

Al Aaraaf  
Edgar Allan Poe

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PART I.

O! Nothing earthly save the ray  
(Thrown back from flowers) of Beauty's eye,  
As in those gardens where the day  
Springs from the gems of Circassy—  
O! nothing earthly save the thrill  
Of melody in woodland rill—  
Or (music of the passion-hearted)  
Joy's voice so peacefully departed  
That like the murmur in the shell,  
Its echo dwelleth and will dwell—  
Oh, nothing of the dross of ours—  
Yet all the beauty—all the flowers  
That list our Love, and deck our bowers—  
Adorn yon world afar, afar—  
The wandering star.

'Twas a sweet time for Nesace—for there  
Her world lay lolling on the golden air,  
Near four bright suns—a temporary rest—  
An oasis in desert of the blest.  
Away—away—'mid seas of rays that roll  
Empyrean splendor o'er th' unchained soul—  
The soul that scarce (the billows are so dense)  
Can struggle to its destin'd eminence—  
To distant spheres, from time to time, she rode,  
And late to ours, the favour'd one of God—  
But, now, the ruler of an anchor'd realm,  
She throws aside the sceptre—leaves the helm,  
And, amid incense and high spiritual hymns,  
Laves in quadruple light her angel limbs.

Now happiest, loveliest in yon lovely Earth,  
Whence sprang the "Idea of Beauty" into birth,  
(Falling in wreaths thro' many a startled star,  
Like woman's hair 'mid pearls, until, afar,  
It lit on hills Achaian, and there dwelt)  
She look'd into Infinity—and knelt.  
Rich clouds, for canopies, about her curled—  
Fit emblems of the model of her world—  
Seen but in beauty—not impeding sight  
Of other beauty glittering thro' the light—  
A wreath that twined each starry form around,  
And all the opal'd air in color bound.

All hurriedly she knelt upon a bed  
 Of flowers: of lilies such as rear'd the head  
 On the fair Capo Deucato, and sprang  
 So eagerly around about to hang  
 Upon the flying footsteps of—deep pride—  
 \*\*Of her who lov'd a mortal—and so died.  
 The Sephalica, budding with young bees,  
 Uprear'd its purple stem around her knees:  
 And gemmy flower, of Trebizond misnam'd—  
 Inmate of highest stars, where erst it sham'd  
 All other loveliness: its honied dew  
 (The fabled nectar that the heathen knew)  
 Deliriously sweet, was dropp'd from Heaven,  
 And fell on gardens of the unforgiven  
 In Trebizond—and on a sunny flower  
 So like its own above that, to this hour,  
 It still remaineth, torturing the bee  
 With madness, and unwonted reverie:  
 In Heaven, and all its environs, the leaf  
 And blossom of the fairy plant, in grief  
 Disconsolate linger—grief that hangs her head,  
 Repenting follies that full long have fled,  
 Heaving her white breast to the balmy air,  
 Like guilty beauty, chasten'd, and more fair:  
 Nyctanthes too, as sacred as the light  
 She fears to perfume, perfuming the night:  
 And Clytia pondering between many a sun,  
 While pettish tears adown her petals run:  
 And that aspiring flower that sprang on Earth—  
 And died, ere scarce exalted into birth,  
 Bursting its odorous heart in spirit to wing  
 Its way to Heaven, from garden of a king:  
 And Valisnerian lotus thither flown  
 From struggling with the waters of the Rhone:  
 And thy most lovely purple perfume, Zante!  
 Isola d'oro!—Fior di Levante!  
 And the Nelumbo bud that floats for ever  
 With Indian Cupid down the holy river—  
 Fair flowers, and fairy! to whose care is given  
 To bear the Goddess' song, in odors, up to Heaven:

“Spirit! that dwellest where,  
     In the deep sky,  
 The terrible and fair,  
     In beauty vie!  
 Beyond the line of blue—  
     The boundary of the star  
 Which turneth at the view  
     Of thy barrier and thy bar—  
 Of the barrier overgone  
     By the comets who were cast  
 From their pride, and from their throne

To be drudges till the last—  
 To be carriers of fire  
 (The red fire of their heart)  
 With speed that may not tire  
 And with pain that shall not part—  
 Who livest—*that* we know—  
 In Eternity—we feel—  
 But the shadow of whose brow  
 What spirit shall reveal?  
 Tho' the beings whom thy Nesace,  
 Thy messenger hath known  
 Have dream'd for thy Infinity  
 A model of their own—  
 Thy will is done, Oh, God!  
 The star hath ridden high  
 Thro' many a tempest, but she rode  
 Beneath thy burning eye;  
 And here, in thought, to thee—  
 In thought that can alone  
 Ascend thy empire and so be  
 A partner of thy throne—  
 By winged Fantasy,  
 My embassy is given,  
 Till secrecy shall knowledge be  
 In the environs of Heaven.”

