

# **The Shadowy Waters**

William Butler Yeats

# Table of Contents

<u><a href="#">The Shadowy Waters</a></u> .....	1
<u><a href="#">William Butler Yeats</a></u> .....	1
<u><a href="#">Introductory Lines</a></u> .....	1
<u><a href="#">The Harp of Aengus</a></u> .....	2
<u><a href="#">The Shadowy Waters</a></u> .....	2

# The Shadowy Waters

William Butler Yeats

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.  
<http://www.blackmask.com>

- [Introductory Lines](#)
  - [The Harp of Aengus](#)
  - [The Shadowy Waters](#)
- 

## Introductory Lines

I walked among the seven woods of Coole:  
Shan-walla, where a willow-hordered pond  
Gathers the wild duck from the winter dawn;  
Shady Kyle-dortha; sunnier Kyle-na-no,  
Where many hundred squirrels are as happy  
As though they had been hidden hy green houghs  
Where old age cannot find them; Paire-na-lee,  
Where hazel and ash and privet hbind the paths:  
Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling  
Their sudden fragrances on the green air;  
Dim Pairc-na-tarav, where enchanted eyes  
Have seen immortal, mild, proud shadows walk;  
Dim Inchy wood, that hides badger and fox  
And marten-cat, and borders that old wood  
Wise Buddy Early called the wicked wood:  
Seven odours, seven murmurs, seven woods.  
I had not eyes like those enchanted eyes,  
Yet dreamed that beings happier than men  
Moved round me in the shadows, and at night  
My dreams were clown hy voices and by fires;  
And the images I have woven in this story  
Of Forgael and Dectora and the empty waters  
Moved round me in the voices and the fires,  
And more I may not write of, for they that cleave  
The waters of sleep can make a chattering tongue  
Heavy like stone, their wisdom being half silence.  
How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud shadows?  
I only know that all we know comes from you,  
And that you come from Eden on flying feet.  
Is Eden far away, or do you hide  
From human thought, as hares and mice and coneyes  
That run before the reaping-hook and lie  
In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods

## The Shadowy Waters

And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,  
More shining winds, more star-glimmering ponds?  
Is Eden out of time and out of space?  
And do you gather about us when pale light  
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,  
And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of feathers  
And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?  
I have made this poem for you, that men may read it  
Before they read of Forgael and Dectora,  
As men in the old times, before the harps began,  
Poured out wine for the high invisible ones.

## The Harp of Aengus

Edain came out of Midhir's hill, and lay  
Beside young Aengus in his tower of glass,  
Where time is drowned in odour-laden winds  
And Druid moons, and murmuring of boughs,  
And sleepy boughs, and boughs where apples made  
Of opal and ruhy and pale chrysolite  
Awake unsleeping fires; and wove seven strings,  
Sweet with all music, out of his long hair,  
Because her hands had been made wild by love.  
When Midhir's wife had changed her to a fly,  
He made a harp with Druid apple-wood  
That she among her winds might know he wept;  
And from that hour he has watched over none  
But faithful lovers.

## The Shadowy Waters

A Dramatic Poem

The deck of an ancient ship. At the right of the stage is the mast,

The Harp of Aengus

with a large square sail hiding a great deal of the sky and sea on that side. The tiller is at the left of the stage; it is a long oar coming through an opening in the bulwark. The deck rises in a series of steps behind the tiller, and the stern of the ship curves overhead. When the play opens there are four persons upon the deck. Aibric stands by the tiller. Forgael sleeps upon the raised portion of the deck towards the front of the stage. Two Sailors are standing near to the mast, on which a harp is hanging.

**First Sailor.** Has he not led us into these waste seas  
For long enough?

**Second Sailor.** Aye, long and long enough.

**First Sailor.** We have not come upon a shore or ship  
These dozen weeks.

**Second Sailor.** And I had thought to make  
A good round Sum upon this cruise, and turn –  
For I am getting on in life – to something  
That has less ups and downs than robbery.

