

**GOLD,
FRANKINCENSE,
AND MYRRH.**

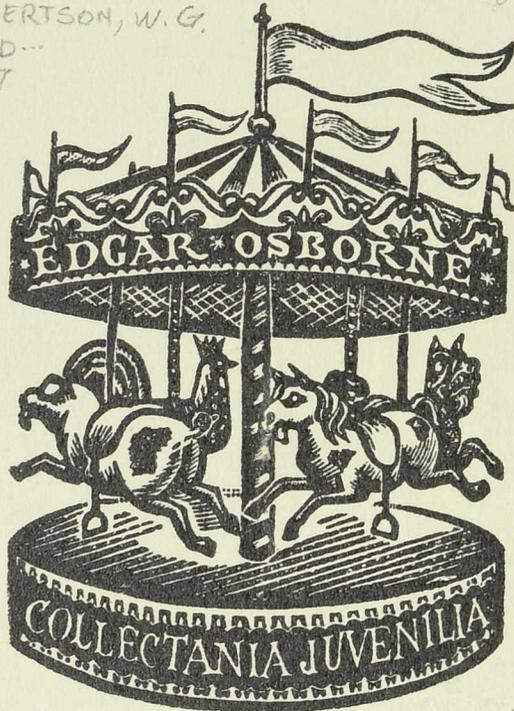
AND OTHER PAGEANTS.



W. GRAHAM ROBERTSON.

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GOLD, FRANKINCENSE,
AND MYRRH. AND
OTHER PAGEANTS ❀





THE WOMAN.

**GOLD, FRANK-
INCENSE, AND
MYRRH. AND OTHER
PAGEANTS FOR A BABY GIRL
BY W. GRAHAM ROBERTSON
WITH TWELVE DESIGNS IN
COLOUR BY THE AUTHOR.**



**LONDON JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
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DEDICATION

Have you forgotten it, Darling Dear?
Was it so far in the Long Ago
That the three great Kings in their crowns drew near,
Out of the dusk in the ember glow,
Seeking a Baby of only a year?
—Now you're a Woman of three, you know.

O Time, run softly yet for a while
Lest we lose a grain of your golden sand!
I may go with her a mile—a mile
As she fares in pageant through Wonderland,
Ruling her realm with an elfin smile,
Holding the world in a dimpled hand.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. THE WOMAN (Frontispiece)
2. STAR-LED
3. THE SONG OF THE GOLD
4. INTO THE NIGHT
5. BIRTHDAY GREETING
6. FALLEN SKIES
7. SUNSET ROSES
8. THE LORD OF THE GARDEN
9. THE FOLK IN GREEN
10. WISDOM OF THE WOODS
11. MOTHER ELDER
12. THE CALL OF DAWN

OVERTURE

THESE Plays were written for the Woman and for her entertainment performed, with the purpose of, in some measure, relieving the tedium of her first year upon this planet.

For the proper understanding of her Plays it must be known that the Woman lives—like all genuine Fairy-tale heroines—“in a little house on the edge of a wood.”

A tiny old farmhouse; a house of narrow winding stairs, of black rafters, and grey panelling full of mysterious cupboards and unexpected recesses; a happy-go-lucky inconsequent house where the cellar is in the dining-room and the library in the bread oven; a house with so little sense of responsibility that it is merely restrained by a staid and elderly chimney from tilting over head-first into the garden.

Outside, from a narrow brick terrace where stands an old well, steps lead down between stiff hedges of lavender

OVERTURE

into a little garden of bright flowers, set like a jewel among dark woods and rough meadow lands.

More lavender hedges surround it, and in its centre lies a tiny pool of water lilies, white, yellow, and pink, with a flower-twined dial rising from its midst.

And here are Rosemary and Boy's Love, Rue and Bergamot, and many a kindly herb of sweet old-world savour.

A summer garden to dream in; a garden to dream of in winter.

It is winter now. All the flowers are tucked comfortably away under their warm brown coverlet; the little pool is covered by a thin veil of ice through which some belated lily leaves make dim blurs of soft green.

Indoors in the old parlour we sit gravely before the fire; the Woman, Grandpa—I am known as Grandpa, a courtesy title—and Bob, a solemn sheep-dog who takes life seriously, having no tail to wag.

“Do you remember—long ago when you were young—” observed I to the Woman, “that garden all filled with flowers?”

The Woman was silent. No one knows what she remembers and what she forgets—and she never tells.

OVERTURE

“You should cultivate memories of that sort,” I went on. “Make a collection: they are far more amusing than books or pictures. I will give you a hint. If you can only think a smell really smellily—there you are. Shut your eyes and think hard of Southern Wood. Directly you get the smell right you are back in the summer garden with the fun all over again.”

The Woman looked intelligent.

“You might get a wonderful collection in time,” I resumed, pursuing the train of thought. “Take the case of Billy there.” I indicated one of the strange fauna of Toy Land lying blandly beside us on the rug. “His outside was evidently a cat once, and his inside is sheep’s wool. What a memory he must have of the moment when these apparently incongruous elements blended graciously into a grey monkey with bead teeth and a flannel tongue.”

“Ah,” said the Woman, rather struck by the idea.

“If I were to write you a little play,” I said gently, “setting forth the advantages of a good memory for pleasant things,—what would you say?”

“Damn,” said the Woman promptly and distinctly.

OVERTURE

The choice of language was perhaps unfortunate, but as this lurid monosyllable comprised the greater part of her vocabulary I felt able to accept it as encouragement.

“Very well,” I said, “you wait, and one of these nights—we’ll see.”

And one evening, not long afterwards, we saw.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

A TWELFTH NIGHT
PAGEANT FOR A
BABY GIRL ❀ ❀

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THE ANGEL OF THE STAR

KING CASPAR (*Holder of the Gold Casket of Happiness*)

KING MELCHIOR (*Holder of the Blue Casket of Dreams*)

KING BALTHAZAR (*Holder of the Green Casket of Memory*)

A HERALD

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

A TWELFTH NIGHT PAGEANT

[In the old kitchen of the farmhouse the small audience, the BABY in the midst, sits quietly round a great open hearth. Firelight fills the room with a dim glow and shadows dance mysteriously over the grey panelled walls and black rafters, while low windows gleam like jewels with the intense blue of an early winter twilight. At the further end of the room doors stand open showing a little stair leading to an upper chamber in complete darkness.]

It is the evening of the Epiphany.

Far in the distance voices begin the Song of the First Noel. The music draws nearer, and down the steps comes a HERALD in tabard of crimson and gold, holding a white wand in his hand. Voices sing softly as he speaks]

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

THE HERALD

Gentles, I pray you, of your courtesy,
You will a while endure our mummary.
Sooth it has reached you that a certain Star
In days of old drew Wise Men from afar,
And that it went before and led the way
To where, in Bethlehem, a Baby lay.
This then our matter is; that when each year
The days of Holy Christmas Tide draw near
Again out-shines the Star, the Wise Men come
Again to earth and visit every home
In gilded city or in pasture wild
That holds the presence of a little child.
This is our theme. I have no more to say;
So rise the Star and set we forth the Play.

[The HERALD stands aside. The singing voices ring out clearly in the third verse of the Ancient Carol, "They lookèd up and saw a Star."

In the darkness of the upper room appears a little moving light. It draws nearer and a tiny childish FIGURE, white-



STAR-LED.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

robed and star-crowned, descends the steps bearing in its hand a golden lamp.

The music dies away and the ANGEL speaks]

THE ANGEL

Long ago from the East I came,
Long ago on a Christmas morn.
A tiny taper of starry flame,
A little light that was not the dawn,
Came and beckoned to point the way
Over the place where the Young Child lay.

The stars were hiding their shining eyes,
They shrank in shadows of cloudy hair;
The wondering moon forgot to rise,
I hung alone in the empty air,
Peeping down through the woven hay,
Over the place where the Young Child lay.

Long ago was that Christmas night,
Yet rise I still on a birthday morn;

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

Telling of hope and sweet delight,
Of grief forgotten and joys new-born;
Beacon flame in the kindling skies
Over the place where a young child lies.

[The ANGEL pauses, listening with uplifted finger. In the distance, but rapidly drawing nearer, Three Voices sing the Carol "Kings of Orient." The music is close at hand—then ceases. Out of the darkness Voices call]

A VOICE

Whither, O Star? We walk in blackest night!

THE ANGEL

Follow my Light.

A VOICE

Ever we follow and our guide obey.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

THE ANGEL

This way! This way!

A VOICE

Star, wherefore linger you? What is your will?

THE ANGEL

Here stand I still.

[Enter, down the steps, KING CASPAR bearing a golden casket. His robes are golden and shine with many jewels. On his head is a golden crown]

CASPAR

Out of the Past we come, our way retracing;
A down the steps of Time our feet are pacing.
Lo! Past and Present meeting and embracing.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

[*Enter KING MELCHIOR bearing a casket of lapis lazuli.
His robes are blue and a blue mantle covers his head*]

MELCHIOR

Out of the Past we come with lore of learning ;
We who have seen the Christmas planet burning,
Now, when men's hearts are to that Christmas turning.

[*Enter KING BALTHAZAR bearing a casket of jade and
chrysoptase. His robe is green and he is crowned with
leaves*]

BALTHAZAR

Out of the Past, the Star before us going,
To every Child, its first fair Yule Tide knowing,
On the Twelfth Day we come, our gifts bestowing.

[*The THREE MAGI sink to their knees before the Star, and
stretching their hands to it, speak all together*]

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

THE THREE MAGI

Herald of Joy, O Halcyon!
Harbinger of the Sun and Spring!
Where is the babe we wait upon?
Magic gifts in our hands we bring.
Wonderful gifts we bring to her,
Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh!

[*The ANGEL steps forward. The MAGI rise*]

THE ANGEL

Speak the Spell of the Gifts of Might
One by one while I hold the light.

[*KING CASPAR steps to the side of the ANGEL*]

CASPAR

First come I, King Caspar hight.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

THE ANGEL

[*leading the KING up to the BABY*]

This is the Song of the Gold,
The Hoard that the Fairies hold;
That their delicate hands have spun
From the beams of the molten sun;
That never is bought or sold.
Hear the Song of the Gold!

[*KING CASPAR opens his casket and takes from it a tiny
golden key*]

CASPAR

Know you the Bridge of the Rainbow?
The Arch that flushes and glows,
A pathway bright through the Infinite
To the Land that Nobody Knows?
Where the great span lights from the utmost heights
Whence the fairy flights unfold,
At the foot of the stair you may find it there,
The Treasure of Rainbow Gold.



