

## Oenone Poem

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### Oenone

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson  
There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier Than all the valleys of Ionian hills. The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen, Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine, And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine In cataract after cataract to the sea. Behind the valley topmost Gargarus Stands up and takes the morning: but in front The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal Troas and Ilion's column'd citadel, The crown of Troas.

Hither came at noon Mournful Oenone, wandering forlorn Of Paris, once her playmate on the hills. Her cheek had lost the rose, and round her neck Floated her hair or seem'd to float in rest. She, leaning on a fragment twined with vine, Sang to the stillness, till the mountain-shade Sloped downward to her seat from the upper cliff.

"O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida, Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. For now the noonday quiet holds the hill: The grasshopper is silent in the grass: The lizard, with his shadow on the stone, Rests like a shadow, and the winds are dead. The purple flower droops: the golden bee Is lily-cradled: I alone awake. My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love, My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim, And I am all aweary of my life.

"O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida, Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. Hear me, O Earth, hear me, O Hills, O Caves That house the cold crown'd snake! O mountain brooks, I am the daughter of a River-God, Hear me, for I will speak, and build up all My sorrow with my song, as yonder walls Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed, A cloud that gather'd shape: for it may be That, while I speak of it, a little while My heart may wander from its deeper woe.

"O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida, Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. I waited underneath the dawning hills, Aloft the mountain lawn was dewy-dark, And dewy-dark aloft the mountain pine: Beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris, Leading a jet-black goat white-horn'd, white-hooved, Came up from reedy Simois all alone.

"O mother Ida, harken ere I die. Far-off the torrent call'd me from the cleft: Far up the solitary morning smote The streaks of virgin snow. With down-dropt eyes I sat alone: white-breasted like a star Fronting the dawn he moved; a leopard skin Droop'd from his shoulder, but his sunny hair Cluster'd about his temples like a God's: And his cheek brighten'd as the foam-bow brightens When the wind blows the foam, and all my heart Went forth to embrace him coming ere he came.

"Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. He smiled, and opening out his milk-white palm Disclosed a fruit of pure Hesperian gold, That smelt ambrosially, and while I look'd And listen'd, the full-flowing river of speech Came down upon my heart.

My own Oenone, Beautiful-brow'd Oenone, my own soul, Behold this fruit, whose gleaming rind ingrav'n "For the most fair," would seem to award it thine, As lovelier than whatever Oread haunt The knolls of Ida, loveliest in all grace Of movement, and the charm of married brows.'

"Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. He prest the blossom of his lips to mine, And added 'This was cast upon the board, When all the full-faced presence of the Gods Ranged in the halls of Peleus; whereupon Rose feud, with question unto whom 'twere due: But light-foot Iris brought it yester-eve, Delivering that to me, by common voice Elected umpire, Herè comes to-day, Pallas and Aphroditè, claiming each This meed of fairest. Thou, within the cave Behind yon whispering tuft of oldest pine, Mayst well behold them unbeheld, unheard Hear all, and see thy Paris judge of Gods.'

"Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. It was the deep midnight: one silvery cloud Had lost his way between the piney sides Of this long glen. Then to the bower they came, Naked they came to that smooth-swarded bower, And at their feet the crocus brake like fire, Violet, amaracus, and asphodel, Lotos and lilies: and a wind arose, And overhead the wandering ivy and vine, This way and that, in many a wild festoon Ran riot, garlanding the gnarled boughs With bunch and berry and flower thro' and thro'.

"O mother Ida, harken ere I die. On the tree-tops a crested peacock lit, And o'er him flow'd a golden cloud, and lean'd Upon him, slowly dropping fragrant dew. Then first I heard the voice of her, to whom Coming thro' Heaven, like a light that grows Larger and clearer, with one mind the Gods Rise up for reverence. She to Paris made Proffer of royal power, ample rule Unquestion'd, overflowing revenue Wherewith to embellish state, 'from many a vale And river-sunder'd champaign clothed with corn, Or labour'd mine undrainable of ore. Honour,' she said, 'and homage, tax and toll, From many an inland town and haven large, Mast-throng'd beneath her shadowing citadel In glassy bays among her tallest towers.'

"O mother Ida, harken ere I die. Still she spake on and still she spake of power, 'Which in all action is the end of all; Power fitted to the season; wisdom-bred And throned of wisdom—from all neighbour crowns Alliance and allegiance, till thy hand Fail from the sceptre-staff. Such boon from me, From me, Heaven's Queen, Paris, to thee king-born, A shepherd all thy life but yet king-born, Should come most welcome, seeing men, in power Only, are likest Gods, who have attain'd Rest in a happy place and quiet seats Above the thunder, with undying bliss In knowledge of their own supremacy.'

"Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. She ceased, and Paris held the costly fruit Out at arm's-length, so much the thought of power Flatter'd his spirit; but Pallas where she stood Somewhat apart, her clear and bared limbs O'erthwarted with the brazen-headed spear Upon her pearly shoulder leaning cold, The while, above, her full and earnest eye Over her snow-cold breast and angry cheek Kept watch, waiting decision, made reply.

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, These three alone lead life to sovereign power. Yet not for power (power of herself Would come uncall'd for) but to live by law, Acting the law we live by without fear; And, because right is right, to follow right Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.'

"Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. Again she said: 'I woo thee not with gifts. Sequel of guerdon could not alter me To fairer. Judge thou me by what I am, So shalt thou find me fairest.

Yet, indeed, If gazing on divinity disrobed Thy mortal eyes are frail to judge of fair, Unbias'd by self-profit, oh! rest thee sure That I shall love thee well and cleave to thee, So that my vigour, wedded to thy blood, Shall strike within thy pulses, like a God's, To push thee forward thro' a life of shocks, Dangers, and deeds, until endurance grow Sinew'd with action, and the full-grown will, Circled thro' all experiences, pure law, Commensure perfect freedom.'

Here she ceas'd And Paris ponder'd, and I cried, 'O Paris, Give it to Pallas!' but he heard me not, Or hearing would not hear me, woe is me!

"O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida, Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. Idalian Aphroditè beautiful, Fresh as the foam, new-bathed in Paphian wells, With rosy slender fingers backward drew From her warm brows and bosom her deep hair Ambrosial, golden round her lucid throat And shoulder: from the violets her light foot Shone rosy-white, and o'er her rounded form Between the shadows of the vine-bunches Floated the glowing sunlights, as she moved.

"Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die. She with a subtle smile in her mild eyes, The herald of her triumph, drawing nigh Half-whisper'd in his ear, 'I promise thee The fairest and most loving wife in Greece.' She spoke and laugh'd: I shut my sight for fear: But when I look'd, Paris had raised

his arm, And I beheld great Herè's angry eyes, As she withdrew into the golden cloud, And I was left alone within the bower; And from that time to this I am alone, And I shall be alone until I die.

"Yet, mother Ida, harken ere I die. Fairest—why fairest wife? am I not fair? My love hath told me so a thousand times. Methinks I must be fair, for yesterday, When I past by, a wild and wanton pard, Eyed like the evening star, with playful tail Crouch'd fawning in the weed. Most loving is she? Ah me, my mountain shepherd, that my arms Were wound about thee, and my hot lips prest Close, close to thine in that quick-falling dew Of fruitful kisses, thick as Autumn rains Flash in the pools of whirling Simois!

"O mother, hear me yet before I die. They came, they cut away my tallest pines, My tall dark pines, that plumed the craggy ledge High over the blue gorge, and all between The snowy peak and snow-white cataract Foster'd the callow eaglet—from beneath Whose thick mysterious boughs in the dark morn The panther's roar came muffled, while I sat Low in the valley. Never, never more Shall lone OEnone see the morning mist Sweep thro' them; never see them overlaid With narrow moon-lit slips of silver cloud, Between the loud stream and the trembling stars.

"O mother, hear me yet before I die. I wish that somewhere in the ruin'd folds, Among the fragments tumbled from the glens, Or the dry thickets, I could meet with her The Abominable, that uninvited came Into the fair Pele{i}an banquet-hall, And cast the golden fruit upon the board, And bred this change; that I might speak my mind, And tell her to her face how much I hate Her presence, hated both of Gods and men.

"O mother, hear me yet before I die. Hath he not sworn his love a thousand times, In this green valley, under this green hill, Ev'n on this hand, and sitting on this stone? Seal'd it with kisses? water'd it with tears? O happy tears, and how unlike to these! O happy Heaven, how canst thou see my face? O happy earth, how canst thou bear my weight? O death, death, death, thou ever-floating cloud, There are enough unhappy on this earth, Pass by the happy souls, that love to live: I pray thee, pass before my light of life, And shadow all my soul, that I may die. Thou weighest heavy on the heart within, Weigh heavy on my eyelids: let me die.

"O mother, hear me yet before I die. I will not die alone, for fiery thoughts Do shape themselves within me, more and more, Whereof I catch the issue, as I hear Dead sounds at night come from the inmost hills, Like footsteps upon wool. I dimly see My far-off doubtful purpose, as a mother Conjectures of the features of her child Ere it is born: her child!—a shudder comes Across me: never child be born of me, Unblest, to vex me with his father's eyes!

"O mother, hear me yet before I die. Hear me, O earth. I will not die alone, Lest their shrill happy laughter come to me Walking the cold and starless road of death Uncomforted, leaving my ancient love With the Greek woman. I will rise and go Down into Troy, and ere the stars come forth Talk with the wild Cassandra, for she says A fire dances before her, and a sound Rings ever in her ears of armed men. What this may be I know not, but I know That, wheresoe'er I am by night and day, All earth and air seem only burning fire."

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