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# LATER POEMS.

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Charles G. D. Roberts.

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**FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.**

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IN SEPTEMBER.

BEFORE THE BREATH OF STORMS  
ACTAEON.

A BALLAD OF PHILOMELA.

IN THE AFTERNOON.

LOTOS.

LP. PS8485.023 L32

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## IN SEPTEMBER.

This windy, bright September afternoon  
My heart is wide awake, yet full of dreams.  
The air, alive with hushed confusion, teems  
With scent of grain-fields, and a mystic rune  
Foreboding of the fall of Summer soon  
Keeps swelling and subsiding; till there seems  
O'er all the world of valleys, hills, and streams,  
Only the wind's inexplicable tune.

My heart is full of dreams, yet wide awake.  
I lie and watch the topmost tossing boughs  
Of tall elms, pale against the vault of blue;  
But even now some yellowing branches shake,  
Some hue of death the living green endows:—  
If beauty flies, fain would I vanish too.

Fredericton, Sept., 1882.

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## BEFORE THE BREATH OF STORM.

I.

Before the breath of storm,  
While yet the long, bright afternoons are warm,  
Under this stainless arch of azure sky  
The air is filled with gathering wings for flight;  
Yet with the shrill mirth and the loud delight  
Comes the foreboding sorrow of this cry—  
"Till the storm scatter and the gloom dispel,  
Farewell! Farewell!  
Farewell!"

190669

## II.

Why will-ye go so soon,  
 In these soft hours, this sweeter month than June?  
 The liquid air floats over field and tree  
     A veil of dreams—where do ye find the sting?  
 A gold enchantment lies upon the sea  
     And purpled hills—why have ye taken wing?—  
 But faint, far-heard, the answers fall and swell—  
     “Farewell! Farewell!  
     Farewell!”

Sept., 1882.

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**ACTAEON.**

*(Duselia, a woman of Plataea, speaks.)*

I have lived long, and watched out many days,  
 And seen the showers fall and the light shine down  
 Equally on the vile and righteous head.  
 I have lived long, and served the gods, and drawn  
 Small joy and liberal sorrow,—scorned the gods,  
 And drawn no less my little meed of good,  
 Suffered my ill in no more grievous measure.  
 I have been glad—Alas, my foolish people!  
 I have been glad with you;—and ye are glad  
 Seeing the gods in all things, praising them  
 In yon their lucid heaven, this green world,  
 The moving inexorable sea, and wide  
 Delight of noonday,—till in ignorance  
 Ye err, your feet transgress, and the bolt falls.  
 Ay, have I sung, and dreamed that they would hear,

And worshipped, and made offerings ; it may be  
They heard amid their peace and were well pleased,—  
A little music in their ears perchance,  
A grain more savour for their nostrils, sweet  
Though scarce accounted of. But when for me  
The mists of Acheron have striven up,  
And horror was shed round me ; when my knees  
Relaxed, my tongue clave speechless, they forgot.  
And when my sharp cry cut the moveless night,  
And days and nights my wailings clamored up  
And beat about their golden homes, perchance  
They shut their ears ;—no happy music this  
Eddying through their nectar-cups and calm.  
Then I cried out against them, and died not ;  
And rose, and set me to my daily tasks ;  
So all day long with bare uplift right arm  
Drew out the strong thread from the carded wool,  
Or wrought strange figures, lotus-buds and serpents,  
In purple on the himation's saffron fold ;  
Nor uttered praise with the slim-wristed girls  
To any god, nor uttered any prayer,  
Nor poured out bowls of wine or smooth, bright oil,  
Nor brake and scattered cakes of beaten meal  
And honey, as this time, or such a god,  
Required ; nor offered apples summer-flushed,  
Scarlet pomegranates, poppy-blooms or doves.  
All this with scorn and waiting all day long,  
And night long with dim fear, afraid of sleep,—  
Seeing I took no hurt of all these things,  
And seeing my eyes were dried of their tears  
So that once more the light grew sweet for me,  
Once more grew sweet the fields and valley streams,

