

PART II
IN APRIL ONCE, AND OTHER POEMS

II
LYRICAL PIECES

1000

OVERTONES

I heard a bird at break of day
Sing from the autumn trees
A song so mystical and calm,
So full of certainties,
No man, I think, could listen long
Except upon his knees.
Yet this was but a simple bird
Alone, among dead trees.

IN NEW YORK

1. ON SUNDAY MORNING

Far, far from here the church bells ring,
As when I was a child,
And there is one I dearly love
Walks in the sunlight mild.
To church she goes, and with her once
I went, a little child.

The church bells ring far, far away,
The village streets are bright,
The sunlight falls in slanting bars
And fills the church with light.
And I remember when I knelt
Beside her, in delight.

There's something lost, there's something lost,
Some wisdom has beguiled!
My heart has flown a thousand miles
And in the sunlight mild
I kneel and weep beside her there
As she prays for her child.

2. THE SONG YOU LOVE

When I have sung the sweet songs and the sad,
The songs of magic drifting from above,
The trumpet songs that shout across men's souls,

The sleep-song, breasted softer than the dove,
Still there will be one song I have not sung —
 The song you love, the song you love.

What are the torches of the world to you,
The words that comfort men and calm their fears?
What are the stars with their strange harmonies,
Or fate that shadows all, or death that jeers?
There must be laughter in the song you love
 And at the end there must be tears.

When I have come to that green place we know
Where cedars stand that have no faith in spring,
Where through the utter peace of afternoon
The mocking-birds their heartless raptures fling,
Long after it is dust, one heart there'll be
 Restless with words it could not sing.

3. WEARINESS

I sometimes think Thou art my secret love;
But not to-night. . . . To-night I have the need
Of human tenderness; not hovering wings,
But one warm breast where I may lay my head
And close my eyes. For I am tired to-night. . . .
The park was full of lovers,
And such a slender moon looked down on them. . . .
For one kiss of one mouth, free-given, I
Would give — what's left of me to-night
To the last dream!
Art Thou a jealous god?
Dost think to force by loneliness

Unwilling love to Thee?
Beware, beware! The winds of madness blow
Strong, strong on nights like these! . . .
Thou dost deny me what's of life most sweet,
The bending head and lovely eyes of love —
Then give, beseech Thee, give me sleep.

4. IN THE NIGHT

Drifting, groping
For delight;
Longing, hoping
All the night.
Perfume of
Blossomed hair —
Where is love?
Ah, no, not there! . . .
Not there.

Turning, turning,
Sleepless-eyed,
Something burning
At my side —
Winds that sweep
Poppied hair,
Where is sleep?
Ah, no, not there! . . .
Not there?

5. HOME

I have a need of silence and of stars;
Too much is said too loudly; I am dazed.

The silken sound of whirled infinity
Is lost in voices shouting to be heard.
I once knew men as earnest and less shrill.
An undermeaning that I caught I miss
Among these ears that hear all sounds save silence,
These eyes that see so much but not the sky,
These minds that gain all knowledge but no calm.
If suddenly the desperate music ceased,
Could they return to life? or would they stand
In dancers' attitudes, puzzled, polite,
And striking vaguely hand on tired hand
For an encore, to fill the ghastly pause?
I do not know. Some rhythm there may be
I cannot hear. But I — oh, I must go
Back where the breakers of deep sunlight roll
Across flat fields that love and touch the sky;
Back to the more of earth, the less of man,
Where there is still a plain simplicity,
And friendship, poor in everything but love,
And faith, unwise, unquestioned, but a star.
Soon now the peace of summer will be there
With cloudy fire of myrtles in full bloom;
And, when the marvelous wide evenings come,
Across the molten river one can see
The misty willow-green of Arcady.
And then — the summer stars . . . I will go home.

THE WANDERER

I have grown weary of the open sea,
The chartless ways, the storms, the loneliness,
The coast that topples, tall and shelterless —
Weary of faring where all things are free!

Yet once the open sea was all romance,
Purple and olive-stained and golden-scaled;
And every breeze from some adventure hailed,
And shoals were silver for the moon to dance.

The cliffs were only tall to keep untrod
The kingdom of the fay hung high in air,
And every storm was but Poseidon's dare,
And brave it was to battle with a god.

Ah, blithe it was when the mad night was done
And day with flying hair woke wild and white,
To see the salty sail loom in the light
And know one battle more was bravely won.

Then these were magic seas that ever rang
With melodies, now wild, now sweet, now glad;
At dusk the drifting choirs unseen were sad
And in the lulls of night the sirens sang.

They sing no more; the colors now are grey;
The cliffs defend not fairyland, but home;

And when th' impenitent, hoar sea has clomb
The clouds, I have no heart to sing or pray.

Oh, I am weary of the open sea,
Vigils and storms and watches without name,
The ache of long resistance without aim,
The fetters of the fetterless and free.

