

Classic Poetry Series

**Walter de la Mare**  
**- poems -**

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## Walter de la Mare(1873 - 1958)

Sir Walter de la Mare was born in Charlton, Kent, in the south of England, of well-to-do parents. His father, James Edward Delamaere, was an official of the Bank of England. His mother, Lucy Sophia (Browning) Delamare, was related to the poet Robert Browning. He was educated in London at St. Paul's Cathedral Choir School, which he left at age 16. From 1890 to 1908 he worked in London in the accounting department of the Anglo-American Oil Company. His career as a writer started from about 1895 and he continued to publish to the end of his life. His first published story, 'Kismet' (1895), appeared in the Sketch under the pseudonym Walter Ramal.

In 1908 de la Mare was awarded a yearly government pension of £100, and he devoted himself entirely to writing. He retired to Taplow in Buckinghamshire, where he lived with his wife, Constance Elfrida Ingpen, and four children. His son Richard became chairman of Faber & Faber, and published several of his father's books. In 1915 he became one of the legatees of his fellow poet Rupert Brooke. De la Mare received the CH in 1948, and the OM in 1953. He died at Twickenham, near London, on June 22, 1958. De la Mare is buried in St Paul's Cathedral.

His first stories and poems De la Mare wrote for periodicals, among others for The Sketch, and published in 1902 a collection of poetry, SONGS OF CHILDHOOD, under the name Walter Ramal. It attracted little notice. Subsequently De la Mare published many volumes of poetry for both adults and children. In 1904 appeared under his own name the prose romance HENRY BROCKEN, in which the young hero encounters writers from the past.

THE RETURN (1910) was an eerie story of spirit possession. Arthur Lawford suspects that an eighteenth-century pirate, Nicholas Sabathier, is seizing control of his personality. "'Here lie ye bones of one, Nicholas Sabathier,' he began murmuring again - 'merely bones, mind you; brains and heart are quite another story. And it's pretty certain the fellow had some kind of brains. Besides, poor devil, he killed himself. That seems to hint at brains...'"

De la Mare's first successful book was The Listeners; the title poem is one of his most anthologized pieces. In the work supernatural presence haunts the solitary Traveller, the typical speaker of his poems: "Is there anybody there? said the Traveller, / Knocking on the moonlit door; / And his horse in the silence champed the grasses / Of the forest's ferny floor.... / But no one descended to the Traveller; / No head from the leaf-fringed sill / Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes, / Where he stood perplexed and still." In 1923 he produced a

collection of other people's poetry, COME HITHER. In his poems de la Mare has described the English sea and coast, the secret and hidden world of nature.

His favorite themes, childhood, death, dreams, commonplace objects and events, de la Mare examined with a touch of mystery and often with an undercurrent of melancholy. His novels have been reprinted many times in horror collections because of their sense of wonder, and also hidden malevolence. However, De la Mare did not have the morbid atmosphere of Poe, but his dreamlike visions had much similarities with Blake.

# A Song Of Enchantment

A song of Enchantment I sang me there,  
In a green-green wood, by waters fair,  
Just as the words came up to me  
I sang it under the wild wood tree.

Widdershins turned I, singing it low,  
Watching the wild birds come and go;  
No cloud in the deep dark blue to be seen  
Under the thick-thatched branches green.

Twilight came: silence came:  
The planet of Evening's silver flame;  
By darkening paths I wandered through  
Thickets trembling with drops of dew.

But the music is lost and the words are gone  
Of the song I sang as I sat alone,  
Ages and ages have fallen on me -  
On the wood and the pool and the elder tree.

Walter de la Mare

# Alexander

It was the Great Alexander,  
Capped with a golden helm,  
Sate in the ages, in his floating ship,  
In a dead calm.

Voices of sea-maids singing  
Wandered across the deep:  
The sailors labouring on their oars  
Rowed as in sleep.

All the high pomp of Asia,  
Charmed by that siren lay,  
Out of their weary and dreaming minds  
Faded away.

Like a bold boy sate their Captain,  
His glamour withered and gone,  
In the souls of his brooding mariners,  
While the song pined on.

Time like a falling dew,  
Life like the scene of a dream  
Laid between slumber and slumber  
Only did seem. . . .

O Alexander, then,  
In all us mortals too,  
Wax not so overbold  
On the wave dark-blue!

Come the calm starry night,  
Who then will hear  
Aught save the singing  
Of the sea-maids clear?

Walter de la Mare

# All But Blind

All but blind  
In his chambered hole,  
Gropes for worms  
The four-clawed mole.

All but blind  
In the evening sky,  
The hooded Bat  
Twirls softly by.

All but blind  
In the burning day,  
The barn owl  
Blunders on her way.

And blind as are  
These three to me,  
So blind to someone  
I must be.

Walter de la Mare

# All That's Past

Very old are the woods;  
And the buds that break  
Out of the brier's boughs,  
When March winds wake,  
So old with their beauty are--  
Oh, no man knows  
Through what wild centuries  
Roves back the rose.  
Very old are the brooks;  
And the rills that rise  
Where snow sleeps cold beneath  
The azure skies  
Sing such a history  
Of come and gone,  
Their every drop is as wise  
As Solomon.

Very old are we men;  
Our dreams are tales  
Told in dim Eden  
By Eve's nightingales;  
We wake and whisper awhile,  
But, the day gone by,  
Silence and sleep like fields  
Of amaranth lie.

Walter de la Mare

# Alone

The abode of the nightingale is bare,  
Flowered frost congeals in the gelid air,  
The fox howls from his frozen lair:  
Alas, my loved one is gone,  
I am alone:  
It is winter.

Once the pink cast a winy smell,  
The wild bee hung in the hyacinth bell,  
Light in effulgence of beauty fell:  
I am alone:  
It is winter.

My candle a silent fire doth shed,  
Starry Orion hunts o'erhead;  
Come moth, come shadow, the world is dead:  
Alas, my loved one is gone,  
I am alone;  
It is winter.

Walter de la Mare

# An Epitaph

Here lies a most beautiful lady,  
Light of step and heart was she;  
I think she was the most beautiful lady  
That ever was in the West Country.

But beauty vanishes, beauty passes;  
However rare -- rare it be;  
And when I crumble, who will remember  
This lady of the West Country.

Walter de la Mare

# Arabia

Far are the shades of Arabia,  
Where the Princes ride at noon,  
'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets,  
Under the ghost of the moon;  
And so dark is that vaulted purple  
Flowers in the forest rise  
And toss into blossom 'gainst the phantom stars  
Pale in the noonday skies.

Sweet is the music of Arabia  
In my heart, when out of dreams  
I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn  
Descry her gliding streams;  
Hear her strange lutes on the green banks  
Ring loud with the grief and delight  
Of the dim-silked, dark-haired Musicians  
In the brooding silence of night.

They haunt me -- her lutes and her forests;  
No beauty on earth I see  
But shadowed with that dream recalls  
Her loveliness to me:  
Still eyes look coldly upon me,  
Cold voices whisper and say --  
'He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia,  
They have stolen his wits away.'

Walter de la Mare

# As I Was Walking

As I was walking,  
Thyme sweet to my nose,  
Green grasshoppers talking,  
Rose rivalling rose:  
And wing, like amber,  
Dispread in light,  
As from bush to bush  
Linnet took flight:  
Master Rabbit I saw  
In the shadow-rimmed mouth  
Of his sandy cavern,  
Looking out to the South.  
'Twas dew-tide coming;  
The turf was sweet  
To nostril, curved tooth,  
And wool-soft feet.  
Sun was in West;  
Crystal in beam  
Of its golden shower  
Did his round eye gleam.  
Lank human was I,  
And a foe, poor soul—  
Snowy flit of a scut,  
He was into his hole,  
And—stamp, stamp, stamp!  
Through dim labyrinths clear,  
The whole world darkened,  
A murderer near.

Walter de la Mare

## At Ease

Most wounds can Time repair;  
But some are mortal -- these:  
For a broken heart there is no balm,  
No cure for a heart at ease --

At ease, but cold as stone,  
Though the intellect spin on,  
And the feat and practiced face may show  
Nought of the life that is gone;

But smiles, as by habit taught;  
And sighs, as by custom led;  
And the soul within is safe from damnation,  
Since it is dead.

Walter de la Mare

## AUTUMN (November)

There is a wind where the rose was,  
Cold rain where sweet grass was,  
And clouds like sheep  
Stream o'er the steep  
Grey skies where the lark was.

Nought warm where your hand was,  
Nought gold where your hair was,  
But phantom, forlorn,  
Beneath the thorn,  
Your ghost where your face was.

Cold wind where your voice was,  
Tears, tears where my heart was,  
And ever with me,  
Child, ever with me,  
Silence where hope was.