**First Sailor.** I am so tired of being bachelor  
I could give all my heart to that Red Moll  
That had but the one eye.

**Second Sailor.** Can no bewitchment  
Transform these rascal billows into women  
That I may drown myself?

**First Sailor.** Better steer home,  
Whether he will or no; and better still  
To take him while he sleeps and carry him  
And drop him from the gunnel.

**Second Sailor.** I dare not do it.  
Were't not that there is magic in his harp,  
I would be of your mind; but when he plays it  
Strange creatures flutter up before one's eyes,  
Or cry about one's ears.

**First Sailor.** Nothing to fear.

**Second Sailor.** Do you remember when we sank that  
galley  
At the full moon?

**First Sailor.** He played all through the night.

**Second Sailor.** Until the moon had set; and when I looked  
Where the dead drifted, I could see a bird  
Like a grey gull upon the breast of each.  
While I was looking they rose hurriedly,  
And after circling with strange cries awhile  
Flew westward; and many a time since then  
I've heard a rustling overhead in the wind.

**First Sailor.** I saw them on that night as well as you.  
But when I had eaten and drunk myself asleep  
My courage came again.

**Second Sailor.** But that's not all.  
The other night, while he was playing it,  
A beautiful young man and girl came up

## The Shadowy Waters

In a white breaking wave; they had the look  
Of those that are alive for ever and ever.

**First Sailor.** I saw them, too, one night. Forgael was  
playing,

And they were listening therbeyond the sail.  
He could not see them, but I held out my hands  
To grasp the woman.

**Second Sailor.** You have dared to touch her?

**First Sailor.** O she was but a shadow, and slipped from  
me.

**Second Sailor.** But were you not afraid?

**First Sailor.** Why should I fear?

**Second Sailor.** 'Twas Aengus and Edain, the wandering  
lovers,

To whom all lovers pray.

**First Sailor.** But what of that?

A shadow does not carry sword or spear.

**Second Sailor.** My mother told me that there is not one

Of the Ever-living half so dangerous  
As that wild Aengus. Long before her day  
He carried Edain off from a king's house,  
And hid her among fruits of jewel-stone  
And in a tower of glass, and from that day  
Has hated every man that's not in love,  
And has been dangerous to him.

**First Sailor.** I have heard

He does not hate seafarers as he hates  
Peaceable men that shut the wind away,  
And keep to the one weary marriage-bed.

**Second Sailor.** I think that he has Forgael in his net,  
And drags him through the sea,

**First Sailor.** Well, net or none,  
I'd drown him while we have the chance to do it.

**Second Sailor.** It's certain I'd sleep easier o' nights  
If he were dead; but who will be our captain,  
Judge of the stars, and find a course for us?

**First Sailor.** I've thought of that. We must have Aibric  
with us,

For he can judge the stars as well as Forgael.

[Going towards Aibric.]

Become our captain, Aibric. I am resolved  
To make an end of Forgael while he sleeps.  
There's not a man but will be glad of it  
When it is over, nor one to grumble at us.

**Aibric.** You have taken pay and made your bargain for it.

**First Sailor.** What good is there in this hard way of  
living,

Unless we drain more flagons in a year  
And kiss more lips than lasting peaceable men  
In their long lives? Will you be of our troop  
And take the captain's share of everything

And bring us into populous seas again?

**Aibric.** Be of your troop! Aibric be one of you  
And Forgael in the other scale! kill Forgael,  
And he my master from my childhood up!  
If you will draw that sword out of its scabbard  
I'll give my answer.

**First Sailor.** You have awakened him.

[To Second Sailor.]

We'd better go, for we have lost this chance.

[They go out.]

**Forgael.** Have the birds passed us? I could hear your  
voice,

But there were others.

**Aibric.** I have seen nothing pass.

**Forgael.** You're certain of it? I never wake from sleep  
But that I am afraid they may have passed,  
For they're my only pilots. If I lost them  
Straying too far into the north or south,  
I'd never come upon the happiness  
That has been promised me. I have not seen them  
These many days; and yet there must be many  
Dying at every moment in the world,  
And flying towards their peace.

