

“Spell-Bound” (1858)

William Morris

How weary is it none can tell,
How dismally the days go by!
I hear the tinkling of the bell,
I see the cross against the sky.

The year wears round to autumn-tide,
Yet comes no reaper to the corn;
The golden land is like a bride
When first she knows herself forlorn—

She sits and weeps with all her hair
Laid downward over tender hands; 10
For stained silk she hath no care,
No care for broken ivory wands;

The silver cups beside her stand;
The golden stars on the blue roof
Yet glitter, though against her hand
His cold sword presses, for a proof

He is not dead, but gone away.
How many hours did she wait
For me, I wonder? Till the day 20
Had faded wholly, and the gate

Clanged to behind returning knights?
I wonder did she raise her head
And go away, fleeing the lights;
And lay the samite on her bed,

The wedding samite strewn with pearls:
Then sit with hands laid on her knees,
Shuddering at half-heard sound of girls
That chatter outside in the breeze?

I wonder did her poor heart throb
At distant tramp of coming knight? 30
How often did the choking sob
Raise up her head and lips? The light,

Did it come on her unawares,
And drag her sternly down before
People who loved her not? in prayers
Did she say one name and no more?

And once – all songs they ever sung,
All tales they ever told to me,
This only burden through them rung:
O golden love that waitest me, 40

*The days pass on, pass on a-pace,
Sometimes I have a little rest
In fairest dreams, when on thy face
My lips lie, or thy hands are prest*

*About my forehead, and thy lips
Draw near and nearer to mine own;
But when the vision from me slips,
In colourless dawn I lie and moan,*

*And wander forth with fever'd blood,
That makes me start at little things, 50
The blackbird screaming from the wood,
The sudden whirr of pheasants' wings.*

*O dearest, scarcely seen by me—
But when that wild time had gone by,
And in these arms I folded thee,
Who ever thought those days could die?*

*Yet now I wait, and you wait too,
For what perchance may never come;
You think I have forgotten you,
That I grew tired and went home. 60*

*But what if some day as I stood
Against the wall with strained hands,
And turn'd my face toward the wood,
Away from all the golden lands;*

*And saw you come with tired feet,
And pale face thin and wan with care,
And stained raiment no more neat,
The white dust lying on your hair: --*

*Then I should say, I could not come;
This land was my wide prison, dear; 70
I could not choose but go; at home
There is a wizard whom I fear:*

*He bound me round with silken chains
I could not break; he set me here
Above the golden-waving plains,
Where never reaper cometh near.*

*And you have brought me my good sword,
Wherewith in happy days of old
I won you well from knight and lord;
My heart upswells and I grow bold. 80*

*But I shall die unless you stand,
-- Half lying now, you are so weak, --
Within my arms, unless your hand
Pass to and fro across my cheek.*