

ANIMA LUNAE.

*Written partly under the great rock Sigiri, in Ceylon,  
partly in Arabia, near Aden.*

ZOHRA the king by feathered fans  
Slept lightly through the mid-day heat.  
Swart giants with drawn yataghans  
Guard, standing at his head and feet,  
Zohra, the mightiest of the khans !

Each slave Circassian like a moon  
Sits smiling, burning with young bloom  
Of dawn, and weaves an airy tune  
Like a white bird's song bright and bold  
That dips a fiery plume.  
So the song lulled, lazily rolled  
In tubes of silver, lutes of gold ;  
And all that palace drowsed away  
The hours that fanned with silken fold  
The progress of the Lord of Day.  
Yet, as he slept, a grey  
Shadow of dream drew near, and stooped  
And glided through the ranks of slaves,  
Leaving no shadow where they drooped,  
No echo in the architraves  
As silent as the grave's.  
That shape vibrated to the tune  
Of thought lulled low ; the stirless swoon  
Half felt its fellow gather close,  
Yet stirred not : now the intruder moves,  
Turns the tune slower to grave rows  
Of palm trees, losing life in loves  
Less turbid than the mildest dream

That ever stirred the stream  
Whereon night floats, a shallop faint,  
Ivory and silver bow and beam,  
Dim-figured with the images  
Divinely quaint  
Of gold engraved, forth shadowing sorceries.  
So the king dreamed of love : and passing on  
The shape moved quicker, winnowing with faint fans  
The soundless air of thought : the noonday sun  
Seemed to the mightiest of a thousand khans  
Like to a man's  
Brief life—a thousand such dream spans!—  
And so he dreamed of life : and failing plumes  
Wrought through ancestral looms  
In the man's brain : and so he dreamed of death.  
And slower still the grey God wrought  
Dividing consciousness from breath,  
And life and death from thought.  
So the king dreamed of Nought.

Yet subtly-shapen was this Nothingness,  
Not mere negation, as before that dream  
Drew back the veil of sleep ;  
But strange : the king turned idly, sought to press  
The bosom where love lately burnt supreme,  
And found no ivory deep.  
He turned and sought out life ; and nothing lived :

Death, and nought died. The king's brow fell. Sore  
grieved  
He rose, not knowing : and before his will  
Swan's throat, dove's eyes, moon's breast, and woman's  
mouth,  
And form desirable  
Of all the clustered love drew back : grew still  
"O turn, my lover, turn thee to the South!"  
The girl's warm song of the Siesta's hour.  
Heedless of all that flower,  
Eager to feel the strong brown fingers close

On the unshrinking rose  
And pluck it to his breast to perish there ;  
With neither thought nor care  
Nor knowledge he went forth : none stay, none dare  
Proffer a pavid prayer.

There was a pavement bright with emerald  
Glittering on malachite  
Clear to the Sun : low battlements enwalled  
With gold the ground enthralled,  
Sheer to the sight  
Of sun and city : thither in his trance  
The king's slow steps advance.  
There stood he, and with eyes unfolded far  
(Clouds shadowing a star  
Or moonlight seen through trees—so came the lashes  
Over—and strong sight flashes !)  
Travelled in thought to life, and in its gleam  
Saw but a doubtful dream.

His was a city crescent-shaped whose wall  
Was brass and iron : in the thrall  
Of the superb concave  
Lay orb'd a waveless wave.  
Four moons of liquid light revolved and threw  
Their silvery fountains forth, whose fruitful dew  
Turned all the plain to one enamelled vale  
Green as the serpent's glory, and—how still !  
—To where the distant hill  
Shaped like an Oread's breast arose beyond,  
Across the starless pond  
Silent and sleeping—O the waters wan  
That seem the soul of man !—  
Suddenly darkness strikes the horizon round  
With an abyss profound  
That blots the half-moon ere the sun be set.  
A mountain of pure jet  
Rears its sheer bulk to heaven ; and no snows  
Tinge evening with rose.

No blaze of noon invades those rocks of night,  
Nor moon's benignant might.  
And looking downward he beheld his folk  
Bound in no tyrant's yoke ;  
Knowing no God, nor fearing any man ;  
Life's enviable span  
Free from disease and vice, sorrow and age.  
Only death's joys assuage  
A gathering gladness at the thought of sleep.  
Never in all the archives, scroll on scroll,  
Reaching from aeons wrote they "Women weep,  
Men hate, the children suffer." In the place  
Where men most walked a table of fine brass  
Was set on marble, with an iron style  
That all might carve within that golden space  
If one grief came—and still the people pass,  
And since the city first began  
None wrote one word thereon till one—a man  
Witty in spite of happiness—wrote there :  
"I grieve because the tablet is so fair  
And still stands bare,  
There being none to beautify the same  
With the moon-curved Arabian character."  
Whereat the king, "Thy grief itself removes  
In its own cry its cause." And thence there came  
Soft laughter that may hardly stir  
The flowers that shake not in the City of Loves.  
(For so men called the city's name  
Because the people were more mild than doves,  
More beautiful than Gods of wood or river ;  
And so the city should endure for ever.)

