

## XCIX.

When age hath taken movement from thy hips  
 and strength from these two arms to bear thy load,  
 wilt thou remember th' texture of my lips  
 from youthful kisses I had once bestow'd?  
 I know for certain I'll love thee as well  
 when I am aged as I do today;  
 my heart shall fall for thee just as it fell  
 when first I did thy stunning face survey.  
 Yea, love is most mysterious in its grace –  
 the touch of hands can passions fierce ignite.  
 Pray take me once again in thy embrace  
 and kiss me well beneath celestial light.  
 — 'Tis more than a mere daydream thought aloud:  
 we have been with a romance pure endow'd.

## XCIII.

It is unclear; pray clarify for me  
 what thou'st purport when thou dost nod assent  
 when I know in thy mind thou'dst rather be  
 professing well thy genuine dissent.  
 What message should I hear when thou say'st "go"  
 but see within thine eyes thou'dst bid me stay?  
 What troubles must thy heart tormented know  
 to say our time doth swiftly ebb away?  
 Thy indecision leads me t'ward the left  
 ere thou dost change thy course and travel right;  
 our daylight quarrels feel of love bereft  
 ere turning into passion through the night.  
 — No, I cannot thy message clearly glean  
 so tell me true, my sweet: what dost thou mean?

The tolls upon Success's roads are steep,  
 yet I did each one faithfully remit;  
 I did each punitory sentence keep,  
 although I never did a crime commit.  
 O I have missteps made – far more than one –  
 for each, I've had sand punted in my face.  
 Despite it all, I still have vict'ry won  
 and taken up the mantle of first place.  
 Yea, triumph's sweet, but 'tis not pure delight –  
 no, I did not a life of leisure choose.  
 My battle rages on, and still I fight  
 for I have long resolv'd to never lose.  
 — Our winning ways are o'er the world renown'd:  
 my friends, we have as th' champions been crown'd!

## LXXXIX.

Good morrow, says this spectre from thy past;  
 may we discuss the sordid details of  
 the times we shared, the scars we then amass'd,  
 and the minutiae of long-lost love?  
 'Tis said time heals all wounds, although my heart  
 still aches, despite the distance years endow.  
 I can't recall the ease youth did impart,  
 or life before the world did to us bow.  
 I've sent these missives, o'er a thousandfold,  
 to give good morrow here from far beyond –  
 and make amends for all the wrongs untold,  
 but thou'lt not to these messages respond.  
 — I shout each 'sorry' t'ward thy distant shore  
 for deeds that do not pain thee any more.

## LXXVI.

Sweet child, thou shouldst recite thy nightly pray'r;  
 beseech the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost  
 to watch o'er thee and keep thee in their care –  
 forget thou not to pray for those thou know'st.  
 I'll swaddle thee with blankets in thy bed,  
 ensure thy light of innocence doth gleam;  
 until the Sandman cometh in his stead  
 to bless thine eyes with sleep, perchance to dream.  
 Still, thou dost lie awake, one eye unclos'd,  
 thy pillow gripp'd as if to stop its breath,  
 for thine are dreams of dreadfulness compos'd –  
 of conquest, famine, war, and fiery death.  
 — The day departs, the pitch-black night appears –  
 now take my hand! We'll brave thy twilight fears!

## LXXV.

O, thou art too capricious with my heart!  
 Thou'st no supply of love, just pure demand.  
 From our first kiss, I should have known thou art  
 so feckless, for thou dost not understand:  
 for thee I'd catch an incoming grenade,  
 risk being hoist upon my own petard.  
 As I'd by those explosives be flambéed,  
 I'd see my hands on sabres' steel be scarr'd.  
 If I believ'd it'd keep thee safe from pain,  
 I'd fling myself beneath a wagon's wheels –  
 I'd suffer slings and arrows through my brain  
 if that would quell the woe my darling feels.  
 — And yet, my heart is evermore resign'd  
 to know thou wouldst not do the same in kind.

