Section 1: Prologue

The Lover begins by evoking ‘a quiet bay’ (in his distant homeland), as it appeared, on one phantasmagoric day, from the encircling cliffs that shelter it from the ‘outer sea’ (a bay rightly to be called his – the ‘Lover’s Bay’).

It becomes clear that he is talking directly to a shadowy group of listeners (‘Sirs’).

The Lover tells how feelings from the Past are beginning to stir within him; and he invokes the Muse of memory.

Memory obeys.

In his mind’s eye, the curving bay takes on colour, a summer-house appears on the hillside, and a small boat lies in the rippling water.

(SsWALT

(Shortest, divided into sections, Waymarked, Abridged Lover’s Tale)

The Lover’s Tale

by Alfred Tennyson

A version in fifteen sections, abridged and edited for performance by Patrick Boyde (2016)

(Text of Sections 1-7 from Parts I and II, 1832, and Sections 8-15 from Parts III and IV, 1879)

(Part 1)

Here far away, seen from the topmost cliff,
Filling with purple gloom the vacancies
Between the tufted hills, the sloping seas
Hung in mid-heaven, and half-way down rare sails,
White as white clouds, floated from sky to sky.
Oh! pleasant breast of waters, quiet bay,
Like to a quiet mind in the loud world,
Where the chafed breakers of the outer sea
Sank powerless, even as anger falls aside,
And withers on the breast of peaceful love.
Keep thou thy name of ‘Lover’s Bay’.

See, Sirs,

Even now the Goddess of the Past, that takes
The heart, and sometimes toucheth but one string,
That quivers, and is silent, and sometimes
Sweeps suddenly all its half-moulder’d chords
To an old melody, begins to play
On those first-moved fibres of the brain.

I come, great Mistress of the ear and eye:
Breathe but a little on me, and the sail
Will draw me to the rising of the sun,
The lucid chambers of the morning star,
And East of life.

It grows upon me now—the semicircle
Of dark blue waters and the narrow fringe
Of curving beach, the summer-house aloft
That open’d on the pines with doors of glass,
A mountain nest—the pleasure-boat that rock’d
Upon the crispings of the dappled waves.
Memories flood in.

He remembers, collectively, images of Love and Hope – of himself and his belovéd, Camilla, in the ‘pleasure-boat’ on the bay.

Sounds reinforce sight.

He hears again the plash of little waves against the the boat and the ‘creaking’ of a pine.

The Lover distills the essence of what he has just recalled and offers an anticipation of the mood of his Tale:

The Lovers’ Bay is the ‘perfectness within him’, the image that has sustained him through all later sufferings.

His spirit is able to resist the ‘bitterness of death’ only because he lived so fully in the ‘pleasant yesterday’; only because, like a camel, he had drunk deep of the ‘diamond fountain by the palms’, before toiling across the ‘drifting dust’ of the desert.

The captatio is complete. He has the listeners’ attention.

He knows they will want to learn when his great love began.

It is impossible to tell them.

Can a flower remember its life in the bud?

O Love, O Hope,

They come, they crowd upon me all at once, Moved from the cloud of unforgotten things, They flash across the darkness of my brain, The many pleasant days, the moonlit nights, When thou and I, Camilla, thou and I Were borne about the bay, the while without, And close above us, sang the wind-tost pine, And shook its earthly socket, for we heard, In rising and in falling with the tide, Close by our ears, the huge roots strain and creak.

Trust me, long ago I should have died, if it were possible To die in gazing on that perfectness; But from my farthest lapse, my latest ebb, Thine image, like a charm of light and strength Upon the waters, pushed me back again On these deserted sands of barren life.

To me alone,
The Present is the vassal of the Past: So that, in that I have lived, do I live, And cannot die, and am in having been A portion of the pleasant yesterday, Thrust forward on to-day and out of place; Even as the all-enduring camel, driven Far from the diamond fountain by the palms, Toils onward thro’ the middle moonlit nights, Shadow’d and crimson’d with the drifting dust, Or when the white heats of the blinding noons Beat from the concave sand; yet in him keeps A draught of that sweet fountain that he loves, To stay his feet from falling, and his spirit From bitterness of death.

Ye ask me, friends, When I began to love. How should I tell ye? Ye know not what ye ask. How should the broad and open flower tell What sort of bud it was, when press’d together In its green sheath, close lapt in silken folds It seemed to keep its sweetness to itself? For as men know not when they fall asleep Into delicious dreams, our other life, So know I not when I began to love.
He can only repeat his summary and search for other similes.

Love was his sap and the air he breathed.

His love and his life are two aspects of the same thing, like the colour and fragrance of a rose.

This is my sum of knowledge—that my love grew with myself—say rather, was my growth, My inward sap, the hold I have on earth, My outward circling air wherein I breathe. For how should I have lived and not have loved? Can ye take off the sweetness from the flower, The colour and the sweetness from the rose, And place them by themselves? or set apart Their motions and their brightness from the stars, And then point out the flower or the star? Or build a wall betwixt my life and love, And tell me where I am?

Before he saw my day my father died, And he was happy that he saw it not. As Love and I do number equal years So she, my love, is of an age with me. How like each other was the birth of each! The sister of my mother—she that bore Camilla close beneath her beating heart— In giving so much beauty to the world, Left her own life with it. So we were born, so orphan'd. She was motherless, And I without a father.