I thought with how small profit men take heed  
 To worship, with bowed heads and suppliant hands  
 And sacrifice, the everlasting gods,  
 Who take small thought of men to curse or bless,  
 Girt with their purples of perpetual peace.  
 Thus blindly deemed I of them ; yet, and yet  
 Have late well learned their hate is swift as fire,  
 Be one so wretched to encounter it ;  
 Ay, have I seen a multitude of good deeds  
 Fly up in the pan like husks, like husks blown-dry.  
 Hereafter let none question the high gods.  
 I questioned, but these watching eyes have seen  
 Actæon, thewed and sinewed like a god,     \       
 Godlike for sweet speech and great deeds, hurled down  
 To hideous death,—scarce suffered space to breathe  
 Ere the wild heart in his changed, quivering side  
 Burst with mad terror, and the stag's wide eyes  
 Glared one sick moment mid the dogs' hot jaws.

Cithæron, mother mount, set steadfastly  
 Deep in Bœotia, past the utmost roar  
 Of seas, beyond Corinthian waves withdrawn,  
 Girt with green vales awake with brooks or still,  
 Towers up mid lesser-browed Bœotian hills,—  
 These couched like herds secure beneath its ken,—  
 And watches earth's green corners. At mid-noon  
 We of Plataea mark the sun make pause  
 Right over it, and top its crest with pride ;  
 Men of Eleusis look toward north at dawn  
 To see the long, white fleeces upward roll  
 Smitten aslant with saffron, fade like smoke,  
 And leave the grey-green dripping glens all bare,

The drenched slopes open sunward ;—slopes wherein  
What gods, what godlike men to match with gods,  
Have roamed, and grown up mighty, and waxed wise  
Under the law of him whom gods and men  
Reverence and call Cheiron ! He made wise  
With knowledge of all wisdom, had made wise  
Actaeon, till none cunninger there moved  
To drive with might the javelin forth, or bend  
The corded ebony, save Leto's son.

But him the Centaur shall behold no more  
With long stride making down the beechy glade,  
Clear-eyed, with firm lips laughing, at his heels  
The clamour of his fifty deep-tongued hounds,—  
Him the wise Centaur shall behold no more.

I have lived long, and watched out many days,  
And am well sick of watching. Three days since,  
I had gone forth upon the slopes for herbs,  
Snake-root, and subtle gums ; and when the light  
Fell slantwise thro' the upper glens, and missed  
The sunk ravines, I came where all the hills  
Circle the valley of Gargaphian streams.  
Reach beyond reach all down the valley gleamed,  
Thick branches ringed them. Scarce a bow-shot past  
My platan, thro' the woven leaves low hung,  
Trembling in meshes of the woven sun,  
A yellow-sanded pool, shallow and clear  
Lay sparkling, brown about the further bank  
Where scarlet-berried ash-trees darkened it.  
But suddenly the waters brake awake  
With laughter and light voices, and I saw  
Where Artemis, white goddess incorrupt,

Bane of swift beasts and deadly for straight shaft  
 Unswerving, from a coppice not far off  
 Came to the pool from the hither bank to bathe.  
 Amid her maiden company she moved,  
 Their cross-thonged yellow buskins scattered off,  
 Unloosed their knotted hair; and thus the pool  
 Received them stepping shrinking down to it.

Here they flocked white, and splashed the water drops  
 On rounded breast and shoulder snowier  
 Than high light clouds that bar the morning's blue,—  
 Fresher than river-grasses which the herds  
 Pluck from the river in the burning noons.  
 Their tresses on the summer wind they flung,  
 And some a shining yellow fleece let fall  
 For the sun's envy,— others with white hands  
 Lifted a glooming wealth of locks more dark  
 Than deepest wells, but purple in the sun.  
 But she, their mistress, of the heart unstormed,  
 Stood taller than them all, supreme, and still,  
 Perfectly fair like day, and crowned with hair  
 The colour of nipt beech-leaves: — Ah, such hair  
 Was mine in years when I was such as these.  
 I let it fall to cover me, or coiled  
 Its soft thick coils about my throat and arm,  
 Its colour like nipt beech-leaves, tawny brown,  
 But in the sun a fountain of live gold.  
 Of these grey locks I dreamed not, but for men  
 Knowledge of ill is swift, and soon at hand.—  
 The while from hollowed palm and cool the stream  
 Luxuriously fell lingering down her limbs,  
 And sparkled o'er the snowiness unflushed.

