

### *Home Burial*

He saw her from the bottom of the stairs  
Before she saw him. She was starting down,  
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.  
She took a doubtful step and then undid it  
To raise herself and look again. He spoke  
Advancing toward her: 'What is it you see  
From up there always—for I want to know.'  
She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,  
And her face changed from terrified to dull.  
He said to gain time: 'What is it you see,'  
Mounting until she cowered under him.  
'I will find out now—you must tell me, dear.'  
She, in her place, refused him any help,  
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.  
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,  
Blind creature; and a while he didn't see.  
But at last he murmured, 'Oh' and again, 'Oh.'

'What is it—what?' she said.

'Just that I see.'

'You don't,' she challenged. 'Tell me what it is.'

'The wonder is I didn't see at once.  
I never noticed it from here before.  
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.  
The little graveyard where my people are!  
So small the window frames the whole of it.  
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?  
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,  
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight  
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind those.  
But I understand: it is not the stones,  
But the child's mound—'

'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried.

She withdrew, shrinking from beneath his arm  
That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;  
And turned on him with such a daunting look,

He said twice over before he knew himself:  
'Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?'

'Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!  
I must get out of here. I must get air.  
I don't know rightly whether any man can.'

'Amy! Don't go to someone else this time.  
Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs.'  
He sat and fixed his chin between his fists.  
'There's something I should like to ask you, dear.'

'You don't know how to ask it.'

'Help me, then.'

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

'My words are nearly always an offense.  
I don't know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you. But I might be taught,  
I should suppose. I can't say I see how.  
A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk. We could have some arrangement  
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you're a-mind to name.  
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.  
Two that don't love can't live together without them.  
But two that do can't live together with them.'  
She moved the latch a little. 'Don't—don't go.  
Don't carry it to someone else this time.  
Tell me about it if it's something human.  
Let me into your grief. I'm not so much  
Unlike other folks as your standing there  
Apart would make me out. Give me my chance.  
I do think, though, you overdo it a little.  
What was it brought you up to think it the thing  
To take your mother-loss of a first child  
So inconsolably—in the face of love.  
You'd think his memory might be satisfied—'

'There you go sneering now!'

‘I’m not, I’m not!

You make me angry. I’ll come down to you.  
God, what a woman! And it’s come to this,  
A man can’t speak of his own child that’s dead.’

‘You can’t because you don’t know how to speak.  
If you had any feelings, you that dug  
With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;  
I saw you from that very window there,  
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,  
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly  
And roll back down the mound beside the hole.  
I thought, Who is that man? I didn’t know you.  
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs  
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.  
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice  
Out in the kitchen, and I don’t know why,  
But I went near to see with my own eyes.  
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes  
Of the fresh earth from your own baby’s grave  
And talk about your everyday concerns.  
You had stood the spade up against the wall  
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.’

‘I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.  
I’m cursed. God, if I don’t believe I’m cursed.’

‘I can repeat the very words you were saying:  
‘Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.’  
Think of it, talk like that at such a time!  
What had how long it takes a birch to rot  
To do with what was in the darkened parlour.  
You *couldn’t* care! The nearest friends can go  
With anyone to death, comes so far short  
They might as well not try to go at all.  
No, from the time when one is sick to death,  
One is alone, and he dies more alone.  
Friends make pretense of following to the grave,  
But before one is in it, their minds are turned  
And making the best of their way back to life  
And living people, and things they understand.  
But the world’s evil. I won’t have grief so

If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't!

'There, you have said it all and you feel better.  
You won't go now. You're crying. Close the door.  
The heart's gone out of it: why keep it up?  
Amyl There's someone coming down the road!'

'*You*—oh, you think the talk is all. I must go—  
Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you—'

'If—you—do!' She was opening the door wider.  
'Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.  
I'll follow and bring you back by force. I *will!*—'

### *The Oven Bird*

There is a singer everyone has heard,  
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,  
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.  
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers  
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.  
He says the early petal-fall is past,  
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers  
On sunny days a moment overcast;  
And comes that other fall we name the fall.  
He says the highway dust is over all.  
The bird would cease and be as other birds  
But that he knows in singing not to sing.  
The question that he frames in all but words  
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

### *The Vanishing Red*

He is said to have been the last Red Man  
In Action. And the Miller is said to have laughed—  
If you like to call such a sound a laugh.  
But he gave no one else a laugher's license.  
For he turned suddenly grave as if to say,  
'Whose business,—if I take it on myself,  
Whose business—but why talk round the barn?—  
When it's just that I hold with getting a thing done with.'