She was my foster-sister: one soft lap Pillow'd us both: one common light of eyes Was on us as we lay: our baby lips, Kissing one bosom, ever drew from thence The stream of life, one stream— Perchance assimilating all <their> tastes and future fancies.

As was our childhood, so our infancy, They tell me, was a very miracle Of fellow-feeling and communion. Oh, happy, happy outset of my days, I will not speak of thee: These have not seen thee, these can never know thee, They cannot understand me.

Pass on then A term of eighteen years. Ye would but laugh If I should tell ye how I heard in thought Those rhymes, ‘The Lion and the Unicorn’, ‘The Four-and-twenty Blackbirds’, ‘Banbury Cross’, ‘The Gander’ and ‘The Man of Mitylene’, And all the quaint old scraps of ancient crones, Which are as gems set in my memory, Because she learn’d them with me.
… to the fateful day when
his greatest Hope was
dashed to become his
abiding Despair.

Move with me to that hour,
Which was the hinge on which the door of Hope,
Once turning, open’d far into the outward,
And never closed again.

I well remember,
It was a glorious morning, such a one
As dawns but once a season. Up the rocks we wound;
The great pine shook with lovely sounds of joy,
That came on the sea-wind. As mountain brooks
Our blood ran free: the sunshine seem’d to brood
More warmly on the heart than on the brow.
We often paused, and looking back, we saw
The clefts and openings in the hills all fill’d
With the blue valley and the glistening brooks,
And with the low dark groves—a land of Love;
Where Love was worshipp’d upon every height,
Where Love was worshipp’d under every tree—
A land of promise, flowing with the milk
And honey of delicious memories!
Down to the sea, as far as eye could ken,
From verge to verge it was a Holy Land,
Still growing holier as you near’d the bay,
For there the temple stood.

When we had reach’d
The grassy platform on some hill, I stoop’d,
I gather’d the wild herbs, and for her brows
And mine wove chaplets of the selfsame flower,
Which she took smiling, and with my work there
Crown’d her clear forehead. Once or twice she told me
(For I remember all things), to let grow
The flowers that run poison in their veins.
She said, ‘The evil flourish in the world’;
Then playfully she gave herself the lie:
‘Nothing in nature is unbeautiful,
So, brother, pluck and spare not.’ So I wove
Even the dull-blooded poppy, ‘whose red flower
Hued with the scarlet of a fierce sunrise,
Like to the wild youth of an evil king,
Is without sweetness, but who crowns himself
Above the secret poisons of his heart
In his old age’—a graceful thought of hers
Graven on my fancy!

O how like a nymph,
A stately mountain-nymph, she look’d! how native
Unto the hills she trod on!
Methought a light
Burst from the garland I had woven, and stood
A solid glory on her bright black hair:
A light, methought, broke from her dark, dark eyes,
And shot itself into the singing winds,
And fell about my footsteps on the mountains.

Towards sunset they reached
the ‘Hill of Woe’ (so called
because a man had hurled
his wife and child down with
despairing shouts from a
fragile bridge at its summit,
and then jumped to his death
in the chasm below).

The two continued to climb,
 delighting in the challenge

From the summit, ‘with a
fearful, self-impelling joy’,
she could see far away a
‘mighty landskip’ of heath,
rocks and woods,
‘interfused’ with a ‘glory of
broad waters’, dissolving
into the ‘incorporate light of
sun and sea’, visible between
a ‘purple range of mountain-
cones’ in the West.

They crossed the fragile
bridge (from which the
murderer and his wife and
child had plunged).

Now their rapturous
attention was held by the
skyscape – ‘a tissue of light
unparalleled’ – created by the
rays of the setting sun in the
West, contrasting with the
‘thin blue air’ into which the
rising moon seemed to be
‘half-melted’.

About sunset
We came unto the Hill of Woe, so call’d
Because the legend ran that, long time since,
One rainy night, when every wind blew loud,
A woful man had thrust his wife and child
With shouts from off the bridge, and following, plunged
Into the dizzy chasm below.

The path was steep and loosely strewn with crags:
We mounted slowly: yet to both of us
It was delight, not hindrance: unto both
Delight from hardship to be overcome.
I became to her
A tutelary angel as she rose,
And with a fearful self-impelling joy
Saw round her feet the country far away,
Beyond the nearest mountain’s bosky brows,
Burst into open prospect—heath and hill,
And steep-down walls of battlemented rock
And glory of broad waters interfused;

and, last,
Framing the mighty landskip to the West,
A purple range of mountain-cones, between
Whose interspaces gush’d in blinding bursts
The incorporate light of sun and sea.

At length,
Upon the tremulous bridge, that from beneath
Seemed with a cobweb firmament to link
The earthquake-shattered chasm, hung with shrubs,
We passed with tears of rapture. All the West,
And ev’n unto the middle South, was ribb’d
And barr’d with bloom on bloom. The sun beneath,
Held for a space ’twixt cloud and wave, shower’d down
Rays of a mighty circle, weaving over
That varied wilderness a tissue of light
Unparallel’d. On the other side, the moon,
Half-melted into thin blue air, stood still
And pale and fibrous as a wither’d leaf.
His eye, in memory, lovingly follows the 'amber' course of the stream, back to his own 'loved mountains', back to 'that small bay' and the 'open main' beyond, in which its waters 'glowed intermingling'.

