





“ They stood beside the coffin’s foot and head.  
Both gazed in silence, with bowed faces—Grey  
With bony chin pressed into bony throat.”



## Mrs. Holmes Grey.

BY WILLIAM M. ROSSETTI.

"Perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart; one of the indivisible primary faculties or sentiments which give direction to the character of man."  
—EDGAR POE.

RAIN-WASHED for hours, the streets at last  
were dried.

Profuse and pulpy sea-weed on the beach,  
Pushed by the latest heavy tide some way  
Across the jostled shingle, was too far  
For washing back, now that the sea at ebb  
Left an each time retreating track of foam.  
There were the wonted tetchy and sidelong  
crabs,

With fishes silvery in distended death.

No want of blue now in the upper sky :—  
But also many piled-up flat grey clouds,  
Threatening a stormy night-time ; and the  
sun

Sank, a red glare, between two lengthened  
streaks,

Hot dun, that stretched to southward ; and  
at whiles

The wind over the water swept and swept.

The townspeople, and, more, the visitors,  
Were passing to the sea-beach through the  
streets,

To take advantage of the lull of rain.

The English "Rainy weather" went from  
mouth

To mouth, with "Very" answered, or a  
shrug

Of shoulders, and a growl, and "Sure to be !  
Began the very day that we arrived."

"Yes," answered one who met a travelling  
friend ;

"I had forgotten that in England you  
Must carry your umbrella every day.

An Englishman's a centaur of his sort,  
Man cross-bred with umbrella. All the same,  
I say good-bye to France and Italy,  
Now that I'm here again. Excuse me now,  
As I was going up into the town  
To feast my eyes on British tiles and slates."

So on he walked, looking about him. Rows  
Of houses were passed by, irregular ;  
Many compacted of the shingle-stones,  
Round, grey or white—with each its gar-  
den patch

VI.

Now as the outskirts neared ; and down  
the streets

Which crossed them he was catching  
glimpses still

Of waves which whitening shattered out  
at sea.

The road grew steep here, climbing up a  
slope

Strewn with October leaves, which followed  
him,

Or drifted edgeways on. The grey ad-  
vanced,

Half colour and half dusk, along the sky.

A dead leaf from a beech-tree loosed itself,  
And touched across his forehead. As he  
raised

His eyes, they caught a window, and he  
stopped—

An opened upper window of a house

With close-drawn blinds. A man was  
settled there,

Eager in looking out, yet covertly.

He watched, nor moved his eyes from that  
he watched.

The passenger drew close beside the rails,  
Looking attentively. "Why, Grey," he  
cried ;

"Can that be you, Grey ? I had thought  
you'd been——"

The face turned sharply on him, and the  
eyes

Glanced down, and both hands pulled the  
window shut.

Pushing a wicket-gate, the other went

On to the door, expecting it to unclose.

The garden was but scantily stocked with  
flowers,

And these were fading mostly, thinly leaved,  
The earth-plots littered with the fall of  
them.

Stately some dahlia-clusters yet delayed,  
Crimson, alternating with flame-colour.

He stretched his fingers to the velvet bloom  
Of one, and drew a petal 'twixt them. Then

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The plaited flower fell separate all to earth  
By ring and ring; only the calyx stood  
Upon its stalk. The autumn time was come.  
Out of the bordering box stiff plantain  
grew.

Scarce would the loose trees have afforded  
shade,  
So lessened was the bulk between their  
boughs,  
Had there been sun to cast it. In the grass  
Rested the moisture of the recent rain.

No one seemed coming; so he walked some  
steps  
Backward, and peered: no sign of any one.  
He knocked, and at the touch the door  
unclosed.

"Don't you remember, years ago, your  
friend,  
And correspondent since, John Harling?"

"Oh,  
I know you, sir, of course—I did at once."

"*Sir!* Why, how now? Between old  
friends like us?"

How many letters that begin '*Dear John,*  
In your handwriting, I have asked after,  
These eight years, in some scores of *postes-*  
*restantes!*

Too many, I should hope, for us to *Sir*  
Each other now. But only tell me,  
Grey——"

Grey said, "Come up, come up."

