

Edmund Spenser (1552 or 1553–1599)

Excerpts from *The Faerie Queene*

CANTO I

*The Patron of true Holinesse
foule Errour doth defeate;
Hypocrisie him to entrappe
doth to his home entreate.*

I

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine, 1
Ycladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
The cruel markes of many'a bloody fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield: 5
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
Full iolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.

II

And on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore, 10
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,
And dead as liuing euer him ador'd:
Vpon his shield the like was also scor'd,
For soueraine hope, which in his helpe he had: 15
Right faithfull true he was in deede and word,
But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad;
Yet nothing did he dread, but euer was ydrad.

III

Vpon a great aduenture he was bond,
That greatest *Gloriana* to him gaue, 20
That greatest Glorious Queene of *Faerie* lond,
To winne him worship, and her grace to haue,
Which of all earthly things he most did craue;
And euer as he rode, his hart did earne
To proue his puissance in battell braue 25
Vpon his foe, and his new force to learne;
Vpon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.

IV

A louely Ladie rode him faire beside,
Vpon a lowly Asse more white then snow,
Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide 30
Vnder a vele, that wimpled was full low,
And ouer all a blacke stole she did throw,
As one that inly mournd: so was she sad,
And heauie sat vpon her palfrey slow;
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had, 35
And by her in a line a milke white lambe she lad.

V

So pure and innocent, as that same lambe,
She was in life and euery vertuous lore,
And by descent from Royall lynage came
Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore 40
Their scepters stretcht from East to Westerne shore,
And all the world in their subiexion held;
Till that infernall feend with foule vprore
Forwasted all their land, and them expeld:
Whom to auenge, she had this Knight from far compeld. 45

VI

Behind her farre away a Dwarfe did lag,
That lasie seemd in being euer last,
Or wearied with bearing of her bag
Of needments at his backe. Thus as they past,
The day with cloudes was suddeine ouercast, 50
And angry *Ioue* an hideous storme of raine
Did poure into his Lemans lap so fast,
That euerie wight to shrowd it did constrain,
And this faire couple eke to shroud themselues were fain.

VII

Enforst to seeke some couert nigh at hand, 55
A shadie groue not far away they spide,
That promist ayde the tempest to withstand:
Whose loftie trees yclad with sommers pride
Did spred so broad, that heauens light did hide,
Not perceable with power of any starre: 60
And all within were pathes and alleies wide,
With footing worne, and leading inward farre:
Faire harbour that them seemes; so in they entred arre.

VIII

And fourth they passe, with pleasure forward led, 65
Ioying to heare the birdes sweete harmony,
Which therein shrouded from the tempest dred,
Seemd in their song to scorne the cruell sky.
Much can they prayse the trees so straight and hy,
The sayling Pine, the Cedar proud and tall,
The vine-prop Elme, the Poplar neuer dry, 70
The builder Oake, sole king of forrests all,
The Aspine good for staues, the Cypresse funerall.

IX

The Laurell, meed of mightie Conquerours
And Poets sage, the firre that weepeth still,
The Willow worne of forlorne Paramours, 75
The Eugh obedient to the benders will,
The Birch for shaftes, the Sallow for the mill,
The Mirrhe sweete bleeding in the bitter wound,
The warlike Beech, the Ash for nothing ill,
The fruitfull Oliue, and the Platane round, 80
The caruer Holme, the Maple seeldom inward sound.

X

Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,
Vntill the blustering storme is ouerblowne;
When weening to returne, whence they did stray, 85
They cannot finde that path, which first was showne,
But wander too and fro in wayes vnknowne,
Furthest from end then, when they nearest weene,
That makes them doubt their wits be not their owne:
So many pathes, so many turnings seene,
That which of them to take, in diuerse doubt they been. 90

XI

At last resolving forward still to fare,
Till that some end they finde or in or out,
That path they take, that beaten seemd most bare,
And like to lead the labyrinth about; 95
Which when by tract they hunted had throughout,
At length it brought them to a hollow caue
Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout
Eftsoones dismounted from his courser braue,
And to the Dwarfe awhile his needlesse spere he gaue.