Even as thus they played, while some lithe maids  
Upreached fair arms to grasp the berried ash,  
And plucking the bright bunches showered them wide  
By red ripe handfuls, not far off I saw  
With long stride making down the beechy glade,  
Clear-eyed, with firm lips laughing, at his heels  
The clamour of his fifty deep-tongued hounds,  
Actaeon. I beheld him not far off,  
But unto bath and bathers hid from view,  
Being beyond that mighty rock whereon  
His wont was to lie stretched at dip of eve,  
When frogs are loud amid the tall-plumed reeds  
In marshy lands along Asopus' bank,  
Deeming his life was very sweet, his day  
A pleasant one, the peopled breadths of earth  
Most fair, and fair the shining tracts of sea —  
Green solitudes, and broad low-lying plains  
Made brown with frequent labour of men's hands,  
And salt blue fruitless waters. But this Mount,  
Cithaeron, bosomed deep in soundless hills —  
Its fountained vales, its nights of starry calm,  
Its high chill dawns, its long-drawn golden days,—  
Was dearest to him. Here he dreamed high dreams,  
And felt within his sinews strength to strive  
Where strife was sorest and to overcome,  
And in his heart the thought to do great deeds,  
With power in all ways to accomplish them.  
For had not he done well to men, and done  
Well to the gods! Therefore he stood secure.

But him — for him — Ah that these eyes should see! —  
Approached a sudden stumbling in his ways.



Not yet, not yet he knew a God's fierce wrath,  
Nor wist of that swift vengeance lying in wait.

And now he came upon a slope of sward  
Against the pool. With startled cry the maids  
Shrank clamoring round their mistress, or made flight  
To covert in the hazel thickets. She  
Stirred not, but pitiless anger paled her eyes,  
Intent with deadly purpose. He, amazed,  
Stood with his head thrust forward, while his curls  
Sun-lit lay glorious on his mighty neck,  
Let fall his bow and clanging spear, and gazed  
Dilate with ecstasy,— nor marked the dogs  
Hush their deep tongues, draw close, and ring him round,  
And fix upon him strange, red, hungry eyes,  
And crouch to spring. This for a moment; then  
It seemed his strong knees faltered, and he sank.  
Then I cried out, for straight a shuddering stag  
Sprang one wild leap over the dogs — but they  
Fastened upon his flanks with a long yell,  
And reached his throat: and that proud head went down  
Beneath their wet red fangs and reeking jaws.

I have lived long and watched out many days,  
Yet have not seen that aught is sweet save life,  
Nor learned that life hath other end than death.  
Thick horror like a cloud had veiled my sight,  
That for a space I saw not; and my ears  
Were shut from hearing; but when sense grew clear  
Once more, I only saw the vacant pool  
Unrippled, only saw the dreadful sward  
Where dogs lay gorged, or moved in fretful search.

LATER POEMS.

9

Questing uneasily ; — and some far up  
The slope, and some at the low water's edge,  
With snouts set high in air and swelling throats.  
Uttered keen howls that smote the Sundered hills.  
They missed their master's form, nor understood  
Where was the voice they loved, the hand that reared :  
And some lay watching by the spear and bow  
Flung down.

And now upon the homeless pack  
And paling stream arose a fitful wind  
Out of the yellow west awhile, and moved  
The branches down the valley : then blew off  
To eastward toward the long grey straits, and died  
Into the dark, beyond the utmost verge.

Fredericton, March, 1882.

