

Rose Leaves When the Rose is Dead

By Madison J. Cawein

See how the rose leaves fall—
The rose leaves fall and fade:
And by the wall, in dusk funereal,
How leaf on leaf is laid,
Withered and soiled and frayed.

How red the rose heaves fall—
And in the ancient trees,
That stretch their twisted arms about the hall,
Burdened with mysteries,
How sadly sighs the breeze.

How soft the rose leaves fall—
The rose leaves drift and lie:
And over them dull slugs and beetles crawl,
And, palely glimmering by,
The glow-worm trails its eye.

How thick the rose leaves fall—
And strew the garden way,
For snails to slime and spotted toads to sprawl,
And, plodding past each day,
Coarse feet to tread in clay.

How fast they fall and fall—
Where Beauty, carved in stone,
With broken hands veils her dead eyes; and, tall,
White in the moonlight lone,
Looms like a marble moan.

How slow they drift and fall—
And strew the fountained pool,
That, in the nymph-carved basin by the wall,
Reflects in darkness cool
Ruin made beautiful.

How red the rose leaves fall—
Fall and like blood remain
Upon the dial's disc, whose pedestal,
Black-mossed and dark with stain,
Crumbles in sun and rain.

How wan they seem to fall
 Around one where she stands
Dim in their midst, beyond the years' recall,
 Reaching pale, passionate hands
 Into the past's vague lands.

How still they fall and fall
 Around them where they meet
As oft of old: she in her gem-pinned shawl
 Of white; and he, complete
 In black from head to feet.

How faint the rose leaves fall
 Around them where, it seems,
He holds her clasped—parting from her and all
 His heart's young hopes and dreams
 There in the moon's thin beams.

Around them rose leaves fall—
 And in the stress and urge
Of winds that strew them lightly over all,
 With deep, autumnal surge,
 There seems to rise a dirge:—

“See how the rose leaves fall
 Upon thy dead, O soul!
The rose leaves of the love that once in thrall
 Held thee beyond control,
 Making thy heart's world whole.

“God help them still to fall
 Around thee, bowed above
The face within thy heart, beneath the pall!
 The perished face thereof,
 The beautiful face of Love.”