

William Motherwell (1797-1835)

7 *Lady Margaret*

I lay within the chamber lone  
Where the Lady Margaret died;  
And wildly there the midnight wind  
Like hapless spirit sighed.

I mused upon that peerless One, 5  
So beautiful of blee;  
And marvelled much of her sad death's  
Time-hallowed mystery:  
For, as a rainbow-tinted cloud,  
Smote by a gentle wind, 10  
Sails o'er the deep, slow paced and proud,  
Yet leaves no trace behind;  
Nor can conjecture index true  
Where one bright shadow lay,  
Till all has melted from the view, 15  
In nothingness away;  
So did that lady vanish quite,  
In her sad latter day!

It is a hundred years ago 20  
Since living limb did rest  
Within that chamber's chilling gloom,  
And rose a living guest!  
But many a brave and stately corpse  
Of lord and lady tall,  
Have here lain cold and motionless 25  
Ere their proud funeral:  
For no sound or sight, however strange,  
Can lifeless flesh appal.  
But ancient crones have noted well  
Of each corpse that lay there, 30  
That writhen was each ghastly limb,  
The eyelid opened wide, and grim  
Each cold dead eye did glare.

It is a hundred years ago,  
Even on this very night, 35  
Since, in this unsunned room, and lone,  
Reposed that lady bright —  
A miracle of loveliness —  
A very beam of light.  
Blythe dawns the morn — her bridal morn, 40  
And merry minstrels play;  
The brisk bridegroom, and all his kin,  
Came trooping with a joyous din,  
In seemliest array.  
The bridegroom came, but ah! the bride 45  
Was missing and away!  
And of that gentle lady's fate  
None wot of till this day!  
And, since that night, all tenantless  
Of life hath been her room; 50  
Till even I did madly break  
Upon its sacred gloom.

It was a dull and eerie night  
Of wind and bitter sleet,  
When first that tomb-like chamber rung 55  
With the echoes of my feet;  
And on its narrow casements hard  
The hail and rain did beat,  
While through each crazed and time-worn chink  
The hollow wind did moan, 60  
As if a hundred harps were strung  
Within that chamber lone,  
And every minstrel there had been  
Some disembodied one!  
But it is a lofty chamber, 65  
And passing rich withal  
When on its gilded mouldings huge  
The quivering moonbeams fall.  
And, ever and anon, in sooth,  
Even on that stormy night, 70  
Would some pale tempest-shattered ray  
Through the dim windows find its way —

A very thread of light —  
To glimmer on the needlecraft  
And curious tapestry 75  
Which moulder on the walls, — brave scrolls  
Of dim antiquitye,  
Embodying many a quaint device  
Of love and chivalrye.

Oh! it is a lofty chamber, 80  
But dull it is to see,  
In the dead pause of the deep midnight,  
When the faggots dying be,  
And nought but embers red  
Throw round a dubious gleam, 85  
Like the indistinct forthshadowings  
Of a sad and unquiet dream.

Then suddenly to wake from sleep,  
To gaze round that dim room  
We're sure to feel as one whose pulse 90  
Again beats in the tomb,  
Swelling with idle life and strength  
Within its stifling gloom.

'Twas even so that I awoke  
(Sure awake I could not be), 95  
Though with the life-likeness of waking truths  
Were all things clothed to me.

'Twas in terror I awoke  
Within that chamber dim;  
The sweat drop burst on my cold brow, 100  
Dull horror numbed each limb.  
In agony my temples beat,  
Life only throbb'd there;  
And creeping cold, like living things,  
Stood up each clammy hair. 105  
It seem'd as if a spell from hell  
Were drugg'd deep with the air;  
Yet wherefore should I fear,  
To me was all unknown;  
For that chamber was, as heretofore, 110

Dim, desolate, and lone.  
And I heard the angry winter's wind  
Still shrilly whistling by;  
I heard it stir the leafless trees,  
And heard their faint reply. 115  
While the ticking clock, right audibly,  
Did note time's passing sigh,  
And, like some dusky banner broad,  
Loud flapping in the breeze,  
The faded arras on the walls 120  
Sung its own exiquies.

