



On the verge of the month of the white new year,
 When friend to friend gives heartiest cheer,
 The rain and the frost for a night and a day
 Have cunningly worked alternately.
 They have thickened the crust of the dazzling snow
 Over whose surface the cold winds blow:
 They have fringed the eaves with their old device,
 Enormous daggers of glittering ice:
 And the nails in the walls, where in summer time
 The scarlet runners were wont to climb,
 They have crowned with gems more bright, more fair,
 Than eastern queens on their bosoms wear.
 But scarcely a glance do we waste on these,
 For our wonder is fixed on the jewelled trees:
 Never before, in all their days,
 Have they borne such beauty for mortal gaze:
 On them the frost and the rain have wrought
 A splendour that could not be sold or bought.
 Heavily laden from foot to crown,
 Like fairest of brides with heads bowed down,
 In park and square, demurely they stand,—
 Stand by the wayside all over the land,
 Thick-crusts with pearls of marvellous size,
 Whose lustre rebukes our aching eyes.
 Thus for a night and a day they have stood,
 Modest and chaste in their virginhood:
 But are they as happy, as joyful at heart,

As when, in green vesture, they gladly took part
 In all the fresh bliss that to spring-time they owed,—
 In all the hot pleasure that summer bestowed?
 "Nay, verily, nay," I hear them repeat:
 "The blood in our veins, even down to our feet,
 Is gelid and still,—we are sick unto death:
 Oh send us, ye heavens, oh send us a breath
 Of warmth that will bear all these jewels away,—
 These fetters that we for a night and a day
 Have borne in silence with infinite pain.
 Oh give us our freedom, our bare arms again."
 A wind that had slept all this time in the south,
 In an orange grove that was faint from drouth,
 Heard the soft plaint of the jewelled trees,
 And came in the guise of a gentle breeze,—
 Came, and with kisses tenderly
 Unbound the captives, and set them free.
 Their crystalline chains were broken asunder,
 Filling all earth with a blinding wonder,—
 With a crash and a flash and a musical sound,
 Like a shower of stars they fell to the ground:
 And, freed from their bondage, the grateful trees
 In their bare brown arms caressed the breeze,
 Caressed the wind that came from the south,
 From the orange grove that was faint with drouth:
 And they wept for joy, their thanks they wept,
 While the wind lay still in their arms and slept.