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Lullabies & Nocturnes

First, the Nocturnes

Restorative Dreaming

A pensive morning in quiet shade
Of this is inner contentment made
A sip of silence, a moment's rest
In the garden corner I love the best
With butterflies skimming the border's blooms
Voile curtains billowing out of rooms
A book of poems upon my lap
Read in short bursts between nap and nap
And the sound of a bicycle coming near
To bring the post of love-letters here
I'd rather recline in this reverent haze
Than waste on reality any days

Music of a Summer Evening

The cricket, the frog, and the mockingbird,
Under the moonlight on the third
Night of its waxing toward the full,
Listen to silence in the lull,
Contemplate summer's magic trick
Of tuning the sprinklers' flash and click,
And then trade chirps of their favorite word,
The cricket, the frog, and the mockingbird.

Masked Olivia

The sleeping lady whose closed eyes
Conceal the wisdom of the wise
Contain the laughter children know
And barricade a world below
Keeps in closed eyelids cool release
And in her heart a realm of peace

Eclipse

It all began with the erasure of
All memory, of thought and hope and care,

Of sight and sound and sense, and of the air,
Removal of all faint belief in love—
A chrysalis unsealed its crystal door,
Wherefrom emerged a brittle wingèd thing
That slowly pulsed the veining of its wing,
Searching for light and heat that came no more—
And, lastly, drew upon the black'ning sky
To fill its velvet wings, opaque, a most
Mysterious angel, butterfly, a ghost,
Then spread that inky cloak and sprang to fly—
And so was blotted out the sun and moon
And ev'ry ounce of life at highest noon.

Faithful

Out there the stars are shining
Even at the height of blazing day.
Isn't it comforting to know
The sweetness of graceful night
Waits in the wings,
Quiet,
And will appear when the dimming
House lights hush the hurly-burly
And the sky becomes
A darkened proscenium?

Shades of Indigo

Ocean or sky, it's all the same;
liquid or vapor, fluid, sky—
Look for the stars and wonder why
you can't remember your place, your name,
Your hopes, your fears, your heart, your dreams,
or anything like a concrete fact,
But only sense, faintly, a world intact
when the air and sea converge their streams.
When the blue engulfs both thought and time,
what is the measure by which you live?
How many tears and breaths must give
their blue to make the world so sublime?

The Angelus

The single note, which falls,
Ever so slowly, wrenchingly,
Like the very last beat of a heart—
That note rolls into depths

Untouchable by light, dives
So chasm-deep that the abyss
Must swallow it down and never
Surrender the sound again—

And all that remains of light
And life is just
The faintest remembrance of
The beating heart, the palest
Recollection of that benedictory
Fall of the note

From Below

Piercing black silence with
A melancholy line, she sings,
And from her burning breast
Arise such glowing tones
That all the sorrows of the world
Unfold, and with them in
The sinuously golden rays of light
She has coaxed in from outer
Darkness and decay, she finally
Takes that wandering and rolling
Way of theirs, all together, and moves
Instead toward the distant
Rippling gleam—and she,
Drawing from the dispirited and cold
Distance of sadness some new
And hopeful song, where once
Had lingered doubting and despair,
A glint of light pulled in
Solely by the sweetness of her voice,
Renews the comfort of the thought
That night is permeable, that joy
Lingers in the wings and waits
Only for one golden voice to call
It back into this place with that
Fine line of notes that first consoles
And then assures us all that past
This darkness there are mornings still.

Resting in Peace

Sheltered under lawn I lie,
a chrysalis, pre-butterfly,

a seed before both bulb and root
begin their stretching underfoot,
not yet awake yet not asleep,
but naked, nascent in the deep
recesses of the cradling soil,
before renewal, after toil,
untroubled and quite unconcerned
with things that should be done or learned
but rather, 'neath this silent slope,
transforming to a world of hope.

At Close of Day

After the labor that fills the day and long before full darkness falls,
We long to gather and go away, to leave the dimness of labor's halls
And go back home to the fireside, where supper and books and armchairs wait,
To spend the remains of eventide over soup and a novel beside the grate.
This is the way the day should end, and peace and renewal repair the spent,
Frayed souls whose work was less than friend, for whom the fire is heaven-sent—
This nest of comfort from which we roam
Always draws us back to hearth and home.