THE SONG OF THE GOLD.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

What is the gold of the Rainbow?
The liquid light in the air,
The yellow hoard of the sunset poured
Out from the everywhere.
Over the rim of the mountain dim
We catch the gleam from afar,
Apples of gold that shine as of old
At the Gate of the Evening Star.

This is the gold of the Rainbow.
The fire-decked Marigold,
The splendid dower of the tall Sunflower
Enshrined and aureoled.
Manifold are the stores of gold
On earth and in sky above,
All held in fee for who finds the Key,
And the name of the Key is Love.

Who wins the gold of the Rainbow?
Few gather a single ray;
In care and sorrow we seek to-morrow
To find it—yesterday.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

But be yours the key of the Treasury
That you enter in and possess,
For ever to hold the Rainbow Gold
Which men call—Happiness.

[KING CASPAR *lays down the golden key and retires*]

THE ANGEL

[*with hands outstretched over the key*]

Rainbow Gold be yours galore,
The First of the Fairy Gifts in store.

[KING MELCHIOR *steps to the ANGEL's side. The room
fills with a strange fragrance*]

MELCHIOR

Next come I, King Melchior.

THE ANGEL

[*leading the KING forward*]

Sing of the Frankincense,
When the odorous cloud grows dense,

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

When broods o'er the scented gloom
The spirit of all perfume.
Worship and reverence
Is the Song of the Frankincense.

[KING MELCHIOR *opens his casket. From it rises a thin, blue stream of fragrant smoke which spreads veil-like before his face*]

MELCHIOR

Perfume clouds that rise and cling,
Sweet, intense,
Mystical burnt-offering,
Frankincense!

Wrap us round in magic shade
Faint and blue.
Of such fabric dreams are made
False and true.

Through the mist-wreath thin and frail
Stretch your hand.
See, where lies beyond the veil
Wonderland,

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

Land unpeopled, unexplored.

Fare we on

To the throne where sits the lord

Oberon.

Look within his eyes a while,

Touch his feet,

You will see the Dream King's smile

Slow and sweet.

So may he, at our behest

Bending down,

On your brow a moment rest

Dream Land's Crown.

Thus shall be the Spell of Might

Wrought for you.

Evermore your dreams be bright!

All come true!

[Out of the blue casket he takes sweet gums and scented woods and, laying them before the BABY, retires]

THE ANGEL

Three the Gifts of the Magers are.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

[KING BALTHAZAR *comes to the ANGEL's side*]

BALTHAZAR

At your call, O Lord of the Star,
Last I come, King Balthazar.

THE ANGEL

[*bringing BALTHAZAR to the BABY*]

This is the Song of the Myrrh
When soft south breezes stir
A breath from the groves of spice
In the fields of Paradise,
Of Musk and of Lavender.
Hear the Song of the Myrrh.

[KING BALTHAZAR *opens his casket and takes from it a
store of rosemary and other sweet herbs*]

BALTHAZAR

Come down to the garden of spices
When summer winds blow,

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

Where the herbs with their old-world devices
Stand quaintly arow,
Where the scent of the Southern Wood lingers,
Where grey grows the Rue,
And Lavender's delicate fingers
Wave kisses to you.

In the little green world of sweet fancies,
The fay haunted close,
Gold eyes of the dark-hooded pansies
Smile back to the rose.

In the pool, where the clouds and the lilies
Entwiningly lie,
Fleet fish wander whither their will is
Through tracts of the sky.

Little Queen of the Bower, by your favour,
Remember it long.
May your heart ever garner its savour,
Hear ever its song.

With the glow of a sun-laden hour,
The flash of a wing,
The scent of a leaf or a flower
Comes Childhood and Spring.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

In the days when the Child-heart must harden
 With knowledge and pain
You will always come back to your Garden,
 Your Dreamland again.
Though cares of the world come in legion,
 Yours still be the boon,
The song of the Blue Bird, the Region
 Laid West of the Moon.

Sweet hedges enclose and conceal it
 Lest Grief draw a-near!
Not a sound of a sigh must reveal it,
 No trace of a tear.
With never a thought of the morrow
 Be cloudless your blue,
Lest for Memory sweet we plant Sorrow,
 For Rosemary Rue.

*[He lays down a bunch of sweet herbs, then moves back
to his companions.]*

The Three solemnly advance together]

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

CASPAR

Into the dark from whence we came,
Into the night of the long ago
Pass we soon, but to-day we claim
To walk the world and our gifts bestow,
Bearing now, as we bore of old,
Frankincense and Myrrh and Gold.

MELCHIOR

Joy's fair garment of golden beams,
(These are the gifts we leave with her.)
The cloudy robe of the Lord of Dreams,
Memory's mantle sweet with Myrrh.
Give we in love and in reverence
Gold and Myrrh and Frankincense.

BALTHAZAR

Hark, we are called and may not abide.
Our Twelfth Night Pageant is but begun.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

Of all the babies at Christmas tide
We carry the Gifts to every one,
Bringing to each as we bring to her
Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh.

THE ANGEL [*standing by the stair*]

Short grows our time below.

CASPAR [*passing out*]

We go.

THE ANGEL

Onward while holds the spell!

MELCHIOR [*passing out*]

Farewell.

THE ANGEL

Needs must we now be gone!

BALTHAZAR [*passing out*]

Lead on.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

[The ANGEL slowly mounts the steps, then pauses]

THE ANGEL

In the flush of the waking sky

Fade I.

I cover my waning light.

[blows out lamp]

Good night!

[disappears into the darkness.]

The HERALD comes forward and takes his stand upon the stair]

THE HERALD

Gentles, our task is done, but, lest you fear
This troop of antic Masquers gathered here,
Learn that these Kings and Angels are but show,
Pale shadows falling from the Long-ago
With glint of gold and breath of withered spice;
A painted arras wrought in quaint device,
Such fabric as the Fays of Fancy weave
To deck the enchanted halls of Make-believe.



INTO THE NIGHT.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

To-night the Star flame kindled as of old,
Our Kings fared bravely in their crowns of gold,
But now the play is done, so ends their reign,
And pass the Three to Shadowland again.

[The HERALD mounts the steps and disappears, throwing open the outer door as he goes.

The upper chamber fills with dim blue twilight.

Music sounds and the THREE KINGS, Star-led, move slowly across.

Bearing their Caskets aloft and softly singing, they pass out of the house into the night, their voices dying away in the darkness]

THE END.

ENTR'ACTE

"TAKE a rest," I said. The Woman was posing to me in a dressy white pelisse, the glories of which slightly overweighted her.

She drew a breath of relief and intimated a desire to make a tour of the studio, so, with due regard to her chiffon, I raised her, and together we inspected various pictures, coming to a stand before her own portrait.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Woman, as one who would say, "Velasquez? Pooh!" "Ah-h-h!"

"I'm very glad you think so," I rejoined, much flattered. "Unfortunately, I cannot entirely agree with you. It isn't just what I want. Oh, don't you wish," I continued, warming to the subject, "don't you wish we could always get just what we want?"

ENTR'ACTE

The Woman looked quickly at me with an expression of consummate artfulness, and tried—but too late—to suppress a self-conscious giggle.

“Ah!” I replied. “Well, yes—I suppose you do mostly. But I mean *always*, and with no trouble. Just to wish, and a Beautiful Fairy appears, and—there you are—pop! For instance, what do you like best in the world?”

“B-b-b——” began the Woman slowly.

“Nonsense,” I interrupted. “I wonder at your mentioning it! And you couldn't ask a Beautiful Fairy for a—bottle! No respectable Fairy would have such a thing about her. Now, putting that aside, what do you like best?”

“Ga-a,” said the Woman, after reflection.

“Grapes? Come, that's better. Grapes and——?”

“'Nanyas,” said the Woman, with a gigantic effort of elocution.

“Bananas? Exactly. Well, suppose you could at any time merely wish, and a Beautiful Fairy would present you with more grapes and bananas than you could put in a—a—a soup tureen!” I concluded rather lamely, at a loss for a more striking symbol of immensity.

ENTR'ACTE

“ Ah! ” said the Woman.

“ Ah, indeed, ” I said; and we gazed gravely at each other.

“ Or a Wishing Well, now, ” I resumed. “ That's a charming property. No gentleman's estate should be without one. ”

The Woman assented.

“ Well, look here, ” I cried in a burst of generosity, “ I'll give you a Wishing Well for your Birthday, and you shall be present at the opening ceremony. What do you say to that? ”

The Woman butted me violently in the face with the top of her head, her accepted equivalent for a warm embrace.

“ Then you may regard the thing as settled, ” I said, rubbing my nose. “ Now, take the pose again, please. —No, no, not that broad grin! This is the soulful, 'trailing clouds of glory' picture. That's better. Now then. ”

And the sitting was resumed.

THE WISHING WELL

A BIRTHDAY PAGEANT
FOR A YEAR-OLD WOMAN

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

THE QUEEN OF THE BLUEBELLS (*Spirit of the East*)

THE FAIRY OF THE MEADOWS (*Spirit of the South*)

THE LADY OF THE SUNSET (*Spirit of the West*)

THE POLE STAR (*Spirit of the North*)

A FAIRY HERALD

AND

LOVE

THE ARGUMENT

O, Water Lily!
Come you a-greeting
Our year-old sweeting
With kisses chilly?

Deep Well of Wishes,
Blue waters brimming
Where dreams are swimming
Like golden fishes!

Though bright her bower,
Though Fairy-haunted,
Our maid enchanted
Lacks yet a flower.

The light clouds sever—
Soft wings close round her;
Lo, Love has found her,
To leave her never.

THE WISHING WELL

A BIRTHDAY PAGEANT FOR A YEAR-OLD WOMAN

[On the morning of the BABY'S first Birthday she and her train are again seated in the old farm kitchen.

A horn sounds faintly without, the panel doors open and a HERALD enters. He bows to the company and speaks]

THE HERALD

Kind greeting, friends, to all. Oyez! Oyez!
Our 'good Queen's birth we celebrate to-day.
One year ago this little Queen of ours
Came from the Nowhere to this land of flowers;
And round her throng the Fairies of the bower,
Doffing their caps of darkness for an hour,
For on this holy day of happy birth
They of the Air may walk with men of Earth.

THE WISHING WELL

Come forth and speak with Spirits face to face,
Talk with the streams and all the flowery race;
Seen and Unseen alike this day rejoice;
The Winds have speech and Waters find a voice.

[The HERALD steps out upon the terrace. The spectators follow and stand looking down into the lower garden.