Walter de la Mare

# Bones

Said Mr. Smith, "I really cannot  
Tell you, Dr. Jones—  
The most peculiar pain I'm in—  
I think it's in my bones."

Said Dr. Jones, "Oh, Mr. Smith,  
That's nothing. Without doubt  
We have a simple cure for that;  
It is to take them out."

He laid forthwith poor Mr. Smith  
Close-clamped upon the table,  
And, cold as stone, took out his bones  
As fast as he was able.

Smith said, "Thank you, thank you, thank you,"  
And wished him a good-day;  
And with his parcel 'neath his arm  
He slowly moved away.

Walter de la Mare

# Brueghel's Winter

Jagg'd mountain peaks and skies ice-green  
Wall in the wild, cold scene below.  
Churches, farms, bare copse, the sea  
In freezing quiet of winter show;  
Where ink-black shapes on fields in flood  
Curling, skating, and sliding go.  
To left, a gabled tavern; a blaze;  
Peasants; a watching child; and lo,  
Muffled, mute--beneath naked trees  
In sharp perspective set a-row--  
Trudge huntsmen, sinister spears aslant,  
Dogs snuffling behind them in the snow;  
And arrowlike, lean, athwart the air  
Swoops into space a crow.

But flame, nor ice, nor piercing rock,  
Nor silence, as of a frozen sea,  
Nor that slant inward infinite line  
Of signboard, bird, and hill, and tree,  
Give more than subtle hint of him  
Who squandered here life's mystery.

Walter de la Mare

# Comfort

As I mused by the hearthside,  
Puss said to me;  
'there burns the fire , man,  
and here sit we.

Four walls around us  
against the cold air;  
and the latch drawn close  
to the draughty stair.

A roof o'er our heads  
star-proof, moon immune,  
and a wind in the chimney  
to wail us a tune.'

'What felicity!' miaowed he,  
'where none may intrude;  
just man and beast- met  
in this solitude!'

'Dear God, what security,  
comfort and bliss!  
and to think, too what ages  
have brought us to this!'

'You in your sheep's' wool coat,  
buttons of bone,  
and me in my fur-about  
on the warm hearthstone'

Walter de la Mare

# Dry August Burned

Dry August burned. A harvest hare  
Limp on the kitchen table lay,  
Its fur blood-blubbered, eye astare,  
While a small child that stood near by  
Wept out her heart to see it there.

Sharp came the clop of hoofs, the clang  
Of dangling chain, voices that rang  
Out like a leveret she ran,  
To feast her glistening bird-clear eyes  
On a team of field artillery  
Gay, to manaeuvres, thudding by.  
Spur and gun and limber plate  
Flashed in the sun. Alert, elate,  
Noble horses, foam at lip,  
Harness, stirrup, holster, whip,  
She watched the sun-tanned soldiery,  
Till dust-white hedge had hidden away —  
Its din into a rumour thinned —  
The laughing, jolting, wild array:  
And then — the wonder and tumult gone —  
Stood nibbling a green leaf, alone,  
Her dark eyes, dreaming. . . . She turned, and ran,  
Elf-like, into the house again.  
The hare had vanished. . . . ' Mother, ' she said,  
Her tear-stained cheek now flushed with red,  
' Please, may I go and see it skinned? '

Walter de la Mare

# Fare Well

When I lie where shades of darkness  
Shall no more assail mine eyes,  
Nor the rain make lamentation  
When the wind sighs;  
How will fare the world whose wonder  
Was the very proof of me?  
Memory fades, must the remembered  
Perishing be?

Oh, when this my dust surrenders  
Hand, foot, lip, to dust again,  
May these loved and loving faces  
Please other men!  
May the rusting harvest hedgerow  
Still the Traveller's Joy entwine,  
And as happy children gather  
Posies once mine.

Look thy last on all things lovely,  
Every hour. Let no night  
Seal thy sense in deathly slumber  
Till to delight  
Thou have paid thy utmost blessing;  
Since that all things thou wouldst praise  
Beauty took from those who loved them  
In other days.

Walter de la Mare

# Ghost

'Who knocks? ' 'I, who was beautiful  
Beyond all dreams to restore,  
I from the roots of the dark thorn am hither,  
And knock on the door.'

'Who speaks? ' 'I -- once was my speech  
Sweet as the bird's on the air,  
When echo lurks by the waters to heed;  
'Tis I speak thee fair.'

'Dark is the hour!' 'Aye, and cold.'  
'Lone is my house.' 'Ah, but mine? '  
'Sight, touch, lips, eyes gleamed in vain.'  
'Long dead these to thine.'

Silence. Still faint on the porch  
Brake the flames of the stars.  
In gloom groped a hope-wearied hand  
Over keys, bolts, and bars.

A face peered. All the grey night  
In chaos of vacancy shone;  
Nought but vast sorrow was there --  
The sweet cheat gone.

Walter de la Mare

# Gloria Mundi

Upon a bank, easeless with knobs of gold,  
Beneath a canopy of noonday smoke,  
I saw a measureless Beast, morose and bold,  
With eyes like one from filthy dreams awoke,  
Who stares upon the daylight in despair  
For very terror of the nothing there.

This beast in one flat hand clutched vulture-wise  
A glittering image of itself in jet,  
And with the other groped about its eyes  
To drive away the dreams that pestered it;  
And never ceased its coils to toss and beat  
The mire encumbering its feeble feet.

Sharp was its hunger, though continually  
It seemed a cud of stones to ruminate,  
And often like a dog let glittering lie  
This meatless fare, its foolish gaze to sate;  
Once more convulsively to stoop its jaw,  
Or seize the morsel with an envious paw.

Indeed, it seemed a hidden enemy  
Must lurk within the clouds above that bank,  
It strained so wildly its pale, stubborn eye,  
To pierce its own foul vapours dim and dank;  
Till, wearied out, it raved in wrath and foam,  
Daring that Nought Invisible to come.

Ay, and it seemed some strange delight to find  
In this unmeaning din, till, suddenly,  
As if it heard a rumour on the wind,  
Or far away its freer children cry,  
Lifting its face made-quiet, there it stayed,  
Till died the echo its own rage had made.

That place alone was barren where it lay;  
Flowers bloomed beyond, utterly sweet and fair;  
And even its own dull heart might think to stay  
In livelong thirst of a clear river there,  
Flowing from unseen hills to unheard seas,  
Through a still vale of yew and almond trees.

And then I spied in the lush green below  
Its tortured belly, One, like silver, pale,  
With fingers closed upon a rope of straw,  
That bound the Beast, squat neck to hoary tail;  
Lonely in all that verdure faint and deep,  
He watched the monster as a shepherd sheep.

I marvelled at the power, strength, and rage  
Of this poor creature in such slavery bound;  
Fettered with worms of fear; forlorn with age;  
Its blue wing-stumps stretched helpless on the ground;  
While twilight faded into darkness deep,  
And he who watched it piped its pangs asleep.

Walter de la Mare

# Good-Bye

The last of last words spoken is, Good-bye -  
The last dismantled flower in the weed-grown hedge,  
The last thin rumour of a feeble bell far ringing,  
The last blind rat to spurn the mildewed rye.

A hardening darkness glasses the haunted eye,  
Shines into nothing the watcher's burnt-out candle,  
Wreathes into scentless nothing the wasting incense,  
Faints in the outer silence the hunting-cry.

Love of its muted music breathes no sigh,  
Thought in her ivory tower gropes in her spinning,  
Toss on in vain the whispering trees of Eden,  
Last of all last words spoken is, Good-bye.

Walter de la Mare

# Hi!

Hi! Handsome hunting man,  
Fire your little gun,  
Bang! Now that animal  
Is dead and dumb and done.  
Never more to peep again, creep again, leap again,  
Eat or sleep or drink again, oh, what fun!

Walter de la Mare

# How Sleep The Brave

Bitterly, England must thou grieve —  
Though none of these poor men who died  
But did within his soul believe  
That death for thee was glorified.

Ever they watched it hovering near —  
A mystery beyond thought to plumb —  
And often, in loathing and in fear,  
They heard cold danger whisper, Come! —

Heard, and obeyed. Oh, if thou weep  
Such courage and honour, woe, despair;  
Remember too that those who sleep  
No more remorse can share.

Walter de la Mare

# I Can't Abear

I can't abear a butcher,  
I can't abide his meat,  
The ugliest shop of all is his,  
The ugliest in the street;  
Bakers' are warm, cobblers' dark  
Chemists' burn watery lights;  
But oh, the sawdust butchers shop  
That ugliest of sights.

