The boughs are dreamy with new-opened blooms,
The laughter of the air shakes petals down,
The forest paths are dappled with the sun,
And youth rides by with half-closed, taunting eyes,
Drinking his fill of Life's delicious prime,
In idleness that is a noble dream.
He hears the breathing of the magic world,
And, head-bent, listens to the inner song
That gushes lustrosly from his own heart.
Yet, as he rides, anon he hears far off
Across the boughs a trumpet note; he stops,
And something stirs and answers deep in him.
The sound fades; on he rides. A nearer blast
Shouts out; Youth listens with his lifted eyes;
Another! The blossoms are broken! Another, more loud!
And suddenly all of the wood is shaken with trumpets and shouts
And calls and commands and sounds of the battle affray.
For, lo! the wood leads out to the bloody, bare plain
Where the legions of God are engaged to the death.
Hard pressed are the knights of the Lord; they charge and are felled,
And arise and return to be slain.
And over the clamor and dust of the fight,
The thundering voice of the Lord
Giving heart to the banners of purple and red of His hosts!
And filled with the dreams and the wonder he learned in the woods,
Youth rushes in, turns his back to the sunshine and glamor,
Draws sword and brings succor to them that are faint
And oppressed with the strife, and fights on till he dies.
Thou too, thou too art lordly-souled, O youth,
Thou wilt not shun the sword-play of thy God!
Choose! The bare plain is ahead!

David (turning passionately to Guido). Come with us, Guido. His words seem God’s to me;
And thou art not afraid. Thou broughtest
Into the evil world around me here
Goodness, and I remembered Nicholas.
Thou art my only friend. Come with us, Guido.

(Guido stands with lifted head, deeply moved, uncertain. A film of amethyst afterglow is across the west; there are many stars. Intense silence, then the sound of a shepherd’s flute rises from the road, passes, and fades. A long pause. Guido listens, entranced.)

Guido. Didst hear that flute?
Serle. Not when the voice of God rings in my ears!

Guido (passionately). My God spoke also! My God is not your God!
Why do ye think the trees disrobe themselves
In gales of color gorgeously,
Instead of one swift greyness;
Why do ye think the stars swing past
In visible magnificence?
The sea could bear its traffic
Without the tumult of its coloring;
Sheep could be led without that shepherd’s fluting,
And children born without the primrose moon
In western skies! Deaf and blind!
Ye speak as transients through life, who know
Nothing of this divine, mysterious earth
My element! Speak not to me of purposes,
Sure death, eternal wrong!
I am a leaf of scarlet,
A summer-tinted cloud,
A kiss in the dark, forgotten soon,
But red, desired of many!
Hell does not gape beneath my feet, and if
About my head the almond blossoms crowd,
What need have I of heaven? . . . David, David,
I cannot go!

(A pause. The sound of horses approaching on the road. All listen.)

GUIDO. The guards returning!

DAVID. No, not before midnight.

GUIDO. What can it be? . . . God, let me out of this place!

(The horses stop below. A boy's voice calls "Master!")

GUIDO (calls down). Felice! It's my page, David! He's come for me!

Page of mine, come up, come quickly up!

(Watching over the parapet.)

An empty saddle! That's for me! Free, free!
They've tied their horses just below us —
They've crossed the moat — They're coming —
Sicily! At last! At last!

DAVID (rousing himself). But you are prisoners!
If you are seen, then I am prisoner too.

(Sound of footsteps in the corridor.) Too late!

(FELICE, a thirteen-year-old page, rushes in, leaps into Guido's arms.
A guard follows with a torch; fixes it in the wall and goes out.)

FELICE. Master, I found the Emperor at Capua

In conference with the papal delegates.
The long feud's at an end.
He and the Pope are friends and you're released —
Downstairs his nuncio makes all arrangements.
Our horses wait below!
GUIDO. What a page! David, you know Felice.
     I wish that you could go with us!
     We'll start at once. Good-bye, good-bye,
     Dear friends, we're off to Sicily!

FELICE. Not Sicily.
GUIDO. Not Sicily?
FELICE. The Emperor sends us on a mission north.
GUIDO. But where?
FELICE. Into Provence.
GUIDO. With roundelay to some fair Queen of Love?
FELICE. Nay, Master, 'tis at last the great adventure!
GUIDO. Speak out, Felice.
FELICE. We bear the tidings of a great crusade.
     To-morrow we'll be soldiers of the Cross.

GUIDO. Go on.
FELICE. The Pope has won the Emperor's consent
     To lead an army 'gainst the heretics.

GUIDO. 'Tis a lie!
FELICE. It is the truth.
     And we to bishops, princes, potentates
     Bring the good news —
     War, war, till the last heretic is dead.

SERLE. My people, O my people!
     Shepherd, we must go now!