XII

Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde, 100
Least suddaine mischiefe ye too rash prouoke:
The danger hid, the place vnknowne and wilde,
Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke,
And perill without show: therefore your stroke,
Sir Knight, with-hold, till further triall made. 105
Ah Ladie, (said he) shame were to reuoke
The forward footing for an hidden shade:
Vertue giues her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade.

XIII

Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place
I better wot then you, though now too late 110
To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace,
Yet wisdomes warnes, whilst foot is in the gate,
To stay the steppe, ere forced to retrate.
This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den*,
A monster vile, whom God and man does hate: 115
Therefore I read beware. Fly fly (quoth then
The fearefull Dwarfe) this is no place for liuing men.

XIV

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide,
But forth vnto the darksome hole he went, 120
And looked in: his glistring armor made
A litle glooming light, much like a shade,
By which he saw the vgly monster plaine,
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine, 125
Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain.

XV

And as she lay vpon the durtie ground,
Her huge long taile her den all ouerspred,
Yet was in knots and many boughtes vpwound,
Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred 130
A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
Sucking vpon her poisonous dugs, eachone
Of sundry shapes, yet all ill faoured:
Soone as that vncouth light vpon them shone,
Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone. 135

XVI

Their dam vpstart, out of her den effraide,
 And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile
 About her cursed head, whose folds displaid
 Were stretcht now forth at length without entraile.
 She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle 140
 Armed to point, sought backe to turne againe;
 For light she hated as the deadly bale,
 Ay wont in desert darknesse to remaine,
 Where plain none might her see, nor she see any plaine.

XVII

Which when the valiant Elfe perceiu'd, he lept 145
 As Lyon fierce vpon the flying pray,
 And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept
 From turning backe, and forced her to stay:
 Therewith enrag'd she loudly gan to bray,
 And turning fierce, her speckled taile aduaunst, 150
 Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay:
 Who nought aghast his mightie hand enhaunst:
 The stroke down from her head vnto her shoulder glaunst.

XVIII

Much daunted with that dint, her sence was dazd,
 Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round, 155
 And all attonce her beastly body raizd
 With doubled forces high aboue the ground:
 Tho wrapping vp her wrethed sterne arownd,
 Lept fierce vpon his shield, and her huge traine
 All suddenly about his body wound, 160
 That hand or foot to stirre he stroue in vaine:
 God helpe the man so wrapt in *Errours* endlesse traine.

XIX

His Lady sad to see his sore constraint,
 Cride out, Now now Sir knight, shew what ye bee,
 Add faith vnto your force, and be not faint: 165
 Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee.
 That when he heard, in great perplexitie,
 His gall did grate for grieffe and high disdaine,
 And knitting all his force got one hand free, 170
 Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine,
 That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.

XX

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw
 A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
 Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,
 Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke 175
 His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:
 Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
 With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
 And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
 Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has. 180

XXI

As when old father *Nilus* gins to swell
 With timely pride aboue the *Aegyptian* vale,
 His fattie waues do fertile slime outwell,
 And ouerflow each plaine and lowly dale:
 But when his later spring gins to auale, 185
 Huge heapes of mudd he leaues, wherein there breed
 Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male
 And partly female of his fruitful seed;
 Such vgly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.

XXII

The same so sore annoyed has the knight, 190
 That welnigh choked with the deadly stinke,
 His forces faile, ne can no lenger fight.
 Whose corage when the feend perceiu'd to shrinke,
 She poured forth out of her hellish sinke
 Her fruitfull cursed spawne of serpents small, 195
 Deformed monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke,
 With swarming all about his legs did crall,
 And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.

XXIII

As gentle Shepheard in sweete euen-tide,
 When ruddy *Phoebus* gins to welke in west, 200
 High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,
 Markes which do byte their hasty supper best,
 A cloud of combrous gnattes do him molest,
 All striuing to infixe their feeble stings,
 That from their noyance he no where can rest, 205
 But with his clownish hands their tender wings
 He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings.

XXIV

Thus ill bestedd, and fearefull more of shame,
 Then of the certeine perill he stood in,
 Halfe furious vnto his foe he came, 210
 Resolu'd in minde all suddenly to win,
 Or soone to lose, before he once would lin
 And strooke at her with more then manly force,
 That from her body full of filthie sin
 He raft her hatefull head without remorse; 215
 A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed from her corse.

