John Davidson (1857-1909)

A Ballad of Euthanasia 6

In magic books she read at night, And found all things to be A spectral pageant brought to light By nameless sorcery. 'Bethink you, now, my daughter dear,' The King of Norway cried, "Tis summer, and your twentieth year-High time you were a bride! 'The sunlight lingers o'er the wold By night; the stars above 10 With passion throb like hearts of gold; The whole world is in love.' The scornful princess laughed and said, 'This love you praise, I hate. Oh, I shall never, never wed; 15For men degenerate. 'The sun grows dim on heaven's brow; The world's worn blood runs cold; Time staggers in his dotage now; Nature is growing old. 20'Deluded by the summertime, Must I with wanton breath Whisper and sigh? I trow not!—I Shall be the bride of Death.' Fair princes came with gems of price, 25And kings from lands afar. 'Jewels!' she said. 'I may not wed Till Death comes with a star.'

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At midnight when she ceased to read, She pushed her lattice wide, And saw the crested rollers lead The vanguard of the tide.	30
The mighty host of waters swayed, Commanded by the moon;	
The wind a marching music made; The surges chimed in tune.	35
But she with sudden-startled ears	
O'erheard a ghostly sound—	
Or drums that beat, or trampling feet, Above or underground.	40
The mountain-side was girt about	
With forests dark and deep.	
'What meteor flashes in and out Thridding the darksome steep?'	
Soon light and sound reached level ground, And lo, in blackest mail,	45
Along the shore a warrior	
Rode on a war-horse pale!	
And from his helm as on he came	
A crescent lustre gleamed;	50
The charger's hoofs were shod with flame:	
The wet sand hissed and steamed.	
'He leaves me! Nay; he turns this way From elfin lands afar.	
"Tis Death,' she said. "He comes to wed	55
His true love with a star!	
'No ring for me, no blushing groom,	
No love with all its ills, No long-drawn life! I am the wife	
Of Death, whose first kiss kills.'	60

The rider reached the city wall;

Over the gate he dashed;	
Across the roofs the fire-shod hoofs	
Like summer-lightning flashed.	
Before her bower the pale horse pawed	65
The air, unused to rest;	
The sable groom, he whispered 'Come!'	
And stooped his shining crest.	
She sprang behind him; on her brow	
He placed his glowing star.	70
Back o'er the roofs the fire-shod hoofs	
Like lightning flashed afar.	
Through hissing sand and shrivelled grass	
And flowers singed and dead,	
By wood and lea, by stream and sea,	75
The pale horse panting sped.	
At last as they beheld the morn	
His sovereignty resume,	
Deep in an ancient land forlorn	
They reached a marble tomb.	80
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They lighted down and entered in:	
The tears, they brimmed her eyes;	
She turned and took a lingering look,	
A last look at the skies;	
Then went with Death. Her lambent star	85
The sullen darkness lit	
In avenues of sombre yews,	
Where ghosts did peer and flit.	
But soon the way grew light as day;	
With wonderment and awe,	90
A golden land, a silver strand,	00
And grass-green hills she saw.	
In gown and smock good country folk	
In fields and meadows worked;	

The salt seas wet the ruddy net Where glistering fishes lurked.	95
The meads were strewn with purple flowers, With every flower that blows; And singing loud o'er cliff and cloud The larks, the larks arose!	100
'The sun is bright on heaven's brow, The world's fresh blood runs fleet; Time is as young as ever now, Nature as fresh and sweet.'	
Her champion said; then through the wood He led her to a bower; He doffed his sable casque and stood A young man in his flower!	105
 'Lo! I am Life, your lover true!' He kissed her o'er and o'er. And still she wist not what to do, And still she wondered more. 	110
And they were wed. The swift years sped Till children's children laughed; And joy and pain and joy again Mixed in the cup they quaffed.	115
Upon their golden wedding day, He said, 'How now, dear wife?' Then she: 'I find the sweetest kind Of Death is Love and Life.'	120
1894	

(From *The Poems of John Davidson*. 2 vols. Ed. Andrew Turnbull. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic P, 1973)