But the king's mood was otherwise this day.  
Along time's river, fifty years away,  
There was a young man once  
Ruddier than autumn suns  
With gold hair curling like the spring sun's gold,  
And blue eyes where stars lurked for happiness,  
And lithe with all a young fawn's loveliness.

Such are the dwellers of the fire that fold  
Fine wings in wanton ecstasy, and sleep  
Where the thin tongues of glory leap  
Up from the brazen hold  
And far majestic keep  
Of Djinn, the Lord of elemental light.  
But he beheld some sight  
Beyond that city's joy: his gentle word  
The old king gently heard.  
(This king was Zohra's father) "Lord and king  
Of love's own city, give me leave to wing  
A fervid flight to yonder hills of night.  
Not that my soul is weary of the light  
And lordship of thy presence; but in tender dream  
I saw myself on the still stream  
Where the lake goes toward the mountain wall.  
These little lives and loves ephemeral  
Seemed in that dream still sweet; yet even now  
I turned the shallop's prow  
With gathering joy toward the lampless mountains.  
I heard the four bright fountains  
Gathering joy of music—verily  
I cannot understand  
How this can be,  
Yet—I would travel to that land."  
So all they kissed him—and the boy was gone.  
But when the full moon shone  
A child cried out that he had seen that face  
Limned with incomparable grace  
Even in the shape of splendour as she passed.  
The king's thought turned at last  
To that forgotten story: and desire  
Filled all his heart with aureate fire  
Whose texture was a woman's hair; so fine  
Bloomed the fair flower of pleasure:  
Not the wild solar treasure  
Of gleaming light, but the moon's shadowy pearl,  
The love of a young girl  
Before she knows that love: so mused the king;

“I am not weary of the soul of spring,”  
He said, “none happier in this causeless chain  
Of life that bears no fruit of pain,  
No seed of sorrow,” yet his heart was stirred,  
And, wasting no weak word  
On the invulnerable air, that had  
No soul of memories sad,  
He passed through all the palace: in his bowers  
He stooped and kissed the flowers;  
And in his hall of audience stayed awhile,  
And with a glad strange smile  
Bade a farewell to all those lords of his;  
And greeted with a kiss  
The virgins clustered in his halls of bliss.  
Next, passing through the city, gave his hand  
To many a joyous band  
Flower-decked that wandered through the wanton ways  
Through summer’s idle days.  
Last, passing through the city wall, he came  
Out to the living flame  
Of lambent water and the carven quay,  
Stone, like embroidery!  
All the dear beauty of art’s soul sublime  
He looked on the last time,  
And trod the figured steps, and found the ledge  
At the white water’s edge  
Where the king’s pinnacle lodged; but he put by  
That shell of ivory,  
And chose a pearl-inwoven canoe, whose prow  
Bore the moon’s own bright brow  
In grace of silver sculptured; and therein  
He stepped; and all the water thin  
Laughed to receive him; now the city faded  
Little by little into many-shaded  
Clusters of colour. So his boat was drawn  
Subtly toward the dawn  
With little labour; and the lake dropped down  
From the orb’s utter crown  
O’er the horizon; and the narrowing sides

Showed him the moving tides  
And pearling waters of a tinier stream  
Than in a maiden's dream  
She laves her silken limbs in, and is glad.  
Then did indeed the fountains change their tune,  
Sliding from gold sun-clad  
to silver filigree wherethrough the moon  
Shines—for the subtle soul  
Of music takes on shape, and we compare  
The cedar's branching hair,  
The comet's glory, and the woman's smile,  
To strange devices otherwise not heard  
Without the lute's own word.

So on the soul of Zohra grew  
A fashioned orb of fiery dew;  
Yet (as cool water on a leaf)  
It touched his spirit not with grief,  
Although its name was sorrow.  
“O for a name to borrow”  
(He mused) “some semblance for this subtle sense  
Of new experience!  
For on my heart, untouched, my mind not used  
To any metre mused,  
Save the one tranquil and continuous rhyme  
Of joy exceeding time,  
Here the joy changes, but abides for ever,  
Here on the shining river  
Where the dusk gathers, and tall trees begin  
To wrap the shallop in,  
Sweet shade not cast of sun or moon or star,  
But of some light afar  
Softer and sweeter than all these—what light  
Burns past the wondrous night  
Of yonder crags?—what riven chasm hides  
In those mysterious sides?  
Somewhere this stream must leap  
Down vales divinely steep  
Into some vain unprofitable deep!”