**Aibric.** Put by these thoughts,  
And listen to me for a while. The sailors  
Are plotting for your death.

**Forgael.** Have I not given  
More riches than they ever hoped to find?  
And now they will not follow, while I seek  
The only riches that have hit my fancy.

**Aibric.** What riches can you find in this waste sea  
Where no ship sails, where nothing that's alive  
Has ever come but those man-headed birds,  
Knowing it for the world's end?

**Forgael.** Where the world ends  
The mind is made unchanging, for it finds  
Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible hope,  
The flagstone under all, the fire of fires,  
The roots of the world.

**Aibric.** Shadows before now  
Have driven travellers mad for their own sport.

**Forgael.** Do you, too, doubt me? Have you joined their  
plot?

**Aibric.** No, no, do not say that. You know right well  
That I will never lift a hand against you.

**Forgael.** Why should you be more faithful than the rest,  
Being as doubtful?

**Aibric.** I have called you master  
Too many years to lift a hand against you.

**Forgael.** Maybe it is but natural to doubt me.  
You've never known, I'd lay a wager on it,

A melancholy that a cup of wine,  
A lucky battle, or a woman's kiss  
Could not amend.

**Aibric.** I have good spirits enough.

**Forgael.** If you will give me all your mind awhile –  
All, all, the very bottom of the bowl –  
I'll show you that I am made differently,  
That nothing can amend it but these waters,  
Where I am rid of life – the events of the world –  
What do you call it? – that old promise-breaker,  
The cozening fortune-teller that comes whispering,  
"You will have all you have wished for when you have  
earned

Land for your children or money in a pot.–  
And when we have it we are no happier,  
Because of that old draught under the door,  
Or creaky shoes. And at the end of all  
How are we better off than Seaghan the fool,  
That never did a hand's turn? Aibric! Aibric!  
We have fallen in the dreams the Ever-living  
Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world  
And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh,  
And find their laughter sweeter to the taste  
For that brief sighing.

**Aibric.** If you had loved some woman –

**Forgael.** You say that also? You have heard the voices,  
For that is what they say – all, all the shadows –  
Aengus and Edain, those passionate wanderers,  
And all the others; but it must be love  
As they have known it. Now the secret's out;  
For it is love that I am seeking for,  
But of a beautiful, unheard-of kind  
That is not in the world.

**Aibric.** And yet the world  
Has beautiful women to please every man.

**Forgael.** But he that gets their love after the fashion  
"Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope  
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even  
The bed of love, that in the imagination  
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,  
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,  
And as soon finished.

**Aibric.** All that ever loved  
Have loved that way – there is no other way.

**Forgael.** Yet never have two lovers kissed but they  
believed there was some other near at hand,  
And almost wept because they could not find it.

**Aibric.** When they have twenty years; in middle life  
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,  
And let the dream go by.

**Forgael.** It's not a dream,

But the reality that makes our passion  
As a lamp shadow – no – no lamp, the sun.  
What the world's million lips are thirsting for  
Must be substantial somewhere.

**Aibric.** I have heard the Druids  
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.  
It may be that the Ever-living know it –  
No mortal can.

**Forgael.** Yes; if they give us help.

**Aibric.** They are besotting you as they besot  
The crazy herdsman that will tell his fellows  
That he has been all night upon the hills,  
Riding to hurley, or in the battle-host  
With the Ever-living.

**Forgael.** What if he speak the truth,  
And for a dozen hours have been a part  
Of that more powerful life?

**Aibric.** His wife knows better.  
Has she not seen him lying like a log,  
Or fumbling in a dream about the house?  
And if she hear him mutter of wild riders,  
She knows that it was but the cart-horse coughing  
That set him to the fancy.

**Forgael.** All would be well  
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,  
And get into their world that to the sense  
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly  
Among substantial things; for it is dreams  
That lift us to the flowing, changing world  
That the heart longs for. What is love itself,  
Even though it be the lightest of light love,  
But dreams that hurry from beyond the world  
To make low laughter more than meat and drink,  
Though it but set us sighing? Fellow-wanderer,  
Could we but mix ourselves into a dream,  
Not in its image on the mirror!