DAVID. Too late. The guard who brought the page is now below
     Warning them I've unloosed the prisoners.
     They will return to put us both in chains.

SERLE. O God, the murders and the burnings once again!
     Must the truth die utterly, utterly!

(A sound of footsteps.)

DAVID. There is the guard.
GUIDO. Close that door. (DAVID hesitates.) Close it, 
Bolt it.

(DAVID and FELICE close and bolt the great door leading into the interior of the castle.)

GUIDO. Up on my shoulder, page. Take down the ladder.

(FELICE on GUIDO’s shoulder climbs up and takes down the rope ladder from GUIDO’s window.)

"Twill reach the ground. (A loud knock on the door.)

Quick, make it fast.

(They fasten the ladder to the parapet so that it drops to the road. 
Voices inside call "Open!")

GUIDO (calls out). I am the prisoner to be released. 
Three minutes, friends, while I change raiment. . . . 
David, Felice, take the old man down, 
Ride north! 
Five minutes’ start and you are safe. 
Go, warn them that so soon must die.

DAVID. But you?

GUIDO (taking DAVID’s broadsword). I’ll hold them here.

FELICE. Master —

GUIDO. Go, page of mine, Felice.

SERLE. Thou child of God!

(DAVID falls on his knees and catches GUIDO’s hand, overcome.)

GUIDO. Go, David, quickly, quickly — God-speed!

(FELICE and DAVID with difficulty help SERLE over the parapet and disappear. GUIDO stands before the door, leaning on his sword.)

How hatefully thou lovest me, God!
Voices within. Open.

GUIDO. Another minute, friends!

(Cries of “Open,” confused noise; they batter on the door, finally breaking it in.)

GUIDO. Back, there, villains!

(Guido rushes in with the broadsword, forcing them into the passageway. The sound of horses' hoofs; it dies out. Guido fights desperately; a guard rushes under his arm, stabs him. He staggers and falls. The guards enter, look around, think he is dead and go out. Enter Felice over the edge of the parapet.)

FELICE. Master Master!

(Finds Guido and lifts him in his arms.)

GUIDO. Thou, Felice? . . . Thou didst return to me?
FELICE. I could not leave thee.
GUIDO. I'm glad. . . . And they have gone?
FELICE. They're safe. . . . But thou art wounded!
GUIDO. I'm glad we are alone. 'Tis almost like Dying in Sicily.
FELICE. Master, thou canst not die!
GUIDO. I should not die.

Death has mistook his quarry, and Jesus sleeps. (He sinks down.)

FELICE (terrified). I'll fetch a priest.
GUIDO. Stay here.

I am beyond the laying on of hands.
My deeds were not. My aspirations lacked
Not beauty, but singleness of purpose.
And I have lived.
No priest can mend what's broken here.
And for the rest ...  
Persephone or Mary will recall  
That I on earth was young and beautiful ...  
Help me up, page, where I may see the world.  

(FELICE supports him to the parapet.)

I shall miss the iris skies and wet, clear stars  
Of these our April evenings ...  
And thee, Felice ...  
Can any other world be half so lovely,  
Or any other life so sweet?  
This earthly ecstasy not yet half-lived,  
This heady vintage of days and nights  
Sipped only ... Perhaps it is as well ...  
When thou dost see Palermo, rising from the sea,  
Felice, think of me ...  
The bursting wave of life,  
Breast it with twofold joy, remembering me.

FELICE (sobbing). I am thy page. Ah, leave me not alone.

GUIDO. Hush, hush! But yet, forget me never.  
Hold me — I cannot see — There, there —  
I would that now I could find words of counsel  
Which might protect thee always; but  
I, too, am young and still untaught.  
Yet treasure this:  
Pray often, as you sing, unthinkingly;  
'Twill Jesus please, and then, it sweetens one.  
O littlest comrade of my heart,  
Doubt not the world is good and mankind mostly noble.  
That I have lived unstained  
Hath profited me surely by the gift  
Of deep delight. The lips of harlotry
Can never kiss the sun
With the light rapture that was ours. . . .
The rest I did not learn.

FELICE. Why didst thou fight to save those men, Master?

GUIDO. Something about God — I can’t remember —
I had to fight —
Closer, Felice. . . . I’m sleepy.
Sing me that song we made
As we rode up from Sicily.

FELICE. I cannot.

GUIDO. The little song . . .

FELICE (sings).

    Jesu,
    If Thou wilt make
    Thy peach trees bloom for me,
    And fringe my bridle paths both sides
    With tulips red and free,
    If Thou wilt make Thy skies as blue
    As ours in Sicily,
    And wake the little leaves that sleep
    On every bending tree,
    I promise not to vexen Thee
    That Thou shouldst make eternally
    Heaven, my home.
    But right contentedly —

Master! Master!

