# Robert Browning's "Mesmerism" (1855)

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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?

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---

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5

## 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---

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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---

## 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:

## 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---

# 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.

#### 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

115

#### XXII.

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

# 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!

## 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?