

Classic Poetry Series

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

- poems -

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A Silent Wood

O silent wood, I enter thee
With a heart so full of misery
For all the voices from the trees
And the ferns that cling about my knees.

In thy darkest shadow let me sit
When the grey owls about thee flit;
There will I ask of thee a boon,
That I may not faint or die or swoon.

Gazing through the gloom like one
Whose life and hopes are also done,
Frozen like a thing of stone
I sit in thy shadow – but not alone.

Can God bring back the day when we two stood
Beneath the clinging trees in that dark wood?

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

A Year and a Day

Slow days have passed that make a year,
Slow hours that make a day,
Since I could take my first dear love
And kiss him the old way;
Yet the green leaves touch me on the cheek,
Dear Christ, this month of May.

I lie among the tall green grass
That bends above my head
And covers up my wasted face
And folds me in its bed
Tenderly and lovingly
Like grass above the dead.

Dim phantoms of an unknown ill
Float through my tired brain;
The unformed visions of my life
Pass by in ghostly train;
Some pause to touch me on the cheek,
Some scatter tears like rain.

A shadow falls along the grass
And lingers at my feet;
A new face lies between my hands --
Dear Christ, if I could weep
Tears to shut out the summer leaves
When this new face I greet.

Still it is but the memory
Of something I have seen
In the dreamy summer weather
When the green leaves came between:
The shadow of my dear love's face --
So far and strange it seems.

The river ever running down
Between its grassy bed,
The voices of a thousand birds
That clang above my head,
Shall bring to me a sadder dream
When this sad dream is dead.

A silence falls upon my heart
And hushes all its pain.
I stretch my hands in the long grass
And fall to sleep again,
There to lie empty of all love
Like beaten corn of grain.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

At Last

O mother, open the window wide
And let the daylight in;
The hills grow darker to my sight
And thoughts begin to swim.

And mother dear, take my young son,
(Since I was born of thee)
And care for all his little ways
And nurse him on thy knee.

And mother, wash my pale pale hands
And then bind up my feet;
My body may no longer rest
Out of its winding sheet.

And mother dear, take a sapling twig
And green grass newly mown,
And lay them on my empty bed
That my sorrow be not known.

And mother, find three berries red
And pluck them from the stalk,
And burn them at the first cockcrow
That my spirit may not walk.

And mother dear, break a willow wand,
And if the sap be even,
Then save it for sweet Robert's sake
And he'll know my soul's in heaven.

And mother, when the big tears fall,
(And fall, God knows, they may)
Tell him I died of my great love
And my dying heart was gay.

And mother dear, when the sun has set
And the pale kirk grass waves,
Then carry me through the dim twilight
And hide me among the graves.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Dead Love

Oh never weep for love that's dead
Since love is seldom true
But changes his fashion from blue to red,
From brightest red to blue,
And love was born to an early death
And is so seldom true.

Then harbour no smile on your bonny face
To win the deepest sigh.
The fairest words on truest lips
Pass on and surely die,
And you will stand alone, my dear,
When wintry winds draw nigh.

Sweet, never weep for what cannot be,
For this God has not given.
If the merest dream of love were true
Then, sweet, we should be in heaven,
And this is only earth, my dear,
Where true love is not given.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Early Death

Oh grieve not with thy bitter tears
The life that passes fast;
The gates of heaven will open wide
And take me in at last.

Then sit down meekly at my side
And watch my young life flee;
Then solemn peace of holy death
Come quickly unto thee.

But true love, seek me in the throng
Of spirits floating past,
And I will take thee by the hands
And know thee mine at last.

He and She and Angels Three

Ruthless hands have torn her
From one that loved her well;
Angels have upborn her,
Christ her grief to tell.

She shall stand to listen,
She shall stand and sing,
Till three winged angels
Her lover's soul shall bring.

He and she and the angels three
Before God's face shall stand;
There they shall pray among themselves
And sing at His right hand.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Fragment of a Ballad

Many a mile over land and sea
Unsummoned my love returned to me;
I remember not the words he said
But only the trees moaning overhead.

And he came ready to take and bear
The cross I had carried for many a year,
But words came slowly one by one
From frozen lips shut still and dumb.

How sounded my words so still and slow
To the great strong heart that loved me so,
Who came to save me from pain and wrong
And to comfort me with his love so strong?

I felt the wind strike chill and cold
And vapours rise from the red-brown mould;
I felt the spell that held my breath
Bending me down to a living death.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Gone

To touch the glove upon her tender hand,
To watch the jewel sparkle in her ring,
Lifted my heart into a sudden song
As when the wild birds sing.