**Aibric.** While  
We're in the body that's impossible.

**Forgael.** And yet I cannot think they're leading me  
To death; for they that promised to me love  
As those that can outlive the moon have known it, '  
Had the world's total life gathered up, it seemed,  
Into their shining limbs – I've had great teachers.  
Aengus and Edain ran up out of the wave –  
You'd never doubt that it was life they promised  
Had you looked on them face to face as I did,  
With so red lips, and running on such feet,  
And having such wide-open, shining eyes.

**Aibric.** It's certain they are leading you to death.  
None but the dead, or those that never lived,  
Can know that ecstasy. Forgael! Forgael!

They have made you follow the man-headed birds,  
And you have told me that their journey lies  
Towards the country of the dead.

**Forgael.** What matter

If I am going to my death? – for there,  
Or somewhere, I shall find the love they have  
promised.

That much is certain. I shall find a woman.

One of the Ever-living, as I think –  
One of the Laughing People – and she and I  
Shall light upon a place in the world's core,  
Where passion grows to be a changeless thing,  
Like charmed apples made of chrysoprase,  
Or chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chrysolite;  
And there, in juggleries of sight and sense,  
Become one movement, energy, delight,  
Until the overburdened moon is dead.

[A number of Sailors enter hurriedly.]

**First Sailor.** Look there! there in the mist! a ship of spice!

And we are almost on her!

**Second Sailor.** We had not known

But for the ambergris and sandalwood.

**First Sailor.** NO; but opoponax and cinnamon.

**Forgael** [taking the tiller from Aibric]. The Ever-living have  
kept my bargain for me,  
And paid you on the nail.

**Aibric.** Take up that rope

To make her fast while we are plundering her.

**First Sailor.** There is a king and queen upon her deck,  
And where there is one woman there'll be others.

**Aibric.** Speak lower, or they'll hear.

**First Sailor.** They cannot hear;

They are too busy with each other. Look!

He has stooped down and kissed her on the lips.

**Second Sailor.** When she finds out we have better men  
aboard

She may not be too sorry in the end.

**First Sailor.** She will be like a wild cat; for these queens  
Care more about the kegs of silver and gold  
And the high fame that come to them in marriage,  
Than a strong body and a ready hand.

**Second Sailor.** There's nobody is natural but a robber,  
And that is why the world totters about  
Upon its bandy legs.

**Aibric.** Run at them now,

And overpower the crew while yet asleep!

[The Sailors go out.]

[Voices and the clashing of swords are heard from the  
other ship, which cannot be seen because of the sail.]

**A Voice.** Armed men have come upon us! O I am slain!

**Another Voice.** Wake all below!

**Another Voice.** Why have you broken our sleep?

**First Voice.** Armed men have come upon us! O I am slain!

**Forgael** [who has remained at the tiller]. There! there they come! Gull, gannet, or diver,  
But with a man's head, or a fair woman's,  
They hover over the masthead awhile  
To wait their Fiends; but when their friends have come

They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs.

One – and one – a couple – five together;

And I will hear them talking in a minute.

Yes, voices! but I do not catch the words.

Now I can hear. There's one of them that says,

"How light we are, now we are changed to birds!"

Another answers, "Maybe we shall find

Our heart's desire now that we are so light.'

And then one asks another how he died,

And says, "A sword-blade pierced me in my sleep.–

And now they all wheel suddenly and fly

To the other side, and higher in the air.

And now a laggard with a woman's head

dGmes crying, "I have run upon the sword.

I have fled to my beloved in the air,

In the waste of the high air, that we may wander

Among the windy meadows of the dawn.'

But why are they still waiting? why are they

Circling and circling over the masthead?

What power that is more mighty than desire

To hurry to their hidden happiness

Withholds them now? Have the Ever-living Ones

A meaning in that circling overhead?