There was a haste  
About his words and manner, and he seemed  
To half forget what first he meant to do.  
He paused at the stairs' foot; then, with a  
glance

Thrown backward at his friend, who stayed  
for him,

He mounted hurriedly, two steps at once.  
They had not shaken hands yet. Harling  
his

Had proffered with the words he uttered  
first,  
But Grey had not appeared to notice it.

Harling had caught the look of the other's  
face

Where twilight in the doorway glimmered  
fresh,

And he had fancied it was pale and worn,  
And anxious as with watchings through  
the night.

But in the room the light no longer served  
For one to see the other, how the weeks

Had changed him, and the months and  
years. The room  
Was dim between the window-blinds and  
dusk.

Now seated—"As you see, John," Grey  
began,

"This is a bed-room. I have not had time  
To trouble myself yet about the house."

"You are but just arrived, then?"

"Yes, but just."  
He was about to say some more, but  
stopped.

"And now," said Harling, "you shall tell  
me all

About yourself. And how and where's  
your wife?"

What is it brought you down here? Have  
you left

Oxford, in which your practice was so good?  
Or are you here on holidays? I come

Upon you by an unexpected chance.  
There must be something to be learned, I

know;  
Chances are not all chance-work. Tell me  
all."

His friend rose up at this; and Harling saw  
His knuckles on his forehead, at his hair,  
And thought his eyes grew larger through  
the dark.

Grey touched him on the shoulder, draw-  
ing breath

To speak with, but he then again sat down.

"Why, first I ought to hear *your* news, I  
think,"

At last he answered, swallowing the gasps  
Which came into his mouth, and clipped  
his words.

"Though travellers have a vested right to  
lie,

I'll take it all on trust." He forged a laugh.

Harling grew certain there was something  
now

His friend had got to tell, and must, but  
feared.

He knew how such a fear, by yielding  
grows,

And would have had him speak it out at  
once.

Nevertheless he answered, "As you will.  
And yet I have but little left to say

Since my last letter. But the whole is this.  
But let us first have light before we talk,

That we may know each other once again.  
I shall not flatter you if grizzled hairs



Prove to outnumber your original brown,  
But tell you truth. You tell the truth of  
me.

I am more than half a Frenchman, I believe,

By this time. That's no compliment, say I,  
For a John Bull at heart, and I am one;  
Thank God, a Tory, and hang the Mar-  
seillaise!"

"No lights, no lights," Grey answered,  
moodily.

"Can we not talk again as once we used,  
Through twilight and through evening into  
night,

Knowing, without a light, it was we two?—  
I little thought then it would come to this,"  
He added, and his voice was only sad.

"And it is well, too, that the light should  
come,

For then perhaps you will have made a  
guess,

By seeing me, before I tell it you.

My dear old friend, it's needless now to  
attempt

To hide it. I am wretched—that's the  
word.

I am a fool not to have got the thing

Over already, for it has to come

At last. But there's a minute's respite still,  
For first you were to tell me of yourself;  
So, Harling, you speak now. But first the  
light."

The other, leaning forward, took his hand,  
And tried to speak some comfort; but the  
words

Faltered between his lips. For he was sure  
That, if he had already heard this grief,  
He would not talk of comfort, but sit dumb.

The lights were come now, and each looked  
on each.

The traveller's face was bronzed, and his  
hair crisp

And close, and his eyes steady—all himself  
Compact and prompt to any chance. And  
yet

He was essentially the same who went,  
To find his level, forth eight years ago,  
Unformed, florid-complexioned, easy-  
tongued:

Travel and time had only mellowed him.

Grey was the same in feature, not in fact.

His face was paler than was always pale;  
The forehead something wrinkled, and the  
lips

Arid and meagre, faded, marked with lines;  
The eyes had sunken further in the head,

With a dark ridge to each, and grizzled  
brows;

His hair, though as of old, was brown and  
soft.

The difference was less, but more the  
change.

Each looked on each some minutes: neither  
spoke.

His friend was clothed in black, as Har-  
ling saw,

Who now resumed the thread of his dis-  
course.

"As for my own adventures, they are few:  
For, after I left Rome—the storm will  
burst,

Be sure, at Rome, before the year is done—  
I went straight back to Paris. Politics,

You know, I've stood aloof from all the  
year;

But even with me, too, they have done  
their work.

