

1848

TO HELEN

Edgar Allan Poe

Poe, Edgar Allan (1809-49) - American poet, short-story writer, and critic who is best known for his tales of ratiocination, his fantastical horror stories, and his genre-founding detective stories. Poe, whose cloudy personal life is a virtual legend, considered himself primarily a poet. To Helen (1848) - The second of two poems Poe wrote under this title. Opening lines: I saw thee once- once only years ago: / I must not say how many- but not many. ...

To Helen

I saw thee once- once only- years ago: I must not say how many- but not many.

It was a July midnight; and from out A full-orbed moon, that, like thine own soul,
soaring, Sought a precipitate pathway up through heaven, There fell a silvery-silken
veil of light, With quietude, and sultriness, and slumber, Upon the upturned faces of a
thousand Roses that grew in an enchanted garden, Where no wind dared to stir, unless
on tiptoe Fell on the upturn'd faces of these roses That gave out, in return for the love-
light, Their odorous souls in an ecstatic death Fell on the upturn'd faces of these roses
That smiled and died in this parterre, enchanted By thee, and by the poetry of thy
presence.

Clad all in white, upon a violet bank I saw thee half reclining; while the moon Fell on
the upturn'd faces of the roses, And on thine own, upturn'd- alas, in sorrow!

Was it not Fate, that, on this July midnight Was it not Fate, (whose name is also Sorrow,)
That bade me pause before that garden-gate, To breathe the incense of those
slumbering roses? No footstep stirred: the hated world an slept, Save only thee and me.
(Oh, Heaven!- oh, God!

How my heart beats in coupling those two words!) Save only thee and me. I paused- I
looked And in an instant all things disappeared.

(Ah, bear in mind this garden was enchanted!) The pearly lustre of the moon went out:
The mossy banks and the meandering paths, The happy flowers and the repining trees,
Were seen no more: the very roses' odors Died in the arms of the adoring airs.

All- all expired save thee- save less than thou: Save only the divine light in thine
eyes Save but the soul in thine uplifted eyes.

I saw but them- they were the world to me!

I saw but them- saw only them for hours, Saw only them until the moon went down.
What wild heart-histories seemed to be enwritten Upon those crystalline, celestial
spheres!

How dark a woe, yet how sublime a hope!

How silently serene a sea of pride!

How daring an ambition; yet how deep How fathomless a capacity for love!

But now, at length, dear Dian sank from sight, Into a western couch of thunder-cloud;
And thou, a ghost, amid the entombing trees Didst glide away. Only thine eyes
remained; They would not go- they never yet have gone; Lighting my lonely pathway
home that night, They have not left me (as my hopes have) since; They follow me- they
lead me through the years.

They are my ministers- yet I their slave.

Their office is to illumine and enkindle
My duty, to be saved by their bright light, And
purified in their electric fire, And sanctified in their elysian fire.

They fill my soul with Beauty (which is Hope), And are far up in Heaven- the stars I
kneel to In the sad, silent watches of my night; While even in the meridian glare of day
I see them still- two sweetly scintillant Venuses, unextinguished by the sun!

THE END