

Weddah And Om-El-Bonain

By James Thomson

PART I.

I.

Weddah and Om-el-Bonain, scarcely grown
To boy and girlhood from their swaddling bands,
Were known where'er the Azra tribe was known,
Through Araby and all the neighbouring lands;
Were chanted in the songs of sweetest tone
Which sprang like fountains 'mid the desert sands:
They were so beautiful that none who saw
But felt a rapture trembling into awe.

II.

Once on a dewy eve when the balm
Of herb and flower made all the air rich wine,
And still the sunless shadow of the palm
Sought out the birthplace of the day divine,
These two were playing in the happy calm.
A young chief said: In these be sure a sign
Great God vouchsafes; a living talisman
Of glory and rich weal to bless our clan.

III.

Proud hearts applauded; but a senior chief
Said: Perfect beauty is its own sole end;
It is ripe flower and fruit, not bud and leaf;
The promise and the blessing meet and blend,
Fulfilled at once: then malice, wrath, and grief,
Lust of the foe and passion of the friend,
Assail the marvel; for all Hell is moved
Against the work of Allah most approved.

IV.

Thus beauty is that pearl a poor man found;
Which could not be surrendered, changed, or sold,
Which he might never bury in the ground,
Or bide away within his girdle-fold;
But had to wear upon his brow uncrowned,
A star of storm and terrors; for, behold,
The richest kings raged jealous for its light,
And just men's hearts turned robbers at the sight.

V.

But if the soul be royal as the gem,
That star of danger may flash victory too,
The younger urged, and bring the diadem
To set itself in. And the other: True;
If all Life's golden apples crown one stem,
Fate touches none; but single they are few:
And whether to defeat or triumph, this
One star lights war and woe, not peaceful bliss.

VI.

But nothing recked the children in that hour,
And little recked through fifteen happy years,
Of any doom in their surpassing dower:
Rich with the present, free from hopes and fears,
They dwelt in time as in a heavenly bower:
Their life was strange to laughter as to tears,
Serenely glad; their partings were too brief
For pain; and side by side, what thing was grief?

VII.

Amidst their clan they dwelt in solitude,
Not haughtily but by instinctive love;
As lion mates with lion in the wood,
And eagle pairs with eagle not with dove;
The lowlier creatures finding their own good
In their own race, nor seeking it above:
These dreamt as little of divided life
As that first pair created man and wife.

VIII.

The calm years flowed thus till the youth and maid
Were almost man and woman, and the spell
Of passion wrought, and each was self-dismayed;
The hearts their simple childhood knew so well
Were now such riddles to them, in the shade
And trouble of the mists that seethe and swell
 When the large dawn is kindling, which shall grow
 Through crimson fires to steadfast azure glow.

IX.

That year a tribe-feud, which some years had slept
Through faintness, woke up stronger than before;
And with its stir young hearts on all sides leapt
For battle, swoln with peace and plenteous store
Swift couriers to and fro the loud land swept
Weaving thin spites to one vast woof of war:
 And Weddah sallied forth elate, ranked man,
 A warrior of the warriors of his clan.

X.

Ere long flushed foes turned haggard at his name;
The beautiful, the terrible: for fire
Burns most intensely in the clearest flame;
The comeliest steed is ever last to tire
And swiftest footed; and in war's fierce game
The noblest sword is deadliest in its gyre:
 His gentle gravity grew keen and gay
 In hottest fight as for a festal day.

XI.

And while he fought far distant with his band,
Walid the Syrian, Abd-el-Malek's son;
Renowned already for a scheme long planned
With silent patience, and a sharp deed done
When its ripe fruit leaned ready for his hand,
And liberal sharing of the fruit well won;
 Came south to greet the tribe, and knit anew
 Old bonds of friendship and alliance true.

XII.

He had full often from the poets heard
Of these two children the divinely fair
But was not one to kindle at a word,
And languish on faint echoes of an air;
By what he saw and touched his heart was stirred,
Nor knew sick longings and the vague despair
Of those who turn from every nearest boon
To catch like infants at the reachless moon.

XIII.

But when one sunset flaming crimson-barred
He saw a damsel like a shape of sleep,
Who moved as moves in indolence the pard;
Above whose veil burned large eyes black and deep,
The lairs of an intense and slow regard
Which made all splendours of the broad world cheap,
And death and life thin dreams; fate-smitten there
He rested shuddering past the hour of prayer.

XIV.

Be heaven all stars, we feel the one moon~s rise
Who else could move with that imperial grace?
Who else could bear about those fateful eyes,
Too overwhelming for a mortal face?
Beyond all heed of questions and surprise
He stood a termless hour in that same place,
Convulsed in silent wrestling with his doom;
Haggard as one brought living from the tomb.

XV.

And she had shuddered also passing by,
A moment; for her spirit though intent
Was chilled as conscious of an evil eye;
But forthwith turned and o'er its one dream bent;
A woman liting as she came anigh:
But to destroy on earth was Weddah sent;
There where he is brave warriors fall before him.
Where he is not pine damsels who adore him.

XVI.

And thus with purpose like a trenchant blade
Forged in that fierce hour's fire, the Syrian chief
Began new life. When next the Council weighed
The heavy future charged with wrath and grief,
He spoke his will: I ask to wed the maid,
The child of Abd-el-Aziz: and, in brief,
I bring for dowry all our wealth and might,
Unto our last heart's blood, to fight your fight.

