

What if the gorse flowers shrivelled and kissing were lost? Without the pulsing waters, where were the marigolds and the songs of the brook? If my veins and my breasts with love embossed Withered, my insolent soul would be gone like flowers that the hot wind took.

So my soul like a passionate woman turns, Filled with remorseful terror to the man she scorned, and her love For myself in my own eyes' laughter burns, Runs ecstatic over the pliant folds rippling down to my belly from the breast-lights above.

Over my sunlit skin the warm, clinging air, Rich with the songs of seven larks singing at once, goes kissing me glad. And the soul of the wind and my blood compare Their wandering happiness, and the wind, wasted in liberty, drifts on and is sad.

Oh but the water loves me and folds me, Plays with me, sways me, lifts me and sinks me as though it were living blood, Blood of a heaving woman who holds me, Owing my supple body a rare glad thing, supremely good.

STUDY

SOMEWHERE the long mellow note of the blackbird Quickens the unclasping hands of hazel, Somewhere the wind-flowers fling their heads back, Stirred by an impetuous wind. Some ways'll All be sweet with white and blue violet. (*Hush now, hush. Where am I?—Biuret—*)

On the green wood's edge a shy girl hovers From out of the hazel-screen on to the grass, Where wheeling and screaming the petulant plovers Wave frightened. Who comes? A labourer, alas! Oh the sunset swims in her eyes' swift pool. (*Work, work, you fool—!*)

Somewhere the lamp hanging low from the ceiling Lights the soft hair of a girl as she reads, And the red firelight steadily wheeling Weaves the hard hands of my friend in sleep. And the white dog snuffs the warmth, appealing For the man to heed lest the girl shall weep.

(Tears and dreams for them; for me Bitter science—the exams. are near. I wish I bore it more patiently. I wish you did not wait, my dear, For me to come: since work I must: Though it's all the same when we are dead.— I wish I was only a bust, All head.)

DISCORD IN CHILDHOOD

OUTSIDE the house an ash-tree hung its terrible whips, And at night when the wind arose, the lash of the tree Shrieked and slashed the wind, as a ship's Weird rigging in a storm shrieks hideously.

Within the house two voices arose in anger, a slender lash Whistling delirious rage, and the dreadful sound Of a thick lash booming and bruising, until it drowned The other voice in a silence of blood, 'neath the noise of the ash.

VIRGIN YOUTH

Now and again All my body springs alive, And the life that is polarised in my eyes, That quivers between my eyes and mouth, Flies like a wild thing across my body, Leaving my eyes

half-empty, and clamorous, Filling my still breasts with a flush and a flame, Gathering the soft ripples below my breasts Into urgent, passionate waves, And my soft, slumbering belly Quivering awake with one impulse of desire, Gathers itself fiercely together; And my docile, fluent arms Knotting themselves with wild strength To clasp what they have never clasped. Then I tremble, and go trembling Under the wild, strange tyranny of my body, Till it has spent itself, And the relentless nodality of my eyes reasserts itself, Till the bursten flood of life ebbs back to my eyes, Back from my beautiful, lonely body Tired and unsatisfied.

MONOLOGUE OF A MOTHER

THIS is the last of all, this is the last! I must hold my hands, and turn my face to the fire, I must watch my dead days fusing together in dross, Shape after shape, and scene after scene from my past Fusing to one dead mass in the sinking fire Where the ash on the dying coals grows swiftly, like heavy moss.

Strange he is, my son, whom I have awaited like a lover, Strange to me like a captive in a foreign country, haunting The confines and gazing out on the land where the wind is free; White and gaunt, with wistful eyes that hover Always on the distance, as if his soul were chanting The monotonous weird of departure away from me.

Like a strange white bird blown out of the frozen seas, Like a bird from the far north blown with a broken wing Into our sooty garden, he drags and beats From place to place perpetually, seeking release From me, from the hand of my love which creeps up, needing His happiness, whilst he in displeasure retreats.

I must look away from him, for my faded eyes Like a cringing dog at his heels offend him now, Like a toothless hound pursuing him with my will, Till he chafes at my crouching persistence, and a sharp spark flies In my soul from under the sudden frown of his brow, As he blenches and turns away, and my heart stands still.

This is the last, it will not be any more. All my life I have borne the burden of myself, All the long years of sitting in my husband's

house, Never have I said to myself as he closed the door: "Now I am caught!—You are hopelessly lost, O Self, You are frightened with joy, my heart, like a frightened mouse."

Three times have I offered myself, three times rejected. It will not be any more. No more, my son, my son! Never to know the glad freedom of obedience, since long ago The angel of childhood kissed me and went. I expected Another would take me,—and now, my son, O my son, I must sit awhile and wait, and never know The loss of myself, till death comes, who cannot fail.

