

LibriVox

Short Poetry Collection
Number 28

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An Irish Airman Foresees His Death

William Butler Yeats

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public man, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

Beatrice

Sara Teasdale

Send out the singers -- let the room be still;
They have not eased my pain nor brought me sleep.
Close out the sun, for I would have it dark
That I may feel how black the grave will be.
The sun is setting, for the light is red,
And you are outlined in a golden fire,
Like Ursula upon an altar-screen.
Come, leave the light and sit beside my bed,
For I have had enough of saints and prayers.
Strange broken thoughts are beating in my brain,
They come and vanish and again they come.
It is the fever driving out my soul,
And Death stands waiting by the arras there.

Ornella, I will speak, for soon my lips
Shall keep a silence till the end of time.
You have a mouth for loving -- listen then:
Keep tryst with Love before Death comes to tryst;
For I, who die, could wish that I had lived
A little closer to the world of men,
Not watching always thro' the blazoned panes

That show the world in chilly greens and blues
And grudge the sunshine that would enter in.
I was no part of all the troubled crowd
That moved beneath the palace windows here,
And yet sometimes a knight in shining steel
Would pass and catch the gleaming of my hair,
And wave a mailed hand and smile at me,
Whereat I made no sign and turned away,
Affrighted and yet glad and full of dreams.
Ah, dreams and dreams that asked no answering!
I should have wrought to make my dreams come true,
But all my life was like an autumn day,
Full of gray quiet and a hazy peace.

What was I saying? All is gone again.
It seemed but now I was the little child
Who played within a garden long ago.
Beyond the walls the festal trumpets blared.
Perhaps they carried some Madonna by
With tossing ensigns in a sea of flowers,
A painted Virgin with a painted Child,
Who saw for once the sweetness of the sun
Before they shut her in an altar-niche
Where tapers smoke against the windy gloom.
I gathered roses redder than my gown
And played that I was Saint Elizabeth,
Whose wine had turned to roses in her hands.
And as I played, a child came thro' the gate,
A boy who looked at me without a word,
As tho' he saw stretch far behind my head
Long lines of radiant angels, row on row.
That day we spoke a little, timidly,
And after that I never heard the voice
That sang so many songs for love of me.
He was content to stand and watch me pass,
To seek for me at matins every day,
Where I could feel his eyes the while I prayed.
I think if he had stretched his hands to me,
Or moved his lips to say a single word,
I might have loved him -- he had wondrous eyes.

Ornella, are you there? I cannot see --
Is every one so lonely when he dies?,p>
The room is filled with lights -- with waving lights --
Who are the men and women 'round the bed?
What have I said, Ornella? Have they heard?

There was no evil hidden in my life,
And yet, and yet, I would not have them know --

Am I not floating in a mist of light?
O lift me up and I shall reach the sun!

By The Arno

Oscar Wilde

THE oleander on the wall
Grows crimson in the dawning light,
Though the grey shadows of the night
Lie yet on Florence like a pall.

The dew is bright upon the hill,
And bright the blossoms overhead,
But ah! the grasshoppers have fled,
The little Attic song is still.

Only the leaves are gently stirred
By the soft breathing of the gale,
And in the almond-scented vale
The lonely nightingale is heard.

The day will make thee silent soon,
O nightingale sing on for love!
While yet upon the shadowy grove
Splinter the arrows of the moon.

Before across the silent lawn
In sea-green mist the morning steals,
And to love's frightened eyes reveals
The long white fingers of the dawn

Fast climbing up the eastern sky
To grasp and slay the shuddering night,
All careless of my heart's delight,
Or if the nightingale should die.

The Clod and the Pebble

William Blake

"Love seeketh not Itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair."

So sung a little Clod of Clay
Trodden with the cattle's feet,
But a Pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:

"Love seeketh only Self to please,
To bind another to Its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite."

Egotist

Ambrose Bierce

Megaceph, chosen to serve the State
In the halls of legislative debate,
One day with his credentials came
To the capitol's door and announced his name.
The doorkeeper looked, with a comical twist
Of the face, at the eminent egotist,
And said: "Go away, for we settle here
All manner of questions, knotty and queer,
And we cannot have, when the speaker demands
To know how every member stands,
A man who to all things under the sky
Assents by eternally voting 'I.'"

Foreign Lands

Robert Louis Stevenson

UP into the cherry tree
Who should climb but little me?
I held the trunk with both my hands
And looked abroad on foreign lands.

I saw the next door garden lie,
Adorned with flowers, before my eye,
And many pleasant places more
That I had never seen before.

If I could find a higher tree
Farther and farther I should see,
To where the grown-up river slips
Into the sea among the ships.