The sun-dial has vanished from its pedestal in the midst of the lily pool, and in its place a little Figure is standing in glittering garments which sparkle like falling waters. Round the pool the garden is gay with flowers, and from it four narrow paths diverge, North, South, East and West]

THE HERALD

Behold where, risen from her waters cool,
Expectant stands the Fairy of the Pool.
She waits a Birthday greeting to bestow,
And for your joy new pageantries to show.
If you will hear her, come, descend with me,
But, lest the Vision vanish, silent be.



BIRTHDAY GREETING.

THE WISHING WELL

[The BABY and her train pass down the steps, between hedges of Lavender, led by the HERALD. The glittering figure is seen to be a little WATER FAIRY in shining vesture of blue and opal, crowned with water lilies and holding in her hand a rainbow shell.

Smilingly she stretches out her hand to the BABY and softly speaks]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Maiden whom we greet,
For Joy's kisses meet,
Now a year has run
Since you saw the sun.
Tell me—is it sweet?

Child of sunny days,
O'er my water-ways
Lean, and see your face
In an azure space
Where the sunlight plays.

Blue eyes, grave and deep,
Through the lilies peep,

THE WISHING WELL

Full of summer skies;
Happy, kindly eyes
Never meant to weep.

Lilies round them cling
Floating in a ring.
Little clouds float too,
Blossoms of the blue,
Lilies on the wing.

Through my shining glass
Little clouds must pass,
Little sorrows fly;
Such a tiny sigh!
Such a small 'alas'!

Scarce a drop of rain
Can such clouds contain.
These are but the white
Shadows of delight;
Skies are blue again.

[She hands the little shell to the BABY and is silent]

THE WISHING WELL

THE HERALD

O Lily of the Waters, speak the spell
That lifts a veil from the Invisible.
Now is the hour propitious, and I hear
The Four Great Powers of the Air draw near.
From the four winds they come and gather round,
Standing within your garden's narrow bound,
Your little land of lavender and musk,
Dread Rulers of the dawnlight and the dusk.

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

This is the appointed place and this the hour.
Peace, while I speak the words of mystic power.

[She turns to the East, holding out her hands in conjuration]

Winds blow fresh; the day is breaking,
Life within my garden waking.
Dusk and Dawn, one moment meeting,
Wave the world a golden greeting.
Spirit of the East, appear!

THE WISHING WELL

[*The HERALD sounds his trumpet*]

A VOICE FROM THE EAST

I am here.

[A Figure is seen moving through the wood between the grey willow stems. As it draws nearer and steps from the wood into the garden it is seen to be a bright-haired CHILD robed in deep blue. Her head is wreathed with bluebells and from her shoulders falls a long blue mantle.

She advances along the Eastern path, pausing beside the pool]

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

Blue along the alley-ways, blue in the meadow!
The blue sky is falling; run and tell the King!
Blue as a mist wreath, as a blue cloud shadow,
Hangs the chime of bluebells ringing out the Spring.

Up along the wild wood is the blue flood flowing,
Sweet sapphire wavelets breaking at your feet.



FALLEN SKIES.

THE WISHING WELL

Up from the sunrise in the warm East glowing
Come I with the bluebells the Birthday Queen to greet.

Ring the knell of Primrose, her fair face fading
Sinks away drowning deep beneath the blue.
Toll we for the Violet, her secret bower invading,
Brimming brake and hollow up with heaven's own hue.

Sweet Spring's a-dreaming summer dreams of pleasure.
Blue flowers of Dreamland blossom in her wreath.
Through her green woodlands she treads a track of azure,
Blue skies hung over her, blue seas beneath.

Blue Bird of Dreamland, your sweet tones trilling
Call Summer Spring-ward down the way of blue.
Wake, Maiden Dreamer, at the dream's fulfilling,
At blossom of the bluebell—when dreams come true.

*[She lays down her offering of flowers and stands silent.
The FAIRY OF THE POOL turns to the South with extended
arms]*

THE WISHING WELL

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Winds blow softly, faint with sweetness
In the hour of day's completeness.
From fair pastures golden gleaming,
In the noonlight laid a-dreaming,
Spirit of the South, appear!

[The HERALD sounds his trumpet]

A VOICE FROM THE SOUTH

I am here.

[Up the steps from the meadow a GIRL advances in array of glistening green. A crown of field flowers is on her head and her hands are full of thyme and blossoming grasses.

[She moves along the Southern path, pausing by the pool]

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

Up from the hay fields I
In the calm of a breathless day.

THE WISHING WELL

At lilt of the noontide's lullaby
The bright-winged hours forget to fly.
Hush, never wake him. Let him lie.
Time's asleep in the hay.

Sleep at the noonday chime
'Neath the sun's great oriflamme.
Sound and scent are a pulsing rhyme,
Sweet of the hay at its odorous prime,
Sweet of the clover, sweet of the thyme,
Sweet of the marjoram.

Up from the pasture vale
What are the gifts I bring?
Farewell song of the nightingale,
Snowy milk a-foam in the pail,
Golden corn sheaves fain for the flail,
Ripe for the harvesting.

Up from the meadows I,
And a breath of the South with me;
Seeking you from the lands that lie
Where blue of the weald meets blue of the sky,
There where the great downs watch from on high
Over the purple sea.

THE WISHING WELL

[She offers her flowers and stands silent. The FAIRY OF THE POOL turns to the West]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Winds blow low; the day reposes
On a bed of crimson roses.
Rest, dear sun, your prowess proven;
Draw the curtains poppy-woven.
Spirit of the West, appear!

[A long trumpet note from the HERALD]

A VOICE FROM THE WEST

I am here.

[Down steps from the West comes a beautiful GIRL in raiment of rose colour. Round her float cloudy veils of rose and amber, and her red gold hair flows from under a wreath of roses. Along the Western path she comes, holding out a red rose]

THE WISHING WELL

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

Look for me at the hour of rest
From your little window out to the West ;
For far in the West my gardens grow,
Where magical roses stand in a row,
Stretched along in a crimson bar
To strew a path for the Evening Star.
When bed-time comes, at the long day's close,
Out of the West I bring you a rose
 Where the wonderful gardens lie ;
When the red sun flames like a burning brand
I bring you roses from Sunset Land,
 Out of the Hush-a-bye.

And the red of the rose will wrap you round
Like a haunting scent, like a rhythmic sound ;
And the flame of the rose will fall like rain
Soaking through to the drowsy brain ;
Till you lie at the heart of a folded rose
And a red rose-bower yon chamber grows ;
Till colour and scent and sound are one,
A rose-red song from the sinking sun

THE WISHING WELL

At brink of the Dream World's strand;
Till the Ship of Dreams with its sails a-swing
Puts out to you from the sun-setting,
Out of the Lullaby Land.

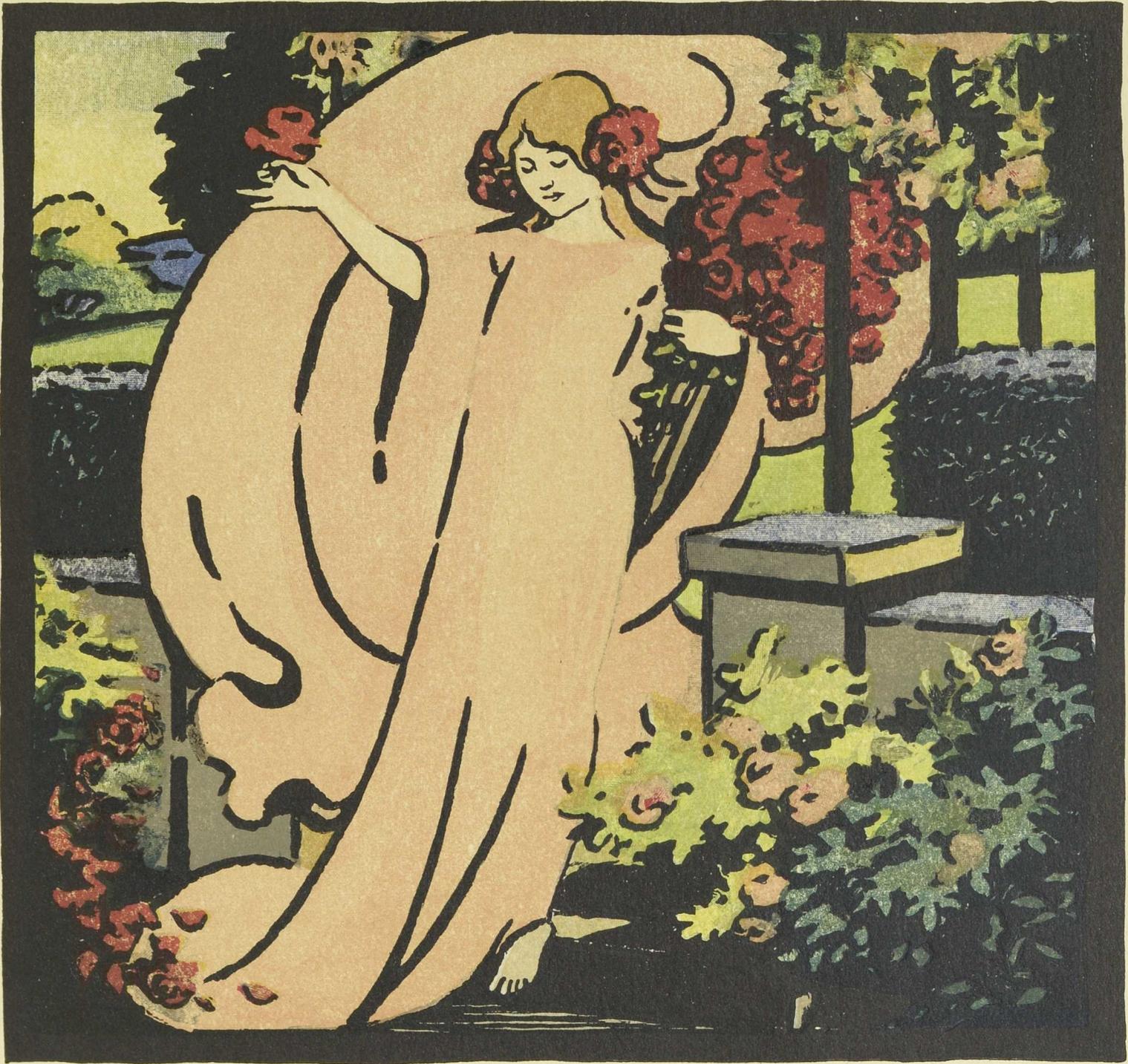
[Bending over the BABY she gives her a red rose; then stands silent.]