You can't get back and see it as he saw it.  
It's too long a story to go into now.  
You'd have to have been there and lived it.  
They you wouldn't have looked on it as just a matter  
Of who began it between the two races.

Some guttural exclamation of surprise  
The Red Man gave in poking about the mill  
Over the great big thumping shuffling millstone  
Disgusted the Miller physically as coming  
From one who had no right to be heard from.  
'Come, John,' he said, 'you want to see the wheel-pit?'

He took him down below a cramping rafter,  
And showed him, through a manhole in the floor,  
The water in desperate straits like frantic fish,  
Salmon and sturgeon, lashing with their tails.  
The he shut down the trap door with a ring in it  
That jangled even above the general noise,  
And came upstairs alone—and gave that laugh,  
And said something to a man with a meal-sack  
That the man with the meal-sack didn't catch—then.  
Oh, yes, he showed John the wheel-pit all right.

*To E.T.*

I slumbered with your poems on my breast  
Spread open as I dropped them half-read through  
Like dove wings on a figure on a tomb  
To see, if in a dream they brought of you,

I might not have the chance I missed in life  
Through some delay, and call you to your face  
First soldier, and then poet, and then both,  
Who died a soldier-poet of your race.

I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain  
Unsaid between us, brother, and this remained—  
And one thing more that was not then to say:  
The Victory for what it lost and gained.

You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire

On Vimy Ridge; and when you fell that day  
The war seemed over more for you than me,  
But now for me than you—the other way.

How over, though, for even me who knew  
The foe thrust back unsafe beyond the Rhine,  
If I was not to speak of it to you  
And see you pleased once more with words of mine?

### *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

### *Acquainted with the Night*

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
A luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.

### *Desert Places*

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast  
In a field I looked into going past,  
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,  
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.  
All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
I am too absent-spirited to count;  
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness  
Will be more lonely ere it will be less—  
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars—on stars where no human race is.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.

### *Neither Out Far Nor In Deep*

The people along the sand  
All turn and look one way.  
They turn their back on the land.  
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass

A ship keeps raising its hull;  
The wetter ground like glass  
Reflects a standing gull

The land may vary more;  
But wherever the truth may be—  
The water comes ashore,  
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.  
They cannot look in deep.  
But when was that ever a bar  
To any watch they keep?

### *Design*

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—  
Assorted characters of death and blight  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,  
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—  
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,  
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,  
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?  
What brought the kindred spider to that height,  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?  
What but design of darkness to appall?—  
If design govern in a thing so small.

### *Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same*

He would declare and could himself believe  
That the birds there in all the garden round  
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve  
Had added to their own an oversound,  
Her tone of meaning but without the words.  
Admittedly an eloquence so soft  
Could only have had an influence on birds



When call or laughter carried it aloft.  
Be that as may be, she was in their song.  
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed  
Had now persisted in the woods so long  
That probably it never would be lost.  
Never again would birds' song be the same.  
And to do that to birds was why she came.

*The Subverted Flower*

She drew back; he was calm:  
'It is this that had the power.'  
And he lashed his open palm  
With the tender-headed flower.  
He smiled for her to smile,  
But she was either blind  
Or willfully unkind.  
He eyed her for a while  
For a woman and a puzzle.  
He flicked and flung the flower,  
And another sort of smile  
Caught up like fingertips  
The corners of his lips  
And cracked his ragged muzzle.  
She was standing to the waist  
In goldenrod and brake,  
Her shining hair displaced.  
He stretched her either arm  
As if she made it ache  
To clasp her - not to harm;  
As if he could not spare  
To touch her neck and hair.  
'If this has come to us  
And not to me alone—'  
So she thought she heard him say;  
Though with every word he spoke  
His lips were sucked and blown  
And the effort made him choke  
Like a tiger at a bone.  
She had to lean away.  
She dared not stir a foot,  
Lest movement should provoke