My poor Louise was dead—shot down, I  
learned,

Upon the people's barricades in June:

She turned up quite a Red Republican

After their twenty-fourth of February;

And my successor in her graces fell

With her—both fighting and yelling side  
by side.

I could not but curse at them through my  
teeth

With her own *sacré-Dieu's*—the whole of  
them

Who get up revolutions and revolts.

And then they swore I was an Orleanist,

An English spy, or something; and indeed

I found myself, the scanty days I stopped,

A centre-piece for all the blackest looks.

At least I thought so. Many of my friends,

Besides, were gone, waiting for better times

When next they come to Paris. So I left

Disgusted, and crossed over. Why should I

Quit England and dear brother Tories?

still,

Although I do now think of settling here,

Perhaps, before another twelvemonth goes,

The South will tempt me back—sooner,

perhaps.

I must, I think, die travelling in the

South."

He made an end of speaking. Grey looked  
up.

"Is there no more?" he asked. He said,  
"No more."

Grey's face turned whiter, and his fingers  
twitched.

"It is my turn to speak, then"—and he rose,  
Taking a candle: "come this way with me."

They stepped aside into a neighbouring room.

Grey walked with quiet footsteps, and he turned

So noiselessly the handle of the door  
That Harling fancied some one lay asleep  
Inside. The hand recovered steadiness.

The room was quite unfurnished, striking chill.

A rent in the drawn window-blind betrayed  
A sky unvaried, moonless, cloudless, black.  
Only two chairs were set against the wall,  
And, not yet closed, a coffin placed on them.

Harling's raised eyes inquired why he was brought

Hither, and should he still advance and look.

"It is my wife," said Grey; "look in her face."

This in a whisper, holding Harling's arm,  
And tightened fingers clenched the whispering.

Harling could feel his forehead growing moist,

And sought in vain his friend's averted eyes.

Their steps, suppressed, creaked on the uncovered boards:

They stood beside the coffin's foot and head.

Both gazed in silence, with bowed faces—  
Grey

With bony chin pressed into bony throat.

The woman's limbs were straight inside her shroud.

The death which brooded glazed upon her eyes

Was hidden underneath the shapely lids;  
But the mouth kept its anguish. Combed  
and rich

The hair, which caught the light within its strings,

Golden about the temples, and as fine  
And soft as any silk-web; and the brows

A perfect arch, the forehead undisturbed;  
But the mouth kept its anguish, and the lips,

Closed after death, seemed half in act to speak.

Covered the hands and feet; the head was laid

Upon a prayer-book, open at the rite  
Of solemnizing holy matrimony.  
Her marriage-ring was stitched into the page.

Grey stood a long while gazing. Then he set

The candle on the ground, and on his knees  
Close to her unringed shrouded hand, he prayed,

Silent. With eyes still dry, he rose unchanged.

They left the room again with heeded steps.  
On friendly Harling lay the awe of death  
And pity: he took his seat without a sound.

Some of the hackneyed phrases almost passed

His lips, but shamed him, and he held his peace.

"Harling," said Grey, after a pause, "you think

No doubt that this is all—her death is all.  
Harling, when first I saw you in the street,  
I feared you meant to come and speak to me;

So hid myself and waited till you knocked;  
Waited behind the door until you knocked,  
Longing that you, perhaps, would go.

When I  
Had opened it, I think I called you *Sir*—  
Did you not chide me? Do you know, it seemed

So strange to me that any one I knew  
Before this happened should be here the same,

And know me for the same that once I was,  
I could not quite imagine we were friends.  
It is not merely death would make one feel

Like this—no, there is something more behind

Harder than death, more cruel. Let me wait

Some moments; then no help but I must tell."

He gathered up his face into his hands  
From chin to temples, only just to think  
And not be seen. He had not seated him,  
But leaned against the chair. Nor Harling spoke.

"Two months are gone now," Grey pursued. "We two

Lived lovingly. I had to come down here,  
And here I met a surgeon of the town.

Hell only knows—I cannot tell you—why,



I asked him to return with me, and spend A fortnight at our house. Perhaps I wrote The whole of this to you when it occurred. His name is Luton."

Here he chose to pause. "Perhaps: I am not certain," Harling said.