The FAIRY OF THE POOL turns to the North and speaks slowly and softly]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Winds be hushed. No bird is calling.
From the stars a silence falling
Sheds deep sleep on tree and flower.
Watcher of the Darkest Hour,
Spirit of the North, appear!

[The HERALD blows a long solemn note]



SUN-SET ROSES.

THE WISHING WELL

A VOICE FROM THE NORTH

I am here.

[Down the long stairway from the North a tall Figure moves slowly. His robes are of dull silver veiled with black and showing beneath them tarnished silver armour. In his hand is a long silver staff surmounted by a star within a circle. His long grey hair falls from under a helmet of stars]

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTHERN STAR

Ashes of sunset, fading roses,
Falling twilight over the land,
The dim blue door of the night uncloses,
The Stars leap forth in a joyous band,
With glimmering feet in rhythmic paces
They weave a dance through the windy spaces.
Motionless in their midst I stand.

I am the Watchman, watching ever,
Sentinel of the Sleepless Eye;
While the circling dancers join and sever
I keep the way of the Northern sky.

THE WISHING WELL

Though the golden revel is round me swinging,
Though clouds are whirling, though winds are singing
And all else dances, yet dance not I.

Anchored I lie, a lonely eyot
On waveless waters where lilies are.
Calm and still in the restless riot
Watches for ever my steadfast Star;
Midst glittering shoals in circles swaying,
Fleet golden fish in the deep pool playing,
My pale light floats like a nenuphar.

Too grave my song for our little maiden,
Sung too low in a minor key.
Her heart, with roses and sunbeams laden,
Has yet no room for the night and me;
But, Child of the North, she knows the glamour
Of mystic stars and, through Time's rude clamour,
She feels the Hush of Eternity.

What may I bring for a birthday greeting?
How in this Pageant play my part

THE WISHING WELL

Where East and West and South are meeting,
Weaving you garlands with delicate art?
Yet, Northern Child, from your Star inherit
The great sky's Silence, the quiet Spirit,
The watchful eye and the faithful heart.

[He stands silently by the pool.]

The FAIRY, with gestures of welcome, addresses the FOUR SPIRITS]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Spirits, all hail! Well met in happy hour.
My little Lady with rich gifts you dower.
Since last the young Spring ripened into May
Our Garden Queen has reigned a year to-day;
And we, leal subjects to her sovereignty,
The Flower, the Bird, the Butterfly and Bee,
All love her, and would give her of our best.
Great Spirits, hearken then to my request.
Put forth your power and charm me where I stand,
That I, the Ocean of her little Land,

THE WISHING WELL

May in her baby vision ever seem
A Lake of Mystery, an Enchanted Stream,
A Well of Wishes from whose cool recess
Each day floats up a tiny Happiness,
Some small hope satisfied, some dream come true,
Some simple joy that lights the world anew.
Here may she mirrored find all sweet delights,
Fair wraiths of sunny days and silver nights,
And in my mimic heaven may ever trace
The radiant image of a smiling face.

[The SPIRITS gaze at each other, then gravely nod approval]

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

Have then your wish, O Lily of the Stream.

*[The SPIRITS step forward one by one and each appears
to cast something into the pool]*

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

Youth!

THE WISHING WELL

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

Beauty!

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

Happiness!

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

A Star-lit Dream!

Tread we the magic circle in and out
And weave the enclosing spell. About! About!

[The SPIRITS pass slowly round the pool speaking in unison]

THE FOUR SPIRITS

Weave the charm from North to South,
Weave the charm from East to West.
Speak the spell from mouth to mouth,
Mystery made manifest.
Round about the Fairy Well
Weave the charm and speak the spell.

THE WISHING WELL

[The SPIRITS raise a long chain of flowers and, all holding it, form a circle round the pool]

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

Weave it of bluebells and anemones,
Faint sunrise and the freshness of the breeze.

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

Of Joy and Laughter weave the fabric fair,
Of heavy perfume and of golden air.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

Weave it of fading rose and asphodel
And shadows gathered at the twilight bell.

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

Weave it of Silence, Midnight's Mystery,
And pale stars mirrored in a sleeping sea.

THE WISHING WELL

[They hold up the chain above their heads]

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

It holds!

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

It holds!

[The chain parts at the West]

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

It snaps! The thread is broken!
Our toil is vain; in vain the charm is spoken.
All's vain.

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Once more, kind Spirits, I implore.
Attempt the fair enchantment yet once more.

THE WISHING WELL

Some rite neglected or some rune unread
Mars all and leaves the work unperfected.

*[The SPIRITS unite the broken halves of the chain and
again raise it]*

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

I bind it fast. My silver threads are long.

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

I bind it fast. My golden links are strong.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

I bind it fast. My rose chain will not sever.

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

My iron manacles endure for ever.

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

It holds !

THE WISHING WELL

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

It holds!

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

It holds!

[The chain parts at the North]

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

It breaks!

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Alas!

What may we do? The magic hour will pass,
The day of promise darken to the West,
The babe ungifted and the pool unblest.

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

Alas, poor Fairy! All our lore is naught,
The labour vain, the miracle unwrought,

THE WISHING WELL

Missing the essential spell, the consummation,
The Magic Wonder Stone of Transmutation;
And, like the baffled alchemists of old,
We lack a charm to turn the world to gold.

[A pause. The FAIRY OF THE POOL stands sadly with drooping head. Suddenly raising her face she extends her arms and speaks eagerly and quickly]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Mighty Power, whose Presence failing
All our toil is unavailing,
Every charm, thy influence needing,
Fruitless blossom, barren seeding,
Hear and aid us, by the token
Of thine Unknown Name evoken.
Lord of Mysteries, appear!

[The HERALD blows a long note]

A VOICE

I am here.

THE WISHING WELL

[Down the steps a small Figure advances. He is robed in crimson, and a mantle of crimson and gold lined with purple falls from his shoulders. He is winged with peacock plumes, and on his head is a golden crown wreathed with roses.]

At the entrance to the garden he pauses and raises his hands in benediction]

LOVE

Swiftly I come, though late for me you call,
I who am First and Last and All in All.
What charm may influence, what spell may move?
What may all else avail you lacking Love?

*[He comes into the garden and addresses each SPIRIT
in turn]*

For without me the roses are not red,
The sunless meadows weep un comforted,
Trampled by heedless feet the bluebells die,
And not a star peeps through the shrouded sky.

THE WISHING WELL

For I was Lord before the world was born,
Or ever bloomed the flowers, or waved the corn,
Before the sun put on his aureole,
Or needle pointed to the mystic Pole.

[*The FOUR SPIRITS kneel in obeisance*]

Lay now your broken wreath between my hands
And let Love's self knit up the severed strands.

[*He lays his hands upon the chain held by the SPIRIT OF
THE EAST*]

Sweet Seed of Love blown from the gates of morn.

[*He touches the chain at the South*]

Fair Flower of Love from seed of sunrise born.

[*He touches the Western garland*]

Red Heart of Love, the Mystic Rose supernal.



THE LORD OF THE GARDEN.

THE WISHING WELL

[He turns to the North]

Love strong and true and as the stars eternal.

[The SPIRITS raise the chain on high]

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

It holds!

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

It holds!

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

It holds!

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

It holds! 'Tis done!

The charm is woven and the day is won!

THE WISHING WELL

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Hail, Mighty Lord; upon my waters blest
The shadow of your wings will ever rest.
Thanks for my Lady. See—each baby wish
Glides in the semblance of a golden fish!

LOVE

Yea, at her feet the sun's bold splendours lie
And all the lesser jewels of the sky,
While, as a lamp within your waters lit,
The moon is hers if she would cry for it.

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

Pardon us, Lord, who for a while forgot
That, lacking you, our powers avail us not.

THE SPIRIT OF THE EAST

Pardon, great Love-Lord.

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOUTH

Pardon, Mighty One.

THE WISHING WELL

THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

Pardon us—and farewell. Our task is done.

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

The Fairy Hour has struck. Our comrades call.

THE FOUR SPIRITS

Passing, we hail you, Love, the Lord of All!

[The FOUR SPIRITS wander away into the fields and woods; the FAIRY OF THE POOL passes along her little waterway and disappears among the willows. The HERALD retires.]

LOVE stands quietly looking at the BABY and holding in his hands an apple branch laden with pink blossom. At length, with a smile, he speaks]

LOVE

Does a memory wake as you view me?

Here stand I confest.

THE WISHING WELL

In the No-where but lately you knew me,
My Heart was your nest.
Fear me not, little maid; let me still be
Your playmate and friend;
I, the Was and the Is and the Will be,
The World without end.

While incense clouds rise to me striving
Man's pardon to win,
What may I know of shrift or of shriving
Who know not of sin?
Take my gifts of the sun and the summers;
Nay, count not the cost!
My portal is wide for all comers,
My Eden unlost.

*[He gently places the blossoming apple branch in the
BABY'S hands, and slowly moves away into the wood,
speaking as he goes]*

Little Eve, not a fruit is forbidden;
No knowledge of Me.

THE WISHING WELL

Take, eat of my Apples unhidden,
The Fruit of the Tree;
For sheathed is the sword of its Warden,
Unkept is the Way,
And God walks again in His Garden
At cool of the day.

*[The little Figure disappears among the trees, the last words
coming faintly out of the shadows. The voice ceases]*

THE END

ENTR'ACTE

I had adroitly removed the Woman from her following and had retired with her into the Willow Wood to enjoy a quiet talk. But the Woman would not talk.

I introduced subject after subject in vain; she still regarded me with a grave stare of deep inattention.

"Ba," she said in a bored, listless voice. "Ba-a."

"Not at all!" I retorted, rather huffily. "I don't believe you have taken in a single word I've been saying." And certainly her thoughts seemed far away. She was gazing over my shoulder into the wood with the greatest interest, apparently on the best of terms with some person or persons invisible to me.

"Who's your friend?" I asked sharply, for no one likes to be entirely ignored, and there was an eeriness about her proceedings of which I could not approve.

The Woman screwed up her mouth in an odd way and looked so impish that my suspicions were redoubled.

"I'll trouble you to introduce me," I said sternly.

ENTR'ACTE

“Here am I doing my best on your account to keep this place respectable—at considerable personal inconvenience and the sacrifice of a good three-quarters of my acquaintance—and here you are nodding and smiling and generally ‘going on’ for the benefit of people so unpresentable that one cannot even see them. Do you know how dangerous a thing it is to move in this sort of society? How would you like never to see your home again?”

The Woman reflected, then smiled a fat, comfortable smile.

“——Never to see Grandpa again?” I continued, a note of quiet pathos in my voice.