But what's the meaning? [He cries out.] Why do you linger there?

Why linger? Run to your desire,

Are you not happy winged bodies now?

[His voice sinks again.]

Being too busy in the air and the high air,

They cannot hear my voice; but what's the meaning?

[The Sailors have returned. Dectora is with them.]

**Forgael** [turning and seeing her]. Why are you standing with your eyes upon me?

You are not the world's core. O no, no, no!

That cannot be the meaning of the birds.

You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,

But have not bitten yet.

Dectora. I am a queen,

And ask for satisfaction upon these

Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.

[Breaking loose from the Sailors who are holding her.]

Let go my hands!

**Forgael.** Why do you cast a shadow?  
Where do you come from? Who brought you to this  
place?

They would not send me one that casts a shadow.

**Dectora.** Would that the storm that overthrew my ships,  
And drowned the treasures of nine conquered nations,  
And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,  
Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,  
I ask a fitting punishment for all  
That raised their hands against him.

**Forgael.** There are some  
That weigh and measure all in these waste seas –  
They that have all the wisdom that's in life,  
And all that prophesying images  
Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;  
They have it that the plans of kings and queens  
But laughter and tears – laughter, laughter, and tears;  
That every man should carry his own soul  
Upon his shoulders.

**Dectora.** You've nothing but wild words,  
And I would know if you will give me vengeance.

**Forgael.** When she finds out I will not let her go –  
When she knows that.

**Dectora.** What is it that you are muttering –  
That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.

**Forgael.** Although you are more beautiful than any,  
I almost long that it were possible;  
But if I were to put you on that ship,  
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,  
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind  
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge  
It had washed among the stars and put them out,  
And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,  
Until you stood before me on the deck –  
As now.

**Dectora.** Does wandering in these desolate seas  
And listening to the cry of wind and wave  
Bring madness?

**Forgael.** Queen, I am not mad.

**Dectora.** Yet say  
That unimaginable storms of wind and wave  
Would rise against me.

**Forgael.** No, I am not mad –  
If it be not that hearing messages  
From lasting watchers, that outlive the moon,  
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.

**Dectora.** And did those watchers bid you take me  
captive?

**Forgael.** Both you and I are taken in the net.  
It was their hands that plucked the winds awake

And blew you hither; and their mouths have  
promised

I shall have love in their immortal fashion;  
And for this end they gave me my old harp  
That is more mighty than the sun and moon,  
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,  
That none might take you from me.

**Dectora** [first trembling back from the mast where the harp is,  
and then laughing]. For a moment

Your raving of a message and a harp  
More mighty than the stars half troubled me,  
But all that's raving. Who is there can compel  
The daughter and the granddaughter of kings  
To be his bedfellow?

**Forgael.** Until your lips  
Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them.

**Dectora.** My husband and my king died at my feet,  
And yet you talk of love.

**Forgael.** The movement of time  
Is shaken in these seas, and what one does  
One moment has no might upon the moment  
That follows after.

**Dectora.** I understand you now.  
You have a Druid craft of wicked sound  
Wrung from the cold women of the sea –  
A magic that can call a demon up,  
Until my body give you kiss for kiss.

**Forgael.** Your soul shall give the kiss.

**Dectora.** I am not afraid,  
While there's a rope to run into a noose  
Or wave to drown. But I have done with words,  
And I would have you look into my face  
And know that it is fearless.

**Forgael.** Do what you will,  
For neither I nor you can break a mesh  
Of the great golden net that is about us.

**Dectora.** There's nothing in the world that's worth a  
fear.

[She passes Forgael and stands for a moment looking into  
his face.]

I have good reason for that thought.

[She runs suddenly on to the raised part of the poop.]

And now

I can put fear away as a queen should.

[She mounts on to the hulwark and turns towards

**Forgael.]**

Fool, fool! Although you have looked into my face  
You do not see my purpose. I shall have gone  
Before a hand can touch me.

**Forgael** [folding his arms]. My hands are still;  
The Ever-living hold us. Do what you will,

You cannot leap out of the golden net.