The loud stream,
Forth issuing from his portals in the crag,
Ran amber toward the West, and nigh the sea,
Parting my own loved mountains, was received
Shorn of its strength, into the sympathy
Of that small bay, which into open main
Glow'd intermingling close beneath the sun.

We turn’d: our eyes met: hers were bright, and mine Were dim with floating tears, that shot the sunset In lightnings round me; and my name was borne Upon her breath.

Henceforth my name has been
A hallow’d memory, like the names of old;
A center’d, glory-circled memory,
And a peculiar treasure, brooking not Exchange or currency; and in that hour A hope flow’d round me, like a golden mist Charm’d amid eddies of melodious airs, A moment, ere the onward whirlwind shatter it, Waver’d and floated—which was less than Hope, Because it lack’d the power of perfect Hope; But which was more and higher than all Hope, Because all other Hope hath lower aim.

Love lieth deep; Love dwells not in lip-depths:
Love wraps her wings on either side the heart, Absorbing all the incense of sweet thoughts So that they pass not to the shrine of sound. <For> how should Earthly measure mete The Heavenly-unmeasured or unlimited Love, Which scarce can tune his high majestic sense Unto the thunder-song that wheels the spheres; Scarce living in the Aeolian harmony, And flowing odour of the spacious air, Scarce housed within the circle of this earth, Be cabin’d up in words and syllables, Which waste with the breath that made them. Sooner earth Might go round heaven, and the straight girth of Time Inswayne the fulness of Eternity, Than language grasp the infinite of Love.

‘Brother,’ she said, ‘let this be call’d henceforth The Hill of Hope’; and I replied: ‘O sister, My will is one with thine; the Hill of Hope.’
Significantly, the name did not change; it remained the Hill of Woe.
(This — the Lover almost says — was a Liebestod).
Had he died then, he would not have known the death.
He would have thrown himself into the void (like the man from the bridge...), and, accelerating, prolonged 'that intense moment through eternity'.

Nevertheless, we did not change the name.

O day, which did enwomb that happy hour,
Had I died then, I had not known the death:
Planting my feet against this mound of time
I had thrown me on the vast, and from this impulse
Continuing and gath’ring ever, ever,
Agglomerated swiftness, I had lived
That intense moment thro' eternity.

We trod the shadow of the downward hill;
We pass’d from light to dark. On the other side
Is scoop’d a cavern and a mountain-hall,
Which none have fathom’d. If you go far in
(The country people rumour) you may hear
The moaning of the woman and the child,
Shut in the secret chambers of the rock.
I too have heard a sound—perchance of streams
Running far on within its inmost halls,
The home of darkness.

But the cavern mouth,
Half overtrailèd with a wanton weed
Gives birth to a brawling stream, that stepping lightly
Adown a natural stair of tangled roots,
Is presently received in a sweet grove
Of eglantine, a place of burial
Far lovelier than its cradle; for unseen,
But taken with the sweetness of the place,
It giveth out a constant melody
That drowns the nearer echoes. Lower down
Spreads out a little lake, that, flooding, makes
Cushions of yellow sand; and from the woods
That belt it rise three dark, tall cypresses;
Three cypresses, symbols of mortal woe,
That men plant over graves.

Hither we came,
And sitting down upon the golden moss
Held converse sweet and low—low converse sweet,
In which our voices bore least part.
Ye cannot shape
Fancy so fair as is this memory.
Methought all excellence that ever was
Had drawn herself from many thousand years,
And all the separate Edens of this earth,
To centre in this place and time.
Camilla began to speak, ‘with most prevailing sweetness’.

‘Each felt with each inwoven’, and ‘were in union more than double-sweet’.

She began to confess her love, at first, speaking shyly.

She became more urgent and confident.

The Lover trembled in premonition, half wishing she would go no further, but unable to utter words that would check her.

She told him all, including the hope that her love was ‘returned’.

The Lover felt total dismay at what he knew to be coming, but still could find no words to halt her confession.

Her ‘inmost soul lay like an open scroll’ before him, and the name he could read there was that of – Lionel.

Section 5: Coma, Rude Awakening, and Prayer

A link ‘within his inmost frame’ snapped, and he fell in a trance at her feet, ‘smit with exceeding sorrow unto Death’.

I listen’d,
And her words stole with most prevailing sweetness
Into my heart, as throngèd fancies come,
All unawares, into the poet’s brain;
Or as the dew-drops on the petal hung,
When summer winds break their soft sleep with sighs,
Creep down into the bottom of the flower.
So each with each inwoven lived with each,
And were in union more than double-sweet.

What marvel my Camilla told me all?
It was so happy an hour, so sweet a place,
And I was as the brother of her blood.
At first her voice was very sweet and low,
As tho’ she were afeard of utterance;
But in the onward current of her speech,
(As echoes of the hollow-bankèd brooks
Are fashion’d by the channel which they keep)
Her words did of their meaning borrow sound,
Her cheek did catch the colour of her words.

I heard and trembled, yet I could but hear;
I seem’d the only part of Time stood still;
And saw the motion of all other things;
While her words, syllable by syllable,
Like water, drop by drop, upon my ear
Fell, and I wish’d, yet wish’d her not to speak;
But she spake on, for I did name no wish.

What marvel my Camilla told me all
Her maiden dignities of Hope and Love—
‘Perchance’ she said ‘return’d.’ Even then the stars
Did tremble in their stations as I gazed;
But she spake on, for I did name no wish,
No wish—no hope.
The written secrets of her inmost soul
Lay like an open scroll before my view,
And my eyes read, they read aright, her heart
Was Lionel’s.