The Woman positively beamed.

“——Never to see Bob again?”

The Woman’s face lengthened perceptibly.

“*Never* to see Bob again,” I insisted, pursuing my advantage. “Never again to push your fist all the way down his throat! Never again to ascertain beyond all doubt that he really has no tail!”

Alas, I had been too eloquent; the blue eyes brimmed, the Woman was on the verge of tears! “Don’t! Don’t!” I exclaimed hastily. “Please don’t! Bob! For goodness sake—Bob!”

ENTR'ACTE

Bob, in the character of under-nurse, advanced wrinkling his black nose in a pleasant smile and gyrating slowly round us in a series of ingratiating gambols. The cloud lifted—we were saved. The Woman smiled again.

“So that’s all right,” I said, much relieved. “But nevertheless I will put before you a play in which shall be set forth the dangers of too great intimacy with the Little Green People.”

The Woman nearly had a relapse.

“Well, look here then,” I said. “We will compromise. There shall be a play, but a moonlight play; a play that cannot be played until you are in bed. A play that you will not be awake to see. Will that suit you?”

And this scheme, meeting with approval, was accordingly carried out.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A WARNING TO ALL BABIES
AND TO ONE ESPECIALLY

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

OBERON, KING OF FAERIE

THE WISE FAIRY

THE DISCONTENTED FAIRY

FAIRIES OF OBERON'S COURT

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

MOTHER ELDER

VOICES

THE VOICE OF THE WIND

THE VOICE OF THE EARTH

THE VOICE OF THE MOON

A WOMAN'S VOICE

THE PIPES OF PAN

THE ARGUMENT

The sun sank down on the hazel coppice,
Passed in pomp to his fiery bed,
And my garden's glory of joy-bright poppies
Flamed like a beacon burning red.

The moon swam up through the hazel coppice,
Sailing clear of the wind-strewn wrack ;
By her light I looked for my flame-red poppies—
Each crimson poppy was turned to black.

And tear-wan blooms in the moonbeams chilly
Glimmered in radiance far and wide ;
A starry taper seemed every lily,
Like sorrowful souls new-glorified.

* * * * *

Ah, little Sunflower, sunward turning,
Walk not yet in the night's demesne.
Sleep till the lamp of the East is burning,
And leave the moon to the Folk in Green.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[As the audience takes its place by the terrace of the little farmhouse a distant bell tolls midnight. It is the Eve of Midsummer. All is very quiet, no wind stirs in the trees, and the folded flowers sleep under the midsummer moon. The air is full of heavy scents and the many sounds of silence. Softly into the stillness creeps a thin stream of melody, fitful and intermittent, of falling cadences and strange intervals—the pipe of Pan playing in the midnight woods. The flowers sleep—the moon shines—the pipe plays on.]

Suddenly a wind sways the boughs of the hazel tree, the leaves whisper and flutter, and out of their rustling is born a voice]

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A VOICE

Pan! Pan!

Bid your pipe for a while be still.

Give ear.

Do the lords of the Faerie clan

Draw near?

Floats their song from the hill?

[A pause. The piping ceases]

THE VOICE

I am the voice of the Midnight Wind,
And my wings are heavy with sound to-night,
With songs low lilted and whisperings;
Sighing echoes but half defined,
Viewless voices and laughter light,
Hurry and stir of Unseen Things.

For into the night is Wonder born,
A nameless Magic that moves in me,
A breeze from the Gates of Faerie blown.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

I scarce can ruffle the tender corn
So heavy my wings with Mystery,
While Nature waits for the Thing Unknown.

[A silence. The woodland pipe again begins its low monotonous tune.]

A deep VOICE speaks softly from below]

THE VOICE

Pan! Pan!

Cease your piping a while.

Listen.

Heard you the feet that ran?

Glisten

Pale lights in your shadowy aisle?

[A pause. The piping ceases]

THE VOICE

I am the Voice of the Earth,
Man's first mother, the Mould.
The flowers sleep at my breast.
I am worn with burden of birth,
I am weary and brown and old,
But to-night I cannot rest.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

So fair is the night, so fair
That I call upon sleep in vain,
So strongly my pulses beat.
Each breath of the haunted air
Throbs low to a strange refrain,
To an echo of dancing feet.

And the dead Spring stirs in me ;
A flower of my vernal prime
From the dust of my eld is sprung ;
For I hear it—the melody,
The song of the golden time
When old Mother Earth was young.

*[A silence. Again begins the soft piping. A thin clear
VOICE falls from above, where the moon hangs among the
pear-tree branches]*

THE VOICE

O Wind! O Earth! O Pan!
Cease ye all for a while.

Hearken.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Does shadow of mortal man
Darken
The track of my silver smile?

[A pause. The piping ceases]

THE VOICE

There was a Witch of Thessaly,
That evil land of the Over Wise,
By rites unhallowed and sorcery
She drew the Moon from the skies.
As a bird of the air in a fowler's snare
I fell to earth in a darkling swoon,
Quenched at her will like a cresset's flare.
—I am the Voice of the Moon.

And that summoning spell again I hear,
But to earth I sink with a smiling mien,
For I know the call of my Children dear,
My dainty People in Green.
This is the night of Elfdom's might,
The night of wonder, the night of dread.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

All under the Moon is theirs by right
Till Midsummer morn be red.

[A pause. The piping has died into silence. Out of the shadows moves a tall figure wrapped in a green mantle]

THE UNKNOWN

Wind, gentle Wind from the hill top sweeping,
Wakes there a mortal? Moves there a man?

THE VOICE OF THE WIND

Peace on the hill. The world is sleeping.
Hushed are the pipes of Pan.

THE UNKNOWN

Earth, Mother Earth, make me sure! Mistake not!
Falls there a footstep? Stirs there a tread?

THE VOICE OF THE EARTH

Peace in the vale. The living wake not.
Quietly sleep the dead.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE UNKNOWN

Moon, silver Moon, on the distant highways
Comes aught hither from under the sun?

THE VOICE OF THE MOON

Peace in the air. All ways are my ways.
The Fairy Day is begun.

[The UNKNOWN stands silent for a moment gazing down into the moonlit garden. Then extending his arms he speaks slowly]

THE UNKNOWN

By the silence of night,
By the running of streams,
By the owl's soft flight,
By the glow-worm gleams,
By the wings of the wind,

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

By the song of the sea,
Hither, O Faerie kind!
Hither to me!

*[As he speaks dim shapes gather in the lower garden
from the woods and fields and gaze up at the speaker.
From among them a VOICE rises]*

A VOICE

Who names the name that may not be spoken?
Who calls the hosts of the Faerie on?

THE UNKNOWN

I, your King by this sceptre's token!
I, who am Oberon.

*[The green mantle falls from him and he appears clad in
strange raiment of glittering green, crowned with emeralds
and extending a jewelled sceptre.]*

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

The green-robed FAIRIES crowd up the steps from the lower garden; they appear from all sides waving tiny green lamps in the air and singing as they come]

THE FAIRIES

Oberon! Oberon! Fairy King!
Homage and love your subjects bring.
Our King is come to his own again,
And over the world the Fairies reign.
Though dawn will break for us soon, too soon,
Yet the world is Oberon's under the moon!

[Strange music sounds and the FAIRIES dance, waving their lamps. As they dance they sing softly with muted lips. Their words are inaudible, but through the music OBERON speaks the Song of the Midsummer Fairies]

OBERON

Over the moon-washed ground
The feet of the Fairies fall,
 Round and round,
 Round and round,

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Brushing no dew from the grass,
Greener it grows where we pass,
Whiter the daisies tall.

Pipe to us high and low
Soft winds of Midsummer Night.

To and fro,

To and fro

Flutter our feet in a ring,
While our circles widen and swing
Through flicker of shadow and light.

Over the sleeping stream
In deep of the alder shaw

Gloom and gleam,

Gloom and gleam

Chequer the dim lit air
With ripple of glimmer and glare,
Dapple our dancing floor.

The grey owl leaves his bed
With a wailing hu-hu-hoo!

Overhead,

Overhead



THE FOLK IN GREEN.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

The drift of the scud goes by
With a wind in the dome of the sky
Where the stars are dancing too.

*[The FAIRIES cease their dance and speak all together
solemnly through the music]*

THE FAIRIES

Sleep at the midnight. Sleep,
O mortals under the moon,
 Long and deep,
 Long and deep.
Woe to the wakeful eye!
Woe to the pryer and spy
In the hour of the Fairies' noon!

*[A FAIRY comes forward and kneels at the feet of OBERON,
kissing his hand]*

THE FAIRY

All hail, dread Oberon, King of Elves and Fays!
Lord of the other Land beyond the moon

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

And Lord awhile of this dream-peopled world
When mortal man, laid snoringly a-bed,
Yields up his kingdom to the Folk in Green.

OBERON

Know you what sooth you speak, and that this earth
Lies in the grip of Faerie? That to-night
Time's heart-beat and the resistless natural laws
Which fling this whirling planet through the void,
Which cramp our powers and mock our sovereignty,
Hang all suspended? Say, what night is this?

THE FAIRIES

The Mid o' Summer. Vigil of Saint John.

OBERON

Hear then, O Fairies.

[*The FAIRIES kneel in a circle round OBERON*]

On Midsummer Eve,
'Twixt twelve o' the clock and stroke of one, there lies
No hour of woven moments but—a blank,

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A rent in Time and Space through which peeps out
The great For Ever. Spring, to Summer grown,
Fares on and upward to the Gates of Light,
Then, at the zenith, pauses ere again
She turn her feet toward the sunsetting.
And at her pausing comes a hush, a break
In the eternal music; for the year
Nor wanes nor waxes, night wears not to dawn,
To-morrow is unborn, to-day is dead,
And, like a hawk poised on his quivering wings,
Time, the unstaying, tarries in his flight.
Then we of Faerie—we, who are not of Time
Yet not eternal, not of mortal kind
Yet not immortal—hold the world in fee
And ride the starbeams on the Eve of John.

[*The FAIRIES whirl round OBERON in a ring, laughing
sbrilly and chaunting*]

THE FAIRIES

Oberon! Oberon, ruler of all,
What shall we do with the world, our thrall?

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

For all the earth is enchanted ground
And the ring of the Faerie girdles it round.
The world is ours by might—by right!
What shall we do with the world to-night?

OBERON

Choose ye a pledge, O Fairies. Ask a boon,
A gift from this my Kingdom of an hour;
That when our rule is past we bear a prize
To Elfland from the Country under the Sun.

[*The FAIRIES consult in whispers*]

Say, shall I pluck from earth's mysterious heart
Her hidden jewels—empty the deep of pearls
To joy you?

