

## VAUDRACOUR AND JULIA

O HAPPY time of youthful lovers (thus  
My story may begin) O balmy time,  
In which a love-knot on a lady's brow  
Is fairer than the fairest star in heaven!  
To such inheritance of blessed fancy  
(Fancy that sports more desperately with minds  
Than ever fortune hath been known to do)  
The high-born Vaudracour was brought, by years  
Whose progress had a little overstepped  
His stripling prime. A town of small repute, 10  
Among the vine-clad mountains of Auvergne,  
Was the Youth's birth-place. There he wooed a Maid  
Who heard the heart-felt music of his suit  
With answering vows. Plebeian was the stock,  
Plebeian, though ingenuous, the stock,  
From which her graces and her honours sprung:  
And hence the father of the enamoured Youth,  
With haughty indignation, spurned the thought  
Of such alliance.—From their cradles up,  
With but a step between their several homes, 20  
Twins had they been in pleasure; after strife  
And petty quarrels, had grown fond again;  
Each other's advocate, each other's stay;  
And, in their happiest moments, not content,  
If more divided than a sportive pair  
Of sea-fowl, conscious both that they are hovering  
Within the eddy of a common blast,  
Or hidden only by the concave depth  
Of neighbouring billows from each other's sight.  
Thus, not without concurrence of an age 30  
Unknown to memory, was an earnest given  
By ready nature for a life of love,  
For endless constancy, and placid truth;  
But whatsoever of such rare treasure lay  
Reserved, had fate permitted, for support  
Of their maturer years, his present mind  
Was under fascination;—he beheld  
A vision, and adored the thing he saw.  
Arabian fiction never filled the world  
With half the wonders that were wrought for him. 40  
Earth breathed in one great presence of the spring;  
Life turned the meanest of her implements,  
Before his eyes, to price above all gold;  
The house she dwelt in was a sainted shrine;  
Her chamber-window did surpass in glory  
The portals of the dawn; all paradise  
Could, by the simple opening of a door,

Let itself in upon him:—pathways, walks,  
Swarmed with enchantment, till his spirit sank,  
Surcharged, within him, overblest to move 50  
Beneath a sun that wakes a weary world  
To its dull round of ordinary cares;  
A man too happy for mortality!

So passed the time, till whether through effect  
Of some unguarded moment that dissolved  
Virtuous restraint—ah, speak it, think it, not!  
Deem rather that the fervent Youth, who saw  
So many bars between his present state  
And the dear haven where he wished to be  
In honourable wedlock with his Love, 60  
Was in his judgment tempted to decline  
To perilous weakness, and entrust his cause  
To nature for a happy end of all;  
Deem that by such fond hope the Youth was swayed,  
And bear with their transgression, when I add  
That Julia, wanting yet the name of wife,  
Carried about her for a secret grief  
The promise of a mother.

To conceal

The threatened shame, the parents of the Maid  
Found means to hurry her away by night, 70  
And unforwarned, that in some distant spot  
She might remain shrouded in privacy,  
Until the babe was born. When morning came  
The Lover, thus bereft, stung with his loss,  
And all uncertain whither he should turn,  
Chafed like a wild beast in the toils; but soon  
Discovering traces of the fugitives,  
Their steps he followed to the Maid's retreat.  
Easily may the sequel be divined—

Walks to and fro—watchings at every hour; 80  
And the fair Captive, who, whene'er she may,  
Is busy at her casement as the swallow  
Fluttering its pinions, almost within reach,  
About the pendent nest, did thus espy  
Her Lover!—thence a stolen interview,  
Accomplished under friendly shade of night.

I pass the raptures of the pair;—such theme  
Is, by innumerable poets, touched  
In more delightful verse than skill of mine  
Could fashion; chiefly by that darling bard 90  
Who told of Juliet and her Romeo,  
And of the lark's note heard before its time,  
And of the streaks that laced the severing clouds  
In the unrelenting east.—Through all her courts  
The vacant city slept; the busy winds,  
That keep no certain intervals of rest,