**First Sailor.** No need to drown, for, if you will pardon us

And measure out a course and bring us home,  
We'll put this man to death.

**Dectora.** I promise it.

**First Sailor.** There is none to take his side.

**Aibric.** I am on his side,  
I'll strike a blow for him to give him time  
To cast his dreams away.  
[Aibric goes in front of Forgael with drawn sword. Forgael takes the harp.]

**First Sailor.** No other'll do it.

[The Sailors throw Aibric on one side. He falls and lies upon the deck. They lift their swords to strike Forgael, who is about to play the harp. The stage begins to darken. The Sailors hesitate in fear.]

**Second Sailor.** He has put a sudden darkness over the moon.

**Dectora.** Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros horn  
To him that strikes him first!

**First Sailor.** I will strike him first.  
[He goes close up to Forgael with his sword lifted.]  
[Shrinking back.] He has caught the crescent moon out of the sky,  
And carries it between us.

**Second Sailor.** Holy fire  
To burn us to the marrow if we strike.

**Dectora.** I'll give a golden galley full of fruit,  
That has the heady flavour of new wine,  
To him that wounds him to the death.

**First Sailor.** I'll do it.  
For all his spells will vanish when he dies,  
Having their life in him.

**Second Sailor.** Though it be the moon  
That he is holding up between us there,  
I will strike at him.

The Others. And I! And I! And I!  
[Forgael plays the harp.]

**First Sailor** [falling into a dream suddenly. But you were saying there is somebody  
Upon that other ship we are to wake.  
You did not know what brought him to his end,  
But it was sudden.

**Second Sailor.** You are in the right;  
I had forgotten that we must go wake him.

**Dectora.** He has flung a Druid spell upon the air,  
And set you dreaming.

**Second Sailor.** How can we have a wake  
When we have neither brown nor yellow ale?

**First Sailor.** I saw a flagon of brown ale aboard her.

**Third Sailor.** How can we raise the keen that do not know

What name to call him by?

**First Sailor.** Come to his ship.

His name will come into our thoughts in a minute.

I know that he died a thousand years ago,

And has not yet been waked.

**Second Sailor** [beginning to keen]. Ohone! O! O! O!

The yew-bough has been broken into two,

And all the birds are scattered.

All the Sailors. O! O! O! O!

[They go out keening.]

**Dectora.** Protect me now, gods that my people swear by.

[Aibric has risen from the deck where he had fallen. He has begun looking for his sword as if in a dream.]

**Aibric.** Where is my sword that fell out of my hand

When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!

[He goes dreamily towards the sword, but Dectora runs at it and takes it up before he can reach it.]

**Aibric** [sleepily]. Queen, give it me.

**Dectora.** No, I have need of it.

**Aibric.** Why do you need a sword? But you may keep it.

Now that he's dead I have no need of it,

For everything is gone.

A Sailor [calling from the other ship]. Come hither, Aibric,

And tell me who it is that we are waking.

**Aibric** [half to Dectora, half to himself]. What name had that dead king? Arthur of Britain?

No, no – not Arthur. I remember now.

It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died

Broken-hearted, having lost his queen

Through wicked spells. That is not all the tale,

For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!

For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.

[He goes out.]

[While he has been speaking, and through part of what follows, one hears the wailing of the Sailors from the other ship. Dectora stands with the sword lifted in front of Forgael.]

**Dectora.** I will end all your magic on the instant.

[Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall. She spreads out her hair.

She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.]

This sword is to lie beside him in the grave.

It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,

And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,

For I have heard that he was proud and laughing,

Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,

And that he died a thousand years ago.

O; O! O! O!

[Forgael changes the tune.]

But no, that is not it.

They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!  
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved—  
But what is it that made me say I loved him?  
It was that harper put it in my thoughts,  
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,  
And beat the golden helmet with their swords?

**Forgael.** Do you not know me, lady? I am he  
That you are weeping for.

**Dectora.** No, for he is dead.

O! O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

**Forgael.** It was so given out, but I will prove  
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy  
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.  
Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon  
And you will recollect my face and voice,  
For you have listened to me playing it  
These thousand years.