A FAIRY

In our world the Tide of Dreams
Flows in o'er strands of emerald and beryl

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

To break against a cliff of chrysoprase.
We heed not these dull pebbles of the ground.

OBERON

Then shall I draw the pale stars from the pool
And weave them into garlands?

A FAIRY

In our land
Such stars as these burn in each rose's heart
And glimmer in the grasses at our feet.
We call them glow-worms.

OBERON

Nay then, your's the choice.
My word is passed, the pledge of Oberon.

[The FAIRIES whisper, then one steps forward]

A FAIRY

King, have I leave to speak?

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

OBERON

I do command you
Give your wish utterance. Fear not and say on.

A FAIRY

King, in the sunset woods I met a maid
Keeping a lonely tryst. Her wistful face
Was wan as twilight, and her brooding eyes
Brimmed with the bitter waters men call tears.
—We Fairies cannot weep. Then—through the silence
A sound of hurrying footsteps, and behold,
Melted her tears as sun-kissed dew at dawn,
While to her cheeks sprang roses, and to her lips
—How do they call it? Not a laugh—

OBERON

A smile?

THE FAIRY

Ah yes—a smile. We Fairies cannot smile.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

OBERON

When Joy looks out from Sorrow-misted eyes
Its clear white glory splits to the prism, and lo!
A rainbow; as through April's mourning veil
The radiance falls opal and amethyst.

THE FAIRY

This be our gift, O King. The gift of tears!
Fain would we weep and smile like mortal folk,
Fain taste of human Sorrow, human Joy.

OBERON [*sadly*]

How may I give you Sorrow, tearless ones?
How wake a throbbing in your heartless breasts,
Heartless and hollow?

THE FAIRIES

King, your word is passed!
You promised! Keep your promise!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

OBERON

Not from me,
Myself a Fairy, may this lore be learned.
None but a mortal, earth-bound, passion-swayed,
Can weight you with these cares for which you crave,
Can bring the softening moisture to your eyes
And to your ears the Song that Sorrow sings
Harping upon the heartstrings of the world.

A FAIRY

What mortal may we learn from ?

OBERON

One and all
Hold Sorrow's secret. Learn from the lips of age
Or from the wordless babbling of a child ;
Learn from a little child, a Treasury
Of undawned smiles, a fount of unshed tears.
Gaze in its eyes, the windows of the heart,
And the hard Fairy hearts will quicken and melt
And the hard Fairy eyes grow dim and sweet.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A FAIRY

A child! What is a child?

OBERON

A human flower.

The very centre of Love's encircling spell,
His blossom and the fulness of his grace;
The gladdest, saddest thing in all the world.

THE FAIRIES

[swarming round OBERON and swinging their lamps]

A Child! A Child! Give us a Child, O King!
This is our choice! A Child! Give us a Child!

OBERON

Nay, now you ask too much. This may not be;
For at the uprooting of these Earthly Flowers
Love's Garden grows a waste, a wilderness
Of breaking hearts—

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRIES [*dancing*]

We have no hearts to break!
What do we know of hearts? The Child! The Child!

OBERON

—Withered and parched beneath the burning rain
Of bitter tears.

THE FAIRIES

We have no tears to shed!
What do we know of tears? The Child! The Child!

OBERON [*sadly*]

My word is passed. I may not stay you now.
Pluck then a little Flower of the Sun,
And in its place plant Moonwort, Nightshade, Rue,
And many an evil herb without a name;
For what you take—this is our Fairy Law—
That same must you replace. For the stolen Child
Leave we a Simulacrum, Child of Dreams,

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A pale night blossom waning like the moon,
And with her fading back to Shadow Land.

THE FAIRIES [*dancing and laughing*]

A Changeling! Ay—a Changeling! Fairy-bred,
And withering at the morn like Fairy Gold!
One of our Band in likeness of a Child!

OBERON

Who will adventure?

THE FAIRIES [*all together*]

I! And I! And I!

I too! Let me!

OBERON

Nay, not so eager. You,
O Sorrow Seeker, quit your Elfin shape,
Taking the semblance of a mortal Child.

THE FAIRY [*hesitating*]

King——

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

OBERON

We await you.

THE FAIRY

King, I——

[*turning to the others and whispering*]

What is the rite?

I have forgotten.

A FAIRY [*eagerly*]

First the three circles—thus—
Then the Dark Words that turn the form to air——

A FAIRY [*interrupting*]

The Spell Invisible! Hark you!

(*whispering*) ‘ Benatir,
Carakau, Dedos, Etinarmi ’——

THE FAIRY [*impatiently*]

Yes,

And then——?

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A FAIRY

And then—— The rest I have forgotten.
Who can recall it?

THE FAIRIES [*chattering*]

Nay, not I! Nor I!
We have forgotten.

[OBERON *laughs*. *The FIRST FAIRY steps forward*]

THE FAIRY

King, by your command
We charm but rarely; rarely by our spells
Change This to That or bid What-is-not be;
So the Great Words come strangely to our lips
And our feet falter on the Mystic Way.

OBERON [*laughing*]

Is there none wise amongst you, Summer flies,
Ye dancing motes in a moonbeam?

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRY

Truly—One.

Down in the hollow by the alder pool
The Wise One sits. Swift weaving spiders draw
Around him curtains of grey gossamer
In veils of silvery dimness. At his feet,
Dabbled in ooze and weed, dull water creatures,
The Newt, the Eft, the Frog stare up at him
With yellow lidless eyes unspeculative.
Our dance sweeps by unheeded, and, through the years,
Poring for ever over a mighty Book,
He sits with Wisdom in the woods apart
Shrouded within the twilight of his hair.

OBERON

Fly to him then, ye feather-heads! Beg his aid.
Drink deep of Memory from his Wisdom Pool;
Crave council of his spiders and his frogs.

THE FAIRY

We dare not. Oh, we dare not. He would mock!



WISDOM OF THE WOODS.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A FAIRY

He scorns our dances and our revelries,
Has knowledge of all our deeds and all our words!

THE FAIRIES [*chattering*]

We dare not ask the Wise One. No, we dare not.

A CALM VOICE [*close at hand*]

What would you know, O Fairies? I am here.

[The FAIRIES with little cries scurry away like rabbits into the shadows, leaving OBERON face to face with the WISE FAIRY, a tiny figure with the pale pinched face of a little ailing child, and great eyes full of knowledge, robed in filmy veils of grey, over which fall masses of grey hair trailing down to the ground.

Raising his eyes slowly from a great book he looks into the face of OBERON]

OBERON [*slowly*]

A child's small face with eyes unchildlike burning,

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

The snows of Winter on the brows of May!
What is your age, O Mighty Lord of Learning?

THE WISE FAIRY

A day.

OBERON

Are you so young yet rich in Wisdom's treasure,
Wise One whom all my Elfin Train reveres?
How wears your day reckoned by mortal measure?

THE WISE FAIRY

A thousand years.

OBERON

A day! A thousand years! O random speaker,
How may we read your riddle, reverend Sage?

THE WISE FAIRY

Years are as moments to the Knowledge-Seeker,
An hour an age.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[*He moves nearer to OBERON*]

Yes, I was born but yesterday.
Yesterday—and its requiem
Fell but now from the tall church tower.
So late in my cradle white I lay,
Swinging low on a lily stem,
No day it seems but a single hour.

Yet a thousand Springs have reddened the rose,
A thousand Winters have spent their rime
Since the Midsummer Moon first looked on me.
I count them not, for my life stream flows
Till the last wave leaps from the Sea of Time
To break on the shore of Eternity.

OBERON

Welcome, O Hermit, self-incarcerate,
A stranger to our revels and our Court.
Say, is the race of Faerie so unworthy
That you forswear our fellowship, to bestow
The up-hoarded wisdom of the centuries
On efts and tadpoles?

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE WISE FAIRY

Creatures of change and growth.

A Fairy is—a Fairy. In the past
A Fairy, down the years a Fairy still,
But look beyond the tadpole, and behold
The frog predestinate. Tadpoles for me!

OBERON

Yet for a while fare with your Fairy kin;
We grudge you to the tadpoles, mighty Sage.

THE WISE FAIRY

[pointing to the dark windows of the little house]

Know you the human tadpole in yonder house
Behind that little lattice to the West?
Her too I study, marking every day
New arms, new legs.

OBERON

A tadpole?

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE WISE FAIRY

—Or a child.

A budding woman or a future frog.
Creatures of Destiny both.

OBERON

Right well I know
The little maiden with the speedwell eyes
Who leans me from her lattice half in dreams
When from the hills the day, loath to depart,
Scatters the world with roses. To my call
She smiles responsive, and in her listening ear
I whisper of the coming of the Moon
And the sweet hidden secrets of the night;
How through the dimness lingering colours glow
As a great king-opal; how the trees
Put on strange robes of silver, offering up
The potent incense of earth's Evensong.
Whispers the Elder, frail Acacia swings
Her wind-waved censers in the dusky air,
Shedding a fragrance like a lullaby,
Till softly from the lily trumpets floats

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

A long deep note of perfume solemn sweet
With homage never yielded to the sun.
The dreaming roses murmur in their sleep
And from their hearts distil the attar drop,
The odour of all odour's quintessence,
A Paradise wherein the fragrant souls
Of dear dead roses dwell eternally.
All breathes a welcome, till, in a purple heaven,
The moon floats up, a drop of silver dew
Folded within a mighty Violet.

[The FAIRIES, who have crept back during this speech, swing their little lamps on high with thin cries of salutation to the moon]

THE WISE FAIRY

But were none by saving the child alone,
No peering human eye or curious ear
To catch the Song of Moonlight from your lips
Or view the secret dancing of your feet?

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

OBERON

Fear me not, Lord of Wisdom. They but heard
The night-jar churring in the hazel copse
And chuckle of waking barn owls: they but saw
An old grey hedgehog tumbling on the grass.

THE WISE FAIRY

But, for the maid,—she knows and understands?
She sees the viewless forms of Faerie, hears
Their toneless voices whistling in the air
Yet waking not an echo?

OBERON

Ay, she hears,
She sees, she understands.

THE WISE FAIRY [*thoughtfully*]

She is half ours,
Half ours already.

