

John Ruskin's Wedding Night

Martin Robertson

Quick to beauty more than is common
but reared in rigid abstinence,
children's light voices and cool hands
were all he dared to dream in woman.

The statue underneath the stays
waited in marble innocence:
a light such as in Paradise
flowed from the smile of Beatrice
should fuse them in its white embrace.

The temple-veil rent from his error
revealed the body's subtleties
flushed from the warm blood's quickening.
The yielding and the stiffening,
the wooded clefts and the hot spring,
chilled him with horror and with terror.