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A Song of the Road

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The way was black,
The night was mad with lightning; I bestrode
My wild young colt, upon a mountain road.
And, crunching onward, like a monster's jaws,
His ringing hoof-beats their glad rhythm kept,
Breaking the glassy surface of the pools,
Where hidden waters slept.
A million buzzing insects in the air
On droning wing made sullen discord there.



But suddenly, afar, beyond the wood,
Beyond the dark pall of my brooding thought,
I saw lights cluster like a swarm of wasps
Among the branches caught.
“The inn!” I cried, and on his living flesh
My broncho felt the lash and neighed with eagerness.

And all this time the cool and quiet wood
Uttered no sound, as though it understood.
Until there came to me, upon the night,
A voice so clear, so clear, so ringing sweet—
A voice as of a woman singing, and her song
Dropped like soft music winging, at my feet,

And seemed a sigh that, with my spirit blending,
Lengthened and lengthened out, and had no ending.

And through the empty silence of the night,
And through the quiet of the hills, I heard
That music, and the sounds of the night wind bore me,
Like spirit voices from an unseen world
Came drifting o'er me.

I curbed my horse, to catch what she might say:
"At night they come, and they are gone by day—"
And then another voice, with low refrain,
And untold tenderness, took up the strain:
"Oh love is but an inn upon life's way";
"At night they come, and they are gone by day—"
Their voices mingled in that wistful lay.

Then I dismounted and stretched out my length
Beside a pool, and while my mind was bent
Upon that mystery within the wood,
My eyes grew heavy, and my strength was spent.
And so I slept there, huddled in my cloak.
And now, when by untrodden paths I go,
Through the dim forest, no repose I know
At any inn at nightfall, but apart
I sleep beneath the stars, for through my heart
Echoes the burden of that wistful lay:
"At night they come, and they are gone by day,
And love is but an inn upon life's way."

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