THE FAIRIES

Half ours? Nay, wholly ours!
Teach us to win her, Wise One! Wholly ours!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE WISE FAIRY

Is she not yours for the asking? Weave your charm
About her dwelling, drown each wakeful brain
In the dull lethargy of mortal sleep;
Then—to her pillow, whispering how the elves
Dance over dreaming meadows dim with dew,
Waving white hands of welcome as they sing.
And she will weary of her curtained bed,
Longing for wind-swept spaces of the hills
And far green islands in an enchanted sea.
And she will weary of her safe-guarded home,
Full of soft stirrings and of watchful eyes,
Fain of cool glades and leafy stillnesses
Within whose depths the woodland haunter hears
The heart of Silence beating audibly;
And she will weary of the love of man
And, faring blindly on uncertain feet,
Follow the distant singing across the world.

A FAIRY

Then she is ours!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE WISE FAIRY

Yes, yours to bear away,
Leaving a Changeling Hostage.

THE FAIRIES [*all speaking together*]

This it is—
The Mystery of the Changeling! We would know—
We pray you tell us——

THE WISE FAIRY

Peace, ye clamorous tongues,
Like chatter of starlings at a sunseting!
What would you of me?

A FAIRY

We would know the spell
That turns a Fairy to a Changeling Child.

A FAIRY [*running forward*]

Teach me!

A FAIRY

No, me!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE WISE FAIRY

Say, King. Is it your will
We steal this maid away?

OBERON

My word is passed.
She is a gift to Faerie from its King.

THE WISE FAIRY

Mine is the secret. If the deed's to do
Mine be the doing. Fairies, ring me round
With dance and song. Encompass me about
That none may hear the weighty words of power,
That none may see my elfin daintiness
Clot and congeal, grow dense and lead-enwrapped
In grossness of a form corporeal.

[*The FAIRIES crowd round the WISE FAIRY*]

THE FAIRIES

About! About! Link hands! About! About!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[The FAIRIES dance in a ring round the WISE FAIRY, who is completely hidden from view. Faster and faster they whirl, singing shrilly to a wild air]

THE FAIRIES

Round and round! Round and round!
Weave we a Darkness, build it apace!
Never a look and never a sound
May pass the rim of our circle's bound,
May pierce the veil of the secret place.
Till the Change be wrought that is but begun,
Till the Spell be spoken, the Deed be done.

Cover your face, O moon on high,
Fare on your way nor look behind.
Wandering breezes, pass not by,
Shroud you, cloud you, stars of the sky,
Be deaf O ears, and O eyes be blind!
Lest that be heard to all lips forbid,
Lest that be seen which must still be hid.

As the opal prisons its pulsing flame,
As the pearl encloses its golden sand,

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Our narrowing circles clasp and frame
A deed of dread with never a name ;
The shadows dance with us, hand in hand.
Till that be done which is yet to do ;
Till This be That and till One be Two !

*[The whirling circle breaks and scatters as the song ends ;
each FAIRY casting the light of its lamp upon what appears
in the centre, and laughing shrilly as the figure is revealed.*

*On the ground is seated a small BABY dressed in a pink
frock and wearing a white muslin spangled cap, from
which escape a few locks of yellow hair.*

*A pretty girl-baby of Every-day she seems, but in her
little face burn the strange eyes of the WISE FAIRY.*

*As the FAIRIES laugh her face works, her mouth opens,
and she breaks into a long peevish wail]*

THE FAIRIES

The Changeling ! See, the Changeling ! O bravely
wrought !

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Featly done, Wise One! Here's our little maid
As in a mirror.

OBERON

A distorting glass
Filling the kindly eyes with treacherous guile,
The laughing lips with puckered peevishness.

[*The BABY extends a pink hand palm upwards to OBERON*]

THE BABY

Up! Up!

[*OBERON, laughing, picks up the BABY*]

OBERON

Nay truly this is featly done!
Feature for feature, curl for yellow curl,
Here is the self-same maid whom first I met,
Her white couch spread within the shadowy woods,
Sleeping beneath an Elder and a Thorn.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

*[The BABY turns in his arms facing him with a stare.
Then in an unchildish voice speaks]*

THE BABY

Beneath an Elder!—O bethink you, King!
Say you beneath an Elder?—

OBERON

—and a Thorn.

THE BABY

Under the Fairy Trees!—She knows too much!
The Elder Mother's nurslings are too wise.
Th' Unseen beneath her boughs is visible,
Enchantments hold not, falsehood turns to truth.
Our prize may yet escape us.

OBERON

Then, be brief.
We to her chamber! Little Ones, on guard
Beneath her window!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[Pointing his finger towards the house]

Now, all locks give way;
Back, bolts; and doors, swing wide!

[The house door slowly swings open]

THE BABY

Stay. We forget.
Close first all watching eyes and listening ears.
Who wakes within the house?

OBERON

None, save the Child.
On the debatable ground, Sleep's Borderland,
She waits our coming.

THE BABY

Good. The charm will work.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

*[Pointing a tiny finger at the house the BABY speaks
slowly and solemnly]*

Quiet that none may break,
Silence that all must keep.
Let those who sleep be asleep!
Let those who wake be awake!

*[All the FAIRIES point at the house and speak together
in a whisper]*

THE FAIRIES

Let those who sleep be asleep!
Let those who wake be awake

THE BABY

Eyes, it is soon to weep,
Too soon is it, hearts, to ache.
Let those who wake be awake!
Let those who sleep be asleep!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRIES [*as before*]

Let those who wake be awake!

Let those who sleep be asleep!

OBERON

Slumber now holds all sentinels in sway,
Each door unguarded, quenched each taper's ray;
Yet, ere her fairy freedom shall be gained,
Our maid must cross the threshold unconstrained.
Let bright-winged visions to her lattice rise
Tempting, enticing, charming ears and eyes,
Till eagerly she clammers from her bed
And her small feet, up-borne and Fairy-led,
Flit deftly down the winding of the stair.
Then mark my signal. When from his hidden lair
An owl cries thrice, upraise your shrillest strain,
Calling, compelling, drawing like a chain,
Till to your arms across the threshold stone
She climbs unaided—and the prize is won.
Now, to your posts, my children. Heed with care
The signal.—Nay.—How heavy grows the air
With scent of Elder bloom!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[He hesitates, half overcome by the perfume]

THE BABY

Away! Away!

All will be lost if longer we delay!

[OBERON, carrying the BABY, passes through the open door of the house and disappears.]

The FAIRIES stand watching for a moment, then begin a strange dance, weaving in and out and clustering round the door of the house like a restless swarm of bees. As they dance they sing]

THE FAIRIES

Witless wailings, shrill alarms,
Swift to come and slow to part;
Waning burden in the arms,
Waxing weight upon the heart;
Pallid flower of moonlight born,
Darkling bred to droop at morn.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER FIVE

Wake you, wail you all the night,
While with us our playmate sweet
Through the shadow and the light
Dances with her new-found feet;
Father, mother, all forgot,
Sunlit hours remembered not.

Fairy lips, to laughter strange,
Fairy eyes, for ever dry,
In her fellowship will change,
Lose their still serenity.
While the Mortal Child we keep
We may laugh and we may weep.

Baby smiles that softly break,
Baby hopes and baby fears,
We will steal from her to make
Fairy laughter, Fairy tears;
Sweet maid Sorrow, fair unknown,
For a while ascends our throne.

[Out of the darkness an owl calls thrice. The FAIRIES cluster under the window, their voices rising shrill and urgent to the open casement]

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Daughter of the waning hours
Tangled in the Web of Time,
Come where never-fading flowers
Crown a summer's endless prime.
Hear our calling shrill and wild!
Hither! Hither, mortal Child!

*[The Fairy crowd melts away into the house, creeping
silently in through doors and windows.]*

*As their song dies into silence a faint sound of sobbing
is heard, and a little Figure, robed in opal and blue and
crowned with water-lilies, is seen seated under the Elder
Tree weeping bitterly.*

*Her face sunk upon her knees, she rocks to and fro
absorbed in her own grief.*

*Suddenly a tremor passes through the boughs of the
Elder, the plummy blossoms bow and sway though no
wind is stirring. Out of the tree a soft voice speaks]*



MOTHER ELDER.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE VOICE

Who weeps beneath my shadow? A burning rain
Such as no cloud distils parches my roots.
Who weeps beneath the Elder?

[The branches part and in their midst appears the tall figure of MOTHER ELDER.]

A beautiful woman in long robes of greenish white, her sweet grave face pale under a heavy coronet of blossoms, she stoops in pity over the little mourner, who, without raising her head, sobs out an answer]

THE MOURNER

Alas! Alas!

I am the Fairy of the Garden Pool;
A poor Undine who tends the watery glass,
The little mirror of our year-old Queen.
Woe 's me, the Child!

[Weeps afresh]

MOTHER ELDER

Poor drooping Water Lily,
Beneath my healing shade is Sanctuary;

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Here naught of evil enters, and Sorrow's self
Vainly with pale and ineffectual hands
Beats at my Gates of Peace. Be comforted.

[The little mourner, looking up, sees the tall figure bending over her. She rises, holding out hands of supplication]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

O mighty Elder Mother, loved of men,
And by the race of Faerie loved and feared!
Wisest and kindest of the woodland folk!—

[Her voice breaks and she weeps again. MOTHER ELDER silently holds out her arms and gathers the little figure to her. For a moment they stand linked together, then the little one, stepping back and pushing the fallen hair from her face, speaks more quietly]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Mother, if ever in the furnace glare
And scorching breath of Summer's fierce high-noon

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

I bore you draughts of coolness; if but once
A fainting shoot, refreshed, bore up its head
New-crowned with shadowy blossom; if but one
Wind-withered leaf drank and grew green again,
Aid me to-night! My powers avail me nothing.
Alas, I am the least of all the Fays;
How may I move your pity?

MOTHER ELDER

Who may impose
The measure of Least and Greatest?—Little one,
Within the tiny margin of your pool,
That narrow pool that in the common day
Shrinks to a flower-choked cup, when falls the dark
You hold the great sky cradled in your arms
And rock the stars asleep.

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Good Mother, aid me.
They steal away the Child, our Garden Queen!
See, see; my tears! Yes, I alone can weep

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Of all the Host of Faerie; I alone
Have touched her small hand with a chill caress,
Have held her glowing image to my breast
And rippled back her laughter's happy thrill;
And in my depths there stirs mysteriously
A birth of living waters, and in my heart
The up-leaping bubble of an unknown spring,
And lo—I weep.

MOTHER ELDER [*bending over her*]

Ay, truly, here are tears,
And here—the throbbing of a little heart.
Child—I may name you so for you have passed
Beyond the realm of the Faerie—rare indeed,
Precious above all price the gifts you hold
Of her whom late you crowned your Garden Queen.
What for her subjects of the fields and glades?