To where the roads on either hand
Lead onward into fairy land,
Where all the children dine at five,
And all the playthings come alive.

Futility

Wilfred Owen

Move him into the sun--
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields unsown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning, and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds--
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,
Full-nerved--still warm--too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
--O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break the earth's sleep at all?

Oh, Gray and Tender is the Rain

Lizette Woodworth Reese

Oh, gray and tender is the rain,
That drips, drips on the pane!
A hundred things come in the door,
The scent of herbs, the thought of yore.

I see the pool out in the grass,

A bit of broken glass;
The red flags running wet and straight,
Down to the little flapping gate.

Lombardy poplars tall and three,
Across the road I see;
There is no loveliness so plain
As a tall poplar in the rain.

But oh, the hundred things and more,
That come in at the door! --
The smack of mint, old joy, old pain,
Caught in the gray and tender rain.

The Grief of a Girl's Heart

Lady Augusta Gregory (trans.)

O Donall og, if you go across the sea, bring myself with you and do not forget it; and you will have a sweetheart for fair days and market days, and the daughter of the King of Greece beside you at night.

It is late last night the dog was speaking of you; the snipe was speaking of you in her deep marsh. It is you are the lonely bird through the woods; and that you may be without a mate until you find me.

You promised me, and you said a lie to me, that you would be before me where the sheep are flocked; I gave a whistle and three hundred cries to you, and I found nothing there but a bleating lamb.

You promised me a thing that was hard for you, a ship of gold under a silver mast; twelve towns with a market in all of them, and a fine white court by the side of the sea.

You promised me a thing that is not possible, that you would give me gloves of the skin of a fish; that you would give me shoes of the skin of a bird, and a suit of the dearest silk in Ireland.

O Donall og, it is I would be better to you than a high, proud, spendthrift lady: I would milk the cow; I would bring help to you; and if you were hard pressed, I would strike a blow for you.

O, ochone, and it's not with hunger or with wanting food, or drink, or sleep, that I am growing thin, and my life is shortened; but it is the love of a young man has withered me away.

It is early in the morning that I saw him coming, going along the road
on the back of a horse; he did not come to me; he made nothing of me;
and it is on my way home that I cried my fill.

When I go by myself to the Well of Loneliness, I sit down and I go
through my trouble; when I see the world and do not see my boy, he
that has an amber shade in his hair.

It was on that Sunday I gave my love to you; the Sunday that is last
before Easter Sunday. And myself on my knees reading the Passion; and
my two eyes giving love to you for ever.

O, aya! my mother, give myself to him; and give him all that you have
in the world; get out yourself to ask for alms, and do not come back
and forward looking for me.

My mother said to me not to be talking with you to-day, or to-morrow,
or on the Sunday; it was a bad time she took for telling me that; it
was shutting the door after the house was robbed.

My heart is as black as the blackness of the sloe, or as the black
coal that is on the smith's forge; or as the sole of a shoe left in
white halls; it was you put that darkness over my life.

You have taken the east from me; you have taken the west from me; you
have taken what is before me and what is behind me; you have taken
the moon, you have taken the sun from me; and my fear is great that
you have taken God from me!

The Kingdom of God (In No Strange Place)

Francis Thompson

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air—
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!-
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,

Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

I Like to See It Lap the Miles

Emily Dickinson

I LIKE to see it lap the miles,
And lick the valleys up,
And stop to feed itself at tanks;
And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza;
Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;
Then, punctual as a star,
Stop—docile and omnipotent—
At its own stable door.

A Mathematical Problem In Verse

Benjamin Banneker

A Cooper and Vintner sat down for a talk,

Both being so groggy, that neither could walk,
 Says Cooper to Vintner, "I'm the first of my trade,
 There's no kind of vessel, but what I have made,
 And of any shpe, Sir, -just what you will,-
 And of any size, Sir, -from a ton to a gill!"
 "Then," says the Vintner, "you're the man for me,-
 Make me a vessel, if we can agree.
 The top and the bottom diameter define,
 To bear that proportion as fifteen to nine,
 Thirty-five inches are just what I crave,
 No more and no less, in the depth, will I have;
 Just thirty-nine gallons this vessel must hold,-
 Then I will reward you with silver or gold,-
 Give me your promise, my honest old friend?"
 "I'll make it tomorrow, that you may depend!"
 So the next day the Cooper his work to discharge,
 Soon made the new vessel, but made it too large;-
 He took out some staves, which made it too small,
 And then cursed the vessel, the Vintner and all.
 He beat on his breast, "By the Powers!" - he swore,
 He never would work at his trade any more.
 Now my worthy friend, find out, if you can,
 The vessel's dimensions and comfort the man!

