

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Henry King**

**- poems -**

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## **A Contemplation upon Flowers**

BRAVE flowers--that I could gallant it like you,  
And be as little vain!  
You come abroad, and make a harmless show,  
And to your beds of earth again.  
You are not proud: you know your birth:  
For your embroider'd garments are from earth.

You do obey your months and times, but I  
Would have it ever Spring:  
My fate would know no Winter, never die,  
Nor think of such a thing.  
O that I could my bed of earth but view  
And smile, and look as cheerfully as you!

O teach me to see Death and not to fear,  
But rather to take truce!  
How often have I seen you at a bier,  
And there look fresh and spruce!  
You fragrant flowers! then teach me, that my breath  
Like yours may sweeten and perfume my death.

Henry King

## A Renunciation

WE, that did nothing study but the way  
To love each other, with which thoughts the day  
Rose with delight to us and with them set,  
Must learn the hateful art, how to forget.  
We, that did nothing wish that Heaven could give  
Beyond ourselves, nor did desire to live  
Beyond that wish, all these now cancel must,  
As if not writ in faith, but words and dust.  
Yet witness those clear vows which lovers make,  
Witness the chaste desires that never brake  
Into unruly heats; witness that breast  
Which in thy bosom anchor'd his whole rest--  
'Tis no default in us: I dare acquite  
Thy maiden faith, thy purpose fair and white  
As thy pure self. Cross planets did envy  
Us to each other, and Heaven did untie  
Faster than vows could bind. Oh, that the stars,  
When lovers meet, should stand opposed in wars!

Since then some higher Destinies command,  
Let us not strive, nor labour to withstand  
What is past help. The longest date of grief  
Can never yield a hope of our relief:  
Fold back our arms; take home our fruitless loves,  
That must new fortunes try, like turtle-doves  
Dislodged from their haunts. We must in tears  
Unwind a love knit up in many years.  
In this last kiss I here surrender thee  
Back to thyself.--So, thou again art free:  
Thou in another, sad as that, resend  
The truest heart that lover e'er did lend.  
Now turn from each: so fare our sever'd hearts  
As the divorced soul from her body parts.

Henry King

## Exequy on his Wife

ACCEPT, thou shrine of my dead saint,  
Instead of dirges this complaint;  
And for sweet flowers to crown thy herse  
Receive a strew of weeping verse  
From thy grieved friend, whom thou might'st see  
Quite melted into tears for thee.

Dear loss! since thy untimely fate,  
My task hath been to meditate  
On thee, on thee! Thou art the book,  
The library whereon I look,  
Tho' almost blind. For thee, loved clay,  
I languish out, not live, the day....  
Thou hast benighted me; thy set  
This eve of blackness did beget,  
Who wast my day (tho' overcast  
Before thou hadst thy noontide past):  
And I remember must in tears  
Thou scarce hadst seen so many years  
As day tells hours. By thy clear sun  
My love and fortune first did run;  
But thou wilt never more appear  
Folded within my hemisphere,  
Since both thy light and motion,  
Like a fled star, is fall'n and gone,  
And 'twixt me and my soul's dear wish  
The earth now interposed is....

I could allow thee for a time  
To darken me and my sad clime;  
Were it a month, a year, or ten,  
I would thy exile live till then,  
And all that space my mirth adjourn--  
So thou wouldst promise to return,  
And putting off thy ashy shroud  
At length disperse this sorrow's cloud.

But woe is me! the longest date  
Too narrow is to calculate  
These empty hopes: never shall I  
Be so much blest as to descry  
A glimpse of thee, till that day come  
Which shall the earth to cinders doom,  
And a fierce fever must calcine  
The body of this world--like thine,  
My little world! That fit of fire  
Once off, our bodies shall aspire  
To our souls' bliss: then we shall rise  
And view ourselves with clearer eyes  
In that calm region where no night  
Can hide us from each other's sight.

Meantime thou hast her, earth: much good  
May my harm do thee! Since it stood  
With Heaven's will I might not call  
Her longer mine, I give thee all

My short-lived right and interest  
In her whom living I loved best.  
Be kind to her, and prithee look  
Thou write into thy Doomsday book  
Each parcel of this rarity  
Which in thy casket shrined doth lie,  
As thou wilt answer Him that lent--  
Not gave--thee my dear monument.  
So close the ground, and 'bout her shade  
Black curtains draw: my bride is laid.  
Sleep on, my Love, in thy cold bed  
Never to be disquieted!  
My last good-night! Thou wilt not wake  
Till I thy fate shall overtake:  
Till age, or grief, or sickness must  
Marry my body to that dust  
It so much loves; and fill the room  
My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.  
Stay for me there: I will not fail  
To meet thee in that hollow vale.  
And think not much of my delay:  
I am already on the way,  
And follow thee with all the speed  
Desire can make, or sorrows breed.  
Each minute is a short degree  
And every hour a step towards thee....  
'Tis true--with shame and grief I yield--  
Thou, like the van, first took'st the field;  
And gotten hast the victory  
In thus adventuring to die  
Before me, whose more years might crave  
A just precedence in the grave.  
But hark! my pulse, like a soft drum,  
Beats my approach, tells thee I come;  
And slow howe'er my marches be  
I shall at last sit down by thee.  
The thought of this bids me go on  
And wait my dissolution  
With hope and comfort. Dear--forgive  
The crime--I am content to live  
Divided, with but half a heart,  
Till we shall meet and never part.