Walter de la Mare

# John Mouldy

I spied John Mouldy in his celler,  
Deep down twenty steps of stone;  
In the dusk he sat a-smiling  
Smiling there all alone.

He read no book, he snuffed no candle;  
The rats ran in, the rats ran out,  
And far and near, the drip of water  
Went whisp'ring about.

The dusk was still, with dew a-falling,  
I saw the Dog-star bleak and grim,  
I saw a slim brown rat of Norway  
Creep over him.

I spied John Mouldy in his celler,  
Deep down twenty steps of stone;  
In the dusk he sat a-smiling  
Smiling there all alone.

Walter de la Mare

# Martha

"Once...Once upon a time..."  
Over and over again,  
Martha would tell us her stories,  
In the hazel glen.

Hers were those clear gray eyes  
You watch, and the story seems  
Told by their beautifulness  
Tranquil as dreams.

She'd sit with her two slim hands  
Clasped round her bended knees;  
While we on our elbows lolled,  
And stared at ease.

Her voice and her narrow chin,  
Her grave small lovely head,  
Seemed half the meaning  
Of the words she said.

"Once...Once upon a time..."  
Like a dream you dream in the night,  
Fairies and gnomes stole out  
In the leaf-green light.

And her beauty far away  
Would fade, as her voice ran on,  
Till hazel and summer sun  
And all were gone:--

All fordone and forgot;  
And like clouds in the height of the sky,  
Our hearts stood still in the hush  
Of an age gone by.

Walter de la Mare

# Melmillo

Three and thirty birds there stood  
In an elder in a wood;  
Called Melmillo -- flew off three,  
Leaving thirty in the tree;  
Called Melmillo -- nine now gone,  
And the boughs held twenty-one;  
Called Melmillo -- and eighteen  
Left but three to nod and preen;  
Called Melmillo -- three--two--one--  
Now of birds were feathers none.

Then stole slim in  
To that wood all dusk and green,  
And with lean long palms outspread  
Softly a strange dance did tread;  
Not a note of music she  
Had for echoing company;  
All the birds were flown to rest  
In the hollow of her breast;  
In the wood -- thorn, elder willow --  
Danced alone -- lone danced Melmillo.

Walter de la Mare

## Miss Loo

When thin-strewn memory I look through,  
I see most clearly poor Miss Loo,  
Her tabby cat, her cage of birds,  
Her nose, her hair -- her muffled words,  
And how she'd open her green eyes,  
As if in some immense surprise,  
Whenever as we sat at tea,  
She made some small remark to me.

It's always drowsy summer when  
From out the past she comes again;  
The westering sunshine in a pool  
Floats in her parlour still and cool;  
While the slim bird its lean wires shakes,  
As into piercing song it breaks  
Till Peter's pale-green eyes ajar  
Dream, wake; wake, dream, in one brief bar;  
And I am sitting , dull and shy  
And she with gaze of vacancy,  
And large hands folded on the tray,  
Musing the afternoon away;  
Her satin bosom heaving slow  
With sighs that softly ebb and flow,  
And her plain face in such dismay,  
It seems unkind to look her way:  
Until all cheerful back will come  
Her cheerful gleaming spirit home:  
And one would think that poor Miss Loo  
Asked nothing else, if she had you.

Walter de la Mare

## Miss T

It's a very odd thing -  
As odd can be -  
That whatever Miss T eats  
Turns into Miss T.;  
Porridge and apples,  
Mince, muffins and mutton,  
Jam, junket, jumbles -  
Not a rap, not a button  
It matters; the moment  
They're out of her plate,  
Though shared by Miss Butcher  
And sour Mr. Bate;  
Tiny and cheerful,  
And neat as can be,  
Whatever Miss T. eats  
Turns into Miss T.

Walter de la Mare

# Mistletoe

Sitting under the mistletoe  
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe),  
One last candle burning low,  
All the sleepy dancers gone,  
Just one candle burning on,  
Shadows lurking everywhere:  
Some one came, and kissed me there.

Tired I was; my head would go  
Nodding under the mistletoe  
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe),  
No footsteps came, no voice, but only,  
Just as I sat there, sleepy, lonely,  
Stooped in the still and shadowy air  
Lips unseen - and kissed me there.

Walter de la Mare

# Moonlight

The far moon maketh lovers wise  
In her pale beauty trembling down,  
Lending curved cheeks, dark lips, dark eyes,  
A strangeness not their own.  
And, though they shut their lids to kiss,  
In starless darkness peace to win,  
Even on that secret world from this  
Her twilight enters in.

Walter de la Mare

# Mulla-Mulgars' Journey Song

That one, alone,  
Who's dared and gone  
To seek the Magic Wonderstone,  
No fear, or care,  
Or black despair  
Shall heed until his journey's done.

Who knows, where grows  
The Mulgars' rose,  
In valleys 'neath unmelting snows -  
All secrets, he  
Shall pierce and see,  
And walk unharmed where'er he goes.

Walter de la Mare

# Music

When music sounds, gone is the earth I know,  
And all her lovely things even lovelier grow;  
Her flowers in vision flame, her forest trees  
Lift burdened branches, stilled with ecstasies.

When music sounds, out of the water rise  
Naiads whose beauty dims my waking eyes,  
Rapt in strange dreams burns each enchanted face,  
With solemn echoing stirs their dwelling-place.

When music sounds, all that I was I am  
Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came;  
And from Time's woods break into distant song  
The swift-winged hours, as I hasten along.

Walter de la Mare

# Napoleon

'What is the world, O soldiers?

It is I:

I, this incessant snow,

This northern sky;

Soldiers, this solitude

Through which we go

Is I.'

Walter de la Mare

# Nicholas Nye

Thistle and darnell and dock grew there,  
And a bush, in the corner, of may,  
On the orchard wall I used to sprawl  
In the blazing heat of the day;

Half asleep and half awake,  
While the birds went twittering by,  
And nobody there my lone to share  
But Nicholas Nye.

Nicholas Nye was lean and gray,  
Lame of leg and old,  
More than a score of donkey's years  
He had been since he was foaled;  
He munched the thistles, purple and spiked,  
Would sometimes stoop and sigh,  
And turn his head, as if he'd said,  
'Poor Nicholas Nye! '

Alone with his shadow he'd drowse in the meadow,  
Lazily swinging his tail,  
At break of day he used to bray,-  
Not much too hearty and hale;  
But a wonderful gumption was under his skin,  
And a clean calm light in his eye,  
And once in a while; he'd smile:-  
Would Nicholas Nye.

Seem to be smiling at me, he would,  
From his bush in the corner, of may,-  
Bony and ownerless, widowed and worn,  
Knobble-kneed, lonely and gray;  
And over the grass would seem to pass  
'Neath the deep dark blue of the sky,  
Something much better than words between me  
And Nicholas Nye.

But dusk would come in the apple boughs,  
The green of the glow-worm shine,

The birds in nest would crouch to rest,  
And home I'd trudge to mine;  
And there, in the moonlight, dark with dew,  
Asking not wherefore nor why,  
Would brood like a ghost, and as still as a post,  
Old Nicholas Nye.

Walter de la Mare

# Nod

Softly along the road of evening,  
In a twilight dim with rose,  
Wrinkled with age, and drenched with dew  
Old Nod, the shepherd, goes.

His drowsy flock streams on before him,  
Their fleeces charged with gold,  
To where the sun's last beam leans low  
On Nod the shepherd's fold.

The hedge is quick and green with briar,  
From their sand the conies creep;  
And all the birds that fly in heaven  
Flock singing home to sleep.

His lambs outnumber a noon's roses,  
Yet, when night's shadows fall,  
His blind old sheep-dog, Slumber-soon,  
Misses not one of all.

His are the quiet steeps of dreamland,  
The waters of no-more-pain,  
His ram's bell rings 'neath an arch of stars,  
'Rest, rest, and rest again.'

Walter de la Mare

# November

THERE is wind where the rose was,  
Cold rain where sweet grass was,  
And clouds like sheep  
Stream o'er the steep  
Grey skies where the lark was.

Nought warm where your hand was,  
Nought gold where your hair was,  
But phantom, forlorn,  
Beneath the thorn,  
Your ghost where your face was.

Cold wind where your voice was,  
Tears, tears where my heart was,  
And ever with me,  
Child, ever with me,  
Silence where hope was.

