

# **Chamber Music**

James Joyce

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## 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 thought 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 revery  
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 hear you singing  
A merry air.

My book was 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 springtide 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.

## XII

What counsel has the hooded moon  
Put in thy heart, my shyly sweet,  
Of Love in ancient plenilune,  
Glory and stars beneath his feet—  
A sage that is but kith and kin  
With the comedian Capuchin?  
Believe me rather that am wise  
In disregard of the divine,  
A glory kindles in those eyes  
Trembles to starlight. Mine, O Mine!  
No more be tears in moon or mist  
For thee, sweet sentimentalist.

## XIII

Go seek her out all courteously,  
And say I come,  
Wind of spices whose song is ever  
Epithalamium.  
O, hurry over the dark lands  
And run upon the sea  
For seas and lands shall not divide us,  
My love and me.  
Now, wind, of your good courtesy  
I pray you go,  
And come into her little garden  
And sing at her window;  
Singing: The bridal wind is blowing  
For Love is at his noon;  
And soon will your true love be with you,  
Soon, O soon.

## XIV

My dove, my beautiful one,  
Arise, arise!

The night-dew lies  
Upon my lips and eyes.  
The odorous winds are weaving  
A music of sighs:  
Arise, arise,  
My dove, my beautiful one!  
I wait by the cedar tree,  
My sister, my love,  
White breast of the dove,  
My breast shall be your bed.  
The pale dew lies  
Like a veil on my head.  
My fair one, my fair dove,  
Arise, arise!

## XV

From dewy dreams, my soul, arise,  
From love's deep slumber and from death,  
For lo! the trees are full of sighs  
Whose leaves the morn admonisheth.  
Eastward the gradual dawn prevails  
Where softly-burning fires appear,  
Making to tremble all those veils  
Of grey and golden gossamer.  
While sweetly, gently, secretly,  
The flowery bells of morn are stirred  
And the wise choirs of faery  
Begin (innumerable!) to be heard.

## XVI

O cool is the valley now  
And there, love, will we go  
For many a choir is singing now  
Where Love did sometime go.  
And hear you not the thrushes calling,  
Calling us away?  
O cool and pleasant is the valley  
And there, love, will we stay.



## XVII

Because your voice was at my side  
I gave him pain,  
Because within my hand I held  
Your hand again.

There is no word nor any sign  
Can make amend—  
He is a stranger to me now  
Who was my friend.

## XVIII

O sweetheart, hear you  
Your lover's tale;  
A man shall have sorrow  
When friends him fail.

For he shall know then  
Friends be untrue  
And a little ashes  
Their words come to.

But one unto him  
Will softly move  
And softly woo him  
In ways of love.

His hand is under  
Her smooth round breast;  
So he who has sorrow  
Shall have rest.

## XIX

Be not sad because all men  
Prefer a lying clamour before you:  
Sweetheart, be at peace again—  
Can they dishonour you?

They are sadder than all tears;  
Their lives ascend as a continual sigh.  
Proudly answer to their tears:  
As they deny, deny.

## XX

In the dark pine-wood  
I would we lay,  
In deep cool shadow  
At noon of day.

How sweet to lie there,  
Sweet to kiss,  
Where the great pine-forest  
Enaisled is!

Thy kiss descending  
Sweeter were  
With a soft tumult  
Of thy hair.

O, unto the pine-wood  
At noon of day  
Come with me now,  
Sweet love, away.

## XXI

He who hath glory lost, nor hath  
Found any soul to fellow his,  
Among his foes in scorn and wrath  
Holding to ancient nobleness,  
That high unconsortable one—  
His love is his companion.

## XXII

Of that so sweet imprisonment  
My soul, dearest, is fain—  
Soft arms that woo me to relent  
And woo me to detain.  
Ah, could they ever hold me there  
Gladly were I a prisoner!

Dearest, through interwoven arms  
By love made tremulous,  
That night allures me where alarms  
Nowise may trouble us;  
But sleep to dreamier sleep be wed  
Where soul with soul lies prisoned.

### XXIII

This heart that flutters near my heart  
My hope and all my riches is,  
Unhappy when we draw apart  
And happy between kiss and kiss;  
My hope and all my riches—yes!—  
And all my happiness.

For there, as in some mossy nest  
The wrens will divers treasures keep,  
I laid those treasures I possessed  
Ere that mine eyes had learned to weep.  
Shall we not be as wise as they  
Though love live but a day?

### XXIV

Silently she's combing,  
Combing her long hair,  
Silently and graciously,  
With many a pretty air.

The sun is in the willow leaves  
And on the dappled grass,  
And still she's combing her long hair  
Before the looking-glass.

