

He and She! . . . but she would not speak,
Though he kissed, in the old place, the quiet cheek.
He and She! . . . yet she would not smile,
Though he called her the name she loved erewhile.
He and She! . . . still she did not move
To any one passionate whisper of love.

Then he said: "Cold lips, and breasts without breath!
Is there no voice, no language of death?
Dumb to the ear, and still to the sense—
But to heart and to soul, distinct, intense?
Speak now! I will listen with soul, not ear:—
What was the secret of dying, dear?
Was it the infinite wonder of all,
That you ever could let life's flower fall?
Or was it a greater marvel to feel
The perfect calm, o'er the agony steal?
Was the miracle greater to find how deep,
Beyond all dreams, sank downward that sleep?
Did life roll back its records, dear,
And show, as they say it does, past things clear?
And was it the innermost heart of the bliss
To find out so, what a wisdom Love is?
Oh, perfect dead! Oh, dead most dear,
I hold the breath of my soul to hear!

"I listen as deep as to horrible hell,
As high as to heaven, and you do not tell.
There must be pleasure in dying, sweet,
To make you so placid from head to feet!
I would tell **you**, darling, if I were dead,
And 'twere your hot tears upon my brow shed—
I would speak!—though the Angel of Death had laid
His sword on my lips to keep it unsaid.
You should not ask vainly, with streaming eyes,
Which of all deaths was the chiefest surprise—
The very strangest and suddenest thing
Of all the surprises that dying must bring."

Who will believe that he heard her say,
With the sweet, soft voice, in the dear old way:
"The utmost wonder is this,—I hear,
And see you, and love you, and kiss you, dear;
And am your Angel, who was your Bride;
And know that, though dead, I have never died!"

—Sir Edwin Arnold.