Walter de la Mare

# Off The Ground

Three jolly Farmers  
Once bet a pound  
Each dance the others would  
Off the ground.  
Out of their coats  
They slipped right soon,  
And neat and nicesome  
Put each his shoon.  
One--Two--Three!  
And away they go,  
Not too fast,  
And not too slow;  
Out from the elm-tree's  
Noonday shadow,  
Into the sun  
And across the meadow.  
Past the schoolroom,  
With knees well bent,  
Fingers a flicking,  
They dancing went.  
Up sides and over,  
And round and round,  
They crossed click-clacking  
The Parish bound;  
By Tupman's meadow  
They did their mile,  
Tee-to-tum  
On a three-barred stile.  
Then straight through Whipham,  
Downhill to Week,  
Footing it lightsome,  
But not too quick,  
Up fields to Watchet  
And on through Wye,  
Till seven fine churches  
They'd seen slip by --  
Seven fine churches,  
And five old mills,  
Farms in the valley,

And sheep on the hills;  
Old Man's Acre  
And Dead Man's Pool  
All left behind,  
As they danced through Wool.  
And Wool gone by,  
Like tops that seem  
To spin in sleep  
They danced in dream:  
Withy -- Wellover --  
Wassop -- Wo --  
Like an old clock  
Their heels did go.  
A league and a league  
And a league they went,  
And not one weary,  
And not one spent.  
And lo, and behold!  
Past Willow-cum-Leigh  
Stretched with its waters  
The great green sea.  
Says Farmer Bates,  
'I puffs and I blows,  
What's under the water,  
Why, no man knows !'  
Says Farmer Giles,  
'My mind comes weak,  
And a good man drowned  
Is far to seek. '  
But Farmer Turvey,  
On twirling toes,  
Up's with his gaiters,  
And in he goes:  
Down where the mermaids  
Pluck and play  
On their twangling harps  
In a sea-green day;  
Down where the mermaids  
Finned and fair,  
Sleek with their combs  
Their yellow hair. . . .  
Bates and Giles --

On the shingle sat,  
Gazing at Turvey's  
Floating hat.  
But never a ripple  
Nor bubble told  
Where he was supping  
Off plates of gold.  
Never an echo  
Rilled through the sea  
Of the feasting and dancing  
And minstrelsy.  
They called -- called -- called;  
Came no reply:  
Nought but the ripples'  
Sandy sigh.  
Then glum and silent  
They sat instead,  
Vacantly brooding  
On home and bed,  
Till both together  
Stood up and said: --  
'Us knows not, dreams not,  
Where you be,  
Turvey, unless  
In the deep blue sea;  
But axcusing silver --  
And it comes most willing --  
Here's us two paying our forty shilling;  
For it's sartin sure, Turvey,  
Safe and sound,  
You danced us a square, Turvey,  
Off the ground.'

Walter de la Mare

# Old Susan

When Susan's work was done, she'd sit  
With one fat guttering candle lit,  
And window opened wide to win  
The sweet night air to enter in;  
There, with a thumb to keep her place  
She'd read, with stern and wrinkled face.  
Her mild eyes gliding very slow  
Across the letters to and fro,  
While wagged the guttering candle flame  
In the wind that through the window came.  
And sometimes in the silence she  
Would mumble a sentence audibly,  
Or shake her head as if to say,  
"You silly souls, to act this way!"  
And never a sound from night I'd hear,  
Unless some far-off cock crowed clear;  
Or her old shuffling thumb should turn  
Another page; and rapt and stern,  
Through her great glasses bent on me,  
She'd glance into reality;  
And shake her round old silvery head,  
With--"You!--I thought you was in bed!"--  
Only to tilt her book again,  
And rooted in Romance remain.

Walter de la Mare

# One Moment Take Thy Rest

One moment take thy rest.  
Out of mere nought in space  
Beauty moved human breast  
To tell in this far face  
A dream in noonday seen.  
Never to fade or pass;  
A breath-time's mute delight;  
A joy in flight:  
The aught desire doth mean  
Sighing, Alas!

Walter de la Mare

# Puss

Puss loves man's winter fire  
Now that the sun so soon  
Leaves the hours cold it warmed  
In burning June.

She purrs full length before  
The heaped-up hissing blaze,  
Drowsy in slumber down  
Her head she lays.

While he with whom she dwells  
Sits snug in his inglenook,  
Stretches his legs to the flame  
And reads his book.

Walter de la Mare

# Seeds

The seeds I sowed -  
For week unseen -  
Have pushed up pygmy  
Shoots of green;  
So frail you'd think  
The tiniest stone  
Would never let  
A glimpse be shown.  
But no; a pebble  
Near them lies,  
At least a cherry-stone  
In size,  
Which that mere sprout  
Has heaved away,  
To bask in sunshine,  
See the Day.

Walter de la Mare

# Sephina

Black lacqueys at the wide-flung door  
Stand mute as men of wood.  
Gleams like a pool the ballroom floor —  
A burnished solitude.  
A hundred waxen tapers shine  
From silver sconces; softly pine  
'Cello, fiddle, mandoline,  
To music deftly wooed —  
And dancers in cambric, satin, silk,  
With glancing hair and cheeks like milk,  
Wreathe, curtsey, intertwine.

The drowse of roses lulls the air  
Wafted up the marble stair.  
Like warbling water clucks the talk.  
From room to room in splendour walk  
Guests, smiling in the æry sheen;  
Carmine and azure, white and green,  
They stoop and languish, pace and preen  
Bare shoulder, painted fan,  
Gemmed wrist and finger, neck of swan;  
And still the pluckt strings warble on;  
Still from the snow-bowered, link-lit street  
The muffled hooves of horses beat;  
And harness rings; and foam-flecked bit  
Clanks as the slim heads toss and stare  
From deep, dark eyes. Smiling, at ease,  
Mount to the porch the pumped grandees  
In lonely state, by twos, and threes,  
Exchanging languid courtesies,  
While torches fume and flare.

And now the banquet calls. A blare  
Of squalling trumpets clots the air.  
And, flocking out, streams up the rout;  
And lilies nod to velvet's swish;  
And peacocks prim on gilded dish,  
Vast pies thick-glazed, and gaping fish,  
Towering confections crisp as ice,

Jellies aglare like cockatrice,  
With thousand savours tongues entice.  
Fruits of all hues barbaric gloom —  
Pomegranate, quince and peach and plum,  
Mandarine, grape, and cherry clear  
Englobe each glassy chandelier,  
Where nectarous flowers their sweets distil —  
Jessamine, tuberose, chamomill,  
Wild-eye narcissus, anemone,  
Tendril of ivy and vinery.

Now odorous wines the goblets fill;  
Gold-cradled meats the menials bear  
From gilded chair to gilded chair:  
Now roars the talk like crashing seas,  
Foams upward to the painted frieze,  
Echoes and ebbs. Still surges in,  
To yelp of hautboy and violin,  
Plumed and bedazzling, rosed and rare,  
Dance-bemused, with cheek aglow,  
Stooping the green-twined portal through,  
Sighing with laughter, debonair,  
That concourse of the proud and fair —  
And lo! 'La, la!  
Mamma ... Mamma!  
Falls a small cry in the dark and calls —  
'I see you standing there!'

Fie, fie, Sephina! not in bed!  
Crouched on the staircase overhead,  
Like ghost she gloats, her lean hand laid  
On alabaster balustrade,  
And gazes on and on  
Down on that wondrous to and fro  
Till finger and foot are cold as snow,  
And half the night is gone;  
And dazzled eyes are sore bestead;  
Nods drowsily the sleek-locked head;  
And, vague and far, spins, fading out,  
That rainbow-coloured, reeling rout,  
And, with faint sighs, her spirit flies  
Into deep sleep....

Come, Stranger, peep!  
Was ever cheek so wan?

Walter de la Mare

# Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon  
Walks the night in her silver shoon;  
This way, and that, she peers, and sees  
Silver fruit upon silver trees;  
One by one the casements catch  
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;  
Couched in his kennel, like a log,  
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;  
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep  
Of doves in silver feathered sleep  
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,  
With silver claws, and silver eye;  
And moveless fish in the water gleam,  
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter de la Mare

# Sleep

When all, and birds, and creeping beasts,  
When the dark of night is deep,  
From the moving wonder of their lives  
Commit themselves to sleep.

Without a thought, or fear, they shut  
The narrow gates of sense;  
Heedless and quiet, in slumber turn  
Their strength to impotence.

The transient strangeness of the earth  
Their spirits no more see:  
Within a silent gloom withdrawn,  
They slumber in secrecy.

Two worlds they have--a globe forgot,  
Wheeling from dark to light;  
And all the enchanted realm of dream  
That burgeons out of night.

Walter de la Mare

# Snow

No breath of wind,  
No gleam of sun –  
Still the white snow  
Whirls softly down  
Twig and bough  
And blade and thorn  
All in an icy  
Quiet, forlorn.  
Whispering, rustling,  
Through the air  
On still and stone,  
Roof, - everywhere,  
It heaps its powdery  
Crystal flakes,  
Of every tree  
A mountain makes;  
'Til pale and faint  
At shut of day  
Stoops from the West  
One wint'ry ray,  
And, feathered in fire  
Where ghosts the moon,  
A robin shrills  
His lonely tune.