Moved not; meanwhile the galaxy displayed  
 Her fires, that like mysterious pulses beat  
 Aloft;—momentous but uneasy bliss!  
 To their full hearts the universe seemed hung 100  
 On that brief meeting's slender filament!  
 They parted; and the generous Vaudracour  
 Reached speedily the native threshold, bent  
 On making (so the Lovers had agreed)  
 A sacrifice of birthright to attain  
 A final portion from his father's hand;  
 Which granted, Bride and Bridegroom then would flee  
 To some remote and solitary place,  
 Shady as night, and beautiful as heaven,  
 Where they may live, with no one to behold 110  
 Their happiness, or to disturb their love.  
 But 'now' of this no whisper; not the less,  
 If ever an obtrusive word were dropped  
 Touching the matter of his passion, still,  
 In his stern father's hearing, Vaudracour  
 Persisted openly that death alone  
 Should abrogate his human privilege  
 Divine, of swearing everlasting truth,  
 Upon the altar, to the Maid he loved.  
 "You shall be baffled in your mad intent 120  
 If there be justice in the court of France,"  
 Muttered the Father.—From these words the Youth  
 Conceived a terror; and, by night or day,  
 Stirred nowhere without weapons, that full soon  
 Found dreadful provocation: for at night  
 When to his chamber he retired, attempt  
 Was made to seize him by three armed men,  
 Acting, in furtherance of the father's will,  
 Under a private signet of the State.  
 One the rash Youth's ungovernable hand 130  
 Slew, and as quickly to a second gave  
 A perilous wound—he shuddered to behold  
 The breathless corse; then peacefully resigned  
 His person to the law, was lodged in prison,  
 And wore the fetters of a criminal.  
 Have you observed a tuft of winged seed  
 That, from the dandelion's naked stalk,  
 Mounted aloft, is suffered not to use  
 Its natural gifts for purposes of rest,  
 Driven by the autumnal whirlwind to and fro 140  
 Through the wide element? or have you marked  
 The heavier substance of a leaf-clad bough,  
 Within the vortex of a foaming flood,  
 Tormented? by such aid you may conceive  
 The perturbation that ensued;—ah, no!  
 Desperate the Maid—the Youth is stained with blood;

Unmatchable on earth is their disquiet!  
Yet as the troubled seed and tortured bough  
Is Man, subjected to despotic sway.

For him, by private influence with the Court, 150  
Was pardon gained, and liberty procured;  
But not without exaction of a pledge,  
Which liberty and love dispersed in air.

He flew to her from whom they would divide him—

He clove to her who could not give him peace—

Yea, his first word of greeting was,— “All right

Is gone from me; my lately-towering hopes,

To the least fibre of their lowest root,

Are withered; thou no longer canst be mine,

I thine—the conscience-stricken must not woo 160

The unruffled Innocent,—I see thy face,

Behold thee, and my misery is complete!”

“One, are we not?” exclaimed the Maiden— “One,

For innocence and youth, for weal and woe?”

Then with the father’s name she coupled words

Of vehement indignation; but the Youth

Checked her with filial meekness; for no thought

Uncharitable crossed his mind, no sense

Of hasty anger rising in the eclipse

Of true domestic loyalty, did e’er 170

Find place within his bosom.—Once again

The persevering wedge of tyranny

Achieved their separation: and once more

Were they united,—to be yet again

Disparted, pitiable lot! But here

A portion of the tale may well be left

In silence, though my memory could add

Much how the Youth, in scanty space of time,

Was traversed from without; much, too, of thoughts

That occupied his days in solitude 180

Under privation and restraint; and what,

Through dark and shapeless fear of things to come,

And what, through strong compunction for the past,

He suffered—breaking down in heart and mind!

Doomed to a third and last captivity,

His freedom he recovered on the eve

Of Julia’s travail. When the babe was born,

Its presence tempted him to cherish schemes

Of future happiness. “You shall return,

Julia,” said he, “and to your father’s house 190

Go with the child.—You have been wretched; yet

The silver shower, whose reckless burthen weighs

Too heavily upon the lily’s head,

Oft leaves a saving moisture at its root.

Malice, beholding you, will melt away.

