

IN MEMORABILIA MORTIS

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IN MEMORABILIA MORTIS

BY FRANCIS SHERMAN

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Decoration

"BUT YE—SHALL I BEHOLD YOU WHEN LEAVES FALL,
IN SOME SAD EVENING OP THE AUTUMN-TIDE?"

IN MEMORABILIA MORTIS

I



marked the slow withdrawal of the year,
Out on the hills the scarlet maples shone—
The glad, first herald of triumphant dawn.
A robin's song fell through the silence—clear
As long ago it rang when June was here.
Then, suddenly, a few grey clouds were drawn
Across the sky; and all the song was gone,

And all the gold was quick to disappear,
That day the sun seemed loth to come again;
And all day long the low wind spoke of rain,
Far off, beyond the hills; and moaned, like one
Wounded, among the pines: as though the Earth,
Knowing some giant grief had come to birth,
Had wearied of the Summer and the Sun.

II



watched the slow oncoming of the Fall.
Slowly the leaves fell from the elms, and lay
Along the roadside; and the wind's strange way
Was their way, when they heard the wind's far call.
The crimson vines that clung along the wall
Grew thin as snow that lives on into May;
Grey dawn, grey noon,—all things and hours were grey,
When quietly the darkness covered all.
And while no sunset flamed across the west,
And no great moon rose where the hills were low,
The day passed out as if it had not been:
And so it seemed the year sank to its rest,
Remembering naught, desiring naught,—as though
Early in Spring its young leaves were not green.

III



little while before the Fall was done
A day came when the frail year paused and said:
"Behold! a little while and I am dead;
Wilt thou not choose, of all the old dreams, one?"

Then dwelt I in a garden, where the sun
Shone always, and the roses all were red;
Far off, the great sea slept, and overhead,
Among the robins, matins had begun.
And I knew not at all it was a dream
Only, and that the year was near its close;
Garden and sunshine, robin-song and rose,
The half-heard murmur and the distant gleam
Of all the unvest sea, a little space
Were as a mist above the Autumn's face.

IV



And in this garden sloping to the sea
I dwelt (it seemed) to watch a pageant pass,—
Great Kings, their armour strong with iron and brass,
Young Queens, with yellow hair bound wonderfully.
For love's sake, and because of love's decree,
Most went, I knew; and so the flowers and grass
Knew my steps also: yet I wept Alas,
Deeming the garden surely lost to me.
But as the days went over, and still our feet
Trod the warm, even places, I knew well
(For I, as they, followed the close-heard beat
Of Love's wide wings who was her sentinel)
That here had Beauty built her citadel
And only we should reach her mercy-seat.

V

And ye, are ye not with me now alway?—
Thy raiment, Glauce, shall be my attire!
East of the Sun I, too, seek my desire!
My kisses, also, quicken the well-wrought clay!
And thou, Alcestis, lest my little day
Be done, art glad to die! Upon my pyre,
O Brynhild, let thine ashes feed the fire!
And, O thou Wood Sun, pray for me, I pray!
Yea, ye are mine! Yet there remaineth one
Who maketh Summer-time of all the year,
Whose glory darkeneth the very sun.
For thee my sword was sharpened and my spear,
For thee my least poor deed was dreamed and done,
O Love, O Queen, O Golden Guenevere!

VI

When, suddenly, I was awake. Dead things
Were all about me and the year was dead.
Save where the birches grew, all leaves were shed
And nowhere fell the sound of song or wings.
The fields I deemed were graves of worshipped Kings
Had lost their bloom; no honey-bee now fed
Therein, and no white daisy bowed its head
To harken to the wind's love-murmurings.
Yet, by my dream, I know henceforth for me
This time of year shall hold some unknown grace
When the leaves fall, and shall be sanctified:
As April only comes for memory
Of him who kissed the veil from Beauty's face
That we might see, and passed at Easter-tide.

These six sonnets IN MEMORABILIA
MORTIS, written at Fredericton, New
Brunswick, on the third day of October,
MDCCCXCVI, by Francis Sherman, are privately
printed at the University Press, in Cambridge,
Massachusetts, early in December of the same
year.



Decoration

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