Walter de la Mare

## Some One

Some one came knocking  
At my wee, small door;  
Someone came knocking;  
I'm sure-sure-sure;  
I listened, I opened,  
I looked to left and right,  
But nought there was a stirring  
In the still dark night;  
Only the busy beetle  
Tap-tapping in the wall,  
Only from the forest  
The screech-owl's call,  
Only the cricket whistling  
While the dewdrops fall,  
So I know not who came knocking,  
At all, at all, at all.

Walter de la Mare

# Song of the Mad Prince

Who said, &quot;Peacock Pie&quot;?  
The old King to the sparrow:  
Who said, &quot;Crops are ripe&quot;?  
Rust to the harrow:  
Who said, &quot;Where sleeps she now?  
Where rests she now her head,  
Bathed in eve's loveliness&quot;? —  
That's what I said.

Who said, &quot;Ay, mum's the word&quot;?  
Sexton to willow:  
Who said, &quot;Green dusk for dreams,  
Moss for a pillow&quot;?

Who said, &quot;All Time's delight  
Hath she for narrow bed;  
Life's troubled bubble broken&quot;? —  
That's what I said.

Walter de la Mare

# Sotto Voce

To Edward Thomas

The haze of noon wanned silver-grey,  
The soundless mansion of the sun;  
The air made visible in his ray,  
Like molten glass from furnace run,  
Quivered o'er heat-baked turf and stone  
And the flower of the gorse burned on —  
Burned softly as gold of a child's fair hair  
Along each spiky spray, and shed  
Almond-like incense in the air  
Whereon our senses fed.

At foot — a few sparse harebells: blue  
And still as were the friend's dark eyes  
That dwelt on mine, transfixed through  
With sudden ecstatic surmise.

'Hst!' he cried softly, smiling, and lo,  
Stealing amidst that maze gold-green,  
I heard a whispering music flow  
From guileful throat of bird, unseen: —  
So delicate, the straining ear  
Scarce carried its faint syllabing  
Into a heart caught-up to hear  
That inmost pondering  
Of bird-like self with self. We stood,  
In happy trance-like solitude,  
Harkening a lullay grieved and sweet —  
As when on isle uncharted beat  
'Gainst coral at the palm-tree's root,  
With brine-clear, snow-white foam afloat,  
The wailing, not of water or wind —  
A husht, far, wild, divine lament,  
When Prospero his wizardry bent  
Winged Ariel to bind....  
Then silence, and o'er-flooding noon.  
I raised my head; smiled too. And he —  
Moved his great hand, the magic gone —

Gently amused to see  
My ignorant wonderment. He sighed.  
'It was a nightingale,' he said,  
'That sotto voce cons the song  
He'll sing when dark is spread;  
And Night's vague hours are sweet and long,  
And we are laid abed.'

Walter de la Mare

# Sunk Lyonesse

In sea-cold Lyonesse,  
When the Sabbath eve shafts down  
On the roofs, walls, belfries  
Of the foundered town,  
The Nereids pluck their lyres  
Where the green translucency beats,  
And with motionless eyes at gaze  
Make ministrelly in the streets.

And the ocean water stirs  
In salt-worn casement and porch.  
Plies the blunt-nosed fish  
With fire in his skull for torch.  
And the ringing wires resound;  
And the unearthly lovely weep,  
In lament of the music they make  
In the sullen courts of sleep:  
Whose marble flowers bloom for aye:  
And - lapped by the moon-guided tide -  
Mock their carver with heart of stone,  
Caged in his stone-ribbed side.

Walter de la Mare

# Suppose

Suppose ... and suppose that a wild little Horse of Magic  
Came cantering out of the sky,  
With bridle of silver, and into the saddle I mounted,  
To fly — and to fly;

And we stretched up into the air, fleeting on in the sunshine,  
A speck in the gleam,  
On galloping hoofs, his mane in the wind out-flowing,  
In a shadowy stream;

And oh, when, all lone, the gentle star of evening  
Came crinkling into the blue,  
A magical castle we saw in the air, like a cloud of moonlight,  
As onward we flew;

And across the green moat on the drawbridge we foamed and we snorted,  
And there was a beautiful Queen  
Who smiled at me strangely; and spoke to my wild little Horse, too —  
A lovely and beautiful Queen;

And she cried with delight — and delight — to her delicate maidens,  
'Behold my daughter — my dear!'  
And they crowned me with flowers, and then to their harps sate playing,  
Solemn and clear;

And magical cakes and goblets were spread on the table;  
And at window the birds came in;  
Hopping along with bright eyes, pecking crumbs from the platters,  
And sipped of the wine;

And splashing up — up to the roof tossed fountains of crystal;  
And Princes in scarlet and green  
Shot with their bows and arrows, and kneeled with their dishes  
Of fruits for the Queen;

And we walked in a magical garden with rivers and bowers,  
And my bed was of ivory and gold;  
And the Queen breathed soft in my ear a song of enchantment —  
And I never grew old....

And I never, never came back to the earth, oh, never and never;  
How mother would cry and cry!  
There'd be snow on the fields then, and all these sweet flowers in the winter  
Would wither, and die....

Suppose ... and suppose .

Walter de la Mare

# Tartary

If I were Lord of Tartary,  
Myself, and me alone,  
My bed should be of ivory,  
Of beaten gold my throne;  
And in my court should peacocks flaunt,  
And in my forests tigers haunt,  
And in my pools great fishes slant  
Their fins athwart the sun.

If I were Lord of Tartary,  
Trumpeters every day  
To all my meals should summon me,  
And in my courtyards bray;  
And in the evening lamps should shine,  
Yellow as honey, red as wine,  
While harp, and flute, and mandoline  
Made music sweet and gay.

If I were Lord of Tartary,  
I'd wear a robe of beads,  
White, and gold, and green they'd be --  
And small and thick as seeds;  
And ere should wane the morning star,  
I'd don my robe and scimitar.  
And zebras seven should draw my car  
Through Tartary's dark gleades.

Lord of the fruits of Tartary.  
Her rivers silver-pale!  
Lord of the hills of Tartary.  
Glen, thicket, wood, and dale!  
Her flashing stars, her scented breeze,  
Her trembling lakes, like foamless seas,  
Her bird-delighting citron-trees,  
In every purple vale!

Walter de la Mare

# The Birthnight

Dearest, it was a night  
That in its darkness rocked Orion's stars;  
A sighing wind ran faintly white  
Along the willows, and the cedar boughs  
Laid their wide hands in stealthy peace across  
The starry silence of their antique moss:  
No sound save rushing air  
Cold, yet all sweet with Spring,  
And in thy mother's arms, couched weeping there,  
Thou, lovely thing.

Walter de la Mare

# The Children Of Stare

Winter is fallen early  
On the house of Stare;  
Birds in reverberating flocks  
Haunt its ancestral box;  
Bright are the plenteous berries  
In clusters in the air.

Still is the fountain's music,  
The dark pool icy still,  
Whereupon a small and sanguine sun  
Floats in a mirror on,  
Into a West of crimson,  
From a South of daffodil.

'Tis strange to see young children  
In such a wintry house;  
Like rabbits' on the frozen snow  
Their tell-tale footprints go;  
Their laughter rings like timbrels  
'Neath evening ominous:

Their small and heightened faces  
Like wine-red winter buds;  
Their frolic bodies gentle as  
Flakes in the air that pass,  
Frail as the twirling petal  
From the briar of the woods.

Above them silence lours,  
Still as an arctic sea;  
Light fails; night falls; the wintry moon  
Glitters; the crocus soon  
Will open grey and distracted  
On earth's austerity:

Thick mystery, wild peril,  
Law like an iron rod:—  
Yet sport they on in Spring's attire,  
Each with his tiny fire  
Blown to a core of ardour  
By the awful breath of God.

Walter de la Mare

# The Corner Stone

Sterile these stones  
By time in ruin laid.  
Yet many a creeping thing  
Its haven has made  
In these least crannies, where falls  
Dark's dew, and noonday shade.

The claw of the tender bird  
Finds lodgment here;  
Dye-winged butterflies poise;  
Emmet and beetle steer  
Their busy course; the bee  
Drones, laden, near.

Their myriad-mirrored eyes  
Great day reflect.  
By their exquisite farings  
Is this granite specked;  
Is trodden to infinite dust;  
By gnawing lichens decked.

Toward what eventual dream  
Sleeps its cold on,  
When into ultimate dark  
These lives shall be gone,  
And even of man not a shadow remain  
Of all he has done?