## XXV.

A lonely maiden from a hamlet small –  
 a boy within a woeful city reared:  
 they both at midnight left their port of call  
 t'ward any destination volunteered.  
 A public house is where their journey ends,  
 where patrons smoke their pipes and minstrels play.  
 They share the evening, swiftly more than friends –  
 the other's smile inviting each to stay.  
 Yet there are others wand'ring through the street  
 beneath the lamplight, searching for a soul –  
 they comb the darkened night in hope to meet  
 the sweet companion that shall make them whole.  
 — Ensure thy heart won't let their spirit leave;  
 'tis most important that thou still believe.

## LVI.

O do not rue the details of my past  
 or tarry on, if love thy heart intends.  
 Waste not my time, and our affair shall last  
 if thou dost curry favor with my friends.  
 Affection newly minted soon may fade,  
 but ne'er shall I be clove from friendship's ties;  
 if thy affection's bold, O! 'tis display'd  
 in savory accord with those I prize.  
 So gingerly I have my viewpoint serv'd;  
 if thou hast muster'd th' gallantry to stay,  
 I'll pepper thee with kisses if deserv'd –  
 if thou dost gall, I'll sagely walk away.  
 — I've told thee what I want, what I've desir'd:  
 thou want'st a spicy lass, 'tis what's requir'd.

## XXXVIII.

In ev'ry prior time when thou had ask'd  
 about my day, I'd plainly been address'd.  
 Thy sentiments have ne'er before been mask'd,  
 yet now it seems there's something unexpress'd.  
 O love untrue, thy words betray thy crimes!  
 Thy answers lack the tender sobriquets  
 thou freely spak'st so many other times –  
 as if to hide thy sins and sad regrets.  
 Hast thou a strumpet to thy dwelling brought?  
 I cannot be so easily misled!  
 If thou art guilty, I've thee simply caught  
 by hearing all the words thou'st left unsaid.  
 — And so, if thou art innocent of blame,  
 then prove thy conscience clear and say my name.

## LXXIX.

The mem'ry of her face shall long persist  
 for she could be the Queen of Beauty crown'd,  
 but I'll remember more how she'd insist  
 I was the one who danced within the round.  
 The scene she caus'd made people turn their heads  
 as she her name and slanders did impart;  
 it called to mind advice I once heard said  
 to act with caution 'round young ladies' hearts.  
 My mother, too, had shared her deep chagrin  
 that lies can swift be seen as gospel truth,  
 and so I swear: she's ne'er my lover been,  
 and I am not the father of this youth.  
 — No carnal act between us hath transpir'd;  
 therefore, the kid is not a son I've sir'd.

## LVIII.

We fought with fervor for our young romance  
 and jump'd headlong into its rash pursuit;  
 for once we shared a kiss, there was no chance  
 that any mortal could our love refute.  
 It still lives on – eternal, without pause –  
 although I can't its sacraments observe.  
 Thou canst not say I left thee without cause;  
 I only parted to myself preserve,  
 for I had launch'd myself t'ward love's embrace  
 as trebuchets would hurl projectiles far  
 to try and break the walls that do encase  
 thy heart from any chance it might be scarr'd.  
 — Thy battlements did my assault deflect,  
 and so I am the one instead that's wreck'd.

## LXI.

My reputation's sown with rumors' threads:  
 it's said that I carouse, am void of wit,  
 and have amassed more beaus than Hydra's heads  
 yet cannot make a single one commit.  
 Although my honor's by their words maligned,  
 I'll waste no effort t' have their tales disproved.  
 Instead, I'll dance to music in my mind;  
 my malady's by melodies improved.  
 For just as bakers must their loaves create  
 and thespians put on their fictive acts,  
 the ones who live in scorn shall always hate –  
 I'll from my shoulders shake their vile attacks.  
 — O gentleman well-coiffed! I thee entreat  
 to hither come and dance to this sick beat.

