

JEZEBEL
AND OTHER TRAGIC POEMS

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and other
Tragic Poems

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DÉDICACE.

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PEINTRE, que ton amour inspire
Des chansons toujours plus sublimes,
Malgre qu'aujourd'hui ma mauvaise lyre
Chante l'abime.

Nos espoirs, nos desirs nous rendent
Des amis chers aux dieux ;
Demain, ma voix, plus haute et plus profonde,
Chante les cieux.

À. GERALD.

PERDITA.

LIKE leaves that fall before the sullen wind
At summer's parting kiss and autumn's call,
Lost thoughts fly half-forgotten from my mind,
Like leaves that fall.

They shall not come again ; the wintry pall
Of consciousness clouds o'er them ; they shall
find
No rest, no hope, no tear, no funeral.

Into the night, despairing, bleeding, blind,
They pass, nor know their former place at all,
Lost to my soul, to God, to all mankind,
Like leaves that fall.

JEZEBEL.

PART I.

A LION'S mane, a leopard's skin
 Across my dusty shoulders thrown ;
A swart fierce face, with eyes where sin
 Lurks like a serpent by a stone.
A man driven forth by lust to seek
Rest from himself on Carmel's peak.

A prophet with wild hair behind,
 Streaming in fiery clusters ! Yea,
Tangled with vehemence of the wind,
 And knotted with the tears that slay ;
And all my face parched up and dried,
And all my body crucified.

Ofttimes the Spirit of the Lord
 Descends and floods me with his breath ;
My words are fashioned as a sword,
 My voice is like the voice of death.
The thunder of the Spirit's wings
Brings terror to the hearts of kings.

Anon, and I am driven out
 In desert places by desire ;
My mouth is salt and dry ; I doubt
 If hell hath such another fire ;
If God's damnation can devise
A lust to match these agonies.

The desert wind my body burns,
 The voice of flesh consumes my soul ;

My body towards the city turns,
My spirit seeks its fierier goal;
In wells of heaven to quench my thirst,
And take God's hand among the first.

I conquered self; I grew at last
A prophet chosen of the Lord;
I blew the trumpet's iron blast
That called on Zimri Omri's sword;
My voice inflamed the fiery steel
That was to smite upon Jezreel.

And now, I haste from yonder sands,
With fervour filled, to say God's doom
To Ahab of the bloody hands,
The spoiler of his father's tomb,
The slayer of the vineyard king.
God's judgment, and his fate, I bring.

The city gleams afar; I see
Samarina's white walls on high;
The mountains echo back to me
The vengeful murmur of the sky;
All heaven and earth on me attend
To prophesy the tyrant's end.

The gates are close because of night
Whose heavy breath infects the air;
The dog-star gleams, a devilish light:
I thought I saw behind me glare
The eyes of fiends. I thought I heard
An evil laugh, a mocking word.

The gates swing open at the Name,
Without a warder roused from sleep;
I pass, with face of burning flame,
That is not quenched, although I weep.
(For even my tears are tears of fire,
For loathing, madness, and desire.)

Ah God! the traps for fervent feet!
The morrow beacons, and I came
By where the golden groves of wheat
In summer glories fiercely flame;
To those white courts, by princes trod,
Where Ahab sat, and mocked at God.

Where Ahab sat:—but lo! I saw
No king, no tyrant to be curst;
But she, who filled me with blind awe,
She, for whose blood my thin veins thirst;
The blossom of a painted mouth
And bare breasts tintured with the south.

For lo! the harlot Jezebel!
Her hands dropped perfume, and her tongue
(A flame from the dark heart of hell,
The ivory-barred mouth, that stung
With unimaginable pangs)
Shot out at me, and Hell fixed gangs.

Her purple robes, her royal crown,
The jewelled girdle of her waist,
Her feet with murder splashed, and brown
With the sharp lips that fawn and taste,
The crimson snakes that minister
To those unwearying lust of her.

And all her woman's scent did drift
A steam of poison through the air;
The haze of sunshine seems to lift
And toil in tangles of black hair,
The hair that waves, and winds, and bites,
And glistens with unholy lights.

For lo! she saw me, and beheld
My trembling lips curled back to curse,
Laughed with strong scorn, whose music knelled
The empire of God's universe.

