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| Edgar Lee Masters. 1869– |
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| 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. |  |
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| 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. |  |
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| 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. |  |
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| 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. |  |
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| 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* |