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| Edgar Lee Masters. 1869– |
|   |
| 43. **Silence** |
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| I HAVE known the silence of the stars and of the sea, |   |
| And the silence of the city when it pauses, |   |
| And the silence of a man and a maid, |   |
| And the silence for which music alone finds the word, |   |
| And the silence of the woods before the winds of spring begin, | *5* |
| And the silence of the sick |   |
| When their eyes roam about the room. |   |
| And I ask: For the depths |   |
| Of what use is language? |   |
| A beast of the field moans a few times | *10* |
| When death takes its young. |   |
| And we are voiceless in the presence of realities— |   |
| We cannot speak. |   |
|    |  |
| A curious boy asks an old soldier |   |
| Sitting in front of the grocery store, | *15* |
| "How did you lose your leg?" |   |
| And the old soldier is struck with silence, |   |
| Or his mind flies away |   |
| Because he cannot concentrate it on Gettysburg. |   |
| It comes back jocosely | *20* |
| And he says, "A bear bit it off." |   |
| And the boy wonders, while the old soldier |   |
| Dumbly, feebly lives over |   |
| The flashes of guns, the thunder of cannon, |   |
| The shrieks of the slain, | *25* |
| And himself lying on the ground, |   |
| And the hospital surgeons, the knives, |   |
| And the long days in bed. |   |
| But if he could describe it all |   |
| He would be an artist. | *30* |
| But if he were an artist there would he deeper wounds |   |
| Which he could not describe. |   |
|    |  |
| There is the silence of a great hatred, |   |
| And the silence of a great love, |   |
| And the silence of a deep peace of mind, | *35* |
| And the silence of an embittered friendship, |   |
| There is the silence of a spiritual crisis, |   |
| Through which your soul, exquisitely tortured, |   |
| Comes with visions not to be uttered |   |
| Into a realm of higher life. | *40* |
| And the silence of the gods who understand each other without speech, |   |
| There is the silence of defeat. |   |
| There is the silence of those unjustly punished; |   |
| And the silence of the dying whose hand |   |
| Suddenly grips yours. | *45* |
| There is the silence between father and son, |   |
| When the father cannot explain his life, |   |
| Even though he be misunderstood for it. |   |
|    |  |
| There is the silence that comes between husband and wife. |   |
| There is the silence of those who have failed; | *50* |
| And the vast silence that covers |   |
| Broken nations and vanquished leaders. |   |
| There is the silence of Lincoln, |   |
| Thinking of the poverty of his youth. |   |
| And the silence of Napoleon | *55* |
| After Waterloo. |   |
| And the silence of Jeanne d'Arc |   |
| Saying amid the flames, "Blesséd Jesus"— |   |
| Revealing in two words all sorrow, all hope. |   |
| And there is the silence of age, | *60* |
| Too full of wisdom for the tongue to utter it |   |
| In words intelligible to those who have not lived |   |
| The great range of life. |   |
|    |  |
| And there is the silence of the dead. |   |
| If we who are in life cannot speak | *65* |
| Of profound experiences, |   |
| Why do you marvel that the dead |   |
| Do not tell you of death? |   |
| Their silence shall be interpreted |   |
| As we approach them. | *70* |