

*Chamber Music  
and Other Poems*

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James Joyce



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# CHAMBER MUSIC

# I

Strings in the earth and air  
Make music sweet;  
Strings by the river where  
The willows meet.

There's music along the river  
For Love wanders there,  
Pale flowers on his mantle  
Dark leaves on his hair.

All softly playing,  
With head to the music bent,  
And fingers straying  
Upon an instrument.

## II

The twilight turns from amethyst  
To deep and deeper blue,  
The lamp fills with a pale green glow  
The trees of the avenue.

The old piano plays an air,  
Sedate and slow and gay;  
She bends upon the yellow keys,  
Her head inclines this way.

Shy thoughts and grave wide eyes and hands  
That wander as they list –  
The twilight turns to darker blue  
With lights of amethyst.

## III

At that hour when all things have repose,  
O lonely watcher of the skies,  
Do you hear the night wind and the sighs  
Of harps playing unto Love to uncloset  
The pale gates of sunrise?

When all things repose do you alone  
Awake to hear the sweet harps play  
To Love before him on his way,  
And the night wind answering in antiphon  
Till night is overgone?

Play on, invisible harps, unto Love  
Whose way in heaven is aglow  
At that hour when soft lights come and go,  
Soft sweet music in the air above  
And in the earth below.

## IV

When the shy star goes forth in heaven  
All maidenly, disconsolate,  
Hear you amid the drowsy even  
One who is singing by your gate.  
His song is softer than the dew  
And he is come to visit you.

O bend no more in reverie  
When he at eventide is calling  
Nor muse: Who may this singer be  
Whose song about my heart is falling?  
Know you by this, the lover's chant,  
'Tis I that am your visitant.

## V

Lean out of the window,  
Goldenhair,  
I heard you singing  
A merry air.

My book is closed;  
I read no more,  
Watching the fire dance  
On the floor.

I have left my book:  
I have left my room:  
For I heard you singing  
Through the gloom,

Singing and singing  
A merry air.  
Lean out of the window,  
Goldenhair.

## VI

I would in that sweet bosom be  
(O sweet it is and fair it is!)  
Where no rude wind might visit me.  
Because of sad austerities  
I would in that sweet bosom be.

I would be ever in that heart  
(O soft I knock and soft entreat her!)  
Where only peace might be my part.  
Austerities were all the sweeter  
So I were ever in that heart.

## VII

My love is in a light attire  
Among the apple trees  
Where the gay winds do most desire  
To run in companies.

There, where the gay winds stay to woo  
The young leaves as they pass,  
My love goes slowly, bending to  
Her shadow on the grass;

And where the sky's a pale blue cup  
Over the laughing land,  
My love goes lightly, holding up  
Her dress with dainty hand.

## VIII

Who goes amid the green wood  
With spring tide all adorning her?  
Who goes amid the merry green wood  
To make it merrier?

Who passes in the sunlight  
By ways that know the light footfall?  
Who passes in the sweet sunlight  
With mien so virginal?

The ways of all the woodland  
Gleam with a soft and golden fire –  
For whom does all the sunny woodland  
Carry so brave attire?

O, it is for my true love  
The woods their rich apparel wear –  
O, it is for my own true love,  
That is so young and fair.

## IX

Winds of May, that dance on the sea,  
Dancing a ring-around in glee  
From furrow to furrow, while overhead  
The foam flies up to be garlanded  
In silvery arches spanning the air,  
Saw you my true love anywhere?  
Welladay! Welladay!  
For the winds of May!  
Love is unhappy when love is away!

## X

Bright cap and streamers,  
He sings in the hollow:  
Come follow, come follow,  
All you that love.  
Leave dreams to the dreamers  
That will not after,  
That song and laughter  
Do nothing move.

With ribbons streaming  
He sings the bolder;  
In troop at his shoulder  
The wild bees hum.  
And the time of dreaming  
Dreams is over –  
As lover to lover,  
Sweetheart, I come.

## XI

Bid adieu, adieu, adieu,  
Bid adieu to girlish days.  
Happy Love is come to woo  
Thee and woo thy girlish ways –  
The zone that doth become thee fair,  
The snood upon thy yellow hair,

When thou hast heard his name upon  
The bugles of the cherubim  
Begin thou softly to unzone  
Thy girlish bosom unto him  
And softly to undo the snood  
That is the sign of maidenhood.