To touch her shadow on the sunny grass,
To break her pathway through the darkened wood,
Filled all my life with trembling and tears
And silence where I stood.

I watch the shadows gather round my heart,
I live to know that she is gone –
Gone gone for ever, like the tender dove
That left the Ark alone.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Lord May I Come?

Life and night are falling from me,
Death and day are opening on me,
Wherever my footsteps come and go,
Life is a stony way of woe.
Lord, have I long to go?

Hallow hearts are ever near me,
Soulless eyes have ceased to cheer me:
Lord may I come to thee?

Life and youth and summer weather
To my heart no joy can gather.
Lord, lift me from life's stony way!
Loved eyes long closed in death watch for me:
Holy death is waiting for me –
Lord, may I come to-day?

My outward life feels sad and still
Like lilies in a frozen rill;
I am gazing upwards to the sun,
Lord, Lord, remembering my lost one.
O Lord, remember me!

How is it in the unknown land?
Do the dead wander hand in hand?
God, give me trust in thee.

Do we clasp dead hands and quiver
With an endless joy for ever?
Do tall white angels gaze and wend
Along the banks where lilies bend?
Lord, we know not how this may be:
Good Lord we put our faith in thee –
O God, remember me.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Love and Hate

Ope not thy lips, thou foolish one,
Nor turn to me thy face;
The blasts of heaven shall strike thee down
Ere I will give thee grace.

Take thou thy shadow from my path,
Nor turn to me and pray;
The wild wild winds thy dirge may sing
Ere I will bid thee stay.

Turn thou away thy false dark eyes,
Nor gaze upon my face;
Great love I bore thee: now great hate
Sits grimly in its place.

All changes pass me like a dream,
I neither sing nor pray;
And thou art like the poisonous tree
That stole my life away.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Shepherd Turned Sailor

Now Christ ye save yon bonny shepherd
Sailing on the sea;
Ten thousand souls are sailing there
But they belong to Thee.
If he is lost then all is lost
And all is dead to me.

My love should have a grey head-stonee
And green moss at his feet
And clinging grass above his breast
Whereon his lambs could bleat,
And I should know the span of earth
Where some day I might sleep.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

The Lust of the Eyes

I care not for my Lady's soul
Though I worship before her smile;
I care not where be my Lady's goal
When her beauty shall lose its wile.

Low sit I down at my Lady's feet
Gazing through her wild eyes
Smiling to think how my love will fleet
When their starlike beauty dies.

I care not if my Lady pray
To our Father which is in Heaven
But for joy my heart's quick pulses play
For to me her love is given.

Then who shall close my Lady's eyes
And who shall fold her hands?
Will any hearken if she cries
Up to the unknown lands?

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

The Passing of Love

O God, forgive me that I ranged
My life into a dream of love!
Will tears of anguish never wash
The passion from my blood?

Love kept my heart in a song of joy,
My pulses quivered to the tune;
The coldest blasts of winter blew
Upon me like sweet airs in June.

Love floated on the mists of morn
And rested on the sunset's rays;
He calmed the thunder of the storm
And lighted all my ways.

Love held me joyful through the day
And dreaming ever through the night;
No evil thing could come to me,
My spirit was so light.

O Heaven help my foolish heart
Which heeded not the passing time
That dragged my idol from its place
And shattered all its shrine.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

True Love

Farewell, Earl Richard,
Tender and brave;
Kneeling I kiss
The dust from thy grave.

Pray for me, Richard,
Lying alone
With hands pleading earnestly,
All in white stone.

Soon must I leave thee
This sweet summer tide;
That other is waiting
To claim his pale bride.

Soon I'll return to thee
Hopeful and brave,
When the dead leaves
Blow over thy grave.

Then shall they find me
Close at thy head
Watching or fainting,
Sleeping or dead.

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal

Worn Out

Thy strong arms are around me, love
My head is on thy breast;
Low words of comfort come from thee
Yet my soul has no rest.

For I am but a startled thing
Nor can I ever be
Aught save a bird whose broken wing
Must fly away from thee.

I cannot give to thee the love
I gave so long ago,
The love that turned and struck me down
Amid the blinding snow.

I can but give a failing heart
And weary eyes of pain,
A faded mouth that cannot smile
And may not laugh again.

Yet keep thine arms around me, love,
Until I fall to sleep;
Then leave me, saying no goodbye
Lest I might wake, and weep.

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