XVII.

All mute with marvelling sat. Her sire then said
From infancy unto my brother's son
She has been held betrothed: our lord can wed
Full many a lovelier, many a richer one.
But quite in vain they reasoned, flattered, pled;
This was his proffer, other he had none:
A boy and girl outweighed the Azra tribe?
'Twas strange! His vow was fixed to that sole bribe.

XVIII.

And as their couriers came in day by day
Pregnant with portents of yet blacker ill;
And all their urgency broke in fuming spray
Against the rock of his firm-planted will;
The baffled current took a tortuous way,
And drowned a happy garden green and still,
O'erwhelming Abd-el-Aziz with that gibe,
A boy and girl outvalue all our tribe?

XIX.

He loved his daughter, and he loved yet more
His brother's son; and now the whole tribe prest
The scale against them: there was raging xvar,
Too sure of hapless issue in his breast
Sea-tossed where rocks on all sides fanged the shore.
She heard him moaning: Would I were at rest,
Ere this should come upon me, in the grave!
Her poor heart bled to hear him weep and rave.

XX.

She flung herself all yearning at his feet;
The long white malehair dashed her brow with tears;
But her tears scalded him; her kisses sweet
Were crueller than iron barbs of spears
He had no eyes her tender eyes to meet;
Her soft caressing words scarce touched his ears
 But they were fire and madness in his brain:
 Yet while she clasped he mutely clasped again.

XXI.

At length he answered her: A heavy doom
Is laid upon me; now, when I am old,
And weak, and bending toward the quiet tomb
Can it then be, as we are sometimes told,
That women, nay, that young girls in their bloom
Lovely, beloved, and loving, have been bold
 To give their lives, when blenched the bravest man,
 For safety of their city or their clan?

XXII.

She trembled in cold shadow of a rock
Leaning to crush her where she knelt fast bound;
She grew all ear to catch the coming shock,
And felt already quakings of the ground;
Yet firmly said: Your anguish would not mock
Your daughter, O my Father: pray expound
 The woeful riddle; and whate'er my part,
 It is your very blood which feeds this heart.

XXIII.

He told her all: the perils great and near;
The might of Walid; and the friendship long
Which bound them to his house, and year by year
With mutual kindnesses had grown more strong
His offer, his demand, which would nor hear
A word in mitigation right or wrong.
Her young blood curdled: Bring him to our tent,
That I may plead; perchance he will relent.

XXIV.

He came; and found her sitting double-veiled,
For grief was round her like a funeral stole.
She pleaded, she o'erwhelmed him, and she failed
For still the more her passion moved his soul,
The more he loved her; when his heart most quailed,
His purpose stretched most eager for the goal I stake myself, house,
friends, all, for the tribe Which gives me you; but for no meaner bribe.

XXV.

So her face set into a stony mask,
And heavy silence crushed them for an hour
Ere she could learn the words to say her task
Let only mutes appeal to Fate's deaf power!
Behold I pledge myself to what you ask,
My sire here sells me for the settled dower:
The sheikhs can know we are at one;
I pray That none else know it ere the wedding-day.

XXVI.

Which shall be when next moon is on the wane
As this to-night: my heart is now the bier
Of that which we have sacrificed and slain
My own poor Past, still beautiful and dear,
Cut off from life, wants burial; and though vain
Is woman's weeping, I must weep I fear
A little on the well-beloved's tomb
Ere marriage smiles and blushes can outbloom.

XXVII.

He left them, sire and daughter, to their woe;
Himself then sick at heart as they could be
But set to work at once, and spurred the slow
Sad hours till they were fiery-swift as he
With messengers on all sides to and fro,
With ravelled webs of subtle policy,
He gave the sheikhs good earnest of what aid
They had so cheaply bought with one fair maid.

XXVIII.

Thus he took Araby's one peerless prize,
And homeward went ungrudging all the cost;
Though she was marble; with blank arid eyes,
Weary and hopeless as the waste they crossed
When neither moon nor star is in the skies,
And water faileth, and the track is lost.

He took such statue triumphing for wife,
Assured his love would kindle it to life.

XXIX.

She had indeed wept, wept and wailed that moon,
But had not buried yet her shrouded Past;
Which ever lay in a most deathlike swoon,
Pallid and pulseless, motionless and ghast,
While Fate withheld from it death's perfect boon:
She kept this doleful mystery locked up fast;
Her form was as its sepulchre of stone,
Her heart its purple couch and hidden throne.

XXX.

She went; and sweeter voiced than cooing dove
Hassan the bard his farewell ode must render:
We had a Night, the dream of heaven above,
Wherein one moon and countless stars of splendour;
We had a Moon, the face of perfect love,
Wherein two nights with stars more pure and tender
Our Night with its one moon we still have here
Where is our Moon with its twin nights more dear?

PART II.

I.

As Weddah and his troop were coming back
From their first foray, which success made brief,
Scouts met him and in sharp haste turned his track
On special mission to a powerful chief,
Who wavered still between the white and black,
And lurked for mere self-profit like a thief.

This errand well fulfilled, at last he came
To flush her tear-pearls with the ruby fame.