"I think you might be certain," answered Grey, "If you're my friend." But then he checked himself, Adding: "Forgive me. I am not, you see, Myself to-night—this night, nor many nights, Nor many nights to come. Well, he agreed. Of course, he must agree; else I should not Have been like this, disgraced, made almost mad."

At this he found his passion would be near To drive him to talk wildly: so he kept Silence again some moments—then resumed.

"How should I recollect the days we passed Together? There must surely have been enough

To see, and yet I never saw it once. Besides, my patients kept me out all day Sometimes. It was in August, John, was this—

The end of August, reaping just begun. We've had a splendid harvest, you'll have heard."

"Indeed!" the other said, shifting the while His posture—and he knew not what to say.

"Yes, you detect me," Grey cried bitterly; "You know I am afraid of what's to come—A coward. Now I do hope I shall speak, And tell you all of it without a stop. There was a lady staying with us then, A cousin of my wife's—but older, much; So that you understand how I could ask This Luton down. Before his time was up, He seemed to grow uneasy, and he left,—Merely explaining, business called him home.

I said I had not noticed anything Unusual; and yet I sometimes found Mary in tears, and could not gather why. One day she told me when I questioned her It was for thinking of our girl that died Months back—for that her cousin would begin

Often to talk to her about her own;

So that would make her sad. I thought it strange

She had not so informed me from the first. Her cousin, when I named the point, appeared Surprised; but then to recollect herself, And answered—I could see, a little piqued— She should not cry again because of her.

"These fits of tears continued. We were now

Alone together, for the cousin went Away soon after. Then I could not help Seeing her health and strength were giving way:

Her mind, too, seemed oppressed. She'd hardly leave

At nights the chair she sat in, for she said 'This is the only place where I can sleep.'

Yet her affection for me seemed to grow A kind of pity for its tenderness.

Oh! what is now become of her, that I, After to-morrow, shall not see her more, But have to hide her always from my sight?"

He took some steps, meaning to go again And see her corpse; but, meeting Harling's eye,

Turned and sat down.

"Is it not," he pursued, With floorward gaze, "hard on me I must tell

This business word by word, the whole of it, While I can see it all before me there, And it is clear one word could tell it all? Can you not guess the rest, and spare me now?"

"I will not guess; but you," said Harling, "keep

All that remains unspoken; for it wrings My heart, dear Grey, dear friend, to see you thus."

"No, it is better I should speak it out, For you would fancy something; and at least

You will not need to fancy when you know. She came to me one morning—(this was like

A fortnight after he had gone away, This Luton)—saying that she found it vain Attempting to compose her mind at home; That every place made her remember what The baby had done or looked there, and she felt

Too weak for that, and meant to see her friends

(That is, two sisters some few miles from here).

She spoke more firmly than I had heard her talk

A long time past—because I thought it long—

And I believed she had determined right,

And so consented. But she only said

'I have made up my mind'—thus waiving all

Consent on my part—mere sick wilfulness I took it for. She left the house. I might have told you she'd a lilac dress, and hair worn plain. And so I saw her the last time—

The last time, God in heaven!" He seized his fists

Together, and he clutched them toward his throat.

"Many days passed. She had begged me, feeling sure

It would excite her, not to write a line, And said she would not write, nor let her friends.

I think I did not tell you, though, how pale Her cheeks were; and, in saying this, she sobbed,

For such a lengthened silence looked like death.

"Three weeks, or nearly that, had passed away:

A letter on black-bordered paper came. It was from Luton. Then I did not know the hand, but shall now, if it comes again.

He wrote that I must go immediately, That I was 'to prepare myself'—some trash:

He 'dared not trust his pen to tell me more.'

"On Thursday I arrived here. I cannot attempt to tell you all about it. When you've read this, only call me, and I'll come;

But I will not be by you while you read. On the first day I heard it all from him, And loathe him for it. I am left alone, And all through him."

He took a newspaper from underneath his pillow, and he showed The place to read at. Then he left the room;

And Harling caught his footfall toward the corpse,

And touching of his knees upon the boards.

And this is what he feverishly perused:—

*"Coroner's Inquest—A Distressing Case.*

An inquest was held yesterday, before The County Coroner, into the cause Of the decease of Mrs. Mary Grey, A married lady. Public interest Was widely excited.