Thanatopsis

William Cullen Bryant

To him who in the love of Nature holds
 Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
 A various language; for his gayer hours
 She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
 And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
 Into his darker musings, with a mild
 And healing sympathy, that steals away
 Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts
 Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
 Over thy spirit, and sad images
 Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,
 And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,
 Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;--
 Go forth, under the open sky, and list
 To Nature's teachings, while from all around--
 Earth and her waters, and the depths of air,--
 Comes a still voice--Yet a few days, and thee
 The all-beholding sun shall see no more

In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears,
Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist
Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,
And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
Thine individual being, shalt thou go
To mix for ever with the elements,
To be a brother to the insensible rock
And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.

Yet not to thine eternal resting-place
Shalt thou retire alone--nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world--with kings,
The powerful of the earth--the wise, the good,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulchre.--The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun,--the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods--rivers that move
In majesty, and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green; and, poured round all,
Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste,--
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
Are shining on the sad abodes of death,
Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
The globe are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom.--Take the wings
Of morning--and the Barcan desert pierce,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,
Save his own dashings--yet--the dead are there:
And millions in those solitudes, since first
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep--the dead reign there alone.
So shalt thou rest---and what, if thou withdraw
Unheeded by the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase

His favourite phantom; yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come,
And make their bed with thee. As the long train
Of ages glide away, the sons of men,
The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes
In the full strength of years, matron, and maid,
And the sweet babe, and the gray-headed man,--
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side,
By those, who in their turn shall follow them.

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, that moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

The Fire Soul

George Charles Selden

I sat by my fire in the night, in the night,
The darkness grew deeper around me,
The last faint gleams of the flickering light
Faded out of my sight, into night, into night,
And the spell of revery bound me.

When sudden I saw in the vanishing light
A phantom hovering o'er me;
It wavered an instant in its flight;-
Then faded from sight, into night, into night,
And left but the darkness before me.

And yet so swift and sudden its flight,
So deep the shadows before me,
I knew not whether a beckoning sprite
Had glimmered white, in the night, in the night,
Or only a thought sped o'er me.

The Flea

John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that, self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and sayst that thou
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now;
'Tis true, then learn how false fears be;
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

Thomas of the Light Heart

Owen Seaman

Facing the guns, he jokes as well
As any Judge upon the Bench;
Between the crash of shell and shell
His laughter rings along the trench;
He seems immensely tickled by a
Projectile which he calls a "Black Maria."

He whistles down the day-long road,

And, when the chilly shadows fall
And heavier hangs the weary load,
Is he down-hearted? Not at all.
'T is then he takes a light and airy
View of the tedious route to Tipperary.

His songs are not exactly hymns;
He never learned them in the choir;
And yet they brace his dragging limbs
Although they miss the sacred fire;
Although his choice and cherished gems
Do not include "The Watch upon the Thames."

He takes to fighting as a game;
He does no talking, through his hat,
Of holy missions; all the same
He has his faith—be sure of that;
He'll not disgrace his sporting breed,
Nor play what is n't cricket. There's his creed.

To Edgar Allan Poe

Sarah Helen Whitman

If thy sad heart, pining for human love,
In its earth solitude grew dark with fear,
Lest the high Sun of Heaven itself should prove
Powerless to save from that phantasmal sphere
Wherein thy spirit wandered, -- if the flowers
That pressed around thy feet, seemed but to bloom
In lone Gethsemanes, through starless hours,
When all who loved had left thee to thy doom,--
Oh, yet believe that in that hollow vale
Where thy soul lingers, waiting to attain
So much of Heaven's sweet grace as shall avail
To lift its burden of remorseful pain,
My soul shall meet thee, and its Heaven forego
Till God's great love, on both, one hope, one Heaven bestow.

The Wayfarer

Stephen Crane

The wayfarer,
Perceiving the pathway to truth,
Was struck with astonishment.

It was thickly grown with weeds.
“Ha,” he said,
“I see that none has passed here
In a long time.”
Later he saw that each weed
Was a singular knife.
“Well,” he mumbled at last,
“Doubtless there are other roads.”

What Think You I Take My Pen in Hand?

Walt Whitman

WHAT think you I take my pen in hand to record?
The battle-ship, perfect-model'd, majestic, that I saw pass the offing to-day under full sail?
The splendors of the past day? Or the splendor of the night that envelopes me?
Or the vaunted glory and growth of the great city spread around me?—No;
But I record of two simple men I saw to-day, on the pier, in the midst of the crowd, parting the
parting of dear friends;
The one to remain hung on the other's neck, and passionately kiss'd him,
While the one to depart, tightly prest the one to remain in his arms.

When I Heard the Learned Astronomer

Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.