II.

Into the camp full joyously he rode,
Leading his weary escort; as for him,
The love and trust that in his bosom glowed
Had laughed away all weariness of limb.
The sheikhs, his full report heard, all bestowed
Well-measured praises, brief and somewhat grim;
As veterans scanning the enormous night
In which this one star shone so bravely bright.

III.

Then Abd-el-Aziz rose and left the tent,
And he accompanied with eager pace;
And marked not how his frank smiles as he went
Were unreflected in each well-known face;
How joyous greetings he on all sides sent
Brought hollow echoes as from caverned space:
His heart drank sweet wine 'mid the roses singing,
And thought the whole world with like revels ringing.

IV.

He entered with his uncle, and his glance
Sank disappointed. But the old man wept
With passion o'er him, eyeing him askance;
And made him eat and drink; and ever kept
Questioning, questioning, as to every chance
Throughout his absence; keen to intercept
The fatal, But my cousin? ready strung
Upon the tense lips by the eager tongue.

V.

At length it flew, the lover's winged dart;
He sped it wreathed with flowers of hope and joy,
It pierced with iron point the old man's heart,
Who quivering cried: You are, then, still a boy
Love, love, the sweet to meet, the smart to part,
Make all your world of pleasure and annoy
Is this a time for dalliance in rose bowers?
The vultures gather; do they scent sweet flowers?

VI.

It is a time of woe and shame, of strife
Whose victory must be dolorous as defeat
The sons of Ishmael clutch the stranger's knife
To stab each other; every corpse you meet
Has held a Moslem soul, an Arab life:
The town-serfs prisoned in stark fort and street
Exult while countless tents that freely roam
Perish like proud ships clashing in the foam.

VII.

We might learn wisdom from our foes and thralls!
The mongrels of a hundred barbarous races,
Who know not their own sires, appease their brawls,
Leave night and sunward set their impure faces,
To bay in concert round old Syrian walls,
And thrust their three gods on our holy places:
We have one Sire, one Prophet, and one Lord,
And yet against each other turn the sword.

VIII.

Thus long he groaned with fevered bitterness,
Till, Say at least, my Father, she is well!
Stung prudence out of patience: Surely yes
The children of the faith whom Azrael
Hath gathered, do they suffer our distress?—
But smitten by that word the lover fell,
As if at such rash mention of his name
That bird of God with wings of midnight came.

IX.

Deep in the shadow of those awful plumes
A night and day and night he senseless lay;
And Abd-el-Aziz cowered 'mid deeper glooms,
Silent in vast despair, both night and day
It seemed two forms belonging to the tombs
Had been abandoned in that tent; for they
 Were stark and still and mute alike, although
 The one was conscious of their double woe.

X.

At last death left the balance, and the scale
Of wretched life jarred earth: and in the morn
The lover woke, confused as if a veil
Of heavy dreams involved him; weak and worn
And cold at heart, and wondering what bale
Had wounded him and left him thus forlorn:
 So still half-stunned with anguish he lay long,
 Fretful to rend the shroud that wrapt his wrong.

XI.

He turned; and on the pillow, near his head,
He saw a toy, a trifle, that gave tongue
To mute disaster: forthwith on his bed
The coiled-snake Memory hissed and sprang and stung:
Then all the fury of the storm was shed
From the black swollen clouds that overhung
 The hot rain poured, the fierce gusts shook his soul
 Wild flashes lit waste gloom from pole to pole.

XII.

He hardly dared to touch the petty thing,
The talisman of this tremendous spell
A purse of dark blue silk; a golden ring,
A letter in the hand he knew so well.
Still as he sought to read new gusts would fling
Wet blindness in his vision, and a knell
 Of rushing thunder trample through his brain
 Aud tread him down into the swoon again.

XIII.

He read: Farewell! In one sad word I weave
More thoughts than pen could write or tongue declare,
No other word can Om-el-Bonain leave
To Weddah, save her blessing; and her prayer,
That he will quail not, though his heart must grieve,
That all his strength and valour, skill and care,
Shall be devoted loyally to serve
The sacred Tribe, and never self-ward swerve.

XIV.

For verily the Tribe is all, and we
Are nothing singly save as parts of it:
The one great Nile flows ever to the sea,
The waterdrops for ever change and flit;
And some the first ooze snares, and some may be
The King's sweet draught, proud Cairo's mirror; fit
For all each service of the stream whose fame
They share, by which alone they have a name.

XV.

And since I know that you cannot forget,
And am too sure your love will never change,
I leave my image to your soul: but yet
Keep it as shrined and shrouded till the strange
Sad dream of life, illusion and regret,
Is ended; short must be its longest range.
Farewell! Hope gleams the wan lamp in a tomb
Above a corpse that waits the final doom.

XVI.

This writing was a dear but cruel friend
That dragged him from the deep, and held him fast
Upon life's shore, who would have found an end,
Peace and oblivion. Turn from such a past
To such a future, and unquailing wend
Its infinite hopeless hours ! he shrank aghast:
Yet in this utmost weakness swore to make
The dreadful sacrifice for her dear sake.

XVII.