"When the Jury came From viewing the corpse, in which are seen remains

Of no small beauty, witnesses were called.

"Mr. Holmes Grey, surgeon, deposed: 'I live

In Oxford, where I practise, and deceased Had been my wife for upwards of three years.

About the middle of September, she Was suffering much from weakness, and a weight

Seemed on her mind. The symptoms had begun

Nearly a month before, and still increased, Until at last they gave me great alarm, Of which we often spoke. On the eighteenth She told me she would like to stay awhile With two of her sisters, living on the coast, At Barksedge House, not far from here. She went

Next day. I cannot speak to any more.'

"The Coroner: 'How were you first apprised

Of this most melancholy event?'—'By note

Addressed to me by Mr. Luton here.'

"A Juror: 'Could your scientific skill Assign some cause for this debility?'

'No. I believed it was occasioned (so She intimated) by a domestic grief Quite unconnected with the present case.'

"The Coroner: 'You'll know how to excuse

The question which I feel compelled to put:

I have a public duty to perform. Had you, before the period you described, Any suspicions ever?'—'Never once:

There was no cause for any, I swear to God.'

"The witness had, throughout his testimony,

Preserved his calm—though clearly not without

An effort, which augmented towards the close.



"Jane Langley: 'I keep lodgings in the town.

On the nineteenth September the deceased Engaged a bed-room and a sitting-room. The name I knew her by was Mrs. Grange. I saw but very little of her; she kept, As much as that well could be, to herself, And she would frequently leave home for hours.

I cannot say I made any remark Especially. I found a letter once— Just a few words, torn up. 'Holmes,' it began.

'This letter is the last you ever will. . . ' No more, I think. I threw the bits away. That was, perhaps, four days before her death.

On that day, I suppose, as usual, She left the house: I did not see her, though. She was brought home quite dead.'

"Upon the name Of the next witness being called, some stir Arose through persons pressing on to look. After it had been silenced, and the oath Duly administered, the evidence Proceeded.

"Mr. Edward Luton, surgeon: 'I lately here began for the first time In my profession. I was introduced To Mr. Grey in August. When he left The seaside, he invited me to pass A fortnight at his house, and I agreed. On seeing Mrs. Grey, I recognized In her a lady I had known before Her marriage, a Miss Chalsted. We had met

In company, and, in particular, At some so-called "mesmeric evenings," held

At her remote connection's house, the late Dr. Duplatt. But now, as Mrs. Grey Allowed my presentation to pass off Without a hint of knowing me, I left This point to her, and seemed a stranger: till

We chanced, the sixth day, to be left alone. I talked on just the same, but she was silent. At last she answered, and began to speak Familiarly of when she knew me first; Without explaining—merely as one might talk

Changing the subject. But I let it pass. And yet, when we were next in company, Once more she acted new acquaintanceship. Then, two days after, I believe—one time Her cousin, Mrs. Gwyllt, was out by chance—

The same thing happened; but she spoke of love

Now, and the very word half passed her lips. Our talk ended abruptly. Mrs. Gwyllt Came in, and by her face I saw she had heard.

"This instance was the last we talked alone.

And I began to hear from Mr. Grey His wife was far from well, and had the tears

Now often in her eyes. This made me feel Hampered and restless: so I took my leave After my first eleven days' stay was gone, Saying I had affairs that could not wait.

"Between the seventh of September, when We parted, and the twenty-third, I saw No more of the deceased. Towards seven o'clock

That evening, I was told a lady wished To speak with me. She entered: it was she—

Deceased. I can't describe how pained I was

At finding she had left her home like this. She said she loved me, and conjured me much

Not to desert her; that she loved me young;

That, after we had ceased to meet, she knew

And married Mr. Grey. Also, that when He wrote to her in August I should come, Guessing who I must be, she thought it well

To treat me as a stranger—dreading lest Her love (so she assured me) should revive. All this through sobs and blushes. I could not

Make up my mind what conduct to pursue: I begged her to be calm, and wait awhile, And I would write. She left unnerved and weak.

"I took five days, bewildered how to act. But on the evening of the fifth, I saw, While looking out of window—(it was dusk,

And almost nightfall)—Mrs. Grey, who paced,

Muffled in clothes, before my door. I knew By this how dangerous it must be to wait For a day longer; so I wrote at once She absolutely must return to her home. Nothing was known as yet—all might be well;

In time she would forget me; and besides

I was engaged to marry, and must regard  
Our intercourse as ended.