The demon of pursuit  
That slumbers in a brute.  
It was then her mother's call  
From inside the garden wall  
Made her steal a look of fear  
To see if he could hear  
And would pounce to end it all  
Before her mother came.  
She looked and saw the shame:  
A hand hung like a paw,  
An arm worked like a saw  
As if to be persuasive,  
An ingratiating laugh  
That cut the snout in half,  
And eye become evasive.  
A girl could only see  
That a flower had marred a man,  
But what she could not see  
Was that the flower might be  
Other than base and fetid:  
That the flower had done but part,  
And what the flower began  
Her own too meager heart  
Had terribly completed.  
She looked and saw the worst.  
And the dog or what it was,  
Obeying bestial laws,  
A coward save at night,  
Turned from the place and ran.  
She heard him stumble first  
And use his hands in flight.  
She heard him bark outright.  
And oh, for one so young  
The bitter words she spit  
Like some tenacious bit  
That will not leave the tongue.  
She plucked her lips for it,  
And still the horror clung.  
Her mother wiped the foam  
From her chin, picked up her comb,  
And drew her backward home.

### *Directive*

Back out of all this now too much for us,  
Back in a time made simple by the loss  
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off  
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,  
There is a house that is no more a house  
Upon a farm that is no more a farm  
And in a town that is no more a town.  
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you  
Who only has at heart your getting lost,  
May seem as if it should have been a quarry—  
Great monolithic knees the former town  
Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.  
And there's a story in a book about it:  
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels  
The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,  
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier  
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.  
You must not mind a certain coolness from him  
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.  
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal  
Of being watched from forty cellar holes  
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.  
As for the woods' excitement over you  
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,  
Charge that to upstart inexperience.  
Where were they all not twenty years ago?  
They think too much of having shaded out  
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.  
Make yourself up a cheering song of how  
Someone's road home from work this once was,  
Who may be just ahead of you on foot  
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.  
The height of the adventure is the height  
Of country where two village cultures faded  
Into each other. Both of them are lost.  
And if you're lost enough to find yourself  
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you  
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.  
Then make yourself at home. The only field  
Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.  
First there's the children's house of make-believe,

Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,  
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.  
Weep for what little things could make them glad.  
Then for the house that is no more a house,  
But only a belilaced cellar hole,  
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.  
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.  
Your destination and your destiny's  
A brook that was the water of the house,  
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,  
Too lofty and original to rage.  
(We know the valley streams that when aroused  
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)  
I have kept hidden in the instep arch  
Of an old cedar at the waterside  
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail  
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,  
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.  
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)  
Here are your waters and your watering place.  
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

### *Bereft*

Where had I heard this wind before  
Change like this to a deeper roar?  
What would it take my standing there for,  
Holding open a restive door,  
Looking down hill to a frothy shore?  
Summer was past and the day was past.  
Sombre clouds in the west were massed.  
Out on the porch's sagging floor,  
Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,  
Blindly striking at my knee and missed.  
Something sinister in the tone  
Told me my secret my be known:  
Word I was in the house alone  
Somehow must have gotten abroad,  
Word I was in my life alone,  
Word I had no one left but God.

### *My Butterfly*

Thine emulous fond flowers are dead, too,  
And the daft sun-assaulter, he  
That frightened thee so oft, is fled or dead:  
Save only me  
(Nor is it sad to thee!)  
Save only me  
There is none left to mourn thee in the fields.

The gray grass is not dappled with the snow;  
Its two banks have not shut upon the river;  
But it is long ago—  
It seems forever—  
Since first I saw thee glance,  
With all the dazzling other ones,  
In airy dalliance,  
Precipitate in love,  
Tossed, tangled, whirled and whirled above,  
Like a limp rose-wreath in a fairy dance.

When that was, the soft mist  
Of my regret hung not on all the land,  
And I was glad for thee,  
And glad for me, I wist.

Thou didst not know, who tottered, wandering on high,  
That fate had made thee for the pleasure of the wind,  
With those great careless wings,  
Nor yet did I.

And there were other things:  
It seemed God let thee flutter from his gentle clasp:  
Then fearful he had let thee win  
Too far beyond him to be gathered in,  
Snatched thee, o'er eager, with ungentle grasp.

Ah! I remember me  
How once conspiracy was rife  
Against my life—  
The languor of it and the dreaming fond;  
Surging, the grasses dizzied me of thought,  
The breeze three odors brought,

And a gem-flower waved in a wand!

Then when I was distraught  
And could not speak,  
Sidelong, full on my cheek,  
What should that reckless zephyr fling  
But the wild touch of thy dye-dusty wing!

I found that wing broken to-day!  
For thou are dead, I said,  
And the strange birds say.  
I found it with the withered leaves  
Under the eaves.