And on my haggard face upturned
She spat! Ah God! how my cheek burned!

Then, as a man betrayed, and doomed
 Already, I arose and went,
And wrestled with myself, consumed
 With passion for that sacrament
Of shame. From the day unto this
My cheek desires that hideous kiss.

Her hate, her scorn, her cruel blows,
 Fill my whole life, consume my breath;
Her red-fanged hatred in me glows,
 I lust for her, and hell, and death.
I see that ghastly look, and yearn
Toward the brands of her that burn.

Sleep shuns me; dreams divide the night,
 (My parched throat thirsty for her veins)
That she and I with deep delight
 Suck from death's womb infernal pains,
Whose fire consumes, destroys, devours
Through night's insatiable hours.

And altogether filled with love,
 And altogether filled with sin,
The little sparks and noises move
 About the softness of her skin.
Her pleasures and her passions purr
For the delight I have of her.

Aching with all the pangs of night
 My shuddering body swoons; my eyes
Absorb her eyelids' lazy light,
 And read her bosom to devise
Fresh blossoms of the heart of hell
And secret joys of Jezebel.

Her lips are fastened to my breast
 To suck out blood in feverish tides ;
The token of her I possessed,
 Still on my withered cheek abides.
Thus slowly the desire grows
To kill and have her yet—who knows ?

PART II.

I Know. When Ramoth-Gilead's field
Grew bloody with hot ranks of dead,
I smote amain with sword and shield ;
My brows with mingled blood were red ;
And on my cheek the kiss of hell,
The hatred of my Jezebel.

I waited many days. At last
The rushing of a chariot grew
Frightful through all the city vast :
Men were afraid. But I—I knew
Jehu was here, whose sword should dip
Deep in my love's adulterous lip.

The spirit filled me. *And behold!*
I saw her dead stare to the skies.
I came to her; she was not cold,
But burning with old infamies.
On her incestuous mouth I fell,
And lost my soul for Jezebel.

I followed him afoot, afire ;
Beneath her window he drew rein ;
She looked forth, clad in glad attire,
Haggard and hateful, once again ;
And taunted him. His bastard blood
Quailed, but his violent soul withstood.

He blenched, and then with eyes of flame,
"Who is on my side? Who?" he said.
Three eunuchs, passionless, grown tame,
Grinned from behind her laughing head.

“Throw down that woman!” And my breath
Caught as they flung her out to death.

I think I died that moment. He,
Foaming for vengeance and blood-lust,
Laughed his coarse laugh of hideous glee.
Her sweet bad body in the dust
He trampled. Royal from the womb
A martyred murderess lacks a tomb!

A tigress woman, clad with sin,
And shod with infamy, who pressed
The bloody winepress of my skin,
And plucked the purple of my breast—
Her lovers in their hearts shall keep
Her memory passionate and deep.

They cast her forth on Naboth’s field
Still living, in her harlot’s dress;
Her belly stript, her thighs concealed,
For shame’s sake and for love’s no less.
Night falls; the gaping crowds abide
No longer by her stiffening side.

I crept like sleep toward the place
That held for me her evil head;
I bent like sin above her face
That dying she might kiss me dead.
I whispered “Jezebel!” She turned,
And her deep eyes with hatred burned.

“Ah! prophet, come to mock at me
And gloat on mine exceeding pain?”
“Nay, but to give my soul to thee,
And have thee spit at me again!”
She smiled—I know she smiled—she sighed,
Bit my lips through, and drank, and died!

Her murders and her blasphemies,
 Her whoredoms, God has paid at last ;
 Upon my bosom close she lies ;
 Her carnal spirit holds me fast.
 My blood, my infamy, my pain,
 Seal my subjection and her reign.

My veins poured out her marriage cup,
 For holy water her cruel tongue ;
 For blessing of white hands raised up,
 These perfumed infamies unsung ;
 For God's breath, her sharp tainted breath ;
 For marriage bed, the bed of death.

The hounds that scavenge, fierce and lean,
 Snarl in the moonlight ; in the sky
 The vulture hangs, a ghost unclean ;
 The lewd hyaena's sleepless eye
 Darts through the distance ; these admit
 My lordship over her—and it.

