

# An Autumn Sunset

By Edith Wharton

I

Leaguered in fire  
The wild black promontories of the coast extend  
Their savage silhouettes;  
The sun in universal carnage sets,  
And, halting higher,  
The motionless storm-clouds mass their sullen threats,  
Like an advancing mob in sword-points penned,  
That, balked, yet stands at bay.  
Mid-zenith hangs the fascinated day  
In wind-lustrated hollows crystalline,  
A wan Valkyrie whose wide pinions shine  
Across the ensanguined ruins of the fray,  
And in her hand swings high o'erhead,  
Above the waster of war,  
The silver torch-light of the evening star  
Wherewith to search the faces of the dead.

II

Lagooned in gold,  
Seem not those jetty promontories rather  
The outposts of some ancient land forlorn,  
Uncomforted of morn,  
Where old oblivions gather,  
The melancholy unconsoling fold  
Of all things that go utterly to death  
And mix no more, no more  
With life's perpetually awakening breath?  
Shall Time not ferry me to such a shore,  
Over such sailless seas,  
To walk with hope's slain importunities  
In miserable marriage? Nay, shall not  
All things be there forgot,  
Save the sea's golden barrier and the black  
Close-crouching promontories?  
Dead to all shames, forgotten of all glories,  
Shall I not wander there, a shadow's shade,  
A spectre self-destroyed,  
So purged of all remembrance and sucked back  
Into the primal void,  
That should we on the shore phantasmal meet  
I should not know the coming of your feet?



A New York City aristocrat, Edith Wharton wrote poetry and fiction mainly about high society life. Her marriage to a wealthy businessman gave Wharton ample time to devote to writing such well-known novels as *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence*, and *Ethan Frome*. By age 18 she had already published poems in magazines including the *Atlantic Monthly*.