It seem’d as tho’ a link
Of some light chain within my inmost frame
Was riven in twain;
<And> darkness of the grave and utter night
Did swallow up my vision. At her feet,
Even the feet of her I loved, I fell,
Smit with exceeding sorrow unto Death.
Ah, if only he had never
recovered from this
entrancement!

The night in pity took away my day
Because my grief as yet was newly born.
Would I had lain

Until the pleached ivy tress had wound
Round my worn limbs, and the wild brier had driven
Its knotted thorns thro’ my unpaining brows
Leaning its roses on my faded eyes;
<For> I had been at rest for evermore.

But consciousness began to
return by degrees.

Long time entrancement held me. All too soon,
Life (like a wanton, too-officious friend)
Entering all the avenues of sense,
Pass’d thro’ into his citadel, the brain,
With hated warmth of apprehensiveness.

First, he felt the chill of the
stream;
then heard its ‘murmur’;
and then became aware of
the ‘white light of the weary
moon’.

And first the chillness of the mountain stream
Smote on my brow, and then I seem’d to hear
Its murmur, as the drowning seaman hears,
Who with his head below the surface dropt,
Listens the dreadful murmur indistinct
Of the confusèd seas, and dimly knows
His head shall rise no more: and then came in
O’erhead the white light of the weary moon,
Diffused and molten into flaky cloud.

Next, he seemed to see the
phantasm of his hated rival,
hovering above him.

Was my sight drunk, that it did shape to me
Him who should own that name? or had my fancy
So lethargised discernment in the sense,
That she did act the step-dame to mine eyes,
Warping their nature, till they minister’d
Unto her swift conceits?

But, alas, it was no phantasm
but ‘the man she loved’
himself – ‘even Lionel, the
lover Lionel, all joy’.

There was no such thing.—
It was the man she loved, even Lionel,
The lover Lionel, the happy Lionel,
All joy; who drew the happy atmosphere
Of my unhappy sighs, fed with my tears,
To him the honey dews of orient hope.

Ah!, if only the smiling face
had been the ‘ghastful
brow’ of a hideous spectre,
‘half bursting from the
shroud’ with a gaze
expressing loathing and
remorse!

Anything rather than the
smile of an accepted lover!

Oh! rather had some loathly ghastful brow,
Half-bursten from the shroud, in cere cloth bound,
The dead skin withering on the fretted bone,
The very spirit of Paleness, made still paler
By the shuddering moonlight, fix’d his eyes on mine!
Methinks I could have sooner met that gaze!
Oh, how her choice did leap forth from his eyes!
Oh, how her love did clothe itself in smiles
About his lips!
Lionel’s presence seemed a terrible affront to his ‘sacred, secret, unapproachable woe’

Why should he come my way, Robed in those robes of light I must not wear, With that great crown of beams about his brows— Come like an angel to a damned soul, To tell him of the bliss he had with God— Come like a careless and a greedy heir, That scarce can wait the reading of the will Before he takes possession? Was mine a mood To be invaded rudely, and not rather A sacred, secret, unapproachable woe Unspeakable?

I was shut up with Grief: She took the body of my past delight, Nard ed, and swathed and balm’d it for herself, And laid it in a new-hewn sepulchre, Where man had never lain. I was led mute Into her temple like a sacrifice; I was the high-priest in her holiest place, Not to be loudly broken in upon.

She, when I woke, Something she ask’d, I know not what, and ask’d— Unanswer’d.

He, the blissful lover, too, From his great hoard of happiness distill’d Some drops of solace; like a vain rich man, That, having always prosper’d in the world, Folding his hands deals comfortable words To hearts wounded for ever.

Yet, in truth,
Fair speech was his and delicate of phrase. And why was I to darken their pure love, If, as I knew, they two did love each other, Because my own was darken’d? Her love did murder mine. What then? she deem’d I wore a brother’s mind: she call’d me brother: She told me all her love: she shall not weep.

Starting up at once, As men do from a vague and horrid dream, And throwing by all consciousness of self, In eager haste I shook him by the hand; Then flinging myself down upon my knees Even where the grass was warm where I had lain, I pray’d aloud to God that he would hold The hand of blessing over Lionel, And her whom he would make his wedded wife, Camilla!
The first part of the Tale ends, in effect, with the words of his prayer for their lifelong happiness.

May their days be golden days,
And their long life a dream of linked love,
From which may rude Death never startle them,
But grow upon them like a glorious vision
Solemn but splendid, full of shapes and sounds,
Swallowing its precedent in victory.

(Part II)

Sometimes I thought Camilla was no more,
Some one had told me she was dead, and ask’d me
If I would see her burial: then I seem’d
to rise, and thro’ the forest-shadow borne
With more than mortal swiftness, I ran down
The sleepy sea-bank, till I came upon
The rear of a procession, curving round
The silver-sheeted bay: in front of which
Six stately virgins, all in white, upbare
A broad earth-sweeping pall of whitest lawn,
Wreathed round the bier with garlands: in the distance,
From out the yellow woods, upon the hill,
Look’d forth the summit and the pinnacles
Of a grey steeple. All the pageantry,
Save those six virgins which upheld the bier,
Were stole from head to foot in flowing black;

One walk’d abreast with me, and veiled his brow,
And he was loud in weeping and in praise
Of the departed: a strong sympathy
Shook all my soul: I flung myself upon him
In tears and cries: I told him all my love,
How I had loved her from the first; whereat
He shrunk and howl’d, and from his brow drew back
His hand to push me from him; and the face
The very face and form of Lionel,
Flash’d through my eyes into my innermost brain,
And at his feet I seemed to faint and fall,
To fall and die away. I could not rise,
Albeit I strove to follow. They pass’d on,
The lordly Phantasms; in their floating folds
They pass’d and were no more: but I had fall’n
Prone by the dashing runnel on the grass.

