

Jephthah's Daughter --N. P. Willis

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.  
Judges XI:30,31.

She stood before her father's gorgeous tent,  
To listen for his coming. Her loose hair  
Was resting on her shoulders, like a cloud  
Floating around a statue, and the wind  
Just swaying her light robe, revealed a shape  
Praxiteles might worship. She had clasped  
Her hands upon her bosom, and had raised  
Her beautiful, dark, Jewish eyes to heaven,  
Till the long lashes lay upon her brow.  
Her lip was slightly parted, like the cleft  
Of a pomegranate blossom; and her neck,  
Just where the cheek was melting to its curve  
With the unearthly beauty sometimes there,  
Was shaded, as if light had fallen off,  
Its surface was so polished. She was stilling  
Her light, quick breath to hear; and the white rose  
Scarce moved upon her bosom, as it swelled,  
Like nothing but a lovely wave of light,  
To meet the arching of her queenly neck.  
Her countenance was radiant with love.  
She looked like one to die for it--- a being  
Whose whole existence was the pouring out  
Of rich and deep affections.

Onward came  
The leaden thramp of thousands. Clarion notes  
Rang sharply on the ear at intervals;  
And the low, mingled din of mighty hosts,  
Returning from the battle, poured from afar,  
Like the deep murmur of a restless sea.  
They came, as earthly conquerors always come,  
With blood and splendor, revelry and wo.  
The stately horse treads proudly--- he hath trod  
The brow of death as well. The chariot-wheels  
Of warriors roll magnificently on---



Their weight hath crushed the fallen. MAN is there---  
Majestic, lordly man--- with his sublime  
And elevated brow, and godlike frame;  
Lifting his crest in triumph--- for his heel  
Hath trod the dying like a wine-press down!

The mighty Jephthah led his warriors on  
Through Mizpeh's streets. His helm was proudly set,  
And his stern lip curled slightly, as if to praise  
Were for the hero's scorn. His step was firm,  
But free as India's leopard; and his mail,  
Whose shekels none in Israel might bear,  
Was like a cedar's tassel on his frame.  
His crest was 'udah's kingliest; and the look  
Of his dark, lofty eye, and bended brow,  
Might quell the lion. He led on; but thoughts  
Seemed gathering round which troubled him. The veins  
Grew visible upon his swarthy brow,  
And his proud lip was pressed as if with pain.  
He trod less firmly; and his restless eye  
Glanced forward frequently, as if some ill  
He dared not meet, were there. His home was near,  
And men were thronging, with that strange delight  
They have in human passions, to observe  
The struggle of his feelings with his pride.  
He gazed intently forward. The tall firs  
Before his door were motionless. The leaves  
Of the sweet aloe, and the clustering vines  
Which half concealed his threshold, met his eye,  
Unchanged and beautiful; and one by one,

she called him a traitor. But he answered not.  
Her arms about his neck: he reached not.  
As if she were dead, he turned away. The queen  
Of a silent world in agony. He stood still.  
And her fainting form.----, like the queen  
Her dark eyes staring like a sun-bleached  
Of terror to meet him. Of her resistance  
One after a prolonged protest. And a man  
And he had rescued his power. What for these absent  
He spoke on Jephthah. A woman's name.  
Like the recovered beauty of queen.  
Of silent and shattered ruins. Alone in  
And the shattered ruins. And the queen  
The queen. And the queen. And the queen.



The balsam, with its sweet-distilling stems;  
 And the Circassian rose, and all the crowd  
 Of silent and familiar things, stole up,  
 Like the recovered passages of dreams.  
 He strode on rapidly. A moment more,  
 And he had reached his home; when lo! there sprang  
 One with a bounding footstep, and a brow of light  
 Of light, to meet him. Oh, how beautiful!  
 Her dark eye flashing like a sun-lit gem,  
 And her luxuriant hair,---'twas like the sweep  
 Of a swift wing in visions. He stood still,  
 As if the sight had withered him. She threw  
 Her arms about his neck: he heeded not.  
 She called him "Father," but he answered not.  
 She stood and gazed upon him. Was he wroth?  
 There was no anger in that blood-shot eye.  
 Had sickness seized him? She unclasped his helm,  
 And laid her white hand gently on his brow,  
 And the large veins felt stiff and hard, like cords.  
 The touch aroused him. He raised up his hands,  
 And spoke the name of God, in agony.  
 She knew that he was stricken then, and rushed  
 Again into his arms, and with a flood  
 Of tears she could not stay, she sobbed a prayer  
 That he would breathe his agony in words.  
 He told her--- and a momentary flush  
 Shot o'er her countenance; and then the soul  
 Of Jephthah's daughter wakened; and she stood  
 Calmly and nobly up, and said 'twas well---  
 And she would die. \* \* \* \* \*

The sun had well-nigh set.  
 The fire was on the altar; and the priest  
 Of the High God was there. A pallid man  
 Was stretching out his trembling hands to heaven,  
 As if he would have prayed, but had no words---  
 And she who was to die, the calmest one  
 In Israel at that hour, stood up alone,  
 And waited for the sun to set. Her face  
 Was pale, but very beautiful--her lip  
 Had a more delicate outline, and the tint  
 Was deeper; but her countenance was like  
 The majesty of angels.

The sun set---  
 And she was dead--- but not by violence.