Save

LXIII.

In days of yore, I found great bliss in song –  
 and how I ached to music's joy relate!  
 But fortune bade instead I pass along  
 the news of three young minstrels' tragic fate.  
 E'er since, our innocence hath slowly broke;  
 the king with thorny crown and swiv'ling hips  
 did cede t' the fool in causeless rebel's cloak  
 who draws our weary voices from his lips.  
 And whilst he heal'd, the loving summer came –  
 the sergeants pepper'd us with music's vice  
 'til autumn's chill arriv'd, when evil's flame  
 arose to reap its heinous sacrifice.  
 — O now the arid levee further dries  
 while good men toast their imminent demise.

XXXVI.

Each night I close my eyes to sleep, assured  
 that in my dreams I'll once more see thy face;  
 and thus I know thy soul hath yet endur'd  
 beyond this world's ephemeral embrace.  
 I know not if thy soul stays at my side  
 or if it every night from Heaven leaves;  
 no matter where it lives, thy love abides  
 within me, and again there life achieves.  
 Thy presence hath my courage wholly steel'd;  
 thy spirit's overtaken all my fears.  
 To Father Time our love will never yield;  
 it shall remain unshaken o'er the years.  
 — Although thy image fades at break of dawn,  
 my heart, with thee inside, will still go on.

LXVI.

I feel not like myself when I awake,  
 but nearer to that puffy poet skill'd.  
 To clean my teeth, I happily partake  
 in Mr. Daniel's whiskey well-distill'd.  
 I'll hither not return until the morn  
 and make the time 'til then with pleasure fill'd:  
 we'll have each gorgeous garment of ours worn,  
 each toenail painted, and each bottle swill'd.  
 So minstrels, play your songs with volume great  
 and keep no joyous song from us withheld!  
 We'll not our carefree merriment abate  
 'til constables have us from here expell'd.  
 — Although the ticking clock can ne'er be ceas'd,  
 we'll have our party from its pow'r releas'd.

LXVIII.

In bygone days, I purchas'd my first lute,  
 then strumm'd its strings until my fingers bled.  
 I form'd a modest troupe that ne'er took root,  
 for James bow'd out and Jody left once wed.  
 'Twas then I met thee too; each night would send  
 me to thy mother's porch, where we would swear  
 our promises of love without an end;  
 but youthful oaths aren't often brought to bear.  
 Those summer days seem'd preternat'rally good  
 despite my digits' pain, our later strife;  
 if I could live them evermore, I would –  
 for those, in truth, were th' best days of my life.  
 — Yea, time has marchèd on; now here I pluck  
 my instrument and rue my changèd luck.

## LXXVIII.

**I** once was told I'd swindled be, for Chance  
 did not me with intelligence endow,  
 although the prophet took a foolish stance:  
 her fingers form'd an "L" upon her brow.  
 But Father Time moves forth with constant haste,  
 and so I've always sought my share of joy;  
 to otherwise exist would be a waste –  
 to knowledge without wisdom's grace employ.  
 Our lives are short and fill'd with much to see;  
 why not seek out the roads less travel'd by?  
 Thou canst not know what treasures there may be  
 until thou'st to diverging paths apply.  
 — No others could be made the way you are;  
 now go and play, for thou art naught but star!

## LIII.

**T**he novice bard doth find it hard to breathe;  
 his chest doth heave with hopes t' achieve regard.  
 His feelings guarded, all in th' yard perceive  
 him to've conceiv'd a tale to weave, t' bombard  
 their ears with song – but something's wrong tonight.  
 He's clamm'd up tight and froz'n with fright; the throng's  
 reaction's strong and doth prolong his plight.  
 I' he can't recite, he'll never quite belong —  
 and now, the time for him to rhyme hath pass'd.  
 He leaves aghast; he's been miscast – a crime!  
 He must now climb out of the grime amass'd  
 until at last his skill's recast as prime.  
 — When opportunities arise, take heed  
 and lose thyself in ev'ry worthwhile deed!

