

Classic Poetry Series

Nicholas Breton

- poems -

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A Cradle Song, The Arbor of Amorous Devices, 1593-4

COME little babe, come silly soul,
Thy father's shame, thy mother's grief,
Born as I doubt to all our dole,
And to thyself unhappy chief:
 Sing lullaby, and lap it warm,
 Poor soul that thinks no creature harm.

Thou little think'st and less dost know
The cause of this thy mother's moan;
Thou want'st the wit to wail her woe,
And I myself am all alone:
 Why dost thou weep? why dost thou wail?
 And know'st not yet what thou dost ail.

Come, little wretch--ah, silly heart!
Mine only joy, what can I more?
If there be any wrong thy smart,
That may the destinies implore:
 'Twas I, I say, against my will,
 I wail the time, but be thou still.

And dost thou smile? O, thy sweet face!
Would God Himself He might thee see!--
No doubt thou wouldst soon purchase grace,
I know right well, for thee and me:
 But come to mother, babe, and play,
 For father false is fled away.

Sweet boy, if it by fortune chance
Thy father home again to send,
If death do strike me with his lance,
Yet mayst thou me to him commend:
 If any ask thy mother's name,
 Tell how by love she purchased blame.

Then will his gentle heart soon yield:
I know him of a noble mind:
Although a lion in the field,
A lamb in town thou shalt him find:
 Ask blessing, babe, be not afraid,
 His sugar'd words hath me betray'd.

Then mayst thou joy and be right glad;
Although in woe I seem to moan,
Thy father is no rascal lad,
A noble youth of blood and bone:
 His glancing looks, if he once smile,
 Right honest women may beguile.

Come, little boy, and rock asleep;
Sing lullaby and be thou still;
I, that can do naught else but weep,

Will sit by thee and wail my fill:
God bless my babe, and lullaby
From this thy father's quality.

Nicholas Breton

Phillida and Coridon

IN the merry month of May,
In a morn by break of day,
Forth I walk'd by the wood-side
When as May was in his pride:
There I spied all alone
Phillida and Coridon.
Much ado there was, God wot!
He would love and she would not.
She said, Never man was true;
He said, None was false to you.
He said, He had loved her long;
She said, Love should have no wrong.
Coridon would kiss her then;
She said, Maids must kiss no men
Till they did for good and all;
Then she made the shepherd call
All the heavens to witness truth
Never loved a truer youth.
Thus with many a pretty oath,
Yea and nay, and faith and troth,
Such as silly shepherds use
When they will not Love abuse,
Love, which had been long deluded,
Was with kisses sweet concluded;
And Phillida, with garlands gay,
Was made the Lady of the May.

Nicholas Breton

The Passionate Shepherd

Who can live in heart so glad
As the merry country lad?
Who upon a fair green balk
May at pleasure sit and walk,
And amid the azure skies
See the morning sun arise;
While he hears in every spring
How the birds do chirp and sing;
Or before the hounds in cry
See the hare go stealing by;
Or along the shallow brook
Angling with a baited hook,
See the fishes leap and play
In a blessed sunny day;
Or to hear the partridge call
Till she have her covey all;
Or to see the subtle fox,
How the villain plies the box,
After feeding on his prey
How he closely sneaks away
Through the hedge and down the furrow,
Till he gets into his burrow;
Then the bee to gather honey,
And the little black hair'd coney
On a bank for sunny place
With her forefeet wash her face:
Are not these, with thousands moe
Than the courts of kings do know,
The true pleasing-spirits sights
That may breed true love's delights?

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