(Guido dies.)

Voice of the Madman. Son of David, have mercy on us!
NEW MOON

Now day,
Drawing his golden waters down the west,
Forsakes the loitering, low-bosomed moon.
Naked amid the unaccustomed stars
She stands, afraid, then down the shining ebb
Hastens to hide her girlish loveliness
From their too youthful wonder in the sea.
WHERE ILIUM WAS PROUD

Along the sands where Ilium was proud
A crimson laurel bush, that draws, perhaps,
From Priam's ancient buried house its blood,
Sprinkles with flame the unbeholding waste
In luxury of summer-hearted bliss.
Ah, better so its given years to burn
Unseen of maidens and young warriors
Than, plucked untimely, to have flushed an hour
The white of Helen's bosom on a night
When Paris leaned across the lights and laughter
To drink her up with hot, unmanly eyes.
Its crimson, fading with the dawn, had been
Only a deathless tale in poets' mouths.
EURIPIDES

To him the fate we bear was like a sea
That sweeps above the many ships that sailed,
And waits as home for all that sail again.
Bitter intolerably, and deep as death;
But shining, too, shining and full of spray,
In color stained lovelier than the sky,
Singing a requiem for them that die
Adventuring on its bounds, or, dauntless, sing
When roaring and inevitable wash
Heaves down the prows. . . . His heart was full of stars,
His prayers only to gods that deathlessly
Abide and dream no sin. And Syracuse
That builded on the sea, loved his name most.
Farewell to Etna

Great mountain, swathed in blue with foamy crest
Of fire, majestic as the mighty sea,
Thy brother and immortal comrade close,
The stars except, sole comrade fitting, equal —
Only, perhaps, as dust upon the wind
Shall I behold again thy spreading might.
Yet no regret is mine. I have thee in
My soul, though lodgment base, where room the stars
And many a tide of vestal-footed ocean.
Nor waste I tears that now the Cyclops brood
Is dead, and never hoarse, heroic blast
Shall hurl again in white and purple yeast
Odysseus and the dark-eyed mariners.
Nor foe of gods nor friend thy splendor saw
Than now more dark, more high majestical.
Thy color of solemnity doth stain
The temporal and wayward thing I house.
But if, when I am sown upon the air,
Another, seeing thee against the sunken sun
In folds of wine-dark gauze and amethyst,
Should rise to exaltation more superb
Than mine, and praise with loftier flight of soul
Thy splendor that to-night is all my own —
That were regret! Lend me thy purple thought,
Eternal brooding vigilant, that I
May counsel with my soul to rival his.
THE IMMORTAL RESIDUE

Love and the lofty heart and tears — these three
Immortal are, and draw eternally
Deep from the young world's loveliness their life.
The kiss, the prayer, the cry — the same to-day
As when the brute with noble pang distressed
Cleared the abyss and was man. Than these
Not suer come the stars, nor flooding up
The rainy slopes of spring dark violets.
More utterly than sunset cloud dissolved,
Soft Syracuse has passed. The banded fleet
That flashed into her harbor scornfully
Left not a ghostly sail to haunt the blue.
And they that heard in Athens ere they came
Great Socrates, whose spoken word was like
The calm intoning of the lustral ocean,
Before they perished in their slavery,
Bequeathed not any dream for us to learn.
Nor shall we know the thought of those tall girls
That stood where now the yellow gorse stands high,
And in their golden, fluttering loveliness
Watched the young prisoners. Instead, remain
The bay, the bubble air, the secret dust,
These, and the mortal kinship that we own.
Kisses they whispered for I beg to-day.
Their eyes did never blur but I could guess.
And as their spirits stood, tall as the sword
Of one that guards the portal of a queen
And leans theon in moonlight, mine hath stood.
I know their loves and wingèd hearts and tears,
And mine shall every man that lives know too;
And so the same, forever, to the close.
Perhaps some spring a thousand years from now
Two crowned ineffably with youth, their hearts
A-toss in wind-flower dance before the sun,
Loitering lover-wise across the fields
And empty places that I knew, may chance
Upon the rubble where I dream, and muse:
"Those old barbarians, dead so long ago,
Was life to them so fair, and did the sun
Shine honey-sweet into their open hearts?
Could they have ever dreamed such love as ours,
Or dared, O love, this slow, divinest kiss?"
Their words, I know, shall warm the flower roots
That were my heart. To them as now to me
May day be only blue; all moon the night;
And may enamored fate a little while
Hold back their portion due of tears and dark.
SET OF MOON

The archeress had gone;
A western hill across her path still bore
The magic of her recent footing there;
And upwards all the air was lustral pure.
The city slept, but far above shone bright
The city of the gods that never sleep.