I pray you, cease to comb out,  
Comb out your long hair,  
For I have heard of witchery  
Under a pretty air,

That makes as one thing to the lover  
Staying and going hence,  
All fair, with many a pretty air  
And many a negligence.

### XXV

Lightly come or lightly go:  
Though thy heart presage thee woe,  
Vales and many a wasted sun,  
Oread let thy laughter run  
Till the irreverent mountain air  
Ripple all thy flying hair.  
Lightly, lightly—ever so:

Clouds that wrap the vales below  
At the hour of evenstar  
Lowliest attendants are;  
Love and laughter song-confessed  
When the heart is heaviest.

## XXVI

Thou leanest to the shell of night,  
Dear lady, a divining ear.  
In that soft choiring of delight  
What sound hath made thy heart to fear?  
Seemed it of rivers rushing forth  
From the grey deserts of the north?  
That mood of thine, O timorous,  
Is his, if thou but scan it well,  
Who a mad tale bequeaths to us  
At ghosting hour conjurable—  
And all for some strange name he read  
In Purchas or in Holinshed.

## XXVII

Though I thy Mithridates were,  
Framed to defy the poison-dart,  
Yet must thou fold me unaware  
To know the rapture of thy heart,  
And I but render and confess  
The malice of thy tenderness.  
For elegant and antique phrase,  
Dearest, my lips wax all too wise;  
Nor have I known a love whose praise  
Our piping poets solemnize,  
Neither a love where may not be  
Ever so little falsity.

## XXVIII

Gentle lady, do not sing  
Sad songs about the end of love;  
Lay aside sadness and sing  
How love that passes is enough.  
Sing about the long deep sleep

Of lovers that are dead, and how  
In the grave all love shall sleep:  
Love is aweary now.

## XXIX

Dear heart, why will you use me so?  
Dear eyes that gently me upbraid,  
Still are you beautiful—but O,  
How is your beauty raimented!  
Through the clear mirror of your eyes,  
Through the soft sigh of kiss to kiss,  
Desolate winds assail with cries  
The shadowy garden where love is.  
And soon shall love dissolved be  
When over us the wild winds blow—  
But you, dear love, too dear to me,  
Alas! why will you use me so?

## XXX

Love came to us in time gone by  
When one at twilight shyly played  
And one in fear was standing nigh—  
For Love at first is all afraid.  
We were grave lovers. Love is past  
That had his sweet hours many a one;  
Welcome to us now at the last  
The ways that we shall go upon.

## XXXI

O, it was out by Donnycarney  
When the bat flew from tree to tree  
My love and I did walk together;  
And sweet were the words she said to me.  
Along with us the summer wind  
Went murmuring—O, happily!—  
But softer than the breath of summer  
Was the kiss she gave to me.

## XXXII

Rain has fallen all the day.  
O come among the laden trees:  
The leaves lie thick upon the way  
Of memories.

Staying a little by the way  
Of memories shall we depart.  
Come, my beloved, where I may  
Speak to your heart.

## XXXIII

Now, O now, in this brown land  
Where Love did so sweet music make  
We two shall wander, hand in hand,  
Forbearing for old friendship' sake,  
Nor grieve because our love was gay  
Which now is ended in this way.

A rogue in red and yellow dress  
Is knocking, knocking at the tree;  
And all around our loneliness  
The wind is whistling merrily.  
The leaves—they do not sigh at all  
When the year takes them in the fall.

Now, O now, we hear no more  
The vilanelle and roundelay!  
Yet will we kiss, sweetheart, before  
We take sad leave at close of day.  
Grieve not, sweetheart, for anything—  
The year, the year is gathering.

## XXXIV

Sleep now, O sleep now,  
O you unquiet heart!  
A voice crying "Sleep now"  
Is heard in my heart.

The voice of the winter  
Is heard at the door.  
O sleep, for the winter  
Is crying "Sleep no more."

My kiss will give peace now

And quiet to your heart—  
Sleep on in peace now,  
O you unquiet heart!

### XXXV

All day I hear the noise of waters  
Making moan,  
Sad as the sea-bird is, when going  
Forth alone,  
He hears the winds cry to the water's  
Monotone.

The grey winds, the cold winds are blowing  
Where I go.  
I hear the noise of many waters  
Far below.  
All day, all night, I hear them flowing  
To and fro.

### XXXVI

I hear an army charging upon the land,  
And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees:  
Arrogant, in black armour, behind them stand,  
Disdaining the reins, with fluttering whips, the charioteers.

They cry unto the night their battle-name:  
I moan in sleep when I hear afar their whirling laughter.  
They cleave the gloom of dreams, a blinding flame,  
Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil.

They come shaking in triumph their long, green hair:  
They come out of the sea and run shouting by the shore.  
My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair?  
My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?

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