But when he stood as one about to fall,
And would go weep upon her tomb alone,
And Abd-el-Aziz had to tell him all,
The cry of anguish took a harsher tone:
Rich harem coverlets for funeral pall,
For grave a Syrian marriage couch and throne!
A human rival, breathing mortal breath,
And not the star-cold sanctity of Death!

XVIII.

This truth was as a potent poison-draught,
Fire in the entrails, wild fire in the brain,
Which kindled savage strength in him who quaffed
And did not die of its first maddening pain.
It struck him like the mere malignant shaft
Which stings a warrior into sense again,
Who lay benumbed with wounds, and would have died
Unroused: the fresh wound makes him crawl and hide.

XIX.

A month he wandered in wild solitude;
And in that month grew old, and yet grew strong:
Now lying prone and still as death would brood
The whole long day through and the whole night long;
Now demon-driven day and night pursued
Stark weariness amidst the clamorous throng
Of thoughts that raged with memory and desire,
And parched, his bruised feet burning, could not tire.

XX.

When he came back, o'ermastered by his vow
To serve the Tribe through which he was unblest,
None gazed without remorse upon his brow,
None felt his glance without an aching breast:
Magnificent in beauty even now,
Ravaged by grief and fury and unrest,
He moved among them swift and stern of deed,
And always silent save in action's need.

XXI.

And thus went forth, and unrejoicingly
Drank deep of war's hot wine: as one who drinks
And only grows more sullen, while yet he
Never the challenge of the full cup shrinks;
And rises pale with horror when the glee
Of careless revellers into slumber sinks,
Because the feast which could not give him joy
At least kept phantoms from their worst annoy.

XXII.

The lion of the Azra is come back
A meagre wolf! foes mocked, who mocked no more
When midnight scared them with his fresh attack
After the long day's fighting, and the war
Found him for ever wolf-like on their track,
As if consumed with slakeless thirst of gore
Since he was cursed from slumber and repose,
He wreaked his restlessness on friends and foes.

XXIII.

The lightnings of his keen sword ever flashed
Without a ray of lightning in his glance;
His blade where blades were thickest clove or clashed
Without a war-cry: ever in advance
He sought out death; but death as if abashed
Adopted for its own his sword and lance,
And rode his steed, and swayed aside or blunted
The eager hostile weapons he affronted.

XXIV.

Once in the thick of battle as he raged
Thus cold and dumb amidst the furious cries,
Hassan the bard was near to him engaged,
And read a weird in those forlorn fixed eyes;
And singing of that combat they had waged
Gave voice to what surpassed his own surmise:
*For our young Lion of the mateless doom
Shall never go a cold corpse to the tomb!*

XXV.

Awe silenced him who sang, and deep awe fell
On those who heard it round the campfire's blaze:
But when they questioned he had nought to tell;
The vision had departed from his gaze.
The verse took wing and was a mighty spell;
Upon the foe new terror and amaze,
 To friends redoubled force; to one alone,
 The hero's self, it long remained unknown.

XXVI.

While Weddah in the South with fiery will
Bore conquest wheresoe'er his banner flew,
Walid with royal heart and patient skill
Upon the Syrian confines triumphed too.
They never met: each felt a savage thrill
Which jarred his inmost being through and through
 As still fresh fame the other's fame enlarged
 Each wished his rival in the ranks he charged.

XXVII.

And when the foemen sued at length for peace
To victors surfeited with war's alarms,
Save him who knew all rest in rest must cease,
They said: O warriors, not by your own arms,
Though they are mighty! may their might increase!
But more by Om-el-Bonain fatal charms,
 Possessing both who lost her and who won,
 Have we been baffled, vanquished, and undone.

XXVIII.

Whence Hassan sang his sudden daring ode
Of Beauty revelling in the storm of fight:
For if the warriors into battle rode,
Their hearts were kindled by her living light
Either as sun that in pure azure glowed,
Or baleful star in deep despair's black night:
 And whether by despair or joy she lit
 Intenser fires perplexed the poet's wit.

XXIX.

And would you know why empires break asunder,
Why peoples perish and proud cities fall
Seek not the captains where the steel clouds thunder,
Seek not the elders in the council hall;
But seek the chamber where some shining wonder
Of delicate beauty nestles, far from all
The turmoil, toying with adornments queenly,
And murmuring songs of tender love serenely.

XXX.

The clashing cymbals and the trumpet's clangour
Are peacefuller than her soft trembling lute
The armies raging with hot fire of anger
Are gentler than her gentle glances mute;
The restless rushings of her dainty languor
Outveer the wind, outspeed the barb's pursuit:
Well Hassan knows; who sings high laud and blessing
To this dear fatal riddle past all guessing.

PART III.

I.

The war was over for the time: and men
Returned to heal its wounds, repair its waste,
And thus grow strong and rich to fight again.
And Weddah, cold in victory's sun, embraced
The uncle whom his glory warmed; and then
Gathering his spoil of gems and gold in haste,
Rode forth: the clansmen wondered much to find
His famous favourite steed was left behind.

II.

He set out in the night: none knew his goal,
Though some might fix it in their secret thought.
He could no longer stifle or control,
In calm by battle's fever undistraught,
The piteous yearning of his famished soul
Which unappeasably its food besought;
Fretting his life out like an infant's cry,
Let us but see her once before we die

III.

