

BALLADE

The white night roared with a huge north-wind,
 And he sat before his thundering flame,
 Quaffing holly-crowned wine.
 "Say me, who is she, and whence came
 The snow-white maid with the hair of Inde?
 For I will have her mine!"

"She was crouched in snow by the threshold, lord,
 And we took her in (for the storm is loud),
 But who, we may not know.
 For, poorly-clad, she is strangely proud,
 And will not sit at the servants' board,
 But saith she comes of the snow."

"She shall sit by me," he sware amain;
 "Go, ere another ash-stick chars,
 Ask of her whom she loves."
 "We ask her, lord, and she saith, 'The stars.'"
 And he sware, "I will kiss with kisses twain
 Those cheeks which are two white doves."

The wind had tucked in bed her earth,
 And tiptoed over valley and hill,
 Humming a slumber-croon;
 And all the shining night lay still,
 And the rude trees dropped their hollow mirth;
 Silently came the moon.

He rose from the table, red with wine;
 He put one hand against the wall,
 Swaying as he did stand;
 Three steps took he in the breathless hall,
 Said, "You shall love me, for you are mine."
 And touched her with his hand.

White stretched the north-land, white the south...
 She was gone like a spark from the ash that chars;
 And "After her!" he sware...
 They found the maid. And her eyes were stars,
 A starry smile was upon her mouth,
 And the snow-flowers in her hair.