XXV

Her scattred brood, soone as their Parent deare
 They saw so rudely falling to the ground,
 Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare, 220
 Gathred themselues about her body round,
 Weening their wonted entrance to haue found
 At her wide mouth: but being there withstood
 They flocked all about her bleeding wound,
 And sucked vp their dying mothers blood,
 Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good. 225

XXVI

That detestable sight him much amazde,
 To see th' vnkindly Impes, of heauen accurst,
 Deuoure their dam; on whom while so he gazd,
 Hauing all satisfide their bloody thirst,
 Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst, 230
 And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end
 Of such as drunke her life, the which them nurst;
 Now needeth him no lenger labour spend,
 His foes haue slaine themselues, with whom he should contend.

XXVII

His Ladie seeing all that chaunst, from farre 235
 Approcht in hast to greet his victorie,
 And said, Faire knight, borne vnder happy starre,
 Who see your vanquisht foes before you lye:
 Well worthie be you of that Armorie,
 Wherin ye haue great glory wonne this day, 240
 And proou'd your strength on a strong enimie,
 Your first aduenture: many such I pray,
 And henceforth euer wish that like succeed it may.

XXVIII

Then mounted he vpon his Steede againe,
And with the Lady backward sought to wend; 245
That path he kept which beaten was most plaine,
Ne euer would to any by-way bend,
But still did follow one vnto the end,
The which at last out of the wood them brought.
So forward on his way (with God to frend) 250
He passed forth, and new aduenture sought;
Long way he trauelled, before he heard of ought.

XXIX

At length they chaunst to meet vpon the way
An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray 255
And by his belt his booke he hanging had;
Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad,
And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,
Simple in shew, and voyde of malice bad,
And all the way he prayed, as he went, 260
And often knockt his brest, as one that did repent.

XXX

He faire the knight saluted, louting low,
Who faire him quited, as that courteous was:
And after asked him, if he did know
Of straunge aduentures, which abroad did pas. 265
Ah my deare Sonne (quoth he) how should, alas,
Silly old man, that liues in hidden cell,
Bidding his beades all day for his trespas,
Tydings of warre and worldly trouble tell?
With holy father sits not with such things to mell. 270

XXXI

But if of daunger which hereby doth dwell,
 And homebred euil ye desire to heare,
 Of a straunge man I can you tidings tell,
 That wasteth all this countrey farre and neare.
 Of such (said he) I chiefly do inquere, 275
 And shall you well reward to shew the place,
 In which that wicked wight his dayes doth weare:
 For to all knighthood it is foule disgrace,
 That such a cursed creature liues so long a space.

XXXII

Far hence (quoth he) in wastfull wilderness 280
 His dwelling is, by which no liuing wight
 May euer passe, but thorough great distresse.
 Now (sayd the Lady) draweth toward night,
 And well I wote, that of your later fight
 Ye all forwearied be: for what so strong, 285
 But wanting rest will also want of might?
 The Sunne that measures heauen all day long,
 At night doth baite his steedes the *Ocean* waues emong.

XXXIII

Then with the Sunne take Sir, your timely rest,
 And with new day new worke at once begin: 290
 Vntroubled night they say giues counsell best.
 Right well Sir knight ye haue aduised bin,
 (Quoth then that aged man;) the way to win
 Is wisely to aduise: now day is spent;
 Therefore with me ye may take vp your In 295
 For this same night. The knight was well content:
 So with that godly father to his home they went.

XXXIV

A little lowly Hermitage it was,
 Downe in a dale, hard by a forests side,
 Far from resort of people, that did pas 300
 In trauell to and froe: a little wyde
 There was an holy Chappell edifyde,
 Wherein the Hermite dewly wont to say
 His holy things each morne and euentyde:
 Thereby a Christall streame did gently play, 305
 Which from a sacred fountaine welled forth alway.