There is some haven that no tempest mars,
Some brown-hilled harbor, hushed and clear and deep,
Where tired evening may sit down and weep,
And, waking, find not water there but stars.

There would I creep at last ere day is done,
With ashen sail dropped down and cordage white;
There rest secure, there find before the night
A little hour of peace, a little sun!

THE MAN IN WHITE

(Ambulance drivers from the Front tell that to the grievously wounded, alone on the battlefield, the hallucination often comes of a man in white who comforts them.)

“ Soldier, knowest thou the land
The land that’s home to thee? ”

“ Stranger, with the voice not strange,
Why do you lean to me,
A wounded man, and put a word
That mocks my memory? ”

“ Soldier, I am from that land,
The land that’s home to thee.”

“ O stranger with the gentle hands,
Now let your pity be.
You have no word what land is mine,
Your closed eyes cannot see
As mine, as mine, the land of lands,
The land where I would be.”

“ I see a field of apple trees
That top a furrowed hill,
A little house, a little room,
A flowered window sill.
A woman with a face like thine,
But eyes more sweet and still,
Who prays across the gathered dusk
To guard her child from ill.”

“My God, my God, I fear to look
Lest there be no man by!
If this be but a fever dream
O let me sleep and die
And never know a blessed ghost
From home had heard my cry.”

“See me, touch me, let thy head
On my bosom weigh.
This, the kiss your mother sent,
That on your lips I lay.”
“Yes — it is hers — no other drives
The awful pain away —
I think — that I could fall asleep —
If you — would only — stay.”

“Rest thee, rest thee on my breast,
Let the deep sleep come.
Rest thee, rest thee, soldier lad,
Time is past to roam.
Waking, I shall still be near,
And we shall be at home.”

THE WOOD

There was a knight once rode from out the sun
Into a twilight wood, forever still.
It was a place for blue-eyed knights to shun,
For such are liefer to enchantments ill.
Deep in the wood he rode with head bent low . . .
There was no sound save tired leaves that fell.
His lance hung listless from his saddle bow;
Pale was his armor; pale his mouth as well.
The old adventures and the knightly bouts
Seemed faint and far as shapes in fever seen.
Because his dreams had died, but not his doubts,
His eyes were grey that had been blue, I ween.

But whether he that haunted wood passed through,
Or came unto the marsh, I never knew.

IN THE STORM

The shining moments are so far between!
From their clear crests we see the dawn unfurled
In films of opal on the dew-drenched world —
Life, life, dædal, harmonious, serene!
Then darkness. For that ærial wide scene,
Tempests down mountain by-paths madly hurled;
This way and that our tortured souls are whirled,
Blinded, aghast, beneath the lightning's green.
The peaks are moments; lifelong lasts the dark.
Yet, soul, be strong! Thou hast beheld the sun,
Hast known that life is wisdom and is one.
Stanch thy despair! The cloud-rack thou dost mark
May hide a crest whereto thy wanderings bend.
And this, too, ends. There is a certain end.

MR. W. H. TO THE POET

(THANKING HIM FOR A COPY OF "THE TEMPEST")

My thanks, dear friend, as always! But, I fear
No art — not Prospero's — can speak to me
As those swift words you breathed first in my ear.
They were your heart; this but your wizardry.
We have lived much, won much, and now are old.
Strange, is it not, when I call in review
My life's achievements, dross and drab and gold,
There's nothing shines but took its light from you?
And yet, as I reread our book to-night,
And trembled almost at some old-loved line,
I wondered if the world, so prone to slight,
Would some day slur your stainless name with mine,
Not knowing there is ice in heavenly flame,
And Friendship is Love's canonizèd name.

NOVEMBER

How has November won
More loveliness
With opal mist and sun
Than spring can boast?

The village houses all
Wear aureoles.
Their smoke is pale and tall
As Abel's was.

The winds adoringly
On tiptoe pause,
Nor grudge the branches free
Slow gift of leaves.

And on the air one note
Clear, clear, and sad,
From the unmated throat
Of some lone bird.

O earth, that doth confess
In beauty God,
How calm the happiness,
How close the tears!

PROLOGUE

Whose blood runs gay as summer's,
Whose heart is sure and proud,
Whose days are all newcomers,
Whose nights are dream-endowed, —
Pass on, lest you should hear
Speech neither sweet nor clear.

Whose blood is slowly spilling,
Whose heart has crimson scars,
Whose days have lost their thrilling,
Whose nights have lost their stars —
Pause here and you will find
One of your kith and kind.

TO AN OLD TUNE

You cannot choose but love, lad,
From dawn till twilight dreary;
You cannot choose but love, lad,
Though love grows weary, weary.

For, lad, an if you love not,
You'd best have slept, unwaking;
But, O, an if you love, lad,
Your heart is breaking, breaking.

