

THE LONELY BRIDE

To Rae Fraser

“**B**LEST among women,” they say: I stand
Here in the market-place,
And the crowd throngs by in this lonely land,
Nor stays to heed my face.
My head is bowed down with the shame of my thought:
Mine eyes grow hot with disgrace.
Oh the evil that men have wrought!

I was once a King’s daughter,
Back in the olden time,
They called me the Bride of the Water;
I went to the sea for her rime;
I went to the stars for their song of life,
For then I was in my prime.
Now I am filled with strife.

I stare all day at the men that pass,
And all that I see I crave;
There are simple-gatherers fresh from the grass,
There are mariners brown from the wave,
There are merchants stout with tablets wide;
There is many a fair young slave;
They call me The Lonely Bride.

I was men's wonder the day I came;
I was ruddy and gold and pale:
My eyes were light with a smouldering flame,
On my lips was the untold tale,
And men, as they passed, gazed hard and long,
And women looked scorn and bale
Yea! I was fair and strong.

How should they know the thing I sought?
I was rich and lovely and young,
Not young with the flame that the spring had wrought,
But with fire from the summer sprung.
No man dared speak, but they longed to speak:
Ay! Many a glance they flung.
But I stood with an unflushed cheek.

And only strangers heed me now;
I am but a statue cold.
Ah! could they see the pain in my brow,
My heart that is growing old.
I may not summon them to my side,
Or move my lips' stern fold.
I am The Lonely Bride.

But never a man doth dare to speak,
And with burning heart I stand,
Till I feel the hot blood mount my cheek,
And a trembling shake my hand,

If they but knew of my need, my need,
As I wait in love's barren land,
To me, to me would they speed.

Here in the market-place they pass,
Merchant and slave and thrall;
The dewy herb-gatherer from the grass,
The steward from out the hall.
Ah! the weary waiting till one shall speak,
Oh! then the spell will fall,
And I shall find what I seek.