When he returned not, soon the rumour spread;
That he had vanished now his work was done:
The prophecy had been fulfilled; not dead
But in the body borne beyond the sun,
He lived eternal life. He heard this said
Himself in Walid's city, where as one
Who sojourns but for traffic's sake he dwelt;
And hearing it, more surely shrouded felt.

IV.

Courteous and humble as beseemeth trade,
While ever on the watch, some gems he sold:
Men said, this young man is discreet and staid
Yet fair in dealing, nor too fond of gold.
He smiled to hear his virtues thus arrayed,
A smile that gloomed to frowning; but controlled
The haughty spirit surging in his breast;
The end in view, what mattered all the rest?

V.

The end in reach: for now the favourite slave
Of Om-el-Bonain, as he knew full well;
A frank-eyed girl, whose bosom was a wave
Whereon love's lotus lightly rose and fell
Drew near to him, attracted by his grave
Unscathed majesty, and by the spell
Of his intense and fathomless regard,
Splendid in gloom as midnight myriad-starred.

VI.

She haggled for a trinket with her tongue
To veil the eager commerce of her eyes;
Those daring smugglers when the heart is young,
For contraband of passion. His disguise
In talk with her but loosely round him hung;
She glimpsed a secret and an enterprise;
Love's flower, unsunned by hope, soon fades; she grieves,
Yet still returns to scent the rich dead leaves.

VII.

Till sick at heart and desperate with delay
He ventured all, abruptly flinging down
The weary mask: if death must end the play
Better at once: I learn that in your town
Dwells Om-el-Bonain, whom you know men say.
Upon her eye-flash dropped a decent frown:
She is my mistress, and great Walid's wife—
The word his heart sought, stabbed in with a knife.

VIII.

Your mistress is my cousin; and will be
The friend of who shall tell her I am here.
But if I may not trust your secrecy,
Tell Walid, tell not her: and have no fear
That I will harm you for harm done to me,
Unaimed at her. The life I hold not dear
Might dower you well. But with a passionate oath
The eager girl swore loyalty to both.

IX.

Then hurried from him to her lady sweet,
And thrilled her frozen heart with burning pang:
For life resigned and torpid in defeat
To new contention with its fate upsprang,
This sword of hope found lying at her feet
While love's impetuous clarion summons rang
Weddah alive: alive and here! Beware!
If you now mock, Hell mock your dying prayer!

X.

I saw a merchant: never chief or king
Of form so noble visited our land
He wore a little ring, a lady's ring,
On the last finger of a feared right hand;
Some woe enormous overshadowing
Made beauty terrible that had been bland;
He was convulsed when he would speak your name,
From such abysses of his heart it came.

XI.

Now whether this be Weddah's self or not,
My Lady in her wisdom must decide.
The lady's questions ploughed the self-same spot
Over and over lest some grains should hide
Of this vast treasure fallen to her lot
Swear by the Prophet's tomb I may confide
 In you as in myself until the end;
 And Om-el-Bonain lives and dies your friend.

XII.

Brave Amine swore, and bravely held the vow.
Her mistress kept her babbling all that eve,
A pleasant rill. And on the morrow: Now
Go bid him tell all friends that he must leave
In seven days; so much we must allow,
So many starving hours of bliss bereave!
 His travels urge him in his own despite;
 He gives a farewell feast on such a night:

XIII.

And in the meanwhile he shall fully learn
What is to follow. When this message came,
The thick dark in him 'gan to seethe and burn
Till soul and body fused in one clear flame.
His guests all blinked with wonder to discern
This glowing heart of joy; and flushed with shame
 Unmerited for having thought him cold,
 Who made their old feel young, their young feel old.

XIV.

The long week passed; the morning came to crown
Or kill the lovers' hope. It was a day
Well chosen, for some guests of high renown
Left Walid, who would speed them on their way;
And festal tumult filled the sunny town.
The merchant in departure strolled astray
 Amongst the groups about the palace heaving
 To glimpse the rich procession form for leaving.

XV.

And when it left, absorbing every eye;
A stream of splendours rolling with the din
Of horn and tabor under that blue sky;
Came Amine carelessly and led him in,
With chat of certain anklets she would buy;
And led him lounging onwards till they win
A storeroom where her mistress daily spent
Some matin hours on household cares intent

XVI.

Large chests were ranged around it, one of which
They had made ready with most loving care;
Lurked apertures among the carvings rich,
Above its deep soft couch, for light and air:
Behold your prison cell, your palace niche,
The jewel casket of my Lady fair!
I lock you in: from her must come your key:
Love's captives pay sweet ransom to get free!

XVII.

She found her mistress fever-flushed, and told
Their full success: Our prisoner is secure;
A lion meek as lambkin of the fold,
Prepared your harshest torments to endure!
But, dearest Lady, as you have been bold,
Be prudent, prudent, prudent, and assure
Long life to bliss. Now with your leave I go
To be well seen of all the house below.

XVIII.

She took another stairway for descent,
And sauntered round to the front courtyard gate,
Chatting and laughing lightly as she went
With various groups, all busy in debate
On those departed guests: and some were shent
For meanness maugre retinue and state,
And some extolled for bounteous disposition,
And all summed up with judgment-day precision.

XIX.