She ceas'd—and buried then her burning cheek  
 Abash'd, amid the lilies there, to seek  
 A shelter from the fervour of His eye;  
 For the stars trembled at the Deity.  
 She stirr'd not—breath'd not—for a voice was there  
 How solemnly pervading the calm air!  
 A sound of silence on the startled ear  
 Which dreamy poets name “the music of the sphere.”  
 Ours is a world of words: Quiet we call  
 “Silence”—which is the merest word of all.  
 All Nature speaks, and ev'n ideal things  
 Flap shadowy sounds from visionary wings—  
 But ah! not so when, thus, in realms on high  
 The eternal voice of God is passing by,  
 And the red winds are withering in the sky!

“What tho' in worlds which sightless cycles run,  
 Link'd to a little system, and one sun—  
 Where all my love is folly and the crowd  
 Still think my terrors but the thunder cloud,  
 The storm, the earthquake, and the ocean-wrath—  
 (Ah! will they cross me in my angrier path?)  
 What tho' in worlds which own a single sun  
 The sands of Time grow dimmer as they run,  
 Yet thine is my resplendency, so given  
 To bear my secrets thro' the upper Heaven.  
 Leave tenantless thy crystal home, and fly,

With all thy train, athwart the moony sky—  
 \*Apart—like fire-flies in Sicilian night,  
 And wing to other worlds another light!  
 Divulge the secrets of thy embassy  
 To the proud orbs that twinkle—and so be  
 To ev'ry heart a barrier and a ban  
 Lest the stars totter in the guilt of man!”

Up rose the maiden in the yellow night,  
 The single-mooned eve!—on Earth we plight  
 Our faith to one love—and one moon adore—  
 The birth-place of young Beauty had no more.  
 As sprang that yellow star from downy hours  
 Up rose the maiden from her shrine of flowers,  
 And bent o'er sheeny mountain and dim plain  
 Her way—but left not yet her Therasaeon reign.

## PART II

High on a mountain of enamell'd head—  
 Such as the drowsy shepherd on his bed  
 Of giant pasturage lying at his ease,  
 Raising his heavy eyelid, starts and sees  
 With many a mutter'd “hope to be forgiven”  
 What time the moon is quadrated in Heaven—  
 Of rosy head, that towering far away  
 Into the sunlit ether, caught the ray  
 Of sunken suns at eve—at noon of night,  
 While the moon danc'd with the fair stranger light—  
 Uprear'd upon such height arose a pile  
 Of gorgeous columns on th' unburthen'd air,  
 Flashing from Parian marble that twin smile  
 Far down upon the wave that sparkled there,  
 And nursled the young mountain in its lair.  
 Of molten stars their pavement, such as fall  
 Thro' the ebon air, besilvering the pall  
 Of their own dissolution, while they die—  
 Adorning then the dwellings of the sky.  
 A dome, by linked light from Heaven let down,  
 Sat gently on these columns as a crown—  
 A window of one circular diamond, there,  
 Look'd out above into the purple air  
 And rays from God shot down that meteor chain  
 And hallow'd all the beauty twice again,  
 Save when, between th' Empyrean and that ring,  
 Some eager spirit flapp'd his dusky wing.  
 But on the pillars Seraph eyes have seen  
 The dimness of this world: that grayish green  
 That Nature loves the best for Beauty's grave  
 Lurk'd in each cornice, round each architrave—  
 And every sculptured cherub thereabout  
 That from his marble dwelling peered out,  
 Seem'd earthly in the shadow of his niche—

Achaian statues in a world so rich?  
 Friezes from Tadmor and Persepolis—  
 From Balbec, and the stilly, clear abyss  
 Of beautiful Gomorrah! Oh, the wave  
 Is now upon thee—but too late to save!

Sound loves to revel in a summer night:  
 Witness the murmur of the gray twilight  
 That stole upon the ear, in Eyraco,  
 Of many a wild star-gazer long ago—  
 That stealeth ever on the ear of him  
 Who, musing, gazeth on the distance dim,  
 And sees the darkness coming as a cloud—  
 Is not its form—its voice—most palpable and loud?