## LII.

**T**onight our courtship ends without delay –  
 for though the lady shall too much protest,  
 our romance brought me nothing but dismay  
 and love improper must be laid to rest.  
 My passion for thee had no earthly bounds  
 despite the dearth of reciprocity;  
 yet now I wish to see thee off these grounds,  
 for I'm resolv'd to solitary be.  
 No longer shall I be thy doting fool!  
 Goodbye to thee – *Auf Wiedersehen, adieu!*  
 While I've no inclination to be cruel,  
 my heart desires to tell thee we are through.  
 — Though it sounds crazy, 'tis my truth to tell:  
 we are no more, so fare thee well, well, well.

## L.

**O**kiss unfaithful, were it I was blind  
 that thou couldst not thy suffering impart –  
 or art thou but a cuckold of the mind,  
 the false creation of a wary heart?  
 My eyes are clos'd, but still my vision's clear;  
 my stomach turns to see the shameful scene  
 of my disloyal but beloved dear  
 cavorting with some loutish libertine.  
 Sick jealousy, thy tortures are perverse!  
 Thou goad'st the righteous to their cold demise;  
 they'd rather let the frigid seas immerse  
 them whole than face adulteresses' lies.  
 — No matter what transgressions I've espied,  
 I'll strive to look upon the brighter side.

## VI.

In summer's heat, your absence left me chilled  
 with fitful feelings pulling at my heart.  
 My listless soul, so desp'rate to be thrilled,  
 sought out a jaunt about in swiftest cart.  
 As I approached a bridge, I thought to swerve,  
 yet I continued riding on, unfazed;  
 and once it overturned, I just observed –  
 the span and cart, they burned in fiery blaze.  
 The sight of flames, it filled me up with mirth,  
 like stars above in heavens my soul shares;  
 yet you attempt to throw me back to earth  
 like I've tossed your belongings down the stairs.  
 — Indifferent to the rules I've disobeyed,  
 I love all of this chaos I have made.

## IV.

The game of love, we intimately know –  
 its laws and maxims mastered by our hearts;  
 thus, I propose to be your only beau  
 with passions that no other could impart.  
 These feelings that weigh heavy in my breast  
 should in your soul be similarly sown;  
 I pledge these vows, most earnestly express'd,  
 to make my deep affections truly known:  
 that never shall I vacate from thy side,  
 nor ever shall I disappoint you hence,  
 nor will the day approach that wounded pride  
 could rise from some unfaithful dalliance.  
 — My actions leave your face unstained by tears,  
 and ledgers of my lies shall remain clear.

## VIII.

My mem'ry gazes back on young romance  
 and on its twilight throes, when first you left;  
 you claim'd we needed absence to advance,  
 yet for togetherness, we'd been bereft.  
 You soon returned, your face forlorn and drawn,  
 and from your lips hung promises to change;  
 then, by the morrow, all those oaths were gone  
 and once again we found ourselves estranged.  
 The cycle never breaks; our sordid tales  
 end always with ellipses, not full stops.  
 When yesternight our courtship freshly failed,  
 you saw the cue to take it from the top.  
 — But now that we are once again apart,  
 I swear you shan't again reclaim my heart.

## XX.

Young Thomas is a longshoreman by trade  
 whose guild ceased work to fight for wages fair.  
 The strike drags on; 'tis weeks since he's been paid –  
 a crawl toward destitution and despair.  
 But he has been from truest hardship saved;  
 his sweetheart Gina's at an inn employed  
 where, for her love, she works as though enslaved  
 so they might still their usurers avoid.  
 She tells him softly, "We must not despair;  
 despite our prospects grim, we must endure!  
 We have our love; 'tis wealth beyond compare,  
 worth all the trials of our fate unsure.  
 — With pray'r alone, we have survived 'til now.  
 Pray, take my hand! We'll triumph soon, I vow!"