[He starts up, listening to the birds. The harp slips from  
his hands, and remains leaning against the bulwarks  
behind him.]

What are the birds at there?

Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?

What are you calling out above the mast?

If railing and reproach and mockery

Because I have awakened her to love

By magic strings, I'll make this answer to it:

Being driven on by voices and by dreams

That were clear messages from the Ever-living,

I have done right. What could I but obey?

And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

Dectora [laughing]. Why, it's a wonder out of reckoning

That I should keen him from the full of the moon

To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

**Forgael.** How have I wronged her now that she is merry?

But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.

You know the counsels of the Ever-living,

And all that tossing of your wings is joy,

And all that murmuring's but a marriage-song;

But if it be reproach, I answer this:

There is not one among you that made love

by any other means. You call it passion,

Consideration, generosity;

But it was all deceit, and flattery

To win a woman in her own despite,

For love is war, and there is hatred in it;

And if you say that she came willingly —

**Dectora.** Why do you turn away and hide your face,

That I would look upon for ever?

**Forgael.** My grief!

**Dectora.** Have I not loved you for a thousand years?

**Forgael.** I never have been golden-armed Iollan.  
Vectora. I do not understand. I know your face  
Better than my own hands.

**Forgael.** I have deceived you  
Out of all reckoning.

Tectora. Is it not true  
That you were born a thousand years ago,  
In islands where the children of Aengus wind  
In happy dances under a windy moon,  
And that you'll bring me there?

**Forgael.** I have deceived you;  
I have deceived you utterly.

**Dectora.** How can that be?  
Is it that though your eyes are full of love  
Some other woman has a claim on you,  
And I've but half!

**Forgael.** O no!

**Dectora.** And if there is,  
If there be half a hundred more, what matter?  
I'll never give another thought to it;  
No, no, nor half a thought; but do not speak.  
Women are hard and proud and stubborn-hearted,  
Their heads being turned with praise and flattery;  
And that is why their lovers are afraid  
To tell them a plain story.

**Forgael.** That's not the story;  
But I have done so great a wrong against you,  
There is no measure that it would not burst.  
I will confess it all.

**Dectora.** What do I care,  
Now that my body has begun to dream,  
And you have grown to be a burning sod  
In the imagination and intellect?  
If something that's most fabulous were true –  
If you had taken me by magic spells,  
And killed a lover or husband at my feet –  
I would not let you speak, for I would know  
That it was yesterday and not to-day  
I loved him; I would cover up my ears,  
As I am doing now. [A pause.] Why do you weep?

**Forgael.** I weep because I've nothing for your eyes  
But desolate waters and a battered ship.

**Dectora.** O why do you not lift your eyes to mine?

**Forgael.** I weep – I weep because bare night's above,  
And not a roof of ivory and gold.

**Dectora.** I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,  
And strike the golden pillars with my hands.  
I would that there was nothing in the world  
But my beloved – that night and day had perished,  
And all that is and all that is to be,  
All that is not the meeting of our lips.

**Forgael.** You turn away. Why do you turn away?  
Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon  
My enemy?

**Dectora.** I looked upon the moon,  
Longing to knead and pull it into shape  
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.  
But now it is your thoughts that wander away,  
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know  
How great a wrong it is to let one's thought  
Wander a moment when one is in love?  
[He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out  
over the sea, shading his eyes.]  
Why are you looking at the sea?

**Forgael.** Look there!

**Dectora.** What is there but a troop of ash–grey birds  
That fly into the west?

**Forgael.** But listen, listen!

**Dectora.** What is there but the crying of the birds?

**Forgael.** If you'll but listen closely to that crying  
You'll hear them calling out to one another  
With human voices

**Dectora.** O, I can hear them now.  
What are they? Unto what country do they fly?

**Forgael.** To unimaginable happiness.  
They have been circling over our heads in the air,  
But now that they have taken to the road  
We have to follow, for they are our pilots;  
And though they're but the colour of grey ash,  
They're crying out, could you but hear their words,  
"There is a country at the end of the world  
Where no child's born but to outlive the moon."  
[The Sailors come in with Aibric. They are in great  
excitement.]

