

Auspex¹

My heart, I cannot still it,
Nest that had song-birds in it;
And when the last shall go,
The dreary days, to fill it,
Instead of lark or linnet,²
Shall whirl dead leaves and snow.

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Had they been swallows only,
Without the passion stronger
That skyward longs and sings,—³
Woe's me, I shall be lonely
When I can feel no longer
The impatience of their wings!

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A moment, sweet delusion,
Like birds the brown leaves hover,
But it will not be long
Before their wild confusion
Fall wavering down to cover
The poet and his song.

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1878

¹Prophet or soothsayer who interprets omens taken from the actions of birds. The first line served as the title for the poem's first publication in 1878.

²European songbirds

³The swallow is contrasted with the skylark, noted for the heights it attains and for its singing while in flight.