Walter de la Mare

# The Empty House

See this house, how dark it is  
Beneath its vast-boughed trees!  
Not one trembling leaflet cries  
To that Watcher in the skies—  
'Remove, remove thy searching gaze,  
Innocent of heaven's ways,  
Brood not, Moon, so wildly bright,  
On secrets hidden from sight.'

'Secrets,' sighs the night-wind,  
'Vacancy is all I find;  
Every keyhole I have made  
Wails a summons, faint and sad,  
No voice ever answers me,  
Only vacancy.'  
'Once, once ... ' the cricket shrills,  
And far and near the quiet fills  
With its tiny voice, and then  
Hush falls again.

Mute shadows creeping slow  
Mark how the hours go.  
Every stone is mouldering slow.  
And the least winds that blow  
Some minutest atom shake,  
Some fretting ruin make  
In roof and walls. How black it is  
Beneath these thick boughed trees!

Walter de la Mare

# The Fly

How large unto the tiny fly  
Must little things appear!-  
A rosebud like a feather bed,  
Its prickle like a spear;

A dewdrop like a looking-glass,  
A hair like golden wire;  
The smallest grain of mustard-see  
As fierce as coals of fire;

A loaf of bread, a lofty hill;  
A wasp, a cruel leopard;  
And specks of sale as bright to see  
As lambkins to a shepherd.

Walter de la Mare

# The Fool Rings His Bells (MOTLEY)

Come, Death, I'd have a word with thee;  
And thou, poor Innocency;  
And Love - a lad with broken wing;  
And Pity, too;  
The Fool shall sing to you,  
As Fools will sing.

Ay, music hath small sense,  
And a tune's soon told,  
And Earth is old,  
And my poor wits are dense;  
Yet have I secrets, - dar, my dear,  
To breathe you all: Come near.  
And lest some hideous listener tells,  
I'll ring my bells.

They're all at war!  
Yes, yes, their bodies go  
'Neath burning sun and icy star  
To chaunted songs of woe,  
Dragging cold cannon through a mud  
Of rain and blood;  
The new moon glinting hard on eyes  
Wide with insanities.

Hush! ... I use words  
I hardly know the meaning of;  
And the mute birds  
Are glancing at Love!  
From out their shade of leaf and flower,  
Trembling at treacheries  
Which even in noonday cower.  
Heed, heed not what I said  
Of frenzied hosts of men,  
More fools than I,  
On envy, hatred fed,  
Who kill, and die -  
Spake I not plainly, then?  
Yet Pity whispered, 'Why? '

Thou silly thing, off to thy daisies go.  
Mine was not news for child to know,  
And Death - no ears hath. He hath supped where creep  
Eyeless worms in hush of sleep;  
Yet, when he smiles, the hand he draws  
Athwart his grinning jaws  
Faintly their thin bones rattle, and... There, there;  
Hearken how my bells in the air  
Drive away care! ...

Nay, but a dream I had  
Of a world all mad.  
Not a simple happy mad like me,  
Who am mad like an empty scene  
Of water and willow tree,  
Where the wind hath been;  
But that foul Satan-mad,  
Who rots in his own head,  
And counts the dead,  
Not honest one - and two -  
But for the ghosts they were,  
Brave, faithful, true,  
When, heads in air,  
In Earth's clear green and blue  
Heaven they did share  
With Beauty who bade them there....

There, now! he goes -  
Old Bones; I've wearied him.  
Ay, and the light doth dim,  
And asleep's the rose,  
And tired Innocence  
In dreams is hence...  
Come, Love, my lad,  
Nodding that drawsy head,  
'T is time thy prayers were said!

Walter de la Mare

# The Ghost

Peace in thy hands,  
Peace in thine eyes,  
Peace on thy brow;  
Flower of a moment in the eternal hour,  
Peace with me now.

Not a wave breaks,  
Not a bird calls,  
My heart, like a sea,  
Silent after a storm that hath died,  
Sleeps within me.

All the night's dews,  
All the world's leaves,  
All winter's snow  
Seem with their quiet to have stilled in life's dream  
All sorrowing now.

Walter de la Mare

# The Huntsmen

Three jolly gentlemen,  
In coats of red,  
Rode their horses  
Up to bed.

Three jolly gentlemen  
Snored till morn,  
Their horses champing  
The golden corn.

Three jolly gentlemen  
At break of day,  
Came clitter-clatter down the stairs  
And galloped away.

Walter de la Mare

# The Keys Of Morning

While at her bedroom window once,  
Learning her task for school,  
Little Louisa lonely sat  
In the morning clear and cool,  
She slanted her small bead-brown eyes  
Across the empty street,  
And saw Death softly watching her  
In the sunshine pale and sweet.

His was a long lean sallow face;  
He sat with half-shut eyes,  
Like a old sailor in a ship  
Becalmed 'neath tropic skies.  
Beside him in the dust he had set  
His staff and shady hat;  
These, peeping small, Louisa saw  
Quite clearly where she sat -  
The thinness of his coal-black locks,  
His hands so long and lean  
They scarcely seemed to grasp at all  
The keys that hung between:  
Both were of gold, but one was small,  
And with this last did he  
Wag in the air, as if to say,  
"Come hither, child, to me!"

Louisa laid her lesson book  
On the cold window-sill;  
And in the sleepy sunshine house  
Went softly down, until  
She stood in the half-opened door,  
And peeped. But strange to say  
Where Death just now had sunning sat  
Only a shadow lay:  
Just the tall chimney's round-topped cowl,  
And the small sun behind,  
Had with its shadow in the dust  
Called sleepy Death to mind.  
But most she thought how strange it was

Two keys that he should bear,  
And that, when beckoning, he should wag  
The littlest in the air.

Walter de la Mare

# The Linnet

Upon this leafy bush  
With thorns and roses in it,  
Flutters a thing of light,  
A twittering linnet.  
And all the throbbing world  
Of dew and sun and air  
By this small parcel of life  
Is made more fair;  
As if each bramble-spray  
And mounded gold-wreathed furze,  
Harebell and little thyme,  
Were only hers;  
As if this beauty and grace  
Did to one bird belong,  
And, at a flutter of wing,  
Might vanish in song.

Walter de la Mare

# The Listeners

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door;  
And his horse in the silence champed the grass  
Of the forest's ferny floor;  
And a bird flew up out of the turret,  
Above the Traveller's head:  
And he smote upon the door again a second time;  
"Is there anybody there?" he said.  
But no one descended to the Traveller;  
No head from the leaf-fringed sill  
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,  
Where he stood perplexed and still.  
But only a host of phantom listeners  
That dwelt in the lone house then  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men:  
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,  
That goes down to the empty hall,  
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken  
By the lonely Traveller's call.  
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,  
Their stillness answering his cry,  
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,  
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;  
For he suddenly smote on the door, even  
Louder, and lifted his head:--  
"Tell them I came, and no one answered,  
That I kept my word," he said.  
Never the least stir made the listeners,  
Though every word he spake  
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house  
From the one man left awake:  
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,  
And the sound of iron on stone,  
And how the silence surged softly backward,  
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

Walter de la Mare

# The Market-Place

My mind is like a clamorous market-place.  
All day in wind, rain, sun, its babel wells;  
Voice answering to voice in tumult swells.  
Chaffering and laughing, pushing for a place,  
My thoughts haste on, gay, strange, poor, simple, base;  
This one buys dust, and that a bauble sells:  
But none to any scrutiny hints or tells  
The haunting secrets hidden in each sad face.

The clamour quietens when the dark draws near;  
Strange looms the earth in twilight of the West,  
Lonely with one sweet star serene and clear,  
Dwelling, when all this place is hushed to rest,  
On vacant stall, gold, refuse, worst and best,  
Abandoned utterly in haste and fear.

Walter de la Mare

# The Mocking Fairy

'Won't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill?'  
Quoth the Fairy, nidding, nodding in the garden;  
'Can't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill?'  
Quoth the Fairy, laughing softly in the garden;  
But the air was still, the cherry boughs were still,  
And the ivy-tod neath the empty sill,  
And never from her window looked out Mrs. Gill  
On the Fairy shrilly mocking in the garden.

'What have they done with you, you poor Mrs. Gill?'  
Quoth the Fairy brightly glancing in the garden;  
'Where have they hidden you, you poor old Mrs. Gill?'  
Quoth the Fairy dancing lightly in the garden;  
But night's faint veil now wrapped the hill,  
Stark 'neath the stars stood the dead-still Mill,  
And out of her cold cottage never answered Mrs. Gill  
The Fairy mimbling, mambbling in the garden.

Walter de la Mare

# The Moth

Isled in the midnight air,  
Musked with the dark's faint bloom,  
Out into glooming and secret haunts  
The flame cries, 'Come!'