XXXV

Arriued there, the little house they fill,
 Ne looke for entertainment, where none was:
 Rest is their feast, and all things at their will:
 The noblest mind the best contentment has. 310
 With faire discourse the euening so they pas:
 For that old man of pleasing wordes had store,
 And well could file his tongue as smooth as glas,
 He told of Saintes and Popes, and euermore
 He strowd an *Aue-Mary* after and before. 315

XXXVI

The drouping Night thus creepeth on them fast,
 And the sad humour loading their eye liddes,
 As messenger of *Morpheus* on them cast
 Sweet slombring deaw, the which to sleepe them biddes.
 Vnto their lodgings then his gwestes he riddes: 320
 Where when all drownd in deadly sleepe he findes,
 He to this study goes, and there amiddes
 His Magick bookes and artes of sundry kindes,
 He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy mindes.

XXXVII

Then choosing out few words most horrible, 325
 (Let none them read) thereof did verses frame,
 With which and other spelles like terrible,
 He bad awake blacke *Plutoes* griesly Dame,
 And cursed heauen and spake reprochfull shame
 Of highest God, the Lord of life and light; 330
 A bold bad man, that dar'd to call by name
 Great *Gorgon*, Prince of darknesse and dead night,
 At which *Cocytus* quakes, and *Styx* is put to flight.

XXXVIII

And forth he cald out of deepe darknesse dred
 Legions of Sprights, the which like little flyes 335
 Fluttring about his euer damned hed,
 Awaite whereto their seruice he applyes,
 To aide his friends, or fray his enimies:
 Of those he chose out two, the falsest twoo,
 And fittest for to forge true-seeming lyes; 340
 The one of them he gaue a message too,
 The other by him selfe staide other worke to doo.

XXXIX

He making speedy way through spersed ayre,
 And through the world of waters wide and deepe,
 To *Morpheus* house doth hastily repaire. 345
 Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,
 And low, where dawning day doth neuer peepe,
 His dwelling is; there *Tethys* his wet bed
 Doth euer wash, and *Cynthia* still doth steepe
 In siluer deaw his euer-drouping hed, 350
 Whiles sad Night ouer him her mantle black doth spred.

XL

Whose double gates he findeth locked fast,
The one faire fram'd of burnisht Yuory,
The other all with siluer ouercast;
And wakeful dogges before them farre do lye, 355
Watching to banish Care their enemy,
Who oft is wont to trouble gentle Sleepe.
By them the Sprite doth passe in quietly,
And vnto *Morpheus* comes, whom drowned deepe
In drowsie fit he findes: of nothing he takes keepe. 360

XLI

And more, to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And euer-drizling raine vpon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne: 365
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cries,
As still are wont t'annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard: but carelesse Quiet lyes,
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes.

XLII

The messenger approaching to him spake, 370
But his wast wordes returnd to him in vaine:
So sound he slept, that nought mought him awake.
Then rudely he him thrust, and pusht with paine
Whereat he gan to stretch: but he againe
Shooke him so hard, that forced him to speake. 375
As one then in a dreame, whose dryer braine
Is tost with troubled sights and fancies weake,
He mumbled soft, but would not all his silence breake.

XLIII

The Sprite then gan more boldly him to wake,
 And threatned vnto him the dreaded name 380
 Of *Hecate*: whereat he gan to quake,
 And lifting vp his lumpish head, with blame
 Halfe angry asked him, for what he came.
 Hither (quoth he) me *Archimago* sent,
 He that the stubborne Sprites can wisely tame, 385
 He bids thee to him send for his intent
 A fit false dreame, that can delude the sleepers sent.

XLIV

The God obeyde, and, calling forth straightway
 A diuerse dreame out of his prison darke,
 Deliuered it to him, and downe did lay 390
 His heauie head, deuoide of carefull carke,
 Whose sences all were straight benumbed and starke.
 He backe returning by the Yuorie dore,
 Remounted vp as light as chearefull Larke,
 And on his litle winges the dreame he bore 395
 In hast vnto his Lord, where he him left afore.

XLV

Who all this while with charmes and hidden artes,
 Had made a Lady of that other Spright,
 And fram'd of liquid ayre her tender partes
 So liuely, and so like in all mens sight, 400
 That weaker sence it could haue raiisht quight:
 The maker selfe, for all his wondrous witt,
 Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight:
 Her all in white he clad, and ouer it
 Cast a black stole, most like to seeme for *Vna* fit. 405

XLVI

Now when that ydle dreame was to him brought,
 Vnto that Elfin knight he bad him fly,
 Where he slept soundly void of euill thought,
 And with false shewes abuse his fantasy,
 In sort as he him schooled priuily: 410
 And that new creature, borne without her dew,
 Full of the makers guile, with vsage sly
 He taught to imitate that Lady trew,
 Whose semblance she did carrie vnder feigned hew.