Of all her fellow-slaves it seemed but one,
Whose breast was tinder for love's flame would she
Vouchsafe a spark, had spied the venture run:
Soho, my flirting madam, where is he
You brought in here an hour since with your fun?
A happy rogue, whoever he may be!
Have you already tired of this new dandy,
Or hid him somewhere to be always handy?

XX.

The stupid jealous creature that you are!
Where were your eyes, then, not to know his face?
For weeks back he has dealt in our bazaar,
And now is on the road to some new place.
He had an emerald and diamond star
I thought might win my poor dear Lady's grace
She would not even look at it, alack!
I packed him off for ever with his pack.

XXI.

Thus these long-hapless lovers for awhile,
Enringed with dreadful fire, safe ambush found,
Screened by its very glare; a magic isle
By roaring billows guarded well till drowned;
A refuge spot of green and liquid smile
Whose rampart was the simoon gathering round:
If darkness hid them, it was thunder gloom
Whose light must come in lightnings to consume.

XXII.

And even as Iskander's self for whom
The whole broad earth sufficed not, found at last
Full scope vouchsafed him in the narrow tomb;
So he long pining in the desert vast
As in a dungeon, found now ample room,
Found perfect freedom and content, shut fast
Alive within that coffer-coffin lonely,
Which gave him issue to that chamber only.

XXIII.

They knew what peril compassed them about,
But could not feel the dread it would inspire;
Imperious love shut other passions out,
Or made them fuel for his altar fire.
At first one sole thought harassed them with doubt;
To kill her lord and flee? Then tribe and sire
Would justly curse them; for in every act
He had been loyal to the evil pact.

XXIV.

He had indeed wronged them; for well he knew
Their love from infancy, their plighted troth,
When merciless in mastery he drew
From her repugnant lips the fatal oath!
That love avenged the wrong of love was due;
But still his blood was sacred to them both;
The tender husband and the proved ally
They dare not harm; must death come, they could die.

XXV.

Die! Often he would dream for hours supine
Upon his lidded couch, Life's dream is over:
I wait the resurrection in this shrine
Anon an angel cometh to uncover
The inmost glories of the realm divine,
Because though dead I still am faithful lover
My spirit drinks its fill of bliss, and then
Sinks back into this twilight trance again.

XXVI.

Like bird above its young one in the nest
Which cannot fly, he often heard her singing;
The thrill and swell of rapture from her breast
In fountains of delightful music springing:
It seemed he had been borne among the blest,
Whose quires around his darksome couch were ringing;
Long after that celestial voice sank mute
His heartstrings kept sweet tremble like a lute.

XXVII.

She heard his breathing like a muffled chime,
She heard his tranquil heart-beats through the flow
Of busy menials in the morning time;
Far-couched at night she felt a sudden glow,
And straight her breathing answered rhyme for rhyme
His softest furtive footsteps to and fro:
And none else heard? She marvelled how the sense
Of living souls could be so dull and dense.

XXVIII.

Once early, early, ere the dawn grew loud,
She stole to watch his slumber by its gleam;
And blushing with a soft laugh-gurgle bowed
And sank as in the bosom of a stream,
An ardent angel in a rosy cloud
Resolving the enchantment of his dream:
Where there is room for thee, is room for us;
So may I share thy death-sarcophagus!

XXIX.

She grew so lovely, ravishing, and sweet,
Her brow so radiant and her lips so warm;
Such rich heart-music stirred her buoyant feet,
And swayed the gestures of her lithe young form,
And revelled in her voice to bliss complete;
That Walid whirled with his great passion's storm,
Befooled with joy, went doting down his hell:
Oh, tame and meek, my skittish wild gazelle!

XXX.

Thus these, sings Hassan, of their love's full measure
Drank swiftly in that circle of swift fire;
A veil of light and ardour to their pleasure
Till it revealed their ashes on one pyre:
Some never win, some spend in youth this treasure,
And crawl down sad age starvelings of desire:
These lavish royal wealth in one brief season,
But death found both so rich he gave them reason.

PART IV.

I.

The tender almond-blossom flushed and white
Sank floating in warm flakes through lucid air;
The rose flung forth into the sea of light
Her heart of fire and incense burning bare;
The nightingale thrilled all the breathless night
With passion so intense it seemed despair:
And still these lovers drank love's perfect wine
From that gold urn of secrecy divine.

II.

Then Fate prepared the end. A grey old man,
Bowed down with grief who had not bent with time,
Made way to Walid in the full divan:
His son, great-hearted and in youth's hot prime,
Was now a fugitive and under ban
For an indignant deed of sinless crime;
A noble heirloom pearl the suppliant brought
To clear the clouded face ere he besought.

III.

This pearl in Walid's mood of golden joy
Shone fair as morning star in rosy dawn;
He called his minion, Motar: Take this toy
Unto your Lady where she sits withdrawn,
With my love-greeting, and this message, boy:
Were this a string of such, a monarch's pawn,
A pearl for every note, it would not pay
That song I heard you singing yesterday.

IV.

They had been leaning for an hour perchance,
Motionless, gazing in each other's eyes;
Floating in deep pure joy, whose still expanse
Rippled but rarely with long satiate sighs;
Their souls so intermingled in the trance,
So far away dissolved through fervent skies,
That it was marvel how each fair mute form
Without its pulse and breath remained life-warm.