The host is lifted up. Behold
 The vintage spilt, the broken bread !
 I feast upon the cruel cold
 Pale body that was ripe and red.
 Only, her head, her palms, her feet,
 I kissed all night, and did not eat.

So, and not otherwise, the word
 Of God was utterly fulfilled.
 So, and not otherwise. I heard
 Her spirit cry, by death not stilled :
 "My sin is perfect in thy blood,
 And thou and I have conquered God."

Now let me die, at last desired,
 At last beloved of thee my queen ;
 Now let me die, with blood attired,
 Thy servant naked and obscene ;

To thy white skull, thy palms, thy feet,
Clinging, dead, infamous, complete.

Now let me die, to mix my soul
 With thy red soul, to join our hands,
To weld us in one perfect whole,
 To link us with desirous bands.
Now let me die, to mate in hell
With thee, O harlot Jezebel.

CONCERNING CERTAIN SINS.

SOME sins assume a garb so fine and white
That the blue veil of Heaven seems to shade
Their purity. They are winged so wide and bright
That even angels' pinions seem to fade,
And the archangel's wing recedes in night :—
Ay! even God seems perturbed and afraid
Because it wears so holy a garb of light
Of perfumed fire immaculately made.

These sins are deadly. God is merciless
For Love that joins Man's passion with His
power,
And makes to bloom on earth a fairer flower
Than heaven bears. Our token of success
Is that displeasure toward our sin unnamed
Of a fierce demon jealous and ashamed.

A SAINT'S DAMNATION.

YOU buy my spirit with those peerless eyes
That burn my soul ; you loose the torrent stream
Of my desire ; you make my lips your prize,

And on them burns the whole life's hope : you
deem

You buy a heart ; but I am well aware
How my damnation dwells in that supreme

Passion to feed upon your shoulders bare,
And pass the dewy twilight of our sin
In the intolerable flames of hair

That clothe my body from your head ; you win
The devil's bargain ; I am yours to kill,
Yours, for one kiss ; my spirit for your skin !

O bitter love, consuming all my will !
O love destroying, that hast drained my life
Of all those fountains of dear blood that fill

My heart ! O woman, would I call you wife ?
Would I content you with one touch divine
To flood your spirit with the clinging strife

Of perfect passionate joy, the joy of wine,
The drunkenness of extreme pleasure, filled
From sin's amazing cup ? Oh, mine, mine, mine,

Mine, if your kisses maddened me or killed,
Mine, at the price of my damnation deep,
Mine, if you will, as once your glances willed !

Take me, or break me, slay or sooth to sleep,
If only yours one hour, one perfect hour,
Remembrance and despair and hope to steep

In the infernal potion of that flower,
My poisonous passion for your blood! Behold!
How utterly I yield, how gladly dower

Our sin with my own spirit's quenched gold,
Clothe Love with my own soul's immortal power,
Give thee my body as a fire to hold—
O love, no words, no songs—your breast my
bower!

LOT.

“And while he lingered ... they brought him
forth, and set him without the city.”

—*GEN.* xix. 16.

TURN back from safety: in my love abide,
Whose lips are warm as when, a virgin bride,
I clung to thee ashamed and very glad,
Whose breasts are lordlier for the pain they had,
Whose arms cleave closer than thy spouse's own,
Thy spouse—O lover, kiss me, and atone!
All my veins bleed for love, my ripe breasts beat
And lay their bleeding blossoms at thy feet!
Spurn me no more! O bid these strangers go;
Turn to my lips till their cup overflow;
Hurt me with kisses, kill me with desire,
Consume me and destroy me with the fire
Of bleeding passion straining at the heart,
Touched to the core by sweetnesss that smart;
Bitten by fiery snakes, whose poisonous breath
Swoons in the midnight, and dissolves to death!
Ah! let me perish so, and not endure
Thy falsehood who have known thy love was sure,
Built up by sighs a palace of long years—
Lo! it was faery, and the spell of tears
Dissolves it utterly. O bid them go,
These white-faced boys, where calmer rivers flow
And birds less passionate invoke the spring
Or seek their loves with weaker, wearier wing.
Turn back from safety! Let God's rivers pour
Brimstone and fire, and all his fountains roar
Lava and hail of hell upon my head,
So be he leave us altogether dead,