Henry King

## The Exequy

1 Accept, thou shrine of my dead saint,  
2 Instead of dirges, this complaint;  
3 And for sweet flow'rs to crown thy hearse,  
4 From thy griev'd friend, whom thou might'st see  
5 Quite melted into tears for thee.  
6 Dear loss! since thy untimely fate  
7 My task hath been to meditate  
8 On thee, on thee; thou art the book,  
9 The library whereon I look,  
10 Though almost blind. For thee (lov'd clay)  
11 I languish out, not live, the day,  
12 Using no other exercise  
13 But what I practise with mine eyes;  
14 By which wet glasses I find out  
15 How lazily time creeps about  
16 To one that mourns; this, only this,  
17 My exercise and bus'ness is.  
18 So I compute the weary hours  
19 With sighs dissolved into showers.

20 Nor wonder if my time go thus  
21 Backward and most preposterous;  
22 Thou hast benighted me; thy set  
23 This eve of blackness did beget,  
24 Who wast my day (though overcast  
25 Before thou hadst thy noon-tide past)  
26 And I remember must in tears,  
27 Thou scarce hadst seen so many years  
28 As day tells hours. By thy clear sun  
29 My love and fortune first did run;  
30 But thou wilt never more appear  
31 Folded within my hemisphere,  
32 Since both thy light and mot<sup>{i}</sup>on  
33 Like a fled star is fall'n and gone;  
34 And 'twixt me and my soul's dear wish  
35 An earth now interposed is,  
36 Which such a strange eclipse doth make  
37 As ne'er was read in almanac.

38 I could allow thee for a time  
39 To darken me and my sad clime;  
40 Were it a month, a year, or ten,  
41 I would thy exile live till then,  
42 And all that space my mirth adjourn,  
43 So thou wouldst promise to return,  
44 And putting off thy ashy shroud,  
45 At length disperse this sorrow's cloud.

46 But woe is me! the longest date

47 Too narrow is to calculate  
48 These empty hopes; never shall I  
49 Be so much blest as to descry  
50 A glimpse of thee, till that day come  
51 Which shall the earth to cinders doom,  
52 And a fierce fever must calcine  
53 The body of this world like thine,  
54 (My little world!). That fit of fire  
55 Once off, our bodies shall aspire  
56 To our souls' bliss; then we shall rise  
57 And view ourselves with clearer eyes  
58 In that calm region where no night  
59 Can hide us from each other's sight.

60 Meantime, thou hast her, earth; much good  
61 May my harm do thee. Since it stood  
62 With heaven's will I might not call  
63 Her longer mine, I give thee all  
64 My short-liv'd right and interest  
65 In her whom living I lov'd best;  
66 With a most free and bounteous grief,  
67 I give thee what I could not keep.  
68 Be kind to her, and prithee look  
69 Thou write into thy doomsday book  
70 Each parcel of this rarity  
71 Which in thy casket shrin'd doth lie.  
72 See that thou make thy reck'ning straight,  
73 And yield her back again by weight;  
74 For thou must audit on thy trust  
75 Each grain and atom of this dust,  
76 As thou wilt answer Him that lent,  
77 Not gave thee, my dear monument.

78 So close the ground, and 'bout her shade  
79 Black curtains draw, my bride is laid.

80 Sleep on my love in thy cold bed  
81 Never to be disquieted!  
82 My last good-night! Thou wilt not wake  
83 Till I thy fate shall overtake;  
84 Till age, or grief, or sickness must  
85 Marry my body to that dust  
86 It so much loves, and fill the room  
87 My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.  
88 Stay for me there, I will not fail  
89 To meet thee in that hollow vale.  
90 And think not much of my delay;  
91 I am already on the way,  
92 And follow thee with all the speed

93 Desire can make, or sorrows breed.  
94 Each minute is a short degree,  
95 And ev'ry hour a step towards thee.  
96 At night when I betake to rest,  
97 Next morn I rise nearer my west  
98 Of life, almost by eight hours' sail,  
99 Than when sleep breath'd his drowsy gale.

100 Thus from the sun my bottom steers,  
101 And my day's compass downward bears;  
102 Nor labour I to stem the tide  
103 Through which to thee I swiftly glide.  
104 'Tis true, with shame and grief I yield,  
105 Thou like the van first took'st the field,  
106 And gotten hath the victory  
107 In thus adventuring to die  
108 Before me, whose more years might crave  
109 A just precedence in the grave.  
110 But hark! my pulse like a soft drum  
111 Beats my approach, tells thee I come;  
112 And slow howe'er my marches be,  
113 I shall at last sit down by thee.

114 The thought of this bids me go on,  
115 And wait my dissolut<sup>i</sup>on  
116 With hope and comfort. Dear (forgive  
117 The crime) I am content to live  
118 Divided, with but half a heart,  
119 Till we shall meet and never part.

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