

A Light Woman

BY ROBERT BROWNING

I.

So far as our story approaches the end,
Which do you pity the most of us three?---
My friend, or the mistress of my friend
With her wanton eyes, or me?

II.

My friend was already too good to lose,
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
And over him drew her net.

III.

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she adds just him
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth for a whim!

IV.

And before my friend be wholly hers,
How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
Though she snaps at a wren instead!

V.

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,

And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed.

VI.

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
The wren is he, with his maiden face.
---You look away and your lip is curled?
Patience, a moment's space!

VII.

For see, my friend goes shaling and white;
He eyes me as the basilisk:
I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
Eclipsing his sun's disk.

VIII.

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:
``Though I love her---that, he comprehends---
``One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)
``And be loyal to one's friends!"

IX.

And she,---she lies in my hand as tame
As a pear late basking over a wall;
Just a touch to try and off it came;
'Tis mine,---can I let it fall?

X.

With no mind to eat it, that's the worst!
Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist?
'Twas quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst

When I gave its stalk a twist.

XI.

And I,---what I seem to my friend, you see:
What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess:
What I seem to myself, do you ask of me?
No hero, I confess.

XII.

'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own:
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone!

XIII.

One likes to show the truth for the truth;
That the woman was light is very true:
But suppose she says,---Never mind that youth!
What wrong have I done to you?

XIV.

Well, any how, here the story stays,
So far at least as I understand;
And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
Here's a subject made to your hand!