But what is this?—it cometh—and it brings  
 A music with it—'tis the rush of wings—  
 A pause—and then a sweeping, falling strain,  
 And Nesace is in her halls again.  
 From the wild energy of wanton haste

Her cheeks were flushing, and her lips apart;  
 The zone that clung around her gentle waist  
 Had burst beneath the heaving of her heart.  
 Within the centre of that hall to breathe  
 She paus'd and panted, Zante! all beneath,  
 The fairy light that kiss'd her golden hair  
 And long'd to rest, yet could but sparkle there!

Young flowers were whispering in melody  
 To happy flowers that night—and tree to tree;  
 Fountains were gushing music as they fell  
 In many a star-lit grove, or moon-light dell;  
 Yet silence came upon material things—  
 Fair flowers, bright waterfalls and angel wings—  
 And sound alone that from the spirit sprang  
 Bore burthen to the charm the maiden sang:

“ 'Neath blue-bell or streamer—  
 Or tufted wild spray  
 That keeps, from the dreamer,  
 The moonbeam away—  
 Bright beings! that ponder,  
 With half-closing eyes,  
 On the stars which your wonder  
 Hath drawn from the skies,  
 Till they glance thro' the shade, and  
 Come down to your brow  
 Like—eyes of the maiden  
 Who calls on you now—  
 Arise! from your dreaming  
 In violet bowers,  
 To duty beseeming  
 These star-litten hours—  
 And shake from your tresses

Encumber'd with dew  
 The breath of those kisses  
 That cumber them too—  
 (O! how, without you, Love!  
 Could angels be blest?)  
 Those kisses of true love  
 That lull'd ye to rest!  
 Up! shake from your wing  
 Each hindering thing:  
 The dew of the night—  
 It would weigh down your flight;  
 And true love caresses—  
 O! leave them apart!  
 They are light on the tresses,  
 But lead on the heart.

Ligeia! Ligeia!  
 My beautiful one!  
 Whose harshest idea  
 Will to melody run,  
 O! is it thy will  
 On the breezes to toss?  
 Or, capriciously still,  
 Like the lone Albatross,  
 Incumbent on night  
 (As she on the air)  
 To keep watch with delight  
 On the harmony there?

Ligeia! wherever  
 Thy image may be,  
 No magic shall sever  
 Thy music from thee.  
 Thou hast bound many eyes  
 In a dreamy sleep—  
 But the strains still arise  
 Which *thy* vigilance keep—  
 The sound of the rain  
 Which leaps down to the flower,  
 And dances again  
 In the rhythm of the shower—  
 The murmur that springs  
 From the growing of grass  
 Are the music of things—  
 But are modell'd, alas!  
 Away, then, my dearest,  
 O! hie thee away  
 To springs that lie clearest  
 Beneath the moon-ray—  
 To lone lake that smiles,  
 In its dream of deep rest,  
 At the many star-isles  
 That enjewel its breast—

Where wild flowers, creeping,  
 Have mingled their shade,  
 On its margin is sleeping  
 Full many a maid—  
 Some have left the cool glade, and  
 Have slept with the bee—  
 Arouse them, my maiden,  
 On moorland and lea—  
 Go! breathe on their slumber,  
 All softly in ear,  
 The musical number  
 They slumber'd to hear—  
 For what can awaken  
 An angel so soon  
 Whose sleep hath been taken  
 Beneath the cold moon,  
 As the spell which no slumber  
 Of witchery may test,  
 The rhythmical number  
 Which lull'd him to rest?"

Spirits in wing, and angels to the view,  
 A thousand seraphs burst th' Empyrean thro',  
 Young dreams still hovering on their drowsy flight—  
 Seraphs in all but "Knowledge," the keen light  
 That fell, refracted, thro' thy bounds afar,  
 O death! from eye of God upon that star;  
 Sweet was that error—sweeter still that death—  
 Sweet was that error—ev'n with *us* the breath  
 Of Science dims the mirror of our joy—  
 To them 'twere the Simoom, and would destroy—  
 For what (to them) availeth it to know  
 That Truth is Falsehood—or that Bliss is Woe?  
 Sweet was their death—with them to die was rife  
 With the last ecstasy of satiate life—  
 Beyond that death no immortality—  
 But sleep that pondereth and is not "to be"—  
 And there—oh! may my weary spirit dwell—  
 Apart from Heaven's Eternity—and yet how far from Hell!

