

Robert Browning (1812-89)

7 *Porphyria's Lover*

The rain set early in to-night,  
The sullen wind was soon awake,  
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
And did its worst to vex the lake:  
I listened with heart fit to break. 5  
When glided in Porphyria; straight  
She shut the cold out and the storm,  
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;  
Which done, she rose, and from her form 10  
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,  
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
And, last, she sat down by my side  
And called me. When no voice replied, 15  
She put my arm about her waist,  
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
And all her yellow hair displaced,  
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair, 20  
Murmuring how she loved me — she  
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,  
To set its struggling passion free  
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,  
And give herself to me for ever. 25  
But passion sometimes would prevail,  
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain  
A sudden thought of one so pale  
For love of her, and all in vain:  
So, she was come through wind and rain. 30  
Be sure I looked up at her eyes  
Happy and proud; at last I knew  
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise  
Made my heart swell, and still it grew

While I debated what to do. 35  
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,  
Perfectly pure and good: I found  
A thing to do, and all her hair  
In one long yellow string I wound  
Three times her little throat around, 40  
And strangled her. No pain felt she;  
I am quite sure she felt no pain.  
As a shut bud that holds a bee,  
I warily oped her lids: again  
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain. 45  
And I untightened next the tress  
About her neck; her cheek once more  
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:  
I propped her head up as before,  
Only, this time my shoulder bore 50  
Her head, which droops upon it still:  
The smiling rosy little head,  
So glad it has its utmost will,  
That all it scorned at once is fled,  
And I, its love, am gained instead! 55  
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how  
Her darling one wish would be heard.  
And thus we sit together now,  
And all night long we have not stirred,  
And yet God has not said a word! 60

1836

(From *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*. Vol. 1.  
London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1896)