Always th’ inaudible, invisible thought,
Shaped by the audible and visible,
Moulded the audible and visible:
All crispèd sounds of wave, and leaf and wind,
Flatter’d the fancy of my fading brain.
His recurrent nightmare was a ‘tissue’ of the sights of the fatal day (sea, wood, mountain, cave, cypresses) and of its sounds (moanings, and the roar of the stream).

The storm-pavilion’d element, the wood, The mountain, the three cypresses, the cave, Were wrought into the tissue of my dream. The moanings in the forest, the loud stream, Awoke me not, but were a part of sleep, And voices in the distance, calling to me, And in my vision bidding me dream on.

Such a vision might begin happily, but would end with a vision of death and darkness.

In the dreams, his own ‘sorrow of spirit’ was transferred onto the figure of Camilla.

Still in a trance, he would feel her breath near him, hear her voice, and see her eyes.

It was her eyes that seemed to project the dream-images (located in the storehouse of his memory).

Section 7: The Vision of the Painted Ship
One such transmuted image ‘burst through’ with special force.

In the summer-house near the bay, there had hung a painting of a storm-tossed ship.

In his dream, a shaft of sunlight glanced on this ‘well-known’ picture, which was also ‘well-loved’, because Camilla herself had drawn the outlines in pencil, and he had applied the colours,

The day waned; Alone I sat with her: about my brow Her warm breath floated in the utterance Of silver-chorded tones; her eloquent eyes Shone on my darkness forms which ever stood Within the magic cirque of memory, Invisible but deathless.

Now the light, Which was their life, burst through the cloud of thought Keen, irrepressible. It was a room Within the summer-house of which I spoke, Hung round with paintings of the sea, and one A vessel in mid-ocean, her heaved prow Clambering, the mast bent, and the revin wind In her sail roaring. From the outer day, Betwixt the closest ivies came a broad And solid beam of isolated light, Crowded with driving atomies, and fell Slanting upon that picture, from prime youth Well-known, well-loved.

She drew it long ago Forth gazing on the waste and open sea, One morning when the upblown billow ran Shoreward beneath red clouds, and I had pour’d Into the shadowing pencil’s naked forms Colour and life:
so that it became a "bond and seal of friendship", and—now—his 'lost love, symbol'd in storm'.

Still in the vision, the Lover and Camilla were gazing at the painting, mesmerised.

"All at once the painted vessel began to rock and heave".

Camilla and he were flung into the 'unreal billows', 'caught by a whirlwind', 'driven through the dizzy dark'.

She "shrieked"; the "wind sang"; he "clasped her without fear".

Then suddenly her face above him changed into—'the jaws of Death'.

He 'flung the phantom from him'; the storm ceased; and he seemed to plunge in free fall 'tho' the dark <for> ever and ever (as he had wanted to do on the day he heard Camilla's confession).

Section 8: The Vision of the Funeral Cortege that became a Marriage Procession

After a pause, the Lover narrates the last of his many fevered hallucinations.

her weight

Shrank in my grasp, and over my dim eyes
And parted lips which drank her breath, down hung
The jaws of Death: I, screaming, from me flung
The empty phantom: all the sway and whirl
Of the storm dropt to windless calm, and I
Down welter'd thro' the dark ever and ever.

(Part III)

I came one day and sat among the stones
Strewn in the entry of the moaning cave;
A morning air, sweet after rain, ran over
The rippling levels of the lake, and blew
Coolness and moisture and all smells of bud
And foliage from the dark and dripping woods
Upon my fever'd brows that shook and throb'd
From temple unto temple.
The vision began in the same way as the dream in which he had walked behind the funeral cortege.

A bell was tolling slowly.

Its pulse grew more rapid and the cortege advanced with ‘swifter steps’.

To what height

The day had grown I know not. Then came on me
The hollow tolling of the bell, and all
The vision of the bier. As heretofore
I walk’d behind with one who veil’d his brow.

Methought by slow degrees the sullen bell
Toll’d quicker, and the breakers on the shore
Sloped into louder surf; those that went with me,
And those that held the bier before my face,
Moved with one spirit round about the bay,
Trod swifter steps ;

and while I walk’d with these

In marvel at that gradual change, I thought
Four bells instead of one began to ring,
Four merry bells, four merry marriage-bells,
In clanging cadence jangling peal on peal —
A long loud clash of rapid marriage-bells.

