

"After Many Days" (On the Banks of the Solway. July 1870.)

In autumn's silent twilight, sad and sweet,
O love, no longer mine, alone I stand;
Listening, I seem to hear dear phantom feet
Pass by me down the golden wave-worn strand:
I think of things that were and things that be,
I hear the soft, low rippler of the sea
That to my thoughts responsive music beat.

My heart is very sad to-night and chill,
But hush'd in awe, as his who turns and feels

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A mournful rapture through his being thrill,
When music, sweet and slumbrous, softly steals
Down the deep calm of some cathedral nave;
Then swells and throbs and breaks as does a wave,
And slowly ebb and all again is still.

And is it only five years since, O love,
That we in this old place stood side by side,
Where in the twilight once again I move?
Is this the same shore washed by the same tide?
My heart recalls the past a little space,
The sweet and the irrevocable days;
I knew not then how bitter life might prove.

I loved you then and shall love till I die;
Your way of life is fair, it should be so,
And I am glad, though in dark years gone by
Hard thoughts of you I had, but now I know,
A fairer and a softer path was met
For treading of your dainty maiden feet:
Your life must blossom 'neath a summer sky.

The twilight, like a sleep, creeps on the day,
 And like dark dreams the night creeps on that sleep;
 If you should come again in the old way
 And look from pensive tender eyes and deep
 Upon me, as you look'd in days of old —
 If my hand should again of yours take hold,
 How should I feel, and what thing should I say?

Ah, sweet days flown shall never come again,
 That happy summer time shall not return
 When we two stood beside this peaceful main,
 And saw at eve the rising billows yearn
 With passion to the moon, and heard afar,
 Across the waves, and 'neath the first warm star,
 From ships at sea, some sweet remembered strain.

I can recall the day when first we met,
 And how the burning summer sunlight fell
 Across the sea; nor love do I forget
 How underneath that summer noontide spell

We saw afar the white-sailed vessels glide
As phantom ships upon a waveless tide,
Whose shining calm no breezes come to fret.

And, shall I blame you, sweet, because you chose
A softer path of life than mine can be?

I keep our secret here and no man knows
What pass'd five years ago 'twixt you and me -
Two loves begotten at the self same time,
When that gold summer tide was in its prime:
One love lives yet, and one died with the rose.

I work and live and take my part in things,
And so my life goes on from day to day;
Fruitless the summers, seedless all the springs,
To him who falls December one with May:
The night is not more dreary than the sun,
Not sadder is the twilight, dim and dun,
Than dawn that, still returning, shines and sings.

Fed with sweet scent of hills, through growing shades,
To the white water's edge the wind moans down;
The lapping tide steals on, while day light fades,
And fills the caves with shells and seaweed brown.
Ah! wild sea-beaten coast, more dear to me
Than faintest scenes of that fair land could be
Where warm Italian suns steep happy glades!

Farewell, familiar scene, for I ascend
The jagged path that led me to the shore;
Farewell to cliff, cave, inlet - each a friend;
My parting steps shall visit ye no more:
Drawn are ye all when soft light steals through gloom,
Here had my joy its birth - here found its tomb -
Here love began, and here one love had end.

I had a love, long years ago,
I thought her all my own;
But she has long forgotten me,
And those bright days have flown.
We sat together on the sand,
We heard the billows roar;
We marked the blue waves come and go
Upon the lone sea shore

Oh! little dreamt I, as I gazed
Upon that ocean wide,
And fondly thought our love would be
As boundless as the tide,
That even as the waves effaced,
Each mark upon the sand,
So would my joy be left from me
By sorrow's stern demand.

If she were dead, and in the grave
Our friendship buried lay,

I'd still hope on, and patiently

Await a meeting day.

But she will never call me friend,

Even though we meet again:

'Tis this that adds to each day's woe

Its bitterest draught of pain.

I thought then in my ignorance,

That we were friends for ever:

And knowing not life's sharpest pang,

Dreamt only death could sever.

But I have learnt, through weary years,

All that my hope was worth;

Now I have nothing to expect

Upon this changeful earth.

I never can have faith again,

Or trust as once I did;

I knew not what awaited me,

In the dim future hid.

And yet I know not, if she stood
Tomorrow at my side,
If I could coldly turn away
And spurn her in my pride

I know that, if she took my hand,
Her voice rang in my ear;
Though she grieved not o'er years of wrong,
But once more called me "dear",
I know, I feel it in my heart,
I should be weak again;
And yield me to those tender tones
Though every word were pain.

Oh! no, what'er may come between,
I never can forget,
Though she has long forgotten them,
Those days when first we met.
My trust is gone, but in my heart
My love lies buried deep:
Her touch will never wake it more
From its long, lonely sleep.

For thee, lost love, I shall not see again;
 The pale sad beauty of thy tender face,
 Once lamp and light of this now starless place,
 Comes to me in my dreams, and I am fain
 To hold thee in my arms, and so retain
 Thy phantom form in one long wild embrace;
 A flush illumines the features of dead days,
 But fades before the lights in heaven wane.

O love, sweet love, my first, my only love,
 How can I find the flowering meadows sweet
 That no more feel the Kisses of your feet!

O silent heart that grief no more can move
 O loved and loving lips, whereto mine clove
 Tell hope, long stanch, with thy heart's f muffled beat
 Durted his torn flag, and made his last retreat,
 And all was void below, and dark above.

And now the gulf between us, love, is deep;
 I labour yet a little in the fight,

And bear the ontrage of the jizous light,
I toil by day and in the night I sleep,
And then my heart gets ease for I can weep.

Seven years since we made up our quarrel!
I remember the little low room,
And the garden out of the window,
And the second roses in bloom.

You had suffered, it may have been bravely,
But never pang pass'd without trace;
And if any atonement were needed,
It was there in the look of your face.

The dear eyes too wet to be lifted,
The sweet lips which quivered with pain
Blotted all out: forgiveness? O, darling,
What need, when I have you again!

Seven years! and life rises against us,
And drifts us still farther apart,
And the old timid anguish of silence
Sets a seal on the lips and the heart.

But I think of the tears that were hidden
That day in the little low room;
And the garden out of the window,
And the second roses in bloom.