Lovely in dye and fan,  
A-tremble in shimmering grace,  
A moth from her winter swoon  
Uplifts her face:

Stares from her glamorous eyes;  
Wafts her on plumes like mist;  
In ecstasy swirls and sways  
To her strange tryst.

Walter de la Mare

# The Mother Bird

Through the green twilight of a hedge

I peered, with cheek on the cool leaves pressed,

And spied a bird upon a nest:

Two eyes she had beseeching me

Meekly and brave, and her brown breast

Throbb'd hot and quick above her heart;

And then she oped her dagger bill, -

'Twas not a chirp, as sparrows pipe

At break of day; 'twas not a trill,

As falters through the quiet even;

But one sharp solitary note,

One desperate, fierce, and vivid cry

Of valiant tears, and hopeless joy,

One passionate note of victory:

Off, like a fool afraid, I sneaked,

Smiling the smile the fool smiles best,

At the mother bird in the secret hedge

Patient upon her lonely nest.

Walter de la Mare

# The Night-Swans

'Tis silence on the enchanted lake,  
And silence in the air serene,  
Save for the beating of her heart,  
The lovely-eyed Evangeline.

She sings across the waters clear  
And dark with trees and stars between,  
The notes her fairy godmother  
Taught her, the child Evangeline.

As might the unrippled pool reply,  
Faltering an answer far and sweet,  
Three swans as white as mountain snow  
Swim mantling to her feet.

And still upon the lake they stay,  
Their eyes black stars in all their snow,  
And softly, in the glassy pool,  
Their feet beat darkly to and fro.

She rides upon her little boat,  
Her swans swim through the starry sheen,  
Rowing her into Fairyland-  
The lovely-eyed Evangeline.

'Tis silence on the enchanted lake,  
And silence in the air serene;  
Voices shall call in vain again  
On earth the child Evangeline.

'Evangeline! Evangeline!'  
Upstairs, downstairs, all in vain.  
Her room is dim; her flowers faded;  
She answers not again.

Walter de la Mare

# The Old Men

Old and alone, sit we,  
Caged, riddle-rid men;  
Lost to earth's 'Listen!' and 'See!'  
Thought's 'Wherefore?' and 'When?'

Only far memories stray  
Of a past once lovely, but now  
Wasted and faded away,  
Like green leaves from the bough.

Vast broods the silence of night,  
The ruinous moon  
Lifts on our faces her light,  
Whence all dreaming is gone.

We speak not; trembles each head;  
In their sockets our eyes are still;  
Desire as cold as the dead;  
Without wonder or will.

And One, with a lanthorn, draws near,  
At clash with the moon in our eyes:  
'Where art thou?' he asks: 'I am here,'  
One by one we arise.

And none lifts a hand to withhold  
A friend from the touch of that foe:  
Heart cries unto heart, 'Thou art old!'  
Yet reluctant, we go.

Walter de la Mare

# The Pigs And The Charcoal-Burner

The old Pig said to the little pigs,  
'In the forest is truffles and mast,  
Follow me then, all ye little pigs,  
Follow me fast!'

The Charcoal-burner sat in the shade  
With his chin oil his thumb,  
And saw the big Pig and the little pigs  
Chuffling come.

He watched 'neath a green and giant bough,  
And the pigs in the ground  
Made a wonderful grisling and gruzzling  
And greedy sound.

And when, full-fed, they were gone, and Night  
Walked her starry ways,  
He stared with his cheeks in his hands  
At his sullen blaze.

Walter de la Mare

# The Remonstrance

I was at peace until you came  
And set a careless mind aflame;  
I lived in quiet; cold, content;  
All longing in safe banishment,  
Until your ghostly lips and eyes  
Made wisdom unwise.

Naught was in me to tempt your feet  
To seek a lodging. Quite forgot  
Lay the sweet solitude we two  
In childhood used to wander through;  
Time's cold had closed my heart about,  
And shut you out.

Well, and what then? . . . O vision grave,  
Take all the little all I have!  
Strip me of what in voiceless thought  
Life's kept of life, un hoped, unsought! --  
Reverie and dream that memory must  
Hide deep in dust!

This only I say: Though cold and bare,  
The haunted house you have chosen to share,  
Still 'neath its walls the moonbeam goes  
And trembles on the untended rose;  
Still o'er its broken roof-tree rise  
The starry arches of the skies;  
And 'neath your lightest word shall be  
The thunder of an ebbing sea.

Walter de la Mare

# The Ruin

When the last colours of the day  
Have from their burning ebbed away,  
About that ruin, cold and lone,  
The cricket shrills from stone to stone;  
And scattering o'er its darkened green,  
Bands of fairies may be seen,  
Clattering like grasshoppers, their feet  
Dancing a thistledown dance round it:  
While the great gold of the mild moon  
Tinges their tiny acorn shoon.

Walter de la Mare

# The Scarecrow

All winter through I bow my head  
beneath the driving rain;  
the North Wind powders me with snow  
and blows me black again;  
at midnight 'neath a maze of stars  
I flame with glittering rime,  
and stand above the stubble, stiff  
as mail at morning-prime.  
But when that child called Spring, and all  
his host of children come,  
scattering their buds and dew upon  
these acres of my home,  
some rapture in my rags awakes;  
I lift void eyes and scan  
the sky for crows, those ravening foes,  
of my strange master, Man.  
I watch him striding lank behind  
his clashing team, and know  
soon will the wheat swish body high  
where once lay a sterile snow;  
soon I shall gaze across a sea  
of sun-begotten grain,  
which my unflinching watch hath sealed  
for harvest once again.

Walter de la Mare

# The Scribe

What lovely things  
Thy hand hath made:  
The smooth-plumed bird  
In its emerald shade,  
The seed of the grass,  
The speck of the stone  
Which the wayfaring ant  
Stirs -- and hastes on!

Though I should sit  
By some tarn in thy hills,  
Using its ink  
As the spirit wills  
To write of Earth's wonders,  
Its live, willed things,  
Flit would the ages  
On soundless wings  
Ere unto Z  
My pen drew nigh  
Leviathan told,  
And the honey-fly:  
And still would remain  
My wit to try --  
My worn reeds broken,  
The dark tarn dry,  
All words forgotten --  
Thou, Lord, and I.

Walter de la Mare

# The Seas Of England

The seas of England are our old delight:  
Let the loud billow of the shingly shore  
Sing freedom on her breezes evermore  
To all earth's ships that sailing heave in sight!

The gaunt sea-nettle be our fortitude,  
Sturdily blowing where the clear wave sips;  
O, be the glory of our men and ships  
Rapturous, woe unheeding hardihood!

There is great courage in a land that hath  
Liberty guarded by the unearthly seas;  
And ev'n to find peace at the last in these  
How many a sailor hath sailed down to death!

Their names are like a splendour in an old song;  
Their record shines like bays along the years;  
Their jubilation is the cry man hears  
Sailing sun-fronted the vast deeps among.

The seas of England are our old delight:  
Let the loud billow of the shingly shore  
Sing freedom on her breezes evermore  
To all earth's ships that sailing heave in sight!

Walter de la Mare

# The Sleeper

As Ann came in one summer's day,  
She felt that she must creep,  
So silent was the clear cool house,  
It seemed a house of sleep.  
And sure, when she pushed open the door,  
Rapt in the stillness there,  
Her mother sat, with stooping head,  
Asleep upon a chair;  
Fast -- fast asleep; her two hands laid  
Loose-folded on her knee,  
So that her small unconscious face  
Looked half unreal to be:  
So calmly lit with sleep's pale light  
Each feature was; so fair  
Her forehead -- every trouble was  
Smooth'd out beneath her hair.

But though her mind in dream now moved,  
Still seemed her gaze to rest  
From out beneath her fast-sealed lids,  
Above her moving breast,  
On Ann, as quite, quite still she stood;  
Yet slumber lay so deep  
Even her hands upon her lap  
Seemed saturate with sleep.  
And as Ann peeped, a cloudlike dread  
Stole over her, and then,  
On stealthy, mouselike feet she trod,  
And tiptoed out again.

Walter de la Mare

# The Song Of Finis

At the edge of All the Ages  
A Knight sate on his steed,  
His armor red and thin with rust  
His soul from sorrow freed;  
And he lifted up his visor  
From a face of skin and bone,  
And his horse turned head and whinnied  
As the twain stood there alone.

No bird above that steep of time  
Sang of a livelong quest;  
No wind breathed,  
Rest:  
"Lone for an end!" cried Knight to steed,  
Loosed an eager rein--  
Charged with his challenge into space:  
And quiet did quiet remain.