**First Sailor.** The hold is full of treasure.

**Second Sailor.** Full to the hatches.

**First Sailor.** Treasure on treasure.

**Third Sailor.** Boxes of precious spice.

**First Sailor.** Ivory images with amethyst eyes.

**Third Sailor.** Dragons with eyes of ruby.

**First Sailor.** The whole ship  
Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.

**Third Sailor.** Let's home; I'd give some rubies to a  
woman.

**Second Sailor.** There's somebody I'd give the amethyst  
eyes to.

**Aibric** [silencing them with a gesture]. We would return to  
our own country, Forgael,  
For we have found a treasure that's so great  
Imagination cannot reckon it.  
And having lit upon this woman there,  
What more have you to look for on the seas?

**Forgael.** I cannot – I am going on to the end.

As for this woman, I think she is coming with me.

**Aibric.** The Ever–living have made you mad; but no,

It was this woman in her woman's vengeance

That drove you to it, and I fool enough

To fancy that she'd bring you home again.

'Twas you that egged him to it, for you know

That he is being driven to his death.

**Dectora.** That is not true, for he has promised me

An unimaginable happiness.

**Aibric.** And if that happiness be more than dreams,

More than the froth, the feather, the dust–whirl,

The crazy nothing that I think it is,

It shall be in the country of the dead,

If there be such a country.

**Dectora.** No, not there,

But in some island where the life of the world

Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the world

Had run into one fountain.

**Aibric.** Speak to him.

He knows that he is taking you to death;

Speak – he will not deny it.

**Dectora.** Is that true?

**Forgael.** I do not know for certain, but I know.

That I have the best of pilots.

**Aibric.** Shadows, illusions,

That the Shape–changers, the Ever–laughing Ones,

The Immortal Mockers have cast into his mind,

Or called before his eyes.

**Dectora.** O carry me

To some sure country, some familia'r place.

Have we not everything that life can give

In having one another?

**Forgael.** How could I rest

If I refused the messengers and pilots

With all those sights and all that crying out?

**Dectora.** But I will cover up your eyes and ear?,

That you may never hear the cry of the birds,

Or look upon them.

**Forgael.** Were they but lowlier

I'd do your will, but they are too high – too high.

**Dectora.** Being too high, their heady prophecies

But harry us with hopes that come to nothing,

Because we are not proud, imperishable,

Alone and winged.

**Forgael.** Our love shall be like theirs

When we have put their changeless image on.

**Dectora.** I am a woman, I die at every breath.

**Aibric.** Let the birds scatter, for the tree is broken,

And there's no help in words. [To the Sailors.]

To the other ship,

## The Shadowy Waters

And I will follow you and cut the rope  
When I have said farewell to this man here,  
For neither I nor any living man  
Will look upon his face again.

[The Sailors go out.]

**Forgael** [to Dectora], Go with him,  
For he will shelter you and bring you home.

**Aibric** [taking Forgael's hand]. I'll do it for his sake.

**Dectora**. No. Take this sword  
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.

**Aibric** [half falling into the keen]. The yew-bough has been  
broken into two,

And all the birds are scattered – O! O! O!

Farewell! farewell! [He goes out.]

**Dectora**. The sword is in the rope –  
The rope's in two – it falls into the sea,  
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,  
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,  
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts  
away,

And I am left alone with my beloved,  
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.  
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,

**Forgael**, because you cannot put me from you.  
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I  
Shall be alone for ever. We two – this crown –  
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.  
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.  
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,  
O silver fish that my two hands have taken  
Out of the running stream, O morning star  
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn  
Upon the misty border of the wood,  
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,  
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

**Forgael** [gathering Dectora's hair about him]. Beloved, hav-  
ing dragged the net about us,  
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;  
And that old harp awakens of itself  
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,  
That have had dreams for father, live in us.