Death, in whose service is nothing of gladness, takes me; For the lips and the eyes of God are behind a veil. And the thought of the lipless voice of the Father shakes me With fear, and fills my eyes with the tears of desire, And my heart rebels with anguish as night draws nigher,

IN A BOAT

SEE the stars, love, In the water much clearer and brighter Than those above us, and whiter, Like nenuphars.

Star-shadows shine, love, How many stars in your bowl? How many shadows in your soul, Only mine, love, mine?

When I move the oars, love, See how the stars are tossed, Distorted, the brightest lost. —So that bright one of yours, love.

The poor waters spill The stars, waters broken, forsaken. —The heavens are not shaken, you say, love, Its stars stand still.

There, did you see That spark fly up at us; even Stars are not safe in heaven. —What of yours, then, love, yours?

What then, love, if soon Your light be tossed over a wave? Will you count the darkness a grave, And swoon, love, swoon?

WEEK-NIGHT SERVICE

THE five old bells Are hurrying and eagerly calling, Imploring,

protesting They know, but clamorously falling Into gabbling
incoherence, never resting, Like spattering showers from a bursten
sky-rocket dropping In splashes of sound, endlessly, never
stopping.

The silver moon That somebody has spun so high To settle the
question, yes or no, has caught In the net of the night's
balloon, And sits with a smooth bland smile up there in the
sky Smiling at naught, Unless the winking star that keeps her
company Makes little jests at the bells' insanity, As if *he* knew
aught!

The patient Night Sits indifferent, hugged in her rags, She neither
knows nor cares Why the old church sobs and brags; The light
distresses her eyes, and tears Her old blue cloak, as she crouches
and covers her face, Smiling, perhaps, if we knew it, at the bells'
loud clattering disgrace.

The wise old trees Drop their leaves with a faint, sharp hiss of
contempt, While a car at the end of the street goes by with
a laugh; As by degrees The poor bells cease, and the Night is
exempt, And the stars can chaff The ironic moon at their ease,
while the dim old church Is peopled with shadows and sounds
and ghosts that lurch In its cenotaph.

IRONY

ALWAYS, sweetheart, Carry into your room the blossoming boughs
of cherry, Almond and apple and pear diffuse with light,
that very Soon strews itself on the floor; and keep the
radiance of spring Fresh quivering; keep the sunny-swift March-
days waiting In a little throng at your door, and admit the
one who is plaiting Her hair for womanhood, and play awhile with
her, then bid her depart.

A come and go of March-day loves Through the flower-vine,
trailing screen; A fluttering in of doves. Then a launch
abroad of shrinking doves Over the waste where no hope is
seen Of open hands: Dance in and out Small-
bosomed girls of the spring of love, With a bubble of laughter, and

shrilly shout Of mirth; then the dripping of tears on
your glove.

DREAMS OLD AND NASCENT

OLD

I HAVE opened the window to warm my hands on the sill Where
the sunlight soaks in the stone: the afternoon Is full of dreams, my
love, the boys are all still In a wistful dream of Lorna Doone.

The clink of the shunting engines is sharp and fine, Like savage
music striking far off, and there On the great, uplifted blue palace,
lights stir and shine Where the glass is domed in the blue, soft
air.

There lies the world, my darling, full of wonder and wistfulness
and strange Recognition and greetings of half-acquaint things,
as I greet the cloud Of blue palace aloft there, among misty
indefinite dreams that range At the back of my life's horizon,
where the dreamings of past lives crowd.

Over the nearness of Norwood Hill, through the mellow veil Of
the afternoon glows to me the old romance of David and
Dora, With the old, sweet, soothing tears, and laughter that
shakes the sail Of the ship of the soul over seas where
dreamed dreams lure the un-oceaned explorer.

All the bygone, hushèd years Streaming back where the mist
distils Into forgetfulness: soft-sailing waters where fears No longer
shake, where the silk sail fills With an unfelt breeze that ebbs over
the seas, where the storm Of living has passed, on and
on Through the coloured iridescence that swims in
the warm Wake of the tumult now spent and gone, Drifts my
boat, wistfully lapsing after The mists of vanishing tears and the
echo of laughter.

DREAMS OLD AND NASCENT

NASCENT

MY world is a painted fresco, where coloured shapes Of old,
ineffectual lives linger blurred and warm; An endless tapestry the
past has woven drapes The halls of my life, compelling my soul to
conform.

The surface of dreams is broken, The picture of the past is shaken
and scattered. Fluent, active figures of men pass along the
railway, and I am woken From the dreams that the distance
flattered.