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Mother, for them the gifts of Quietness,
Of kindly love and sweet security.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

When with her train she ranges through the woods
Our Shepherd, Pan, heeds not to count his flock.
No toll of innocent life is lightly claimed,
No small homes pillaged and no songsters hushed.
The orange-throated newt and freckled frog
Hold in the willow pool free revelry;
The wise toad dreams at ease, untroubled lies
The silver blindworm sleeping in the sun.
Man and his woodland brethren are at peace.

MOTHER ELDER

Peace without-doors. How holds she sway within?

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

[on tiptoe peeping through the windows]

Mother, I am too lowly, but myriad eyed
Your high-hung blossoms through the casements peer.
What tale have they to tell?

*[MOTHER ELDER draws down great clusters of blossom,
holding them for a while against her heart]*

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

MOTHER ELDER

A tale of peace.

A little Light within the ancient house,
Thrilling the grey old rafters with sap of Spring
And kindling like a sunrise on the hearth.
Within, even as without, a rule of peace.

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Mother, if thus it be, protect this child!
Save her from power of Faerie! Even now
They steal her from us, drawing her with sweet song,
With beckoning hands and faces falsely fair,
Bright with the treacherous radiance of a dream.
Needs must she follow.

MOTHER ELDER

Is she not my babe?
My nursling, since she lay within my shade
Like a dropped rose amidst my milk-white petals?
Who sleeps beneath the Elder wakens wise,
Filled with a nameless knowledge. She will not follow.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

I fear the Elfin cunning. Beware their craft!
Beware it!

MOTHER ELDER

Nay then, as my nursling sees
So shall you see. Draw near me—nearer yet;
While on your brows and new-found heart I lay
Cool hands fresh dipped in moonshine and in dew.
Look up, for Mother Elder clears the eyes
Of all englamouring sorceries, that their gaze
With calm regard and keen may pierce all veils
Wherewith fair Falsehood cloaks the face of Truth.
Look up to our baby's chamber. Enclosing walls
Stay not your new-born sight. What passes there?

[*The FAIRY, holding the hand of MOTHER ELDER, gazes
up at the nursery window*]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

The tiny room pulses with clustering shapes
Like firelight shadows flickering up the walls

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

And dancing on the rafters. Bright eyes shine,
White arms wave welcome, silver voices call.
How potent is their summons and how sweet!—
So sweet she needs must heed it.

MOTHER ELDER

Look again.

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

The light grows clearer.—Mother—as I gaze
Each Fairy face is changed in dolorous wise!
Meseems some evil wind, some cankering blight,
Shrivels its moonbeam beauty into flame.
The song rings harsh. Is this great Oberon's train,
This goblin rout of withered atomies
Hurrying on ever restless feverish feet
As leaves from Autumn's fiery holocaust
Whirl in a death-dance round the naked stems?
No Fairies these!

MOTHER ELDER

Child of the open eyes,
Fairies in truth. The joyless, sorrowless Folk,

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Flowers without rain or sunshine, melodies
Empty of love or mirth. Fairies in truth.

[*The FAIRY OF THE POOL sinks on her knees weeping*]

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

Fairies in truth!—even as are these am I!
Mother, I too am of the Folk of Faerie,
Thrall to their King.

MOTHER ELDER [*gently raising her*]

No so. You serve a King
Mightier than he. Love's chrism on your brow
Gleams like a fallen star, seals you his child,
No more to bend the knee to Oberon.
Now ends your vigil, faithful sentinel.
Go, tend your baby lilies. Mine to dispel
This wizard storm that clouds my nursling's peace,
Mine to unwind the chain of Evil Sleep
That binds this house in bondage. Child, farewell!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

[retreating slowly and reluctantly]

Farewell. Ah, fail not! Fail not!

MOTHER ELDER

Peace. Behold!

[Stretching out her hands to the house she speaks slowly]

Rise, lest ye sink too deep,
Too deep in the Slumber Lake.
Let those who sleep be awake!
Let those who wake be asleep!

Day out of darkness break;
Dawn from the East up-sweep.
Let those who wake be asleep!
Let those who sleep be awake!

[As her pointing finger moves along the house window after window springs into light. Lights pass from one room to another with sound of hurrying footsteps and hum of voices]

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRY OF THE POOL

[clapping her hands excitedly]

They wake! They wake! See how the leaping flames
Follow your finger point!

MOTHER ELDER

What, lingering yet?

Away! The Fairies come in wrath! Away.

[The little FAIRY comes quickly to MOTHER ELDER and kisses her hand. Then with a gesture of farewell runs swiftly away into the darkness.]

The windows glow in ever-increasing light and dark forms flit across them as the FAIRIES hurry from the waking house.

Soon they are in full flight, swarming down steps from the porch, crowding out from the doors and dropping from the lower windows.

Quickly and breathlessly they cry together]

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRIES

Light! Light!

Putting all shadows to rout!
Driving the Faerie Folk out!
Light that is kindled by man,
Blighting our eyes like a ban,
Cleaving the cloak of the night!

[A long cry is heard as the FALSE BABY rushes out—the grey hair of the WISE FAIRY streaming from her cap and the gossamers gathering again over her dress. OBERON follows]

THE BABY

Ai! Ai!

How has the wrong become right,
Forcing the Fairies to flight?
We are betrayed by our kin,
Foiled by a traitor within,
Foiled by a traitor and spy!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[MOTHER ELDER, *who has softly moved between the FAIRIES and the house, is now seen guarding the door with arms outspread*]

MOTHER ELDER

What would you carry away?
What that is worthy the cost?
Only a soul to be lost,
Only a feather to fly
Lone in the waste of the sky
Trembling and tempest-tossed.

OBERON

Who shall oppose our sway?
The lot of the youngling is cast;
She must be ours at the last!
Ours by the absolute power
Held over earth for an hour.

[MOTHER ELDER *raises her hand with a gesture of command*]

MOTHER ELDER

Hark you! The hour is past.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[Amidst a breathless silence a distant bell chimes—One.

The FAIRIES with a long wail sink to their knees, covering their faces. Then, wildly throwing up their arms, they sing]

THE FAIRIES

Lost! Lost!

Lost to the Land of the Fay,
Plucked out of night into day,
Maiden who might have been ours!
Back to the weeks and the years!
Back to your Time-withered flowers!
Back to the hopes and the fears!
Never to know our delight,
Playmate so small and so sweet:
Lost to the dance are your feet,
Withered your wings for the flight.
Back to the smiles and the tears!
Fairyland beckoned too late;
Closed is the Ivory Gate,
Threshold no more to be crossed!

Lost! Lost!

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

[The FAIRIES as they sing retreat further and further until at the song's close they are hardly visible. As their wailing grows faint OBERON speaks as if to the CHILD]

OBERON

Ay, we have lost you, though yet you stand
With faltering feet on the Fairy Strand.
Never by us may the deed be done
To pluck and to wear a Flower of the Sun.
We are a breath on your life's bright glass;
Like wind-raised ripples we fade and pass,
Till shrined again in a crystal blue
The cloudless image smiles back to you.
But long in your ears our song shall ring
And your heart long echo our whispering,
As deep in the curves of a painted shell
The ancient voices of Ocean dwell.
Farewell, little maid. Farewell. Farewell.

[From the woods and fields comes an echo of Fairy voices]

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

THE FAIRIES

Farewell.

[Again as from infinite distance]

Farewell.

[The figure of OBERON fades slowly into the darkness. The glow of his emerald crown shines for a moment among the tree shadows—then vanishes.

The FAIRIES have disappeared. MOTHER ELDER still watches by the door.

As all grows quiet again the lights in the house go out one by one until a single taper burns in the nursery window.

Through an open casement float the faint notes of a spinet softly touched to an old-world lullaby. Presently within the house a woman's voice sings]

NURSE'S SONG

Bright To-day is ended, faded in the sky, dear.
See his good-night candles lighted overhead.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Poor To-day is drowsy; sing him Hush-a-bye, dear,
Call him Yesterday, dear; put To-day to bed.

[MOTHER ELDER *stands listening with a smile, half forming the words on her lips. The voice sings on*]

Down my baby's garden not a flower but closes,
Not a golden eye, dear, wide awake can keep.
Far away in Dreamland you will meet your roses;
Kiss the world good-night, dear; all the world's asleep.

[*The voice ceases, but the spinet still tinkles out the quaint rocking measure. MOTHER ELDER slowly turns away and, as she goes, half chaunts, half speaks to the lilt of the music*]

MOTHER ELDER

Once upon a time, dear, man was thrall to Fairy
Ere the world grew old, dear, in the golden prime.
Fairies rode the moonbeams, trapping the unwary,
When the world was young, dear; once upon a time.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

Still we hear them calling, though earth grows old and
weary,

Calling through the twilight, "Come away—away!"

When the shadows lengthen and the dusky glades grow
eerie;

Fairy voices calling at dying of the day.

"Come away, away, dear," sigh they in their singing,

"Must you feel the heartache? Can you bear the
pain?"

Mirthless is their laughter, their songs are hollow-ringing.

Joy is born of tears, dear; flowers need the rain.

Listen, but be brave, dear; free from Fairy fetter.

Look, but keep you wise, dear, though they speak you
fair.

Moonlit dreams are sweet, dear, but sunny days are better;

Your little plot of warm brown earth than castles in
the air.

*[As she draws near the Elder Tree the branches bow
down and receive her. While she steps in amongst them
she speaks her last words]*



THE CALL OF DAWN.

A MASQUE OF MIDSUMMER EVE

You are Dawn's own child, dear. Fairyland is fading
Like a song that's ending, like a spoken rhyme.
All was but a dream, dear, an antic masquerading;
Just a Fairy Tale, dear,—Once upon a time.

[The branches close round her. A white hand waves for a moment out of the leaves, then disappears.]

The light in the nursery window goes out; the notes of the spinet falter—then cease.

All is still as before the coming of the FAIRIES, until, through the silence, at first hesitating, then flowing gently on, steals the far-away stream of melody as PAN, at peace once more, pipes again in the quiet woodland]

THE END

CURTAIN

THUS, then, were the Woman's three Plays written and thus performed; and already she has forgotten them, as she runs quickly—so quickly up the steps of the years with never a glance behind.

Yet some day, wakened perhaps by the heavy perfume of incense, by the keen wholesome scents of her little spice garden, or by the sweet drowsy fragrance of moon-washed Elder bloom, strange thoughts may come to her.

How, long ago—perhaps even before she came to us—she has watched the firelight glow in the great jewels of the Magi, she has spoken with the Flowers and the Winds as they moved in glittering robes about her garden, and has seen the Elf Folk dance under the Midsummer moon.

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