V.

When rapid footsteps almost at the door
Stung her to vigilance, and her fierce start
Shook Weddah, and that lion of proud war
Must flee to covert like a timid hart
But drunken with the message he now bore
The saucy youth flew in, Fate's servile dart,
Without announcement; and espied, what he,
Still subtle though amazed, feigned not to see.

VI.

The message with the goodly pearl he gave:
She could for wrath have ground it into dust
Between her richer teeth, and stabbed the slave
Who brought it; but most bitterly she must
Put on sweet smiles of pleasure, and the knave
With tender answer full of thanks entrust.
He lingered: Our kind lady will bestow
Some little mark of bounty ere I go?

VII.

Her anger cried: Only the message dear
Has saved the messenger from punishment;
If evermore as now you enter here
You shall be scourged and starved and prison-pent.
He cowered away from her in sullen fear,
And darted from the room; and as he went
The sting of her rebuke was curdling all
His blood of vanity to poison gall.

VIII.

He hissed in Wahid's ear the seething spite
My Lord's pearl by my Lady's was surpassed;
In that rich cedar coffer to the right
I saw the treasure being hidden fast;
A gallant, young and beautiful and bright.
Unmothered slave, be that foul lie your last
And clove the scandal with his instant sword
Strong Walid: Motar had his full reward.

IX.

When Weddah, plunged from glory into gloom,
Heard that last speech of Om-el-Bonain there
A sudden ominous sense of icy doom
Assailed his glowing heart with bleak despair.
The moment that false slave had left the room
She sprang to seize her lover in his lair:
She bowed all quivering like a storm-swept palm;
He rose to meet her solemn, pale and calm.

X.

He clasped her with strong passion to his breast,
He kissed her with a very tender kiss:
Soul of my soul! what lives men call most blest
Can be compared to our brief lives in bliss?
But one wild year of anguish and unrest;
Three moons of perfect secret love! Were this
My dying hour, I thankfully attest
Of all earth's dooms I have enjoyed the best.

XI.

What, weeping, thou, such kiss-unworthy tears!
The glory of the Azra must not weep,
Whom mighty Weddah worships, for cold fears;
But only for strong love, in stillness deep,
Secluded from all alien eyes and ears.
And now to vigil, and perchance to sleep,
Enshrined once more: be proud and calm and strong;
Your second visitor will come ere long.

XII.

And scarcely was all said when Walid came,
Full gently stealing for a tiger spring;
His love and fury, hope and fear and shame,
All mad with venom from that serpent's sting,
Like wild beasts huddled in a den of flame
Within the cool white palace of a king:
She rose to greet; he deigned no glance of quest,
But went and lolled upon that cedar chest.

XIII.

I come like any haggler of the mart,
Who having sent a bauble seeks its price:
Will you forgive the meanness of my part,
And one of these fair coffers sacrifice?
A clutch of iron fingers gript her heart
Till it seemed bursting in the cruel vice:
And yet she quivered not, nor breathed a moan:
Are not myself and all things here your own?

XIV.

I thank you for the bountiful award;
And choose, say this whereon I now sit here?
Take any, take them all; but that, my Lord,
Is full of household stuff and woman's gear.
I want the coffer, not what it may hoard,
However rich and beautiful and dear.
And it is thine, she said; and this the key:
Her royal hand outheld it stedfastly.

XV.

Swift as a double flash from thunder-skies
The angel and the devil of his doubt
Flamed from the sombre windows of his eyes:
He went and took the key she thus held out,
And turned as if he would unlock his prize.
She breathed not; all the air ran blood about
A swirl of terrors and wild hopes of guilt;
Calm Weddah seized, then loosed, his dagger-hilt.

XVI.

But Walid had restrained himself, and thought:
Shall I unlock the secret of my soul,
The mystery of my Fate, that has been brought
So perfectly within my own control?
That were indeed a work by folly wrought:
For Time, in this my vassal, must unroll
To me, and none but me, what I would learn;
I hold the vantage, undiscerned discern.

XVII.

He summoned certain slaves, and bade them bear
The coffer he had sealed with his own seal
Into a room below with strictest care;
And followed thoughtful at the last one's heel.
At noontide Amine found her mistress there,
Benumbed with horror, deaf to her appeal;
The sightless eyes fixed glaring on that door
By which her soul had vanished evermore.

XVIII.

Beneath the cedar whose noonshadow large,
Level from massive trunk, outspread halfway
Adown a swardslope to the river marge,
Where rosebowers shone between the willows grey,
The wondering bearers bore their heavy charge;
And where the central shadow thickest lay
He bade them delve a pit, and delve it deep
Till watersprings against their strokes should leap.

XIX.

Then waved them to a distance, while he bowed
Upon the coffer, harkening for a space:
If truth bought that poor wretch his bloody shroud,
I bury thus her guilt and my disgrace;
And you, as by the whole earth disavowed,
Sink into nothingness and leave no trace:
If not, it is a harmless whim enough
To sepulchre a chest of household stuff

XX.

With face encircled by his hands, which leaned
Upon the wood, he challenged clear and slow:
The hollow sound, his full hot breath thus screened
Suffused his visage with a tingling glow;
His pulse, his vesture's rustling intervened
And marred the silence: he drew back, and so
Knelt listening yet awhile with bated breath:
The secret lay as mute and still as death.