“She returned  
Next day, the twenty-ninth; and, falling  
down  
Upon her knees, she cried, with hardly a  
word,

Some while, and kept her face between her  
hands;

But at the last she swore she would not go,  
But rather die here. It continued thus  
Six days. For she would come and seat  
herself,

When I was present, in my room, and sit,  
An hour or near, quite silent; or break  
out

Into a flood of words—and then, perhaps  
Between two syllables, stop short, and turn  
Round in her chair, and sob, and hide her  
tears.

“The sixth day, after she had left the  
house,  
I had an intimation we were watched,  
And certain persons had begun to talk.  
I thought it indispensable to write  
Once more, and tell her she could not re-  
main—

I owed it to myself not to allow  
This state of things to last; that I had  
given

The servant orders to deny me, should  
She still persist in calling.

“Towards mid-day  
Of the sixth instant, the deceased once more  
Was at my house, however;—darted  
through

The door, which happened to be left ajar,  
And flung herself right down before my feet.  
This day she did not shed a single tear,  
Nor talk at all at random, but was firm:  
I mean, unalterably resolute

In purpose, and her passion more uncurbed  
Than ever: swore it was impossible  
She should return to live with Mr. Grey  
Again; that, were she at her latest hour,  
She still would say so, and die saying so:  
‘Because’ (I recollect her words) ‘this  
flame

All eats me up while I am here with you;  
I hate it, but it eats me—eats me up,  
Till I have now no will to wish it quenched.’  
I hope to be excused repeating all  
That I remember to have heard her say.  
She bitterly upbraided me for what  
I last had written to her, and declared  
She hated me and loved me all at once

With perfect hate as well as burning love.  
This must have lasted fully half an hour.  
However fearful as to the results,  
I told her simply I could not retract,  
And she must go, or I immediately  
Would write to Mr. Grey. I rose at this  
To leave the room.

“She staggered up as well,  
And screamed, and caught about her with  
her hands:

I think she could not see. I dreaded lest  
She might be falling, and I held her arm,  
Trying to guide her out. As I did so,  
She, in a hurry, faced on me, and screamed  
Aloud once more, and wanted, as I thought,  
To speak, but, in a second, fell.

“I raised  
Her body in my arms, and found her dead.  
I had her carried home without delay,  
And a physician called, whose view con-  
curred

With mine—that instant death must have  
ensued

Upon the rupture of a blood-vessel.’

“This deposition had been listened to  
In the most perfect silence. At its close  
We understand a lady was removed  
Fainting.

“The Coroner: ‘You said just now  
That, in your former letter to deceased,  
You told her nothing yet was known. Was  
not

Her absence traced, then, and suspicion  
roused?’

Did she inform you?’ ‘She informed me  
that

Would not be, for that Mr. Grey and she  
Had mutually consented not to write.  
I have forgotten why.’

“The Coroner:  
‘Is Mr. Grey still present?’ Mr. Grey:  
‘Yes, I am here.’ ‘You heard the last  
reply;

Was such the case?’ ‘It was; we had  
agreed  
To exchange no letters, that her mind  
might have  
The benefit of more complete repose.’

“A Juror to the witness: ‘Did no acts  
Of familiarity occur between  
Deceased and you?’

“Here Mr. Grey addressed  
The Coroner, demurring to a reply.

“The Coroner: ‘It grieves me very much



To pain your feelings; but I feel compelled

To say the question is a proper one.  
It is the Jury's duty to gain light  
On this exceedingly distressing case;  
The public mind has to be satisfied;  
I owe a duty to the public. Let  
The witness answer.'

"Witness: 'She would clasp  
Her arms around me in speaking tenderly,  
And kiss me. She has often kissed my  
hands.  
Not beyond that.'

"The Juror: 'And did you  
Respond—' The Coroner: 'The witness should,  
I think, be pressed no further. He has  
given  
His painful evidence most creditably.'

"The Juror: 'Did deceased, in all these  
days,  
Not write to you at all?' 'She sent me this:  
It is the only letter I received.'