Then those who led the van, and those in rear,
Rush’d into dance, and like wild Bacchanals
Fled onward to the steeple in the woods:

I, too, was borne along and felt the blast
Beat on my heated eyelids: all at once
The front rank made a sudden halt; the bells
Lapsed into frightful stillness; the surge fell
From thunder into whispers; those six maids
With shrieks and ringing laughter on the sand
Threw down the bier; the woods upon the hill
Waved with a sudden gust that sweeping down
Took the edges of the pall, and blew it far
Until it hung, a little silver cloud
Over the sounding seas:

I turn’d: my heart
Shrank in me, like a snow flake in the hand,
Waiting to see the settled countenance
Of her I loved, adorn’d with fading flowers.
But she from out her death-like chrysalis,
She from her bier, as into fresher life,
My sister, and my cousin, and my love,
Leapt lightly clad in bridal white, a light
Of smiling welcome round her lips — her eyes
And cheeks as bright as when she climb’d the hill.
Before he could react, the same man who earlier had been walking alongside him ‘with veiled brow’ stepped forward and took her hand.

Wedding bells rang out again.

Led by Camilla and the man, the rout plunged forward again and disappeared.

The Lover found himself alone ‘beside the vacant bier’.

He seems to draw breath before revealing the outcome of these prophetic dreams. But he cannot bring himself to continue.

‘The Lover breaks away, overcome, as he approaches the Event, and a witness to it completes the tale’.

Section 9: Awaiting the Outcome

Camilla and Lionel were indeed married.

The Lover remained, with his mother, in the house where the cousins had grown up, near the Bay.

He was in black despair, but a premonition held him there almost against his will.

One hand she reach’d to those that came behind. And while I mused nor yet endured to take So rich a prize, the man who stood with me Stept gaily forward, throwing down his robes, And claspt her hand in his: again the bells Jangled and clang’d: again the stormy surf Crash’d in the shingle: and the whirling rout Led by those two rush’d into dance, and fled Wind-footed to the steeple in the woods, Till they were swallow’d in the leafy bowers, And I stood sole beside the vacant bier.

There, there, my latest vision — then the event!

(Another speaks)

(Part IV)

He flies the event: he leaves the event to me: Poor Julian — how he rush’d away; the bells, Those marriage-bells, echoing in ear and heart — But cast a parting glance at me, you saw, As who should say ‘Continue.’

Well, he had

One golden hour — of triumph shall I say? Solace at least — before he left his home. Would you had seen him in that hour of his!

But now,

Whether they were his lady’s marriage-bells, Or prophets of them in his fantasy, I never ask’d: but Lionel and the girl Were wedded, and our Julian came again Back to his mother’s house among the pines.

But these, their gloom, the mountains and the Bay, The whole land weigh’d him down.

He would go,

Would leave the land for ever, and had gone Surely, but for a whisper, ‘Go not yet,’ Some warning — sent divinely — as it seem’d By that which follow’d.
Section 10: Burial of Camilla in Family Vault

Eleven months later the bell he had heard in his dream, began to toll in earnest — for the death of Camilla.

Her body was placed in the family vault, the coffin being left open.

(Think of the tomb of the Capulets in Romeo and Juliet, Act 4, sc. iii).

The Lover resolved to take a final farewell by kissing the corpse on the lips.

(Think of Romeo and Paris on the same mission at the tomb of the Capulets in Romeo and Juliet, Act 5, sc. iii).

And thus he stay’d and would not look at her —
No not for months: but, when the eleventh moon
After their marriage lit the Lover’s Bay,
Heard yet once more the tolling bell, and said,
‘Would you could toll me out of life’, but found
(All softly as his mother broke it to him)
A crueller reason than a crazy ear
For that low knell tolling his lady dead —
Dead — and had lain three days without a pulse:
All that look’d on her had pronounced her dead.

And so they bore her (for in Julian’s land
They never nail a dumb head up in elm).
Bore her free-face’d to the free airs of heaven.
And laid her in the vault of her own kin.

What did he then? Not die: he is here and hale —
Not plunge headforemost from the mountain there,
And leave the name of Lover’s Leap: not he:
He knew the meaning of the whisper now,
Thought that he knew it. ‘This, I stay’d for this:
O Love, I have not seen you for so long.
Now, now, will I go down into the grave,
I will be all alone with all I love,
And kiss her on the lips. She is his no more:
The dead returns to me, and I go down
To kiss the dead.’

The fancy stirr’d him so
He rose and went, and entering the dim vault,
And, making there a sudden light, beheld
All round about him that which all will be.
The light was but a flash, and went again.
Then at the far end of the vault he saw
His lady with the moonlight on her face;
Her breast as in a shadow-prison, bars
Of black and bands of silver, which the moon
Struck from an open grating overhead
High in the wall, and all the rest of her
Drown’d in the gloom and horror of the vault.

‘It was my wish,’ he said, ‘to pass, to sleep,
To rest, to be with her — till the great day
Peal’d on us with that music which rights all,
And raised us hand in hand.’ And kneeling there
He softly put his arm about her neck
And kissed her more than once.
and found her heart was beating…

Was this another of his hallucinations?

<Then> placing his true hand upon her heart, starting, thought
His dreams had come again. ‘Do I wake or sleep? Or am I made immortal, or my love Mortal once more?’

It beat — the heart — it beat:
Faint — but it beat: at which his own began
To pulse with such a vehemence that it drown’d
The feebler motion underneath his hand.
But when at last his doubts were satisfied,
He raised her softly from the sepulchre,
And bore her thro’ the solitary land
Back to the mother’s house where she was born.

There the good mother recall’d
Her fluttering life. She rais’d an eye that ask’d ‘Where?’ till the things familiar to her youth
Had made a silent answer. Then she spoke ‘Here! and how came I here?’ and learning it,
At once began to wander and to wail,
‘Ay, but you know that you must give me back: Send! bid him come’.