So mused the king. Mark you, the full moon shone!  
Nay, but a little past the full, she rose  
An hour past sunset: as some laughter gone,  
After the bride's night, lost in subtler snows  
Rosy with wifehood. Now the shallop glides  
On gloomier shadier tides,  
While the long hair of willows bent and kissed  
The stream, and drew its mist  
Up through their silent atmosphere.  
Some sorrow drawing near  
That slow, dark river would for sympathy  
Have found its home and never wandered out  
Into the sunlight any more. A sigh  
Stirred the pale waters where the moonlight stood  
Upon the sleepy flood  
In certain bough-wrought shapes of mystic meaning,  
As if the moon were weaning  
The king her babe from milk of life and love  
To milk new-dropped above  
From her sweet breast in vaporous light  
Into the willowy night  
That lay upon the river. So the king  
Heard a strange chant—the woods began to sing;  
The river took the tune; the willows kept  
Time; and the black skies wept  
Those tears, those blossoms, those pearl drops of milk  
That the moon shed: and looking up he saw  
As if the willows were but robes of silk,  
The moon's face stoop and draw  
Close to his forehead; at the tears she shed  
He knew that he was dead!  
Thus he feared not, nor wondered, as the stream  
Grew darker, as a dream  
Fades to the utter deep  
Of dreamless sleep.  
The stream grew darker, and the willows cover  
(As lover from a lover  
Even for love's sake all the wealth of love)  
The whole light of the skies: there came to him



Sense of some being dim  
Bent over him, one colour and one form  
With the dark leaves; but warm  
And capable of some diviner air.  
Her limbs were bare, her face supremely fair,  
Her soul one shapely splendour,  
Her voice indeed as tender  
As very silence: so he would not speak,  
But let his being fade: that all the past  
Grew shadowy and weak,  
And lost its life at last,  
Being mere dream to this that was indeed  
Life: and some utter need  
Of this one's love grew up in him: he knew  
The spirit of that dew  
In his own soul; and this indeed was love.  
The faint girl bent above  
With fixed eyes close upon him; oh! her face  
Burned in the rapturous grace  
Feeding on his; and subtly, without touch,  
Grew as a flower that opens at the dawn  
Their kiss: for touch of lips is death to love.  
Even as the gentle plant one finger presses,  
However soft the tress is  
Of even the air's profane caresses,  
It closes, all its joy of light withdrawn;  
The sun feels sadness in his skies above,  
Because one flower is folded. Thus they floated  
Most deathlessly devoted  
Beyond the trees, and where the hills divide  
To take the nighted tide  
Into a darker, deeper, greener breast,  
Maybe to find—what rest?  
Now to those girdling mountains moon-exalted  
Came through the hills deep-vaulted  
That pearly shallop: there the rocks were rent,  
And the pale element  
Flowed idly in their gorges: there the night  
Admits no beam of light;

Nor can the poet's eye  
One ray espy.  
Therefore I saw not how the voyage ended,  
Only wherethrough those cliffs were rended  
I saw them pass: and ever closer bent  
The lady and the lover; ever slower  
Moved the light craft, and lower  
Murmured the waters and the wind complained;  
And ever the moon waned;  
Not wheeling round the world,  
But subtly curved an curled  
In shapes not seen of men, abiding ever  
Above the lonely river  
Aloft: no more I saw than this,  
The shadowy bending to the first sweet kiss  
That surely could not end, though earth should end.  
Therefore my shut eyes blend  
With sleep's own secret eyes and eyelashes,  
Long and deep ecstasies,  
Knowing as now I know—at last—how this  
Foreshadows my own bliss  
Of falling into death when life is tired.  
For all things desired  
Not one as death is so desirable,  
Seeing all sorrows pass, all joys endure,  
All lessons last. Not heaven and not hell  
(My spirit is grown sure)  
Await the lover  
But death's veil draws, life's mother to discover,  
Nature; no longer mother, but a bride!  
Ay! there is none beside.

O brothers mightier than my mightiest word  
In the least sob that stirred  
Your lyres, bring me, me also to the end!  
Be near to me, befriend  
Me in the moonlit, moonless deeps of death,  
And with exalted breath  
Breathe some few flames into the embers dull  
Of these poor rhymes and leave them beautiful.