"A letter here was handed in and read.  
It ran as follows, and it bore the date  
Of twenty-sixth September.

"Dearest Friend,—  
Where is your promise you would write me  
soon

My sentence, death or life? This is the  
third

Of three long days since last I saw you. Oh!  
To press your hand again, and talk to you,  
And see the moving of your lips and eyes!  
Edward, I'm certain that you cannot know  
How much I love you; you must not  
decide

Until convinced of it— But words are  
dead.

That, Edward, is a love in very truth  
Which can avail to overcome such shame  
As kept me four whole days from seeing  
you—

Four days after my coming quite resolved  
To strive no more, but tell you all my heart.  
As daylight passed, and night devoured the  
dusk,

The first time, and the second, and the third,  
I doubted whether I could ever wait  
Till dawn—yet waited all the fourth day  
too,

Staring upon my hands, and looking strange;  
Yes, and the fifth day's twilight hastened  
on.

But love began then driving me about

Between my house and your house, to and  
fro.

At last I could no more delay, but wept,  
And prayed of Christ (for He discerns it  
all),

That, if this thing were sinful unto death,  
He would Himself be first to throw the  
stone.

So then I came and saw you, and I spoke.  
Did I not make you understand how I  
Had loved you in the budding of my youth;  
And how, when we divided, all my hope  
Went out from me for all the future days,  
And how I married, just indifferent  
To whom I took? Perhaps I did not clear  
This up enough, or cried and troubled  
you.

Why did I ever see your face again?  
I had forgotten you; I lived content,  
At peace. Forgotten you! that now ap-  
pears

Impossible, yet I believe I had.  
Then see what now my life must be—con-  
sumed

With inner very fire, merely to think  
Of you, and having lost my heartless peace.  
How shall I dare to live except with you?

"The Coroner to Witness: 'Had you known  
When you were first acquainted with  
deceased,

Before her marriage, that she entertained  
These feelings for you?'—'Friends of mine  
would talk

In a light way about it—nothing more—  
And in especial as to mesmerism.  
I knew that such a match could never be;  
Her friends would have been sure to break  
it off—

Our prospects were so very different.  
I did not think about it seriously.'

"The letter says that you divided: how  
Did that occur?'—'I left the neighbour-  
hood

On account solely of my own affairs.'

"You have deposed that you received a  
hint

Your meetings with deceased had been  
observed.

How did you learn this?'—'Through the  
brother-in-law

Of a young lady that's engaged to me.'

"The witness here retired. He looks about  
The age of twenty-seven,—in person, tall  
And elegant. His tone at times betrayed  
Much feeling.

"Mrs. Celia Frances Gwyllt:  
'Deceased and I were cousins. In the month  
Of August last I spent a little time  
With her and Mr. Grey. In the first week

Of last month, I remember hearing her  
Speak in a manner I considered wrong  
To Mr. Luton, and she seemed confused  
When she perceived me. Shortly afterwards,

I took occasion to inform her so.  
This she at first made light of, and alleged  
It was a mere flirtation. I replied,  
I deemed it was my duty to acquaint  
Her husband; when she begged that I  
would not,

So that at length I yielded. Then came on  
Some crying fits, which Mr. Grey was led  
To ascribe to things I chanced to talk  
about.

This and my pledge of silence vexed me  
much,  
And so, soon after that, I took my leave.'

"Anne Gorman: 'I am Mr. Luton's  
servant.

On Tuesday was the sixth I had to go  
Out on an errand, with the door ajar,  
When I remembered something I had left  
Behind. On coming back, I saw deceased  
Race through the lobby, and whisk into  
the room.

I had been ordered not to let her in.'

"The evidence of Dr. Wallinger  
Ended the case. 'I was called in to see  
The body of deceased upon the sixth:  
Life then was quite extinct; the cause of  
death,

Congestion and effusion of the ventricle.  
Death would be instantaneous. Any strong  
Emotion might have led to that result.'

"The Coroner, in course of summing up,  
Commented on the evidence, and spoke  
Of deceased's conduct in appropriate terms;  
Observing that the Jury would decide  
Upon their verdict from the testimony  
Of the professional witness—which was  
clear,

And seemed to him conclusive. He could do  
No less than note the awful suddenness  
With which the loss of life had followed  
such

A glaring sacrifice of duty's claims.