Burnt in that shameful whirlwind of his ire,
Consumed in one tall pyramid of fire
Whose bowers of flame shall tell the sky of God
How we despised his feet with thunder shod,
And conquered, clasping, all the host of death.
Turn to me, touch me, mix thy very breath
With mine to mingle floods of fiery dew
With flames of purple, like the sea shot through
With golden glances of a fiercer star.
Turn to me, bend above me, you may char
These olive shoulders with an old-time kiss,
And fix thy mouth upon me for such bliss
Of sudden rage rekindled. Turn again,
And make delight the minister of pain,
And pain the father of a new delight.
And light a lamp of torture for the night
Too grievous to be borne without a cry
To rend the very bowels of the sky
And make the archangel gasp—a sudden pang,
Most like a traveller stricken by the fang
Of the black adder whose squat head springs up,
A flash of death, beneath a cactus cup.
Ah turn! my bosom for thy love is cold;
My arms are empty, and my lips can hold
No converse with thee far away like this.
O for that communing pregnant with a kiss
That is reborn when lips are set together
To link our souls in one desirous tether,
And wield our very bodies into one.
Ah fiend Jehovah, what then have we done
To earn thy curse—is love like ours too strong
To dwell before thee, and do thy throne no wrong?
Art thou grown jealous of the fiery band?
Lo! thou hast spoken, and thy strong command
Bade earth and air divide, and on the sea
Thy spirit moved—and thou must envy me!
Gird all thy godhead to destroy a man
Whose little moment is a single span,
Whose small desire is nothing—and thy power

Must root from out his bosom the fair flower
Of passion! Listen to thine own voice yet;
“A rich man many flocks and herds did get
And took the poor man’s lamb.” Thou art the man!
Our love must lie beneath thy bitter ban!
Thou petty, envious God! My king, be sure
His brute force shall not to the end endure;
Some stronger soul than thine shall wrest his crown
And thrust him from his own high heaven down
To some obscure forgetful hell. For me
Forsake thy hopes in him! We worship, we,
Rather the dear delights we know and hold;
The first cool kiss, within the water cold
That draws its music from some bubbling well,
Looks long, looks deadly, looks desirable,
The touch that fires, the next kiss, and the whole
Body embracing, symbol of the soul,
And all the perfect passion of an hour.
Turn to me, pluck that amaranthine flower,
And leave the doubtful blossoms of the sky!
You dare not kiss me! dare not draw you nigh
Lest I should lure you to remain! nor speak
Lest you should catch the blood within your cheek
Mantling. You dared enough—so long ago!—
When to my blossom body clean as snow
You pressed your bosom till desire was pain,
And—then—that midnight—you did dare remain
Though all my limbs were bloody with your mouth
That tore their flesh to satiate its drouth,
That was not thereby satisfied! And now
A pallid coward, with sly, skulking brow,
You must leave Sodom for your spouse’s sake
Coward and coward and coward! who would take
The best flower of my life and leave me so,
Still loving you—Ah! weak—and turn to go
For fear of such a God! O blind! O fool!
To heed these strangers, and to be the tool
Of their smooth lies and monstrous miracles!
O break this bondage and cast off their spells!

Fire righteous! Thou a righteous man! A jest!
A righteous man—you always loved me best,
And even when lured by lips of wanton girls
Would turn away and sigh and touch my curls
And slip half-conscious to the old embrace:—
And now you will not let me see your face
Or hear your voice or touch you. Ah! the hour!
He moves. Come back, come back, my life's one
flower!

Come back. One kiss before your leave me. So!
Stop—turn—one little kiss before you go;
It is my right—you must. Oh no! Oh no!

EPILOGUE.

To die amid the blossoms of the frost
On far fair heights; to sleep the quiet sleep
Of dead men underneath the snowy steep
Of many mountains; ever to have lost
These cares and these distrusts; to lie alone,
Watched by the distant eagle's drowsy wing,
Stars and grey summits, and the winds that sing
Slow dirges in eternal monotone.

Such is my soul's desire, being weary of
This vain eternity of sleepless dreams
That is my life; withal there still may be
In other worlds, the hope of other love
Than this that floods my veins with poisonous
streams,
And wastes with wan desire the soul of me.