

And her true face was a rosy red,  
     The very red of the rose  
 That, couched on the happy garden-bed,  
     In the summer sunlight glows.

And all the wondrous things of love  
     That sang so sweet through the song  
 Were in the look that met in their eyes,  
     And the look was deep and long.

'T was then a knock came at the outer gate,  
     And the usher sought the King.  
 "The woman you met by the Scottish Sea,  
     My Liege, would tell you a thing;  
 And she says that her present need for speech  
     Will bear no gainsaying."

And the King said: "The hour is late;  
     To-morrow will serve, I ween."  
 Then he charged the usher strictly, and said:  
     "No word of this to the Queen."

But the usher came again to the King.  
     "Shall I call her back?" quoth he:  
 For as she went on her way, she cried,  
     Woe! Woe! then the thing must be"

And the King paused, but he did not speak.  
     Then he called for the Voidee-cup:  
 And as we heard the twelfth hour strike,  
 There by true lips and false lips alike  
     Was the draught of trust drained up.

So with reverence meet to King and Queen  
To bed went all from the board;  
And the last to leave the courtly train  
Was Robert Stuart the chamberlain  
Who had sold his sovereign lord.

And all the locks of the chamber-door  
Had the traitor riven and brast;  
And that Fate might win sure way from **afar**,  
**He** had drawn out every bolt and bar  
That made the entrance fast.

And now at midnight he stole his way  
To the moat of the outer wall,  
And laid strong hurdles closely across  
Where the traitors' tread should fall.

But we that were the Queen's bower-maids  
Alone were left behind;  
And with heed we drew the curtains close  
Against the winter wind.

And now that all was still through the hall,  
More clearly we heard the rain  
That clamoured ever against the glass  
And the boughs that beat on the pane

But the fire was bright in the ingle-nook,  
And through empty space around  
The shadows cast on the arras'd wall  
'Mid the pictured kings stood sudden and tall  
Like spectres sprung from the ground.

And the bed was dight in a deep alcove;  
    And as he stood by the fire  
The King was still in talk with the Queen  
    While he doffed his goodly attire.

And the song had brought the image back  
    Of many a bygone year;  
And many a loving word they said  
With hand in hand and head laid to head;  
    And none of us went anear.

But Love was weeping outside the house,  
    A child in the piteous rain;  
And as he watched the arrow of Death,  
He wailed for his own shafts close in the sheath  
    That never should fly again.

And now beneath the window arose  
    A wild voice suddenly:  
And the King reared straight, but the Queen fell back  
    As for bitter dule to dree;  
And all of us knew the woman's voice  
    Who spoke by the Scottish Sea.

"O King," she cried, "in an evil hour  
    They drove me from thy gate;  
And yet my voice must rise to thine ears;  
    But alas! it comes too late!

"Last night at mid-watch, by Aberdour,  
    When the moon was dead in the skies,  
O King, in a death-light of thine own  
    I saw thy shape arise.

"And in full season, as erst I said,  
The doom had gained its growth;  
And the shroud had risen above thy neck  
And covered thine eyes and mouth.

"And no moon woke, but the pale dawn broke,  
And still thy soul stood there;  
And I thought its silence cried to my soul  
As the first rays crowned its hair.

"Since then have I journeyed fast and fain  
In very despite of Fate,  
Lest Hope might still be found in God's will:  
But they drove me from thy gate.

"For every man on God's ground, O King,  
His death grows up from his birth  
In the shadow-plant perpetually;  
And thine towers high, a black yew-tree,  
O'er the Charterhouse of Perth!"

That room was built far out from the house;  
And none but we in the room  
Might hear the voice that rose beneath,  
Nor the tread of the coming doom.

For now there came a torchlight-glare,  
And a clang of arms there came;  
And not a soul in that space but thought  
Of the foe Sir Robert Graeme.

Yea, from the country of the Wild Scots,  
O'er mountain, valley, and glen,

He had brought with him in murderous league  
Three hundred armed men.

The King knew all in an instant's flash,  
And like a King did he stand;  
But there was no armour in all the room,  
Nor weapon lay to his hand.

And all we women flew to the door  
And thought to have made it fast;  
But the bolts were gone and the bars were gone  
And the locks were riven and brast.

And he caught the pale pale Queen in his arms  
As the iron footsteps fell,  
Then loosed her, standing alone, and said,  
"Our bliss was our farewell!"

And 'twixt his lips he murmured a prayer,  
And he crossed his brow and breast;  
And proudly in royal hardihood  
Even so with folded arms he stood —  
The prize of the bloody quest.

Then on me leaped the Queen like a deer:  
"O Catherine, help!" she cried.  
And low at his feet we clasped his knees  
Together side by side.  
"Oh! even a King, for his people's sake,  
From treasonous death must hide!"

"For *her* sake most!" I cried, and I marked  
The pang that my words could wring.