"The Jury gave their verdict in at once:  
'Died by the visitation of God.'

"We learn  
On good authority that the deceased  
Belonged to a distinguished family.  
Her husband's scientific eminence  
Is fully and most widely recognized."

As Harling finished reading this, he rose  
To call his friend; but, shrinking at the  
thought,  
He read it all again and lingeringly.

But, after that, he called in undertone;  
And he received the answer, "Come in  
here."

He entered therefore.

Grey was huddled o'er  
The coffin, looking hard into her face.  
"You know it now," he said, but did not  
move.

"We long have been old friends," Harling  
replied.

"Words are of no avail, and worse than  
none.

I need not try to tell you what I feel."

Grey now stood straight. "I am to bury her  
The day after to-morrow: I alone  
Shall see her covered in beneath the earth.  
May God be near her in the stead of men,  
And let her rest. Yet there is with her that  
Which she shall carry down into the grave;  
Still in the dark her broken marriage-vow  
Under her head: they shall remain together.  
How can I talk like this?" And he  
broke off.

"This is a crushing grief indeed, I know,"  
Said Harling; "yet be brave against it.  
When

This few days' work is over, Grey, go home,  
And mind to be so occupied as must  
Prevent your dwelling on it. If you choose,  
I will accompany and stay with you."

But he replied: "My home will now be  
here;"

And all the angles of his visage thinned.  
"*He* is here I mean to ruin. Shall he still  
Be free to laugh me in his sleeve to scorn,  
And show me pity—pity!—when we meet?  
I have no means of harming him, you  
think?

There's such a thing, though, as profes-  
sional fame,—

I have it. Where's the name of Luton  
known?

is is my home: I mean to ruin him."

"Why, he," objected Harling, "never did



One hair's-breadth wrong to you: his hands  
are clean  
Of all offence to you and yours. For shame!  
It was blind anguish spoke there—not  
yourself."

"Ah! you can talk like that! But it is I  
Who have to feel—I who can see his house  
From here, and sometimes watch him out  
and in,  
And think she used to be with him inside.  
And he could bear her coming day by day,  
And see the sobs collecting in her throat,  
And tresses out of order, as she fell  
Before his feet, and made her prayers, and  
wept!  
He bore this! What a heart he must  
have had!

Must I be grateful for it? Did he not  
Admit inopportune eyes were watching  
him?

He was engaged to marry—yes, and one  
For whom he's bound to keep himself in  
check,  
And crouch beneath her whims and  
jealousy:—

Not that I ever saw her, but I'm sure.  
Besides, he told me she would not be his  
Unless he gains the standing deemed her  
due,—

And I'll take care of that."

His friend was loath,

Seeing the burden of his agony,  
To harass him with argument and blame;  
Yet would he not be by to hear him rave,  
And said he now must go.

"One moment more,"  
Said Grey, and oped the window. Overhead  
The sky was a black veil drawn close as  
death;  
The lamps gave all the light, prolonged in  
rows:  
And chill it blew upon them as they gazed,  
Mixed with thin drops of rain, which  
might not fall  
Straight downward, but kept veering in  
the wind.  
There was a sounding of the sea from far.

Grey pointed. "That beyond there is the  
house,  
Turning the street—that where a candle  
burns  
In the left casement of the upper three.  
That is, no doubt, his shadow on the blind.  
Often I get a glimpse of it from here,  
As when you saw me first this afternoon.  
Shall he not one day pay me down in full?  
John, I can wait; but when the moment  
comes . . .!"

He shut the sash. Harling had seen the  
night,  
Equal, unknown, and desolate of stars.

1849.\*

\* The reader will observe the already remote date at which this poem was written. Those were the days when the præ-Raphaelite movement in painting was first started. I, who was as much mixed up and interested in it as any person not practically an artist could well be, entertained the idea that the like principles might be carried out in poetry; and that it would be possible, without losing the poetical, dramatic, or even tragic tone and impression, to approach nearer to the actualities of dialogue and narration than had ever yet been done. With an unpractised hand I tried the experiment; and the result is this blank-verse tale, which is now published, not indeed without some revision, but without the least alteration in its general character and point of view.—  
W. M. R.