## XVII.

I swiftly woke and donned my finest clothes,  
 uneasy for the social call I'd plann'd;  
 I sought paternal blessings to propose  
 so I might ask thy daughter for her hand.  
 I laid my case with kindness and respect,  
 yet found my pleas were hastily subdued –  
 not only had my hopes been wholly wreck'd,  
 'twas in a manner churlish, brusque, and rude.  
 Thou surely knowest that I am a man;  
 why must thou play the part of boorish brute?  
 I'll not let such a cruelty change my plans;  
 thy surly prohibitions I refute.  
 — To venerate our love, despite your strife,  
 I'd cherish true thy daughter as my wife.

## XIV.

My heart's a scale that measures love and hate,  
 each in the full supply I hold for thee –  
 and though the malice has tremendous weight,  
 I find it's counterbalanced perfectly.  
 Thy base transgressions can't be wiped away,  
 and yet I wish to pardon ev'ry crime.  
 Thy presence strains my nerves; why must thou stay  
 and make confus'd the shameful and sublime?  
 My mind retreats up to the twinkling stars  
 instead of places that befit the wise;  
 I dream of days before our love was marred  
 by infidelities and sordid lies  
 — too fanciful to learn that, should we part,  
 the load of problems'd lift off of my heart.

## LIV.

This verse I'll proffer for each charming belle  
 most beautiful and virtuous, although  
 my looks and garments do beguile as well:  
 I must upon myself a kiss bestow.  
 The passions I alight in maiden's breasts  
 are raging blazes, far too scorching made –  
 so hot, 'twould make a dragon seek its rest;  
 enough to rouse the village fire brigade!  
 So douse the flames! Pray stop and fill my cup,  
 direct our coachman 'round to take us forth,  
 then hear the gentlewomen taking up  
 the Hallelujah hymn as we head north!  
 — For there uptown, we'll rhythm's mission serve;  
 if thou dost not believe me, hark! Observe!

## XXXIV.

Thy confidence in Nature's gifts is strain'd;  
 I know not why, for thine's a pleasing face.  
 Pray, witness all the staring unconstrain'd  
 by those who mark thy entrance to a place.  
 Thy naked face is beauty unsurpass'd;  
 thy countenance is not by rouge improv'd.  
 Like Helen's, it could launch a navy vast,  
 yet thy reflection leaves thee still unmov'd.  
 My life, once dark, is bathed in brilliant light  
 for thou hast graced it with thy presence sweet;  
 yet thou'lt not see the passion thou ignite  
 when thou hast fix'd thy gaze upon thy feet.  
 — Thy charms are tempered with humility,  
 and makes thee still more beautiful to me.

## XXIV.

Is this the waking world, or do I sleep?  
 I find I can't be roused, to my dismay;  
 but you should not for this delinquent weep  
 for I'm a brute whose soul's been toss'd away.  
 O mother sweet, I bring thee news of dread –  
 my life's at end, for I've another slain.  
 I press'd my crossbow up against his head  
 and loosed its bolt away into his brain.  
 – but hark! I see a dark and ghostly form  
 amidst the lightning launch'd by Jove on high!  
 The cries for mercy, silenced by the storm,  
 are futile; I'll not be released, but die.  
 — My fate now seal'd, 'tis plain for all to see:  
 the wind's direction matters not to me.

## LXII.

Thou know'st the fires of love do brightly burn  
 with deep affection for me in thy heart.  
 When thou dost call, I'll to thee swift return  
 for never shall I let us be apart.  
 Yea, this was my belief until 'twas spoke  
 that our romantic bond's come to its end.  
 I begg'd thee end this harsh and wicked joke  
 before my long-undamaged heart did rend!  
 And when thou mad'st thy humorless reply  
 that thou hadst found another charming beau,  
 I cried, "Beloved, sweetheart, dearest – fie!  
 Companion, lover, precious darling – no!"  
 — In my naïveté, I do confide,  
 I thought thou wouldst be e'er more at my side.