Sunset Begins

Sunset begins as dawn is barely ending,
The day a secret known to but a few
Who see such light without yet apprehending
That their mortality is old while new,
That death will follow birth in shorter seasons
Than anyone admits or likes to know,
Yet even such tight brevity has reasons
For relishing the afternoon's brief glow.

Say this, if you would savor for its beauty
A life as short as sorrows make it seem:
That recognizing light remains a duty,
And relishing the colors of its gleam
A pleasure that entrances more compactly,
Succinctly, for the smallness of the day,
And teaches us to see such joys exactly
Within their span, before they fly away.

The moon, appearing ere the sun has faltered,
The sun chasing her tail toward the moon,
And all the stars that follow them, are altered
In sight because I know they vanish soon,

And I with them, but dream that time will lengthen
Enough to let me see another day,
Wiser for seeing afternoons that strengthen
And nourish me by coloring the way.

Sunset begins as I was barely crying,
Newborn, and night appears and quickly wins,
Yet even as I feel I'm fainting, dying,
I know life's beauties when sunset begins.

Chiaroscuro

(The Snowy Owl)

Beautiful when yet unseen,
His stillness moving more than flight;
Like sparkling snow on evergreen
Branches reflecting morning's light
His gleaming feathers' moonlit sheen
Fires through the shadows of the night.
He seldom speaks, and need not sing,
But sighs in whispers when he flies,
For, needing nothing speech can bring,
Wearing the dark as his disguise,
He is the great nocturnal king
Of stars and darkness in this wise

Dainty Bats (Vespertilionidae Pipistrellus)

I: Gilding the Darkness

With filmy wings like petals
And with eyes of anthracite,
She sings her wild high aria
And reigns, queen of the night,
Fanning with flight the garden's night
In intricate display
Until All Hallows Eve should turn
To dawn of All Saints' Day

II: Night Wing

Scuttering through the branches,
Skimming on the pond,
Twisting, whistling through the air
To darkness and beyond,
Flinging out of rafters
And shattering stillness all
Along the edge of midnight,

She hears the fearful call
Of nihilistic shadow,
Of ice, the Totentanz
That pulls her on this drastic flight
And whirring, speeding, haunts
The dreams and waking shudders
So near to death, so far
From all that's comprehended,
To be a shooting star.

Enchantments

One night I stood upon the green
And every nightingale a-wing
Stopped in the linden trees to sing,
A perfect choir though all unseen,
Encircling in the meadow's crown—
Night-blooming flowers 'round my feet
Reflected moonglow, and their sweet,
Sweet breath rose up as stars fell down
In meteor showers to earth because
Its beauty was so great, so dear,
They longed to draw the night sky near
To all this peacefulness that was—
And while I stood upon that lawn,
Aching with joy, with ecstasy
As sharp as ice and flame in me,
I woke full wide, and it was dawn.
The day that came up in that place
Made all the green-wood hum and quake
With quivering for pleasure's sake,
At seeing the full sun's clear face,
Yet, basking in the softest fall
Of constant rain, as mist, to fly
In colored arcs across the sky
And shower prisms on us all—
The birds of day joined in that hymn
And coaxed the foxes to the green,
Contented beasts not often seen
In sun, and as I stood, a slim
Grey foal came, too, and nine or ten
Of rabbits, and the beasts all danced,
And I stood still, transfixed—entranced—
And blinked my eyes, and it was night.

Evening among the Stones

Under cedars, in the beeches
in the garden's deepest reaches,
sing the crickets and the sparrows,
robins, and the draught that harrows
every hollow of the windy, wooded hill...
Where those sleepers are reclining,
and above their tombs, repining,
kneel the loves they left behind them,
who return here yet to find them
and commune again together, sweetly, still...
As the honeysuckle flowers
lull away the weary hours,
here all spirits, in communion
so with nature, find reunion
in the waning light of afternoons at ease...
With the daylight, sadness dimming
like this lake where swans go swimming
through the lilies as its silver
mirror dims, goes dark forever,
souls may meet again as often as they please...