Along the railway, active figures of men. They have a secret that
stirs in their limbs as they move Out of the distance, nearer,
commanding my dreamy world.

Here in the subtle, rounded flesh Beats the active ecstasy. In the
sudden lifting my eyes, it is clearer, The fascination of the quick,
restless Creator moving through the mesh Of men, vibrating in
ecstasy through the rounded flesh.

Oh my boys, bending over your books, In you is trembling and
fusing The creation of a new-patterned dream, dream of
a generation: And I watch to see the Creator, the power
that patterns the dream.

The old dreams are beautiful, beloved, soft-toned, and sure, But
the dream-stuff is molten and moving mysteriously, Alluring my
eyes; for I, am I not also dream-stuff, Am I not quickening, diffusing
myself in the pattern, shaping and shapen?

Here in my class is the answer for the great yearning: Eyes where I
can watch the swim of old dreams reflected on the molten metal of
dreams, Watch the stir which is rhythmic and moves them all as a
heart-beat moves the blood, Here in the swelling flesh the great
activity working, Visible there in the change of eyes and the mobile
features.

Oh the great mystery and fascination of the unseen Shaper, The
power of the melting, fusing Force—heat, light, all in one, Everything
great and mysterious in one, swelling and shaping the dream in the
flesh, As it swells and shapes a bud into blossom.

Oh the terrible ecstasy of the consciousness that I am life! Oh the miracle of the whole, the widespread, labouring concentration Swelling mankind like one bud to bring forth the fruit of a dream, Oh the terror of lifting the innermost I out of the sweep of the impulse of life, And watching the great Thing labouring through the whole round flesh of the world; And striving to catch a glimpse of the shape of the coming dream, As it quickens within the labouring, white-hot metal, Catch the scent and the colour of the coming dream, Then to fall back exhausted into the unconscious, molten life!

A WINTER'S TALE

YESTERDAY the fields were only grey with scattered snow, And now the longest grass-leaves hardly emerge; Yet her deep footsteps mark the snow, and go On towards the pines at the hills' white verge.

I cannot see her, since the mist's white scarf Obscures the dark wood and the dull orange sky; But she's waiting, I know, impatient and cold, half Sobs struggling into her frosty sigh.

Why does she come so promptly, when she must know That she's only the nearer to the inevitable farewell; The hill is steep, on the snow my steps are slow— Why does she come, when she knows what I have to tell?

EPILOGUE

PATIENCE, little Heart. One day a heavy, June-hot woman Will enter and shut the door to stay.

And when your stifling heart would summon Cool, lonely night, her roused breasts will keep the night at bay, Sitting in your room like two tiger-lilies Flaming on after sunset, Destroying the cool, lonely night with the glow of their hot twilight; There in the morning, still, while the fierce strange scent comes yet Stronger, hot and red; till you thirst for the daffodillies With an anguished, husky thirst that you cannot assuage, When the daffodillies are dead, and a woman of the dog-days holds you in

gage. Patience, little Heart.

A BABY RUNNING BAREFOOT

WHEN the bare feet of the baby beat across the grass The little white feet nod like white flowers in the wind, They poise and run like ripples lapping across the water; And the sight of their white play among the grass Is like a little robin's song, winsome, Or as two white butterflies settle in the cup of one flower For a moment, then away with a flutter of wings.

I long for the baby to wander hither to me Like a wind-shadow wandering over the water, So that she can stand on my knee With her little bare feet in my hands, Cool like syringa buds, Firm and silken like pink young peony flowers.

DISCIPLINE

IT is stormy, and raindrops cling like silver bees to the pane, The thin sycamores in the playground are swinging with flattened leaves; The heads of the boys move dimly through a yellow gloom that stains The class; over them all the dark net of my discipline weaves.

It is no good, dear, gentleness and forbearance, I endured too long. I have pushed my hands in the dark soil, under the flower of my soul And the gentle leaves, and have felt where the roots are strong Fixed in the darkness, grappling for the deep soil's little control.

And there is the dark, my darling, where the roots are entangled and fight Each one for its hold on the oblivious darkness, I know that there In the night where we first have being, before we rise on the light, We are not brothers, my darling, we fight and we do not spare.

And in the original dark the roots cannot keep, cannot know Any communion whatever, but they bind themselves on to the dark, And drawing the darkness together, crush from it a twilight, a slow Burning that breaks at last into leaves and a

flower's bright spark.

I came to the boys with love, my dear, but they turned on me; I
came with gentleness, with my heart 'twixt my hands like a
bowl, Like a loving-cup, like a grail, but they spilt
it triumphantly And tried to break the vessel, and to violate
my soul.