## XXXII.

Upon my heart thou hold a rightful claim –  
 a proof that distance shan't our friendship breach;  
 and though I've garnered ample wealth and fame,  
 we hath maintain'd our closeness unimpeach'd.  
 With thee, companion true, I'll share my lot  
 and make our fortunes evermore entwined –  
 for in the dark of night, the eyes cannot  
 observe the treasures they'd in daylight find.  
 But to the heart, we shine like beacons bright;  
 our bond's been strengthen'd by the oaths we swore  
 to persevere – to stand firm and unite  
 when life sends storm clouds threatening to pour.  
 — Thou needest not be drench'd when showers fall;  
 pray take thy place beneath my parasol.

## XLIX.

At break of day, I to my home return'd  
 to be admonish'd for my entrance late.  
 O mother dear, though we're by Fortune spurn'd,  
 our lack shall not my want of fun abate!  
 When callers to my home at midnight come,  
 my father asks if I've some grander plan;  
 I reassure him he hath not become  
 the second fiddle to some other man.  
 Yet that will not affect the things I do;  
 my course of life's not plott'd 'round some boy.  
 When at long last the day of work is through,  
 I'll always aim to find my share of joy.  
 — I'll walk within the sun's enliv'ning rays  
 for girls just want some fun within their days.



## xxx.

I had considered love a mythic force,  
 a fable told to children ere they slept –  
 and if 'twas real, it showed me no remorse  
 while it withheld the wistful dreams I kept.  
 I thought of romance like a chest of gold,  
 assuming what I gave would e'er be lost;  
 thus I commanded that my heart grow cold  
 so I might ne'er incur its heavy cost.  
 But when at last I saw her visage fair,  
 my chill'd convictions thaw'd to my relief;  
 I'm now the heart's disciple, deep in pray'r  
 and thoroughly devout in my belief.  
 — No force on earth could ever be applied  
 to make me, love's apostle, leave her side.

## xv.

So shall we meet after our lesson's learned?  
 Around the water's edge we'll spend the day –  
 and has, perchance, thy mother yet returned?  
 Is she about, or does she steal away?  
 Remember when I tended to thy grass?  
 She then appeared in naught but towel dress'd.  
 Her lasting look showed favor clear as glass,  
 while pointing out some errant growth in jest.  
 Thy mother beckons like a Siren's song;  
 I yearn for only her, and patience fails.  
 Though you and I would be mismatched ere long,  
 the path with her would harbor no travails.  
 — I know such feelings must unseemly be,  
 yet I so love the mother of Stacy!

## xiii.

This mountainside, engulfed in snow untouched,  
 reveals the isolation I command;  
 these icy storms that I have tightly clutched  
 within my heart have blanketed the land.  
 No longer could I heed my parents' will  
 to hold all of my hopes and fears at bay;  
 so all have seen I've mastered winter's chill –  
 my years of forced seclusion, tossed away.  
 The page has now been turned; I'll break the chains  
 that held restrained my true identity.  
 This queen will rule, but o'er her own domain,  
 without a care for what they think of me.  
 — I shan't again the falling snow withhold,  
 for I have ne'er been bothered by the cold.

## xviii.

From western Philadelphia I hail,  
 where in my youth I'd play upon the green  
 'til – rue the day! – I found myself assail'd  
 by ruffians contemptible and mean.  
 Although the spat was trivial and brief,  
 it wounded my dear mother deep within;  
 and so, to give her conscience sweet relief,  
 she sent me forth to live amongst her kin.  
 When to my port of call I'd been conveyed,  
 I came upon a coachman most unique;  
 and yet, I simply took the trip and paid,  
 despite his cab's decor and fresh mystique.  
 — I survey all the land with princely mien  
 in fair Bel-Air, where I do lay my scene.