Then, then, methought I heard a foot,  
It sounded soft and still;  
And slowly then it died away,  
Like echo on the hill, 125  
Or like the far faint murmuring  
Of a lone hermit rill.

Again that footstep sounded near,  
Again it died away;  
And then I heard it gliding past 130  
The couch on which I lay!  
I raised my head, and wildly gazed  
Into the glimmering gloom;  
But nothing save the embers red,  
That on the spacious hearth were spread, 135  
I saw within that room.

And all was dusky round,  
Save where these embers shed  
A pale and sickly gleam of light  
On the Lady Margaret's bed. 140

On the couch where I did lye  
That sickly light did shine  
With one bright flash, when, as a voice  
Did cry — "**Revenge is mine!**"  
Another answered straight, 145  
And said, "**The hour is come!**"

I listened — but these voices twain  
For evermore were dumb.  
But again the still soft foot  
Came creeping stealthy on; 150

And then, Oh God! mine ear upcaught  
A deep and stifled groan.  
It echoed through the lofty room  
So loud, so clear, and shrill,  
Methinks even to my dying-day 155  
I'll hear that echo still.  
Again that deep and smothered groan —  
That rattle in the throat —  
That awful sob of struggling life —  
On my strained ear-strings smote. 160  
In desperate fear I madly strove  
To start from that witch'd bed,  
But on my breast there seem'd up-piled  
A mountain weight of lead.  
And when I strove to speak aloud, 165  
To dissipate that spell,  
I shuddered at the shapeless sounds  
That from mine own lips fell.  
'Twas then, full filled with fear, I shut  
Mine eyes t' escape the gaze 170  
Of that dim chamber's arras'd walls,  
With their tales of other days,  
Lest ghastly shapes should start from them  
To sport in horrid glee  
Before my tortured sight — dark scenes 175  
Of their life's tragedy,  
And like exulting fiends proclaim  
How black man's heart can be.

But visionless scant space I lay  
With throbbing downshut lid, 180  
When o'er my brow and cheek, dear Lord!  
A clammy coldness slid.  
O'er brow and cheek I felt it slide;  
And, like a frozen rill,  
The blood waxed thick within my veins, 185  
Grew pulseless, and stood still.  
O'er brow and cheek I felt it slide,  
So clammy and so cold,  
Like the touch of one whose lifeless limbs  
In winding-sheet are rolled. 190

Straight upward did I look, and then  
From the thick obscurity —  
Oh, horrible! there downward gleamed  
Two glittering eyes on me.  
From the ceiling of that lofty room 195  
These glittering eyes did stare;  
They rested on me, under them,  
With a fixed and fearful glare.  
Oh, never human eyes did flash  
So wild and strange a light, 200  
As these twin eyes straight downward poured  
On that unhappy night.  
Their beams shot down like lances long,  
Unutterably bright.  
And still these glittering living lights 205  
Did steadfast gaze on me;  
And each fibre of my heart shrunk up  
Beneath their sorcery.  
Still, still they gleam — their searching glance  
Has pierced into my brain. 210  
I feel the stream of fire pass through,  
I feel its cureless pain!

One moment seemed to pass, and then  
My vision waxed more clear  
And livelier to my spell-fraught sight, 215  
These blazing eyes appear.  
As with unholy light they lit  
A pallid cheek and brow,  
And quivered on a lip as cold  
And blenched as driven snow. 220  
And I did gaze on that pale brow,  
And on that lovesome cheek;  
I watched those cold part-opened lips,  
Methought that they would speak;  
But motionless, and void of life 225  
As monumental stone,  
Was every feature, save those eyes,  
That evermore out shone  
With a fearful lustre, that to life  
On earth, is never known. 230