But what have I to do with the boys, deep down in my soul, my
love? I throw from out of the darkness my self like a flower into
sight, Like a flower from out of the night-time, I lift my face, and
those Who will may warm their hands at me, comfort this night.

But whosoever would pluck apart my flowering shall burn their
hands, So flowers are tender folk, and roots can only hide, Yet my
flowerings of love are a fire, and the scarlet brands Of my love
are roses to look at, but flames to chide.

But comfort me, my love, now the fires are low, Now I am broken to
earth like a winter destroyed, and all Myself but a knowledge of
roots, of roots in the dark that throw A net on the undersoil,
which lies passive beneath their thrall.

But comfort me, for henceforth my love is yours alone, To you
alone will I offer the bowl, to you will I give My essence only, but love
me, and I will atone To you for my general loving, atone as long as I
live.

SCENT OF IRISES

A FAINT, sickening scent of irises Persists all morning. Here in a jar
on the table A fine proud spike of purple irises Rising above the
class-room litter, makes me unable To see the class's lifted and
bended faces Save in a broken pattern, amid purple and gold
and sable.

I can smell the gorgeous bog-end, in its breathless Dazzle of may-
blobs, when the marigold glare overcast you With fire on your
cheeks and your brow and your chin as you dipped Your face in
the marigold bunch, to touch and contrast you, Your own dark
mouth with the bridal faint lady-smocks, Dissolved on the golden

sorcery you should not outlast.

You amid the bog-end's yellow incantation, You sitting in the
cowslips of the meadow above, Me, your shadow on the bog-flame,
flowery may-blobs, Me full length in the cowslips, muttering you
love; You, your soul like a lady-smock, lost, evanescent, You with
your face all rich, like the sheen of a dove.

You are always asking, do I remember, remember The butter-cup
bog-end where the flowers rose up And kindled you over deep with
a cast of gold? You ask again, do the healing days close up The
open darkness which then drew us in, The dark which then drank up
our brimming cup.

You upon the dry, dead beech-leaves, in the fire of night Burnt
like a sacrifice; you invisible; Only the fire of darkness, and the scent
of you! —And yes, thank God, it still is possible The healing days
shall close the darkness up Wherein we fainted like a smoke or dew.

Like vapour, dew, or poison. Now, thank God, The fire of night is
gone, and your face is ash Indistinguishable on the grey, chill
day; The night has burnt us out, at last the good Dark fire burns on
untroubled, without clash Of you upon the dead leaves saying me
Yea.

THE PROPHET

AH, my darling, when over the purple horizon shall loom The
shrouded mother of a new idea, men hide their faces, Cry out
and fend her off, as she seeks her procreant groom, Wounding
themselves against her, denying her fecund embraces.

LAST WORDS TO MIRIAM

YOURS is the shame and sorrow But the disgrace is mine; Your
love was dark and thorough, Mine was the love of the sun for a
flower He creates with his shine.

I was diligent to explore you, Blossom you stalk by stalk, Till my
fire of creation bore you Shrivelling down in the final

dour Anguish—then I suffered a balm.

I knew your pain, and it broke My fine, craftsman's nerve; Your
body quailed at my stroke, And my courage failed to give you the
last Fine torture you did deserve.

You are shapely, you are adorned, But opaque and dull in the
flesh, Who, had I but pierced with the thorned Fire-threshing
anguish, were fused and cast In a lovely illumined mesh.

Like a painted window: the best Suffering burnt through your
flesh, Undrossed it and left it blest With a quivering sweet wisdom
of grace: but now Who shall take you afresh?

Now who will burn you free From your body's terrors and
dross, Since the fire has failed in me? What man will stoop in your
flesh to plough The shrieking cross?

A mute, nearly beautiful thing Is your face, that fills me with
shame As I see it hardening, Warping the perfect image of
God, And darkening my eternal fame.

MYSTERY

Now I am all One bowl of kisses, Such as the tall Slim
votaries Of Egypt filled For a God's excesses.

I lift to you My bowl of kisses, And through the temple's Blue
recesses Cry out to you In wild caresses.

And to my lips' Bright crimson rim The passion slips, And down my
slim White body drips The shining hymn.

And still before The altar I Exult the bowl Brimful, and cry To you
to stoop And drink, Most High.

Oh drink me up That I may be Within your cup Like a
mystery, Like wine that is still In ecstasy.

Glimmering still In ecstasy, Commingled wines Of you and me In
one fulfil The mystery.

PATIENCE

A WIND comes from the north Blowing little flocks of birds Like
spray across the town, And a train, roaring forth, Rushes
stampeding down With cries and flying curds Of steam, out of the
darkening north.

