Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875-1935)

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ALICE DUNBAR-NELSON
1875–1935

You! Inez!

Orange gleams athwart a crimson soul
Lambent flames; purple passion lurks
In your dusky eyes.
Red mouth; flower soft,
Your soul leaps up—and flashes
Star-like, white, flame-hot.
Curving arms, encircling a world of love.
You! Stirring the depths of passionate desire!

The Gift

Like wine, your kisses touch my lips,
Like wine, the blood thrills through my veins;
The honey that the gold bee sips,
The purple draught that foams and stains
Are in your tender, sweet caress;
My heart is yours, I could give less—
I could give less, but all my life
Lies at your feet, to take or no.
I crave your clasp that shields from strife,
The kiss you gave me, loving so.
I love your breath upon my hair,
Myself I love—you think me fair.

I Sit and Sew

I sit and sew—a useless task it seems,
My hands grown tired, my head weighed down with dreams—
The panoply of war, the martial tread of men,
Grim-faced, stern-eyed, gazing beyond the ken
Of lesser souls, whose eyes have not seen Death,
Not learned to hold their lives but as a breath—
But—I must sit and sew.
I sit and sew—my heart aches with desire—
That pageant terrible, that fiercely pouring fire
On wasted fields, and writhing grotesque things
Once men. My soul in pity flings
Appealing cries, yearning only to go
There in that holocaust of hell, those fields of woe—
But—I must sit and sew.

The little useless seam, the idle patch;
Why dream I here beneath my homely thatch,
When there they lie in sodden mud and rain,
Pitifully calling me, the quick ones and the slain?
You need me, Christ! It is no roseate dream
That beckons me—this pretty futile seam,
It stifles me—God, must I sit and sew?

HELEN HAY WHITNEY
1876–1944

Love and Death

I can believe that my Beloved dies,
   That all her virtue, all her youth shall fail,
   And life, her rosy life, grow cold and pale,
To bloom again in braver Paradise.
I must believe that death shall close her eyes,
   And hold her heart beyond a heavy veil,
   Where silences surround her spirit frail
And waste the form where all my loving lies.

Ah, God! but no. And is my love so weak?
   Her heart may pause, may falter and grow still,
But not her laugh, the color in her cheek—
   That may not fade; the catch that lifts her breath,
Sobbing against my heart. Essay your will—
   These are too dear to fill your grave, O Death!