**A BALLAD OF PHILOMELA.**

From gab of jay and chatter of crake  
The dusk wood covered me utterly :  
And here the tongue of the thrush was awake :  
Flame-lances out of the low bright sky  
Lighted the gloom with gold-brown dye  
Before dark, and manifold chorusing  
Arose of thrushes remote and nigh,  
For the tongue of the singer needs must sing.  
Midmost a close green covert of brake  
A brown bird listening silently  
Sat, and I thought — she mourns for the sake  
Of Itylus, for the stains that lie

In her heritage of sad memory.—  
 But the thrushes were hushed at evening,  
 And I waited to hear the brown bird try,  
 For the tongue of the singer needs must sing.  
 And I said — “ The thought of the thrushes will shake  
 With rapture remembered her heart, and her shy  
 Tongue of the sore times dead will take  
 To make her a living song, when sigh  
 The noiseless winds disburthened by :  
 Hark now ! ”—for the upraised quivering wing,  
 The throat exultant I could descry—  
 For the tongue of the singer needs must sing.

## L'ENVOI.

But the bird dropped dead with only a cry.  
 I found its tongue was withered, poor thing !  
 Then I no whit wondered, for well knew I  
 The heart of the singer will break or sing.  
 Chatham, April. 1881.

## IN THE AFTERNOON.

Wind of the summer afternoon,  
 Hush, for my heart is out of tune !  
 Hush, for thou movest restlessly  
 The too light sleeper, Memory !  
 Whate'er thou hast to tell me, yet  
 T'were something sweeter to forget ; —  
 Sweeter than all thy breath of balm  
 An hour of unremembering calm !

Blowing over the roofs, and down  
The bright streets of this inland town.

These busy crowds, these rocking trees,—  
What strange note hast thou caught from these?

A note of waves and rushing tides,  
Where past the dykes the red flood glides,

To brim the shining channels far  
Up the green plains of Taatramar.

Once more I snuff the salt. I stand  
On the long dykes of Westmoreland;

I watch the narrowing flats, the strip  
Of red clay at the water's lip;

Far off the net-reels brown and high,  
And boat-masts slim against the sky;

Along the ridges of the dykes  
Wind-beaten scant sea-grass, and spikes

Of last year's mullein: down the slopes  
To landward, in the sun, thick ropes

Of blue vetch and convolvulus  
And matted roses glorious.

The liberal blooms o'erbrim my hands;  
I walk the level, wide marsh-lands;

Waist-deep in dusty-blossomed grass  
I watch the swooping breezes pass

In sudden long pale lines, that flee  
Up the deep breast of this green sea.

I listen to the bird that stirs  
The purple tops, and grasshoppers

Whose summer din, before my feet  
Subsiding, wakes on my retreat.

Again the droning bees hum by ;  
Still-winged the gray hawk wheels on high ;

I drink again the wild perfumes.  
And roll, and crush the grassy blooms.

Blown back to olden days, I fain  
Would quaff the olden joys again :

But all the olden sweetness not  
The old unmindful peace hath brought.

—Wind of this summer afternoon  
Thou hast re-called my childhood's June :

My heart, still is it satisfied  
By all that golden summer-tide?

Hast thou one eager yearning filled,  
Or any restless throbbing stilled,

Or hast thou any power to bear  
Even a little of my care?—

Ever so little of this weight  
Of weariness can'st thou abate?—

Ah, poor thy gift indeed, unless  
Thou bring the old child-heartedness :

And such a gift to bring is given,  
Alas, to no wind under heaven !

Wind of the summer afternoon  
Be still ; my heart is not in tune :  
Sweet is thy voice — but yet, but yet  
Of all t'were sweetest — to forget.

1882.

LOTOS.

I

Wherefore awake so long,  
Wide-eyed, laden with care ?  
Not all battle is life,  
But a little respite and peace  
May fold us round as a fleece  
Soft-woven for all men's wear,  
Sleep then, mindless of strife :  
Slumber, dreamless of wrong :—  
Hearken my slumber-song,  
Falling asleep.

II

Drowsily all noon long  
The warm winds rustle the grass  
Hush'dly, lulling thy brain,  
Burthened with murmurs of bees,  
And numberless odours, and ease ;  
Dream-clouds gather and pass  
Of painless remembrance of pain ;  
Havened from rumour of wrong  
Dreams are thy slumber-song,  
Fallen to sleep.

Fredericton, August, 1881.