Whither I turn and set Like a needle steadfastly, Waiting ever to
get The news that she is free; But ever fixed, as yet, To the lode of
her agony.

BALLAD OF ANOTHER OPHELIA

OH the green glimmer of apples in the orchard, Lamps in a wash of
rain! Oh the wet walk of my brown hen through the stack-yard, Oh
tears on the window pane!

Nothing now will ripen the bright green apples, Full of
disappointment and of rain, Brackish they will taste, of tears, when
the yellow dapples Of autumn tell the withered tale again.

All round the yard it is cluck, my brown hen, Cluck, and the rain-wet
wings, Cluck, my marigold bird, and again Cluck for your yellow
darlings.

For the grey rat found the gold thirteen Huddled away in the
dark, Flutter for a moment, oh the beast is quick
and keen, Extinct one yellow-fluffy spark.

Once I had a lover bright like running water, Once his face was
laughing like the sky; Open like the sky looking down in all its
laughter On the buttercups, and the buttercups was I.

What, then, is there hidden in the skirts of all the blossom? What
is peeping from your wings, oh mother hen? 'Tis the sun who
asks the question, in a lovely haste for wisdom; What a lovely
haste for wisdom is in men!

Yea, but it is cruel when undressed is all the blossom, And her shift
is lying white upon the floor, That a grey one, like a shadow, like a
rat, a thief, a rain-storm, Creeps upon her then and gathers in his

store.

Oh the grey garner that is full of half-grown apples, Oh the golden sparkles laid extinct! And oh, behind the cloud-sheaves, like yellow autumn dapples, Did you see the wicked sun that winked!

RESTLESSNESS

AT the open door of the room I stand and look at the night, Hold my hand to catch the raindrops, that slant into sight, Arriving grey from the darkness above suddenly into the light of the room. I will escape from the hollow room, the box of light, And be out in the bewildering darkness, which is always fecund, which might Mate my hungry soul with a germ of its womb.

I will go out to the night, as a man goes down to the shore To draw his net through the surfs thin line, at the dawn before The sun warms the sea, little, lonely and sad, sifting the sobbing tide. I will sift the surf that edges the night, with my net, the four Strands of my eyes and my lips and my hands and my feet, sifting the store Of flotsam until my soul is tired or satisfied.

I will catch in my eyes' quick net The faces of all the women as they go past, Bend over them with my soul, to cherish the wet Cheeks and wet hair a moment, saying: "Is it you?" Looking earnestly under the dark umbrellas, held fast Against the wind; and if, where the lamplight blew Its rainy swill about us, she answered me With a laugh and a merry wildness that it was she Who was seeking me, and had found me at last to free Me now from the stunting bonds of my chastity, How glad I should be!

Moving along in the mysterious ebb of the night Pass the men whose eyes are shut like anemones in a dark pool; Why don't they open with vision and speak to me, what have they in sight? Why do I wander aimless among them, desirous fool?

I can always linger over the huddled books on the stalls, Always gladden my amorous fingers with the touch of their leaves, Always kneel in courtship to the shelves in the doorways, where falls The shadow, always offer myself to one

mistress, who always receives.

But oh, it is not enough, it is all no good. There is something I want to feel in my running blood, Something I want to touch; I must hold my face to the rain, I must hold my face to the wind, and let it explain Me its life as it hurries in secret. I will trail my hands again through the drenched, cold leaves Till my hands are full of the chillness and touch of leaves, Till at length they induce me to sleep, and to forget.

A BABY ASLEEP AFTER PAIN

As a drenched, drowned bee Hangs numb and heavy from a bending flower, So clings to me My baby, her brown hair brushed with wet tears And laid against her cheek; Her soft white legs hanging heavily over my arm Swinging heavily to my movement as I walk. My sleeping baby hangs upon my life, Like a burden she hangs on me. She has always seemed so light, But now she is wet with tears and numb with pain Even her floating hair sinks heavily, Reaching downwards; As the wings of a drenched, drowned bee Are a heaviness, and a weariness.

ANXIETY

THE hoar-frost crumbles in the sun, The crisping steam of a train Melts in the air, while two black birds Sweep past the window again.

Along the vacant road, a red Bicycle approaches; I wait In a thaw of anxiety, for the boy To leap down at our gate.

He has passed us by; but is it Relief that starts in my breast? Or a deeper bruise of knowing that still She has no rest.

THE PUNISHER

I HAVE fetched the tears up out of the little wells, Scooped them up with small, iron words, Dripping over the runnels.

The harsh, cold wind of my words drove on, and still I watched the

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