Though friends and lovers only
Fill life with joyous breath,
Yet friend or lover only
Can make you pray for death.

Throw open wide your heart then,
Love's road-house for a mile!
And if one turns to leave you,
Or stab you — smile, lad, smile.

A HUNGER SONG

Some are fed on kingly fare,
Some starve, as fate decrees;
Of those death takes away the soul,
The body takes of these.

I would not have my soul to die;
Too soon corruption comes.
But two deaths I had rather die,
Than live and live on crumbs.

There is a banquet table set
Within a silver gate
Where lads and maidens lightly feast —
Outside the beggars wait.

Oh, starve me, food and drink denied,
Or gorge till soul succumbs,
But I'll not live as beggars do —
Feed me not, Love, on crumbs.

DEFEAT

Though you have struck me to the bloody core,
It is indeed only one scar the more!
And I'll not turn from you as at the other strokes,
Nor say " Good-bye," as other times I said.
 The agony still chokes,
And still it seems most restful to be dead.
But I'll not say " Good-bye " nor turn away,
 Nor parting lover play. . . .
Leave you? Take everything save all — my heart?
I know the scene too well, too well my part!
Hot tears and bitterness; and I would go,
Go for an hour, a day, a week —
Is bitterness so short called pique?
And in the old, old way, without regret
 I would return to you;
And in the old, old way you would forget
 That ever I had gone, and let
 Some casual tenderness
 Be my return's caress;
Or in some vague, absorbed distress,
Lift up your shadow eyes to mine still wet.

LULLABY

Sleep, brown-eyed, sleep.
'Tis but the winds that weep,
Telling from tree to tree
Their ancient misery.
'Tis but the winds that weep.
 Sleep. . . . Sleep.
'Tis but the touch of dreams
Upon your mouth that seems
Like groping kisses . . . Sleep!
 'Tis but the dreams . . .
And, oh, 'tis but the dew
So bitter tastes to you,
Falling the long night through,
Falling on lips untrue —
 The dew, only the dew.

SANCTUARY

Sweep over me, O lovely winds,
That shake the tasseled oak!
The patience of the ancient earth
Turns blossom at your stroke,
The very grievance of the air
Thins out to silver smoke.

Sweep over me, O youthful winds,
And I will lie as dead
Upon the leaves that lived last year,
With new leaves overhead.
Has your beneficence no balm
For hearts grown wearied?

There's weariness of labor done
That dark and sleep appease;
And fragrant weariness of flesh,
Delightfuller than ease;
But there's a weariness that comes
More wearily than these,

With neither blossoms in its hair,
Nor sleepy sound of rain,
Nor bearing ointments to allay
The heart that's sick with pain.
There is a weariness that comes
And does not go again.

O ancient earth that never tires,
O heavens that renew,
O winds that foam and flash and blow
Forever fresh as dew,
There is a wounded thing that lies
Face down, and calls on you.

AUTUMNAL

To-night the tumult of the autumn wind
Rushes between the ragged grey of heaven
And earth's autumnal grey — swift, swift and loud —
Filled with the wings of wild birds southward blown
And with the wings of leaves that only fly
Their red and golden flight when they are dead.
And we who keep unwillingly the earth,
Are caught, are caught up with the birds and the leaves,
Are whirled above the spare, unblossoming fields,
Along the pallid torrents of the air,
Far from the earth we know, past the dead moon,
Beyond the blue-lit, scattered spheres of night
That flicker down the dark like shaken leaves,
On, on, with the rushing wind of autumn,
Out to the stark, last outpost of creation
Where nothingness surges. . . .
From that wan strand where breaks that ebon tide,
Could we behold, were spirit vision ours,
The blowing legions of the homeless dead
In wraithy phosphorus against the void?
A little while, O winds that rush and call,
A little while, O leaves, and we shall know!

A SEA BALLAD

“ Is that the sea, is that the sea?
O mother dear, lean close to me.
Just there, outside the window sill,
The creeping tides are never still.”
“ Lie back, my son, the April breeze
Is dashing sunlight on the trees.”

“ I hear the sea, I hear the sea;
The breakers keen and call to me!
My father's blood was mixed with brine,
And, oh, my father's blood is mine.”
“ 'Tis fever makes your eyes so blue
And stains your lips with that hot hue.”

“ Look, look, a sail upon the sea! ”
“ 'Tis sunlight on the dogwood tree.”
“ It tacks! And now it comes straight on! ”
“ Merciful God, he is my son.”
“ Mother, I must go down to the sea! ”
“ Nay, son, my son, stay home with me.”

“ Look how they beckon, the sheet is spread.”
“ We are alone and I am afraid.”
“ They are calling me, calling me, I must go down.
They are sailing away to a strange, lonely town.
Mother, come with me. . . . Mother! . . . 'tis done.”
“ God without pity! O son, little son! ”