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ABSALOM.

The waters slept. Night's silvery veil hung low
On Jordan's bosom, and the eddies curled
Their glassy rings beneath it, like the still
Unbroken beating of the sleeper's pulse.
The reeds bent down the stream—the willow leaves,
With a soft check upon the lulling tide,
Forgot the lifting winds—and the long stems,
Whose flowers the waters, like a gentle nurse,
Bear on its bosom, quietly gave way,
And leaned, in graceful attitudes, to rest.
How strikingly the course of nature tells,
By its light heed of human suffering,
That it was fashioned for a happier world!

King David's limbs were weary. He had fled
From *the* Jerusalem, and now he stood
With his faint people for a little rest
Upon the shore of Jordan. The light wind
Of morn was stirring, and he bared his brow
To its refreshing breath, for he had worn
The mourner's covering, and he had not felt
That he could see his people until now.
They gathered round him on the fresh green bank,
And spoke their kindly words—and as the sun
Rose up in Heaven, he knelt among them there,
And bowed his head upon his hands to pray.
Oh! when the heart is full—when bitter thoughts
Come crowding thickly up for utterance,
And the poor common words of courtesy
Are such a very mockery—how much
The bursting heart may pour itself in prayer!
He prayed for Israel; and his voice went up
Strongly and fervently—he prayed for those
Whose love had been his shield; and his deep tones
Grew tremulous—but oh! for Absalom—
For his estranged, misguided Absalom—
The proud, bright being who had burst away,
In all his princely beauty, to defy
The heart that cherish'd him—for him he pour'd,
In agony that would not be control'd,
Strong supplications, and forgave him there
Before his God, for his deep sinfulness.

The pall was settled. He who slept beneath
Was straiten'd for the grave; and as the folds
Sunk to the still proportions, they betrayed
The matchless symmetry of Absalom.
His hair was yet unshorn, and silken curls
Were floating round the tassels, as they sway'd
To the admitted air, as glossy now
As when, in hours of gentle dalliance, bathing
The snowy fingers of Judea's girls.
His helm was at his feet—his banner, soiled
With trailing through Jerusalem, was laid
Revers'd beside him—and the jewell'd hilt,
Whose diamonds lit the passage of his blade,
Rested like mockery on his cover'd brow.

The soldiers of the king trod to and fro,
Clad in the garb of battle, and their Chief,
The mighty Joab—stood beside his bier,
And gazed upon the dark pall steadfastly,
As if he feared the slumberer might stir.
A slow step startled him. He grasped his blade,
As if a trumpet rang; but the bent form
Of David entered, and he gave command
In a low tone to his few followers,
And left him with his dead. The King stood still
Till the last echo died; then throwing off
The sackcloth from his brow, and laying back
The pall from the still features of his child,
He bowed his head upon him, and broke forth
In the resistless eloquence of woe:—

"Alas, my noble boy—that thou should'st die!
Thou, who wert made so beautifully fair—
That death should settle in thy glorious Eye,
And leave his stillness in this clustering hair!
How could he mark thee for the silent tomb,
My proud boy Absalom?"

"Cold is thy brow, my son!—and I am chill,
As to my bosom I have tried to press thee—
How was I wont to feel my pulses thrill,
Like a rich harp-string, yearning to caress thee!
And hear thy sweet "*my Father*" from these dumb
And cold lips, Absalom!"

"The grave hath won thee—I shall hear the gush
Of music, and the voices of the young—
And life will pass me in the mantling blush,
And the dark tresses to the soft wings flung—
But thou no more, with thy sweet voice, shall come
To meet me, Absalom!"

"And now farewell! 'tis hard to give thee up,
With death so like a gentle slumber on thee—
And thy dark sin!—Oh, I could drink the cup,
If from this woe its bitterness had won thee—
May God have called thee, like a wanderer, home,
My erring Absalom!"

He covered up his face, and bowed himself
A moment on his child—then giving him
A look of melting tenderness, he clasp'd
His hands convulsively, as if in prayer,
And as a strength were given him of God,
He rose up calmly, and compos'd the pall
Firmly and decently, and left him there,
As if his rest had been a breathing sleep.

Shakespeare calls her,

The singing mason building roofs of gold.