What guilty spirit, in what shrubbery dim  
 Heard not the stirring summons of that hymn?  
 But two: they fell: for heaven no grace imparts  
 To those who hear not for their beating hearts.  
 A maiden-angel and her seraph-lover—  
 O! where (and ye may seek the wide skies over)  
 Was Love, the blind, near sober Duty known?  
 Unguided Love hath fallen—'mid "tears of perfect moan."

He was a goodly spirit—he who fell:  
 A wanderer by mossy-mantled well—  
 A gazer on the lights that shine above—  
 A dreamer in the moonbeam by his love:



What wonder? for each star is eye-like there,  
 And looks so sweetly down on Beauty's hair—  
 And they, and ev'ry mossy spring were holy  
 To his love-haunted heart and melancholy.  
 The night had found (to him a night of wo)  
 Upon a mountain crag, young Angelo—  
 Beetling it bends athwart the solemn sky,  
 And scowls on starry worlds that down beneath it lie.  
 Here sate he with his love—his dark eye bent  
 With eagle gaze along the firmament:  
 Now turn'd it upon her—but ever then  
 It trembled to the orb of <sup>EARTH</sup> again.

“Ianthe, dearest, see! how dim that ray!  
 How lovely 'tis to look so far away!  
 She seemed not thus upon that autumn eve  
 I left her gorgeous halls—nor mourned to leave,  
 That eve—that eve—I should remember well—  
 The sun-ray dropped, in Lemnos with a spell  
 On th' Arabesque carving of a gilded hall  
 Wherein I sate, and on the draperied wall—  
 And on my eyelids—O, the heavy light!  
 How drowsily it weighed them into night!  
 On flowers, before, and mist, and love they ran  
 With Persian Saadi in his Gulistan:  
 But O, that light!—I slumbered—Death, the while,  
 Stole o'er my senses in that lovely isle  
 So softly that no single silken hair  
 Awoke that slept—or knew that he was there.

The last spot of Earth's orb I trod upon  
 Was a proud temple called the Parthenon;  
 More beauty clung around her columned wall  
 Then even thy glowing bosom beats withal,  
 And when old Time my wing did disenthral  
 Thence sprang I—as the eagle from his tower,  
 And years I left behind me in an hour.  
 What time upon her airy bounds I hung,  
 One half the garden of her globe was flung  
 Unrolling as a chart unto my view—  
 Tenantless cities of the desert too!  
 Ianthe, beauty crowded on me then,  
 And half I wished to be again of men.”

“My Angelo! and why of them to be?  
 A brighter dwelling-place is here for thee—  
 And greener fields than in yon world above,  
 And woman's loveliness—and passionate love.”  
 “But list, Ianthe! when the air so soft  
 Failed, as my pennoned spirit leapt aloft,  
 Perhaps my brain grew dizzy—but the world  
 I left so late was into chaos hurled,  
 Sprang from her station, on the winds apart,

And rolled a flame, the fiery Heaven athwart.  
 Methought, my sweet one, then I ceased to soar,  
 And fell—not swiftly as I rose before,  
 But with a downward, tremulous motion thro'  
 Light, brazen rays, this golden star unto!  
 Nor long the measure of my falling hours,  
 For nearest of all stars was thine to ours—  
 Dread star! that came, amid a night of mirth,  
 A red Daedalion on the timid Earth.”

“We came—and to thy Earth—but not to us  
 Be given our lady’s bidding to discuss:  
 We came, my love; around, above, below,  
 Gay fire-fly of the night we come and go,  
 Nor ask a reason save the angel-nod  
*She* grants to us as granted by her God—  
 But, Angelo, than thine gray Time unfurled  
 Never his fairy wing o’er fairer world!  
 Dim was its little disk, and angel eyes  
 Alone could see the phantom in the skies,  
 When first Al Aaraaf knew her course to be  
 Headlong thitherward o’er the starry sea—  
 But when its glory swelled upon the sky,  
 As glowing Beauty’s bust beneath man’s eye,  
 We paused before the heritage of men,  
 And thy star trembled—as doth Beauty then!”

Thus in discourse, the lovers whiled away  
 The night that waned and waned and brought no day.  
 They fell: for Heaven to them no hope imparts  
 Who hear not for the beating of their hearts.

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