

**LONG AGO**



**By**  
**Michael Field**

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## LII

Ἔγω δ' ἐμαῖρα  
τοῦτο σύνοιδα·

**C** LIMBING *the bill a coil of snakes*  
Impedes Tiresias' path; he breaks  
His staff across them—idle thrust  
That lays the female in the dust,  
But dooms the prophet to forego  
His manhood, and, as woman, know  
The unfamiliar, sovereign guise  
Of passion he had dared despise.

*Ab, not in the Erinny's' ground*  
Experience so dire were found  
As that to the enchanter known  
When womanhood was round him thrown:  
He trembled at the quickening change,  
He trembled at his vision's range,  
His finer sense for bliss and dole,  
His receptivity of soul;  
But when love came, and, loving back,  
He learnt the pleasure men must lack,  
It seemed that he had broken free  
Almost from his mortality.

*Seven years he lives as woman, then*  
Resumes his cruder part 'mong men,  
Till him indignant Hera becks  
To judge betwixt the joys of sex,

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*For the great Queen in wrath has heard  
By her presumptuous lord averred  
That, when he sought her in his brave,  
Young godhead, higher bliss he gave  
Than the unutterable lure  
Of her veiled glances could procure  
For him, as balmy-limbed and proud  
She drew him to Olympia's cloud.*

*"In marriage who hath more delight?"  
She asks; then quivers and grows white,  
As sacrilegious lips reveal  
What woman in herself must feel—  
And passes an avenging band  
Across his subtle eyelids bland.*

*Deep-bosomed Queen, fain would'st thou bide  
The mystic raptures of the bride!  
When man's strong nature draweth nigh  
'Tis as the lightning to the sky,  
The blast to idle sail, the thrill  
Of springtide when the saplings fill.  
Though fragrant breath the sun receives  
From the young rose's softening leaves,  
Her plaited petals once undone  
The rose herself receives the sun.*

*Tiresias, ere the goddess smite,  
Look on me with unblinded sight,  
That I may learn if thou hast part  
In womanhood's secluded heart:  
Medea's penetrative charm  
Own'st thou to succour and disarm,  
Hast thou her passion inly great  
Heroes to mould and subjugate?*

*Can'st thou divine how sweet to bring  
Apollo to thy blossoming  
As Daphne; or, as just a child  
Gathering a bunch of tulips wild,  
To feel the flowery bill-side rent  
Convulsive for thy ravisment?*

*Thou need'st not to unlock thine eyes,  
Thy slow, ironic smile replies:  
Thou hast been woman, and although  
The twining snakes with second blow  
Of golden staff thou did'st assail,  
And, crushing at a stroke the male,  
Had'st virtue from thy doom to break,  
And lost virility re-take—  
Thou hast been woman, and her deep,  
Magnetic mystery dost keep;  
Thou hast been woman, and can'st see  
Therefore into futurity:  
It is not that Zeus gave thee power  
To look beyond the transient hour,  
For thou hast trod the regions dun,  
Where life and death are each begun;  
Thy spirit from the gods set free  
Hath communed with Necessity.  
Tilphusa's fountain thou may'st quaff  
And die, but still thy golden staff  
Will guide thee with perceptive hand  
Among the Shades to understand  
The terrors of remorse and dread,  
And propbesy among the dead.*