

ONCE upon a time there lived in Lesbos,
In a certain street in Mitylene,
A Greek woman, beautiful, accomplished.—”

Thus I might begin at the beginning,
Like the teller of a fairy story
In the old times when we lived at leisure,
Were you storm-bound here within the Ghost House,
Caught abroad and seeking sudden shelter
On this rainy afternoon in August,
(Shelley's birthday marks the date exactly)
Asking at a glance what means this litter
Of unfinished proofs and scribbled margins,
As I set a chair and bid you welcome,
While the wood fire crackles on the hearthstone,
And the rain makes music on the shingles.

You would see the mountain snake with storm-clouds,
Driving mists come up the clove, and ghostly
Wraiths of rain walk in the purple valley.
Furtively the hill-fog through the beeches
Steals in silence, enters at the window,
Shuts the world out, and mysterious stillness
Bids the soul prepare for revelation.

Hushed and waiting, one step from the doorway
Might be early Greece, some Thracian woodland
Far from dwellings, where Pan loved to wander
Drenched and musing through the rainy quiet,
With his flocks all housed, his shepherds happy,
Seeing how it fared with his wild creatures.

Hark, is that his piping grave and tender,
Or a wood-thrush in the hemlock shadows,—
One stray flute-tone from the Summer's chorus?
Did the early earth, from dreams awaking,
Hear that strain of pure deliberate music
Falter from her dewy morning shadows,
Like some glad mysterious enchantment
For the slaking of eternal sorrow?
So it lingers on for our bewitchment