XXI.

Above there in her chamber Weddah might
Have leapt forth suddenly their foe to kill.
Ev'n here with hazard of swift fight and flight
Escaped or perished as a warrior still:
But thus through him her name had suffered blight:
He locked his breath and nerves with rigid will.
 So Walid first let sink his key unused,
 Then signed the slaves back: they wrought on, he mused.

XXII.

Against the dark bulk swelled the waters thin,
The stones and earth were trampled to a mound.
He then broke silence stern and sad: Within
That coffer ye have buried, sealed and bound,
Lies one of the most potent evil djinn,
Whose hate on me and mine hath darkly frowned;
 He sought to kill your mistress: Hell and Doom
 And Allah's curse all guard this dungeon tomb!

XXIII.

And Walid never spoke of this again,
And none dared ask him; for his brow grew black,
His eye flamed evil and appalling when
Some careless word but strayed upon a track
That might from far lead to it: therefore men
Spoke only of the thing behind his back.
 The cedar shadow centred by that mound
 Was sacredly eschewed as haunted ground.

XXIV.

But one pale phantom, noon and night and morn,
Was ever seen there; quiet as a stone,
Huddled and shapeless, weeping tears forlorn
As silent as the dews; her heart alone
And not her lips, whose seal was never torn,
Upbraiding sluggish death with constant moan.
 Hushed whispers circled, piteous eyes were wet
 The captive djinnee holds her captive yet.

XXV.

Thus Walid learned too well the bitter truth,
His home dissolved, its marvellous joy a cheat;
Yet gave no sign to her: for there was ruth
Of memories gall itself left subtly sweet;
And consciousness of wrong against her youth,
And surfeit of a vengeance so complete:
 He could not stab her bleeding heart; her name
 With his own honour he kept pure from shame.

XXVI

She thought Death dead, or prisoned in deep Hell
As sole assuager of the human lot:
But when the evening of the seventh day fell
Walid alone dared tread the fatal spot:
She crouched as who would plunge into a well,
Livid and writhed into a desperate knot;
 Her fingers clutched like talons in the mould:
 Thus the last time his arms about her fold.

XXVII.

As if to glut the demon with her doom,
And break the spell, there where her corse was found
He had it buried; and a simple tomb
Of black-domed marble sealed the dolorous mound;
And there was set to guard the cedar gloom
A triple cirque of cypress-trees around:
 Thus Love wrought Destiny to join his slaves
 Weddah and Om-el-Bonain in their graves.

XXVIII.

True Amine, freed and richly dowered, no less
Had served until the end her lady dear;
And shrouded for the grave that loveliness
Whose noon-eclipse left life without its peer:
Then sought the Azra in her lone distress,
And tended Abd-el-Aziz through the sere
 Forlorn last days; and married in the clan,
 And bore brave children to a valiant man.

XXIX.

Great Walid lived long years beyond this woe,
And still increased in wealth and power and glory;
A loyal friend, a formidable foe
Each Azra was his mother's child saith story;
And he saw goodly children round him grow
To keep his name green when Death took him hoary
So prosperous, was he happy too? the sage
Cites this one counsel of his reverend age

XXX.

Have brood-mares in your stables, my young friend,
And women in your harem, but no wife
A common daggerblade may pierce or rend,
A month bring healing; this, the choicest knife
In Fate's whole armoury, wounds beyond amend,
And with a scratch can poison all your life:
And it lies naked in your naked breast
When you are drunk with joy and sleep's rich rest.

XXXI.

As surely as a very precious stone
Finds out that jeweller who doth excel,
So surely to the bard becometh known
The tale which only he can fitly tell:
A few years thence, and Walid's heart alone
Had thrilled not to a talisman's great spell,
His deathstone set in Hassan's golden verse;
Here poorly copied in cheap bronze or worse.

XXXII.

He ends: We know not which to most admire;
The lover who went silent to his doom;
The spouse obedient to her lord's just ire,
The mistress faithful to her lover's tomb;
The husband calm in jealousy's fierce fire,
Who strode unswerving through the doubtful gloom
To vengeance instant, secret and complete,
And did not strike one blow more than was meet.

XXXIII.

With stringent cords of circumstance dark Fate
Doth certain lives here so entoil and mesh
That some or all must strangle if they wait,
And knife to cut the knots must cut quick flesh:
The first strong arm free severs ere too late;
Fresh writhings would but tangle it afresh:
To die with valiant fortitude, to kill
As priest not butcher; so much scope has will.

XXXIV.

These perished, and he slew them in such wise
That all may meet as friends and free from shame,
Whether they meet in Hell or Paradise,
If he has won long life and power and fame,
Our darlings too have won their own set prize,
Conjoined for evermore in true love's name:
The Azra die when they do love, of old
Was graven with the iron pen, on gold.

XXXV.

May Allah grant eternal joy and youth
In fateless Heaven to one and all of these.
And for himself a little grain of ruth
The bard will beg, this once, while on his knees;
Who cannot always see the very truth,
And does not always sing the truth he sees,
But something pleasanter to foolish ears
That should be tickled not with straws but spears.