But Lionel was away —
Stung by his loss had vanish’d, none knew where.

‘He casts me out,’ she wept, ‘and goes’ — a wail
That seeming something, yet was nothing, born
Not from believing mind, but shatter’d nerve,
Yet haunting Julian, as her own reproof
At some precipitance in her burial.

Then, when her own true spirit had return’d,
‘Oh, yes, and you,’ she said, ‘and none but you?
For you have given me life and love again,
And none but you yourself shall tell him of it,
And you shall give me back when he returns’.

The Lover agreed — on two conditions:
(i) Camilla should remain in the house, concealed from the world;
(ii) he would absent himself immediately, until news should come of Lionel’s return.
Barely had he departed, when Camilla went into labour and gave birth to a son.

And then he rode away; but after this, 
An hour or two, Camilla’s travail came 
Upon her, and that day a boy was born, 
Heir of his face and land, to Lionel.

While the Lover was at at some remote inn, he contracted malaria.

And thus our lonely lover rode away. 
And pausing at a hostel in a marsh—
A dismal hostel in a dismal land, 
A flat malarian world of reed and rush—
There fever seized upon him. Myself was then 
Travelling that land, and meant to rest an hour…

It was here the Narrator chanced to find him and take care of him.

<And> there from fever and my care of him 
Sprang up a friendship that may help us yet. 
For while we roam’d along the dreary coast, 
And waited for her message, piece by piece
I learnt the drearier story of his life;
And, tho’ he loved and honoured Lionel, 
Found that the sudden wail his lady made 
Dwelt in his fancy: did he know her worth, 
Her beauty even? should he not be taught, 
Ev’n by the price that others set upon it, 
The value of that jewel he had to guard?

The Narrator slowly pieced together the Lover’s sad story.

The Lover was obviously still haunted by Camilla’s ‘wail’ of reproach to her husband.

Suddenly came her notice and we past, 
I with our lover, to his native Bay. 
So sweetly and so modestly she came 
To greet us, her young hero in her arms! 
‘Kiss him,’ she said. ‘You gave me life again. 
He, but for you, had never seen it once. 
His other father you! Kiss him, and then 
Forgive him, if his name be Julian too.’

His feelings were mixed. 
Talk of lost hopes and broken heart! his own 
Sent such a flame into his face, I knew 
Some sudden vivid pleasure hit him there.

Determined on self-exile, 
he invited Lionel and his neighbours to a ‘banquet of farewells’ in his hall.

But he was all the more resolved to go, 
And sent at once to Lionel, praying him 
By that great love they both had borne the dead, 
To come and revel for one hour with him 
Before he left the land for evermore; 
And then to friends—they were not many—who lived 
Scatteringly about that lonely land of his, 
And bade them to a banquet of farewells.

Section 13: The Lover Returns: Preparations for a Banquet of Farewells

News came that Lionel had reappeared. 
Together, Lover and Narrator returned to Camilla 
and learned of the birth of her son, who had been christened with the Lover’s own name—Julian.

His feelings were mixed.
The preparations for this 'solemn feast' could not have been more lavish.

And Julian made a solemn feast: I never Sat at a costlier; for all round his hall From column on to column, as in a wood, Not such as here — an equatorial one, Great garlands swung and blossom’d; and beneath, Heirlooms, and ancient miracles of Art.  
Ah heavens!
Why need I tell you all? — suffice to say That whatsoever such a house as his, And his was old, has in it rare or fair Was brought before the guest:

and they, the guests,  
Wonder’d at some strange light in Julian’s eyes (I told you that he had his golden hour), And such a feast, ill-suited as it seem’d To such a time, to Lionel’s loss and his; And that resolv’d self-exile from a land He never would revisit—such a feast So rich, so strange, and stranger ev’n than rich, But rich as for the nuptials of a king.

The guests were astonished at the extravagance and at the unnatural behaviour of their host.

A painting of Camilla was displayed, with a lamp above it and its frame curtained, in such a way that she seemed to be 'stepping out of darkness with a smile'.

(Think of The Winter’s Tale, Act 5, sc. iii.)

Section 14: The Lover Relates a Parable

Finally, the Lover stood up to make a speech. His preamble was long and mysterious.

"It is a good custom in the East for the host to honour his guests by displaying all his most precious treasures.

"The climax comes when he ushers in, and introduces to the most honoured among the guests, the person who is dearest to his heart. (In so doing, he is revealing his innermost heart.)
“This is what I now propose to do.

“But let me first tell you a brief parable to explain my dilemma.

“A certain master left a faithful sick servant to die on the street.

“Another man found the dying servant, tended him, and saved his life. To whom does this servant now owe service? To his master? Or to his rescuer?”

The guests debated the issue and decided to appeal to the silent Lionel as arbitrator.

Lionel gave his verdict without any qualifications: the servant owes his service to the rescuer, to whom he belongs ‘body and soul’.

Section 15: Camilla is ‘Given’ to her Husband, and the Lover Goes into Exile

At that moment, the Narrator himself conducted the living Camilla into the middle of the hall, so beautiful, with her baby in her arms,

“O my heart’s lord, would I could show you,” he says, “Ev’n my heart too.” And I propose to-night To show you what is dearest to my heart, And my heart too.

“But solve me first a doubt. I knew a man, nor many years ago; He had a faithful servant, one who loved His master more than all on earth beside. He falling sick, and seeming close on death, His master would not wait until he died, But bade his menials bear him from the door. And leave him in the public way to die.

