

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 seemed 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
 I'll hear that echo still. 155
 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