And the iron tongs from the chimney-nook  
I snatched and held to the King:  
"Wrench up the plank! and the vault beneath  
Shall yield safe harbouring."

With brows low-bent, from my eager hand  
The heavy heft did he take;  
And the plank at his feet he wrenched and tore;  
And as he frowned through the open floor,  
Again I said, "For her sake!"

Then he cried to the Queen, "God's will be done!"  
For her hands were clasped in prayer.  
And down he sprang to the inner crypt;  
And straight we closed the plank he had ripp'd  
And toiled to smoothe it fair.

(Alas! in that vault a gap once was  
Wherethro' the King might have fled;  
But three days since close-walled had it been  
By his will; for the ball would roll therein  
When without at the palm he play'd.)

Then the Queen cried, "Catherine, keep the door,  
And I to this will suffice!"  
At her word I rose all dazed to my feet,  
And my heart was fire and ice.

And louder ever the voices grew,  
And the tramp of men in mail;  
Until to my brain it seemed to be  
As though I tossed on a ship at sea  
In the teeth of a crashing gale.

Then back I flew to the rest; and hard  
We strove with sinews knit  
To force the table against the door  
But we might not compass it.

Then my wild gaze sped far down the hall  
To the place of the hearthstone-sill;  
And the Queen bent ever above the floor,  
For the plank was rising still.

And now the rush was heard on the stair,  
And "God, what help?" was our cry.  
And was I frenzied or was I bold?  
I looked at each empty stanchion-hold,  
And no bar but my arm had I!

Like iron felt my arm, as through  
The staple I made it pass:  
Alack! it was flesh and bone — no more!  
'T was Catherine Douglas sprang to the door,  
But I fell back Kate Barlass.

With that they all thronged into the hall,  
Half dim to my failing ken;  
And the space that was but a void before  
Was a crowd of wrathful men.

Behind the door I had fall'n and lay,  
Yet my sense was widely aware,  
And for all the pain of my shattered arm  
I never fainted there.

Even as I fell, my eyes were cast  
Where the King leaped down to the pit;  
And lo! the plank was smooth in its place,  
And the Queen stood far from it.

And under the litters and through the bed  
And within the presses all  
The traitors sought for the King, and pierced  
The arras around the wall.

And through the chamber they ramped and stormed  
Like lions loose in the lair,  
And scarce could trust to their very eyes —  
For behold! no King was there.

Then one of them seized the Queen, and cried,  
"Now tells us, where is thy lord?"  
And he held the sharp point over her heart:  
She drooped not her eyes nor did she start,  
But she answered never a word.

Then the sword half pierced the true true breast:  
But it was the Graeme's own son  
Cried, "This is a woman — we seek a man!"  
And away from her girdle-zone  
He struck the point of the murderous steel;  
And that foul deed was not done.

And forth flowed all the throng like a sea,  
And 't was empty space once more;  
And my eyes sought out the wounded Queen  
As I lay behind the door.



And I said: "Dear Lady, leave me here,  
For I cannot help you now;  
But fly while you may, and none shall reck  
Of my place here lying low."

And she said, "My Catherine, God help thee!"  
Then she looked to the distant floor,  
And clapsing her hands, "O God help *him*,"  
She sobbed, "for we can no more!"

But God He knows what help may mean,  
If it mean to live or to die;  
And what sore sorrow and mighty moan  
On earth it may cost ere yet a throne  
Be filled in His house on high.

And now the ladies fled with the Queen;  
And through the open door  
The night-wind wailed round the empty **room**  
And the rushes shook on the floor.

And the bed drooped low in the dark recess  
Whence the arras was rent away;  
And the firelight still shone over the space  
Where our hidden secret lay.

And the rain had ceased, and the moonbeams **lit**  
The window high in the wall —  
Bright beams that on the plank that I knew  
Through the painted pane did fall  
And gleamed with the splendour of Scotland's **crown**  
And shield armorial.

But then a great wind swept up the skies,  
And the climbing moon fell back;  
And the royal blazon fled from the floor,  
And naught remained on its track;  
And high in the darkened window-pane  
The shield and the crown were black.

And what I say next I partly saw  
And partly I heard in sooth,  
And partly since from the murderers' lips  
The torture wrung the truth.

For now again came the armèd tread,  
And fast through the hall it fell;  
But the throng was less: and ere I saw,  
By the voice without I could tell  
That Robert Stuart had come with them  
Who knew that chamber well.

And over the space the Graeme strode dark  
With his mantle round him flung;  
And in his eye was a flaming light  
But not a word on his tongue.

And Stuart held a torch to the floor,  
And he found the thing he sought;  
And they slashed the plank away with their swords;  
And O God! I fainted not!

And the traitor held his torch in the gap,  
All smoking and smouldering;  
And through the vapour and fire, beneath  
In the dark crypt's narrow ring,