Go!—’tis a town where both of us were born;

None will reproach you, for our truth is known;  
And if, amid those once-bright bowers, our fate  
Remain unpitied, pity is not in man.  
With ornaments—the prettiest, nature yields 200  
Or art can fashion, shall you deck our boy,  
And feed his countenance with your own sweet looks  
Till no one can resist him.—Now, even now,  
I see him sporting on the sunny lawn;  
My father from the window sees him too;  
Startled, as if some new-created thing  
Enriched the earth, or Faery of the woods  
Bounded before him;—but the unweeting Child  
Shall by his beauty win his grandsire's heart  
So that it shall be softened, and our loves 210  
End happily, as they began!"

These gleams

Appeared but seldom; oftener was he seen  
Propping a pale and melancholy face  
Upon the Mother's bosom; resting thus  
His head upon one breast, while from the other  
The Babe was drawing in its quiet food.  
—That pillow is no longer to be thine,  
Fond Youth! that mournful solace now must pass  
Into the list of things that cannot be!  
Unwedded Julia, terror-smitten, hears 220  
The sentence, by her mother's lip pronounced,  
That dooms her to a convent.—Who shall tell,  
Who dares report, the tidings to the lord  
Of her affections? so they blindly asked  
Who knew not to what quiet depths a weight  
Of agony had pressed the Sufferer down:  
The word, by others dreaded, he can hear  
Composed and silent, without visible sign  
Of even the least emotion. Noting this,  
When the impatient object of his love 230  
Upbraided him with slackness, he returned  
No answer, only took the mother's hand  
And kissed it; seemingly devoid of pain,  
Or care, that what so tenderly he pressed,  
Was a dependant on the obdurate heart  
Of one who came to disunite their lives  
For ever—sad alternative! preferred,  
By the unbending Parents of the Maid,  
To secret 'spousals meanly disavowed.  
—So be it!

In the city he remained 240

A season after Julia had withdrawn  
To those religious walls. He, too, departs—  
Who with him?—even the senseless Little-one.  
With that sole charge he passed the city-gates,

For the last time, attendant by the side  
Of a close chair, a litter, or sedan,  
In which the Babe was carried. To a hill,  
That rose a brief league distant from the town,  
The dwellers in that house where he had lodged  
Accompanied his steps, by anxious love 250  
Impelled;—they parted from him there, and stood  
Watching below till he had disappeared  
On the hill top. His eyes he scarcely took,  
Throughout that journey, from the vehicle  
(Slow-moving ark of all his hopes!) that veiled  
The tender infant: and, at every inn,  
And under every hospitable tree  
At which the bearers halted or reposed,  
Laid him with timid care upon his knees,  
And looked, as mothers ne'er were known to look, 260  
Upon the nursling which his arms embraced.

This was the manner in which Vaudracour  
Departed with his infant; and thus reached  
His father's house, where to the innocent child  
Admittance was denied. The young man spake  
No word of indignation or reproof,  
But of his father begged, a last request,  
That a retreat might be assigned to him  
Where in forgotten quiet he might dwell,  
With such allowance as his wants required; 270  
For wishes he had none. To a lodge that stood  
Deep in a forest, with leave given, at the age  
Of four-and-twenty summers he withdrew;  
And thither took with him his motherless Babe,  
And one domestic for their common needs,  
An aged woman. It consoled him here  
To attend upon the orphan, and perform  
Obsequious service to the precious child,  
Which, after a short time, by some mistake  
Or indiscretion of the Father, died.— 280

The Tale I follow to its last recess  
Of suffering or of peace, I know not which:  
Theirs be the blame who caused the woe, not mine!  
From this time forth he never shared a smile  
With mortal creature. An Inhabitant  
Of that same town, in which the pair had left  
So lively a remembrance of their griefs,  
By chance of business, coming within reach  
Of his retirement, to the forest lodge  
Repaired, but only found the matron there, 290  
Who told him that his pains were thrown away,  
For that her Master never uttered word  
To living thing—not even to her.—Behold!  
While they were speaking, Vaudracour approached;

But, seeing some one near, as on the latch  
Of the garden-gate his hand was laid, he shrunk—  
And, like a shadow, glided out of view.  
Shocked at his savage aspect, from the place  
The visitor retired.

                                Thus lived the Youth  
Cut off from all intelligence with man,  
And shunning even the light of common day;  
Nor could the voice of Freedom, which through France  
Full speedily resounded, public hope,  
Or personal memory of his own deep wrongs,  
Rouse him: but in those solitary shades  
His days he wasted, an imbecile mind!