

Robert Browning's "Mesmerism" (1855)

I.

All I believed is true!
I am able yet
All I want, to get
By a method as strange as new:
Dare I trust the same to you? 5

II.

If at night, when doors are shut,
And the wood-worm picks,
And the death-watch ticks,
And the bar has a flag of smut,
And a cat's in the water-butt--- 10

III.

And the socket floats and flares,
And the house-beams groan,
And a foot unknown
Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
And the locks slip unawares--- 15

IV.

And the spider, to serve his ends,
By a sudden thread,
Arms and legs outspread,
On the table's midst descends,
Comes to find, God knows what friends!--- 20

V.

If since eve drew in, I say,
I have sat and brought
(So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey--- 25

VI.

Till I seemed to have and hold,
In the vacancy
'Twixt the wall and me,
From the hair-plait's chestnut gold
To the foot in its muslin fold--- 30

VII.

Have and hold, then and there,
Her, from head to foot,
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare--- 35

VIII.

Hold and have, there and then,
All her body and soul
That completes my whole,
All that women add to men,
In the clutch of my steady ken--- 40

IX.

Having and holding, till
I imprint her fast
On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist's skill--- 45

X.

Then,---if ,
And through all and each
Of the veils I reach
To her soul and never swerve,
Knitting an iron nerve--- 50

XI.

Command her soul to advance
And inform the shape
Which has made escape
And before my countenance
Answers me glance for glance--- 55

XII.

I, still with a gesture fit
Of my hands that best
Do my soul's behest,
Pointing the power from it,
While myself do steadfast sit--- 60

XIII.

Steadfast and still the same
On my object bent,
While the hands give vent
To my ardour and my aim
And break into very flame--- 65

XIV.

Then I reach, I must believe,
Not her soul in vain,
For to me again
It reaches, and past retrieve
Is wound in the toils I weave; 70

XV.

And must follow as I require,
As befits a thrall,
Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire,
To the source of the tractile fire: 75

XVI.

Till the house called hers, not mine,
With a growing weight
Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine. 80

XVII.

Out of doors into the night!
On to the maze
Of the wild wood-ways,
Not turning to left nor right
From the pathway, blind with sight--- 85

XVIII.

Making thro' rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,
'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still, composed, strong mind,
Nor a care for the world behind--- 90

XIX.

Swifter and still more swift,
As the crowding peace
Doth to joy increase
In the wide blind eyes uplift
Thro' the darkness and the drift! 95

XX.

While I---to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate,
And relax not a gesture due,
As I see my belief come true. 100

XXI.

For, there! have I drawn or no
Life to that lip?
Do my fingers dip
In a flame which again they throw
On the cheek that breaks a-glow? 105

XXII.

Ha! was the hair so first?
What, unfileted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed? 110

XXTII.

Like the doors of a casket-shrine,
See, on either side,
Her two arms divide
Till the heart betwixt makes sign,
Take me, for I am thine! 115

XXIV.

``Now---now"---the door is heard!
Hark, the stairs! and near---
Nearer---and here---
``Now!" and at call the third
She enters without a word. 120

XXV.

On doth she march and on
To the fancied shape;
It is, past escape,
Herself, now: the dream is done
And the shadow and she are one. 125

XXVI.

First I will pray. Do Thou
That ownest the soul,
Yet wilt grant control
To another, nor disallow
For a time, restrain me now! 130

XXVII.

I admonish me while I may,
Not to squander guilt,
Since require Thou wilt
At my hand its price one day
What the price is, who can say? 135