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Setting for a Fairy Tale

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TWO POEMS

BY WINIFRED WELLES

I.

SETTING FOR A FAIRY TALE

This is a lonesome place—
The water is as quiet as a face
That peace has smoothed and dreams made exquisite.
Like silk on silk your paddle rustles it,
And where the ripple gleams and slips,
It seems as if one sighed and closed his lips;
And softly and as sly
As ghostly cats, the long white mists prowl by.
Oh I can tell
We are not wanted here! There is some spell
Those dwarfs of trees, who squat around the lake,
Are peering through the dusk to see us break.
So desolate a place . . . so full of wonder . . .
Now near and far, and over us and under,
A million million frogs entreat.
Their thin, entangled threads of voices meet
And mingle with the tree-toads', jarring sweet
And whirring strong, as tiny motors might.
And leader of them all, far down the night,
One huge, wet-bellied, moss-mouthed crier
Twangs like a taut, bronze wire.
The ways grow narrower, the voices less.
Only the water-lilies in distress
Hold up their horrified, white hands and cling
Close to each other shuddering.
And I am troubled by their breath,
That smells of mystery or sleep or death.
And was it death or sleep or mystery,
That slew the knighthood in so brave a tree,
Leaving him torn to bowels, stripped to bone,
Abject and mutilated and alone?
His body, broken but still marvellous,
Darkens and bars the ways for us.
And so we leave our boat and move
Timidly through a fearsome grove,
Where witches' shadows huddle as we go.

TWO POEMS

It ends—as sudden as a blow,
And here are blessed, blue-lit spaces!
The fireflies everywhere
Like tips of wands are waving in the air,
And we can see our faces
Dimly, like faces in a well;
So quieted beneath that star
We have forgotten that there was a spell,
And kiss, and laugh to find how real we are!
And then, as if she heard our laughter,
And longed to tiptoe after,
Amazingly alone and still,
Queenlike upon the hill,
The moon uprises, darling as of old.
So we go home, resplendent in her gold,
Safe in her glory,
And happy as the ending of a story.

II.

GESTURE

My arms were always quiet,
Close and never freed,
I was furled like a banner,
Enfolded like a seed.

I thought, when Love shall strike me,
Each arm will start and spring,
Unloosen like a petal
And open like a wing.

Oh Love—my arms are lifted,
But not to sway and toss,
They strain out wide and wounded
Like arms upon a cross.

WINIFRED WELLES.