XLVII

Thus well instructed, to their worke they hast, 415
 And coming where the knight in slomber lay,
 The one vpon his hardy head him plast
 And made him dreame of loues and lustfull play,
 That nigh his manly hart did melt away,
 Bathed in wanton blis and wicked ioy: 420
 Then seemed him his Lady by him lay,
 And to him playnd, how that false winged boy,
 Her chast hart had subdewd, to learne Dame Pleasures toy.

XLVIII

And she herselfe of beautie soueraigne Queene,
 Fayre *Venus* seemde vnto his bed to bring 425
 Her, whom he waking euermore did weene,
 To bee the chastest flowre, that ay did spring
 On earthly braunch, the daughter of a king,
 Now a loose Leman to vile seruice bound:
 And eke the *Graces* seemed all to sing, 430
Hymen iō Hymen dauncing all around,
 Whilst freshest *Flora* her with Yuie girlond crownd.

XLIX

In this great passion of vnwonted lust,
 Or wonted feare of doing ought amis,
 He started vp, as seeming to mistrust 435
 Some secret ill, or hidden foe of his:
 Lo there before his face his Lady is,
 Vnder blake stole hyding her bayted hooke;
 And as halfe blushing offred him to kis,
 With gentle blandishment and louely looke, 440
 Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took.

L

All cleane dismayd to see so vncouth sight,
 And half enraged at her shamelesse guise,
 He thought haue slaine her in his fierce despight:
 But hasty heat tempring with suffrance wise, 445
 He stayde his hand, and gan himselfe aduise
 To proue his sense, and tempt her fained truth.
 Wringing her hands in womans pitteous wise,
 Tho can she weepe, to stirre vp gentle ruth,
 Both for her noble bloud, and for her tender youth. 450

LI

And said, Ah Sir, my liege Lord and my loue,
 Shall I accuse the hidden cruell fate,
 And mightie causes wrought in heauen aboue,
 Or the blind God, that doth me thus amate,
 For hoped loue to winne me certaine hate? 455
 Yet thus perforce he bids me do, or die.
 Die is my dew; yet rew my wretched state
 You, whom my hard auenging destinie
 Hath made iudge of my life or death indifferently.

LII

Your owne deare sake forst me at first to leaue 460
 My Fathers kingdome— There she stopt with teares;
 Her swollen hart her speech seemd to bereaue,
 And then againe begun; My weaker yeares
 Captiu'd to fortune and frayle worldly feares,
 Fly to your fayth for succour and sure ayde: 465
 Let me not dye in languor and long teares.
 Why Dame (quoth he) what hath ye thus dismayd?
 What frayes ye, that were wont to comfort me affrayd?

LIII

Loue of your selfe, she saide, and deare constraint,
 Lets me not sleepe, but wast the wearie night 470
 In secret anguish and vnpittied plaint,
 Whiles you in carelesse sleepe are drowned quight.
 Her doubtfull words made that redoubted knight
 Suspect her truth: yet since no' vntruth he knew,
 Her fawning loue with foule disdainfull spight 475
 He would not shend; but said, Deare dame I rew,
 That for my sake vnknowne such grieffe vnto you grew.

LIV

Assure your selfe, it fell not all to ground;
 For all so deare as life is to my hart,
 I deeme your loue, and hold me to you bound: 480
 Ne let vaine feares procure your needlesse smart,
 Where cause is none, but to your rest depart.
 Not all content, yet seemd she to appease
 Her mournfull plaintes, beguiled of her art,
 And fed with words that could not chuse but please, 485
 So slyding softly forth, she turned as to her ease.

LV

Long after lay he musing at her mood,

Much grieu'd to thinke that gentle Dame so light,

For whose defence he was to shed his blood.

At last, dull wearinesse of former fight

490

Hauing yrockt asleepe his irkesome spright,

That troublous dreame gan freshly tosse his braine,

With bowres, and beds, and Ladies deare delight:

But when he saw his labour all was vaine,

With that misformed spright he backe returnd againe.

495