“I knew another, not so long ago, Who found the dying servant, took him home, And fed, and cherish’d him, and saved his life. I ask you now, should this first master claim His service, whom does it belong to? him Who thrust him out, or him who saved his life?’

This question, so flung down before the guests, And balanced either way by each, at length When some were doubtful how the law would hold, Was handed over by consent of all To one who had not spoken, Lionel.

Fair speech was his, and delicate of phrase, Affirming that as long as either lived, By all the laws of love and gratefulness, The service of the one so saved was due All to the saver — adding, with a smile, The first for many weeks — a semi-smile As at a strong conclusion — ‘body and soul, And life and limbs, all his to work his will.’

Then Julian made a secret sign to me To bring Camilla down before them all. And crossing her own picture as she came, And looking as much lovelier as herself Is lovelier than all others — on her head A diamond circlet, and from under this A veil, that seemed no more than gilded air — So, with that grace of hers, Slow-moving as a wave against the wind That flings a mist behind it in the sun, And bearing high in arms the mighty babe, The younger Julian,
and her eyes lowered.

(Think again of The Winter’s Tale, Act 5, sc. iii.)

The Lover again referred to the custom in the Orient, explaining that this woman was ‘of all things upon earth the dearest to me’.

Lionel was thunderstruck.

Could this apparition be some lost cousin of Camilla’s?

Camilla remained silent.

The guests questioned her.

Camilla remained silent.

The Lover answered on her behalf, justifying her with reference to Lionel’s verdict on the parable.

“She is silent in obedience to the wishes of her rescuer, her second master.

“I myself shall now go far beyond the good custom of the Orient, by making a gift of this person (who is ‘dearest to me’) to the most honoured among my guests.

“So, you must now remain silent while I tell my tale – and in so doing ’show you all my heart’.”

I have here to-night a guest
So bound to me by common love and loss —
What! shall I bind him more? in his behalf,
Shall I exceed the Persian, giving him
That which of all things is the dearest to me,
Not only showing? —And he himself pronounced
That my rich gift is wholly mine to give.

‘Now all be dumb, and promise all of you
Not to break in on what I say by word
Or whisper, while I show you all my heart.’

So she came in … <so> floated in,
While all the guests in mute amazement rose:
And slowly pacing to the middle hall,
Before the board, there paused and stood, her breast
Hard-heaving, and her eyes upon her feet,
Not daring yet to glance at Lionel.

‘My guests,’ said Julian: ‘you are honour’d now
Ev’n to the uttermost: in her behold
Of all my treasures the most beautiful.
Of all things upon earth the dearest to me.’

Then waving us a sign to seat ourselves,
Led his dear lady to a chair of state.
And I, by Lionel sitting, saw his face
Fire, and dead ashes and all fire again
Thrice in a second, felt him tremble too,
And heard him muttering, ‘So like, so like;
She never had a sister. I knew none.
Some cousin of his and hers — O God, so like!’
And then he suddenly ask’d her if she were.
She shook, and cast her eyes down, and was dumb.

And then some other question’d if she came
From foreign lands, and still she did not speak.
Another, if the boy were hers: but she
To all their queries answer’d not a word,
Which made the amazement more.

But Julian, sitting by her, answer’d all:
‘She is but dumb, because in her you see
That faithful servant whom we spoke about,
Obedient to her second master now;
Which will not last.

‘No! all be dumb, and promise all of you
Not to break in on what I say by word
Or whisper, while I show you all my heart.’
He told the guests the whole story, right down to the present moment.

Lionel was overcome.

Turning to Lionel, the Lover solemnly offered him Camilla as his wife, concluding with a final gently-worded reproach at Lionel’s earlier ‘precipitance’ in abandoning her.

Husband, wife and child were thus magnanimously reunited by the Lover in that, his ‘Golden Hour’.

Nevertheless, the Lover could not endure to see the happiness in Lionel’s face.

(Think of his reactions at the end of Part I.)

All was over.

He galloped abruptly away, with the intention of never returning to his native land.

And then began the story of his love
As here to-day, but not so wordily —
The passionate moment would not suffer that—
Past thro’ his visions to the burial; thence
Down to this last strange hour in his own hall.

And then rose up, and with him all his guests
Once more as by enchantment; all but he,
Lionel, who fain had risen, but fell again,
And sat as if in chains —to whom he said:

‘Take my free gift, my cousin, for your wife;
And were it only for the giver’s sake,
And tho’ she seem so like the one you lost,
Yet cast her not away so suddenly,
Lest there be none left here to bring her back:
I leave this land for ever.’

Here he ceased.

Then taking his dear lady by one hand.
And bearing on one arm the noble babe,
He slowly brought them both to Lionel.
And there the widower husband and dead wife
Rush’d each at each with a cry, that rather seem’d
For some new death than for a life renew’d;
Whereat the very babe began to wail.
At once they turn’d, and caught and brought him in
To their charm’d circle, and, half killing him
With kisses, round him closed and clasp’d again.

But Lionel, when at last he freed himself
From wife and child, and lifted up a face
All over glowing with the sun of life,
And love, and boundless thanks —the sight of this
So frighted our good friend, that turning to me
And saying, ‘It is over: let us go’—
There were our horses ready at the doors —
We bade them no farewell, but mounting these
He past for ever from his native land;
And I with him, my Julian, back to mine.

FINIS