

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

Πότνια, πότνια νύξ,
ὑπνοδυτεῖρα τῶν πολυπόνων βροτῶν,
Ἐρεβόθεν ἴθι· μόλε μόλε κατάπτερος
Ἄγαμεμόνιον ἐπὶ δόμον·
ὑπὸ γὰρ ἀλγέων, ὑπὸ τε συμφορᾶς
διοιχόμεθ', οἰχόμεθα.

EURIPIDES.

PRELUDE

The title *Voices of the Night* originally was used by Mr. Longfellow for the poem *Footsteps of Angels*; then he gave it to the first collected volume of his poetry with special application to the group of eight poems following *Prelude*. Here it is confined to this group.

PLEASANT it was, when woods were green
And winds were soft and low,
To lie amid some sylvan scene,
Where, the long drooping boughs between,
Shadows dark and sunlight sheen
Alternate come and go ;

Or where the denser grove receives
No sunlight from above,
But the dark foliage interweaves
In one unbroken roof of leaves,
Underneath whose sloping eaves
The shadows hardly move.

Beneath some patriarchal tree
I lay upon the ground ;
His hoary arms uplifted he,
And all the broad leaves over me
Clapped their little hands in glee,
With one continuous sound ; —

A slumberous sound, a sound that brings
The feelings of a dream,
As of innumerable wings,
As, when a bell no longer swings,
Faint the hollow murmur rings
O'er meadow, lake, and stream.

And dreams of that which cannot die,
Bright visions, came to me,
As lapped in thought I used to lie.
And gaze into the summer sky,
Where the sailing clouds went by,
Like ships upon the sea ;

Dreams that the soul of youth engage
Ere Fancy has been quelled ;
Old legends of the monkish page,
Traditions of the saint and sage,
Tales that have the rime of age,
And chronicles of eld.

And, loving still these quaint old themes,
Even in the city's throng
I feel the freshness of the streams,
That, crossed by shades and sunny gleams,
Water the green land of dreams,
The holy land of song.

Therefore, at Pentecost, which brings
The Spring, clothed like a bride,
When nestling buds unfold their wings,
And bishop's-caps have golden rings,
Musing upon many things,
I sought the woodlands wide.

The green trees whispered low and mild ;
It was a sound of joy !
They were my playmates when a child,
And rocked me in their arms so wild !
Still they looked at me and smiled,
As if I were a boy ;

And ever whispered, mild and low,
"Come, be a child once more !"
And waved their long arms to and fro,
And beckoned solemnly and slow ;
Oh, I could not choose but go
Into the woodlands hoar, —

Into the blithe and breathing air,
Into the solemn wood,
Solemn and silent everywhere !
Nature with folded hands seemed there,
Kneeling at her evening prayer !
Like one in prayer I stood.

Before me rose an avenue
 Of tall and sombrous pines ;
 Abroad their fan-like branches grew,
 And, where the sunshine darted through,
 Spread a vapor soft and blue,
 In long and sloping lines.

And, falling on my weary brain,
 Like a fast-falling shower,
 The dreams of youth came back again, —
 Low lispings of the summer rain,
 Dropping on the ripened grain,
 As once upon the flower.

Visions of childhood ! Stay, oh, stay !
 Ye were so sweet and wild !
 And distant voices seemed to say,
 "It cannot be ! They pass away !
 Other themes demand thy lay ;
 Thou art no more a child !

"The land of Song within thee lies,
 Watered by living springs ;
 The lids of Fancy's sleepless eyes
 Are gat^{er} unto that Paradise ;
 Holy thoughts, like stars, arise ;
 Its clouds are angels' wings.

"Learn, that henceforth thy song shall be,
 Not mountains capped with snow,
 Nor forests sounding like the sea,
 Nor rivers flowing ceaselessly,
 Where the woodlands bend to see
 The bending heavens below.

"There is a forest where the din
 Of iron branches sounds !
 A mighty river roars between,
 And whosoever looks therein
 Sees the heavens all black with sin,
 Sees not its depths, nor bounds.

"Athwart the swinging branches cast,
 Soft rays of sunshine pour ;
 Then comes the fearful wintry blast ;
 Our hopes, like withered leaves, fall fast ;
 Pallid lips say, 'It is past !
 We can return no more !'

"Look, then, into thine heart, and write !
 Yes, into Life's deep stream !
 All forms of sorrow and delight,
 All solemn Voices of the Night,
 That can soothe thee, or affright, —
 Be these henceforth thy theme."

though small against the black,
small against the formless rocks,
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,
hell must open like a red rose
for the dead to pass.

✓ Oread

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

Sheltered Garden

I have had enough.
I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,
every foot-path leads at last
to the hill-crest—
then you retrace your steps,
or find the same slope on the other side,
precipitate.

I have had enough—
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp swish of a branch—
there is no scent of resin
in this place,
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,
aromatic, astringent—
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover
that wanted light—
pears wadded in cloth,
protected from the frost,
melons, almost ripe,
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling
to the empty branch?
All your coaxing will only make
a bitter fruit—
let them cling, ripen of themselves,
test their own worth,
nipped, shrivelled by the frost,
to fall at last but fair
with a russet coat.

Or the melon—
let it bleach yellow
in the winter light,
even tart to the taste—
it is better to taste of frost—
the exquisite frost—
than of wadding and of dead grass.

For this beauty,
beauty without strength,
chokes out life.
I want wind to break,
scatter these pink-stalks,
snap off their spiced heads,
fling them about with dead leaves—
spread the paths with twigs,
limbs broken off,
trail great pine branches,
hurled from some far wood
right across the melon-patch,
break pear and quince—
leave half-trees, torn, twisted
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden
to forget, to find a new beauty
in some terrible
wind-tortured place.

Sea Poppies

Amber husk
fluted with gold,
fruit on the sand
marked with a rich grain,

treasure
spilled near the shrub-pines
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root
among wet pebbles
and drift flung by the sea
and grated shells
and split conch-shells.

Beautiful, wide-spread,
fire upon leaf,
what meadow yields
so fragrant a leaf
as your bright leaf?

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough .

[First version: *Poetry*, 1913]

XXII

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

Now, in its
On the clear viol of her memory,
And makes a constant sacrament of praise.

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING
AT A BLACKBIRD

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
 And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
 But I know, too,
 That the blackbird is involved
 In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
 It marked the edge
 Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
 Flying in a green light,
 Even the bawds of euphony
 Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
 In a glass coach.
 Once, a fear pierced him,
 In that he mistook
 The shadow of his equipage
 For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
 The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