Invocation

From the settling of the evening to the whispering of dawn
Lies a tenebrously winding way that wanders bleakly on...
What's ahead is hid in veiling; what has been, lost in a mist,
And with strength and spirits failing goes the wayfarer, who kissed
Fond farewell to all familiars, bade goodbye to every known,
And set off to see tomorrow; now it seems all hope is flown.
But a flicker in the darkness sparks the vision of a wing,
And the silence now is shattered as a voice begins to sing!
Glorious, the song is lifted in its swelling, sweet refrains,
And the wayfarer is gifted with new courage in his veins.
What loveliness is in it when such music comes along
To illumine every minute; what great powers in a song!
When the journey seems unending and the dark rules every vale,
For whoever needs the tending, let me be
A nightingale.

Sing Me to Sleep

The road is long; the way grows faint,
But with a song and no complaint,
I'll walk it more at peace and ease
If you will shore me up, and please:

Your love for me is deep, I know,
Yet sing me to sleep and let me go—
A path unclear as nighttime draws
Me ever near its end, because
I've had full count of wealth and known
Such joys a fountain might be thrown
Beyond its rim in rushing streams,
So if grown dim, the way holds dreams
Enough to lead me happy hence,
And I'll not plead in self-defense:
Though ever deep your love, I know,
Sing me to sleep and let me go—
Into the night that never ends,
Where dark is light, and waiting friends
And quiet rest and graceful peace
Draw every guest to sweet release
How-e'er the strain of verses went,
With this refrain as Testament
And Will: Deep is your love, I know;
Sing me to sleep and
Let me go—

Lullabies, to End and to Begin Again

Sleep Invention

Sweetly unencumbered slumber
Propped-up pillows made of air
Quilts and comforters that billow
Round my elbows and my hair
Peace internal and external
Are the longings in my heart,
Which for now I'll feed with napping
On the lapping shores of Art

Countdown to Dreaming

What sprightly sprites, by noon and night, what fairies of the air
Dance in my dreams? To me, it seems there's always someone there
To twist and twirl, to whiz and whirl, to pirouette, jeté,
To bow and bend and to transcend mortality this way.
No one can see this dance but me, and only when I slumber,
When forty winks or nap, methinks, begins to unencumber
The dancing denizens of sleep, my own replacements for mere sheep,
And I must count them, lest my deep repose should lose their number.

Reparations

While the quiet of the evening draws its curtain on the noise
Day had clamored 'til its leaving, I will lie in calm and poise,
Gently as a bed of lilies bends in summer's kindest breeze,
As the cat turns, curling, 'til he's found his pose of greatest ease;
While the dusk falls, silent, deeper into night, my eyelids close
Heavily...I'm soon a sleeper in the stillest of repose...
Midnight finds me softly dreaming, all the day's loud clatter gone,
'Til birds chatter at the streaming light of the approaching dawn
While I lie in silent dozing where no sound comes breaking through,
All that shouted ceases, closing restive lips—and spirits, too,
Slip like shades and never flutter more than deepest sleeping sends
To the surface from the utter place of healing and amends;
I will rest here in the solace and the silence so supreme
It can quiet every call as I lie still and, gently, dream...

Beguiling Moonlight

Every autumn evening, at the end of day,
The moon's pale eminence sends out a silver-shining ray
A-glinting through the branches and glimmering on leaves
And shimmering on spiderwebs tucked underneath the eaves
And calling all the kitty-cats from shadowed alleys out
To torment all the night-birds still fluttering about,
And drawing from their houses the dogs behind the slats
Of shuttered sleepy windows to torment all the cats,
And pulling on the heart-strings of every sleepy child
To call each one to play out in the moonlight, in the wild,
To dance among the cat-kins and soar among the birds
And leap among the moon-mad dogs and sing the magic words
That cast a spell of loveliness on creatures so, and soon,
We'll fall asleep, each one of us, under the autumn moon.

Cadence at Evening

Slow as the settling of the sun
Upon the western shore and lees
Where nightingales call from the trees,
Watching the honeyed daylight run—
Slow as the shifting motes of time
That sift and spin in lamp-lit rays,
Fall lazily to dust and haze
And love, ineffably sublime—
Slow as the sleeping breath when dreams
Have ceased, and thought receded to
The farthest corners, shaded blue
To inky black, to flow in streams—

Slow as the silently locked door
Was, to admit all at the last
Where wonder waits that, long held fast,
Now pulls us inward evermore—
Slow as the parting of that night
Which closes day with one last kiss,
Night languorous with hymns like this,
Draws us toward slowly growing light—

Night into Day

In the sinking stillness of the evening,
After birds have ceased to flit and call,
Silence comes to rest as day is leaving
And dark draws down the shade where night will fall;
The smallest breath of wind stirs from its sleeping,
For after dusk another world takes flight,
A world with gleaming secrets in its keeping
That give the constellations dazzling light,
Fill up the moon with shining opalescence,
Fill up the heart with dreaming of the day
And how its powers overcome senescence
When sun returns to chase the night away.

Prairie Romance

The lark in the meadow
is singing her lay,
A paeon to dance,
like the high grass a-sway,
The low-leaning branches
at play in the breeze
With light slanting through
from the tops of the trees

She'll sing us to dusk
and I'll dance you to dawn,
The lark, your beloved—
afield, on the lawn,
And under the float
of the treetops—as they
Bend down to caress
our delight in the day.

Lullaby for Spring

Sleep, my sweet, my lovely one,

From dusk until the rising sun
Paints morning roses blushed with dew;
Let comfort bless the night, and you,
Awaking, bless with joy the ray
That, opalescent, breaks this day.

Coal & Diamonds

Strangely enough, the bond of sleep,
that weight of Lethe sitting on my soul,
Reminds me constantly to keep
from letting diamond days turn back to coal,
For stillness rejuvenates bone and blood
and sinew strong enough to bring me on,
And sleep is a portal through which a flood
of musings sweeps me forward to the dawn,
So rest is essential, and there I lie,
seeming immobile while I dance at speed,
Or mounting on magical wings to the sky,
to soar as sweetly high as I should need
To see in sleep, in my mind's eye,
new ways to spring from dark to day's desire,
To find in the darkness of night what I
love most amid the constellations' fire
And planets and comets' tails' dross and stone
what I can reinvent as suns for day,
My own coal-diamonds, blood and bone
and sinew turned to chasing night away.

Lullaby Ten Thousand

Lie asleep, my languid love, with muses 'round your bed
To whisper dreaming in your ear, lay garlands on your head,
To kiss your cheek with zephyr lips, your heart fill up with peace,
And when the daybreak comes again, sing gently your release
From nighttime and its starry net, to draw you up, away
Into ten thousand leagues of joy, renewed, into the day

Now as I Fall Asleep

Now as I fall asleep,
let darkness also fall;
as my small soul
slips its chains to soar
Phoenix-like to God,
raining a fire
of shooting stars to light

embracing Night
with searing joy!

As my breath leaves
its well-known way
in one last sigh,
let that small cry
turn to incense and
so fly as perfumed
prayer to God,
and send in return
that blessed Word
so longed-for always
and so dear;
send to the ear
of waiting night
the loving voice of God
to say: Beloved!
All at last
is right.

Now as I lie down
in highly holy peace,
enfold me in a hymn;
robe my rest in song,
the radiant winding-sheet
of the archangel choir
singing praises, Alleluias
and Amen!

I Would Like

I would like to die at evening
just as dusk darkens to blue
as the birds chant evensong and
meadow mist falls into dew

distant bells change-ring by lamplight
petals drop from heated blooms
while the hum of peaceful breathing
flows at ease through quiet rooms

I would like to die at evening
as the city goes to sleep
leaf and flowers' perfumes lie down

in their moonlit beds to steep

rise up as all else is settling
one last loving touch to wear
having feasted through my lifetime
then I'll dissipate to air