Walter de la Mare

# The Song Of Shadows

"Sweep thy faint strings, Musician,  
With thy long lean hand;  
Downward the starry tapers burn,  
Sinks soft the waning sand;  
The old hound whimpers couched in sleep,  
The embers smoulder low;  
Across the walls the shadows  
Come, and go.

Sweep softly thy strings, Musician,  
The minutes mount to hours;  
Frost on the windless casement weaves  
A labyrinth of flowers;  
Ghosts linger in the darkening air,  
Hearken at the open door;  
Music hath called them, dreaming,  
Home once more."

Walter de la Mare

# The Spirit Of Air

Coral and clear emerald,  
And amber from the sea,  
Lilac-coloured amethyst,  
Chalcedony;  
The lovely Spirit of Air  
Floats on a cloud and doth ride,  
Clad in the beauties of earth  
Like a bride.

So doth she haunt me; and words  
Tell but a tithe of the tale.  
Sings all the sweetness of Spring  
Even in the nightengale?  
Nay, but with echoes she cries  
Of the valley of love;  
Dews on the thorns of her feet,  
And darkness above.

Walter de la Mare

# The Strangers

Dim-berried is the mistletoe  
With globes of sheenless grey,  
The holly mid ten thousand thorns  
Smoulders its fires away;  
And in the manger Jesus sleeps  
This Christmas Day.

Bull unto bull with hollow throat  
Makes echo every hill,  
Cold sheep in pastures thick with snow  
The air with bleating fill;  
While of his mother's heart this Babe  
Takes His sweet will.

All flowers and butterflies lie hid,  
The blackbird and the thrush  
Pipe but a little as they flit  
Restless from bush to bush  
Even to the robin Gabriel hath  
Cried softly 'Hush!'

Now night's astir with burning stars  
In darkness of the snow;  
Burdened with frankincense and myrrh  
And gold the Strangers go  
Into a dusk where one dim lamp  
Burns softly, lo!

No snowdrop yet its small head nods  
In winds of winter drear;  
No lark at casement in the sky  
Sings matins shrill and clear;  
Yet in this frozen mirk the Dawn  
Breathes, Spring is here!

Walter de la Mare

# The Sunken Garden

Speak not — whisper not;  
Here bloweth thyme and bergamot;  
Softly on the evening hour,  
Secret herbs their spices shower,  
Dark-spiked rosemary and myrrh,  
Lean-stalked, purple lavender;  
Hides within her bosom, too,  
All her sorrows, bitter rue.

Breathe not — trespass not;  
Of this green and darkling spot,  
Latticed from the moon's beams,  
Perchance a distant dreamer dreams;  
Perchance upon its darkening air,  
The unseen ghosts of children fare,  
Faintly swinging, sway and sweep,  
Like lovely sea-flowers in its deep;  
While, unmoved, to watch and ward,  
'Mid its gloomed and daisied sward,  
Stands with bowed and dewy head  
That one little leaden Lad.

Walter de la Mare

# The Three Strangers

Far are those tranquil hills,  
Dyed with fair evening's rose;  
On urgent, secret errand bent,  
A traveller goes.

Approach him strangers three,  
Barefooted, cowed; their eyes  
Scan the lone, hastening solitary  
With dumb surmise.

One instant in close speech  
With them he doth confer:  
God-spced, he hasteneth on,  
That anxious traveller...

I was that man — in a dream:  
And each world's night in vain  
I patient wait on sleep to unveil  
Those vivid hills again.

Would that they three could know  
How yet burns on in me  
Love — from one lost in Paradise —  
For their grave courtesy.

Walter de la Mare

# The Titmouse

If you would happy company win,  
Dangle a palm-nut from a tree,  
Idly in green to sway and spin,  
Its snow-pulped kernel for bait; and see,  
A nimble titmouse enter in.

Out of earth's vast unknown of air,  
Out of all summer, from wave to wave,  
He'll perch, and prank his feathers fair,  
Jangle a glass-clear wildering stave,  
And take his commons there —

This tiny son of life; this spright,  
By momentary Human sought,  
Plume will his wing in the dappling light,  
Clash timbrel shrill and gay —  
And into time's enormous nought,  
Sweet-fed, will flit away.

Walter de la Mare

# The Tryst

Flee into some forgotten night and be  
Of all dark long my moon-bright company:  
Beyond the rumour even of Paradise come,  
There, out of all remembrance, make our home:  
Seek we some close hid shadow for our lair,  
Hollowed by Noah's mouse beneath the chair  
Wherein the Omnipotent, in slumber bound,  
Nods till the piteous Trump of Judgment sound.  
Perchance Leviathan of the deep sea  
Would lease a lost mermaid's grot to me,  
There of your beauty we would joyance make —

A music wistful for the sea-nymph's sake:  
Haply Elijah, o'er his spokes of fire,  
Cresting steep Leo, or the heavenly Lyre,  
Spied, tranced in azure of inanest space,  
Some eyrie hostel, meet for human grace,  
Where two might happy be — just you and I —

Lost in the uttermost of Eternity.  
Think! in Time's smallest clock's minutest beat  
Might there not rest be found for wandering feet?  
Or, 'twixt the sleep and wake of Helen's dream,  
Silence wherein to sing love's requiem?

No, no. Nor earth, nor air, nor fire, nor deep  
Could lull poor mortal longingness asleep.  
Somewhere there nothing is; and there lost Man  
Shall win what changeless vague of peace he can.

Walter de la Mare

# The Veil

I think and think: yet still I fail —  
Why must this lady wear a veil?  
Why thus elect to mask her face  
Beneath that dainty web of lace?  
The tip of a small nose I see,  
And two red lips, set curiously  
Like twin-born berries on one stem,  
And yet, she has netted even them.  
Her eyes, 'tis plain, survey with ease  
Whate'er to glance upon they please.  
Yet, whether hazel, gray, or blue,  
Or that even lovelier lilac hue,  
I cannot guess: why — why deny  
Such beauty to the passer-by?  
Out of a bush a nightingale  
May expound his song; from 'neath that veil  
A happy mouth no doubt can make  
English sound sweeter for its sake.  
But then, why muffle in like this  
What every blossomy wind would kiss?  
Why in that little night disguise  
A daybreak face, those starry eyes?

Walter de la Mare

# The Widow

Grief hath pacified her face;  
Even hope might share so still a place;  
Yet, on the silence of her heart,  
Haply, if a strange footfall start,  
Or a chance word of ecstasy  
Cry through dim cloistered memory,  
Into her eyes her soul will steal  
To gaze into the irrevocable --  
As if death had not power to keep  
One who has loved her long asleep.

Now all things lovely she looks on  
Seem lovely in oblivion;  
And all things mute what shall not be  
Richer than any melody.  
Her narrow hands, like birds that make  
A nest for some old instinct's sake,  
Have hollowed a refuge for her face --  
A narrow and a quiet place --  
Where, far from the world's light, she may  
See clearer what is passed away.

And only little children know  
Through what dark gates her smile may go.

Walter de la Mare

# The World Of Dream

Now, through the dusk  
With muffled bell  
The Dustman comes  
The World to tell,  
Night's elfin lanterns  
Burn and gleam  
in the twilight, wonderful  
World of Dream.

Hollow and dim  
Sleep's boat doth ride,  
Heavily still  
At the waterside.  
Patter, patter,  
The children come,  
Yawning and sleepy,  
Out of the gloom.

Like droning bees  
in a garden green.  
Over the thwarts  
They clamber in.  
And lovely Sleep  
With long-drawn oar  
Turns away  
From the whispering shore.

Over the water  
Like roses glide  
Her hundreds of passengers  
Packed inside,  
To where in her garden  
Tremble and gleam  
The harps and lamps  
Of the World of Dream.

Walter de la Mare

# Tit For Tat

Have you been catching fish, Tom Noddy?  
Have you snared a weeping hare?  
Have you whistled 'No Nunny' and gunned a poor bunny,  
Or blinded a bird of the air?

Have you trod like a murderer through the green woods,  
Through the dewy deep dingles and glooms,  
While every small creature screamed shrill to Dame Nature  
'He comes - and he comes!'

Wonder I very much do, Tom Noddy,  
If ever, when off you roam,  
An ogre from space will stoop a lean face,  
And lug you home:

Lug you home over his fence, Tom Noddy,  
Of thorn-sticks nine yards high,  
With your bent knees strung round his old iron gun  
And your head a dan-dangling by:

And hung you up stiff on a hook, Tom Noddy,  
From a stone-cold pantry shelf,  
Whence your eyes will glare in an empty stare,  
Till you are cooked yourself!

Walter de la Mare

# Tom's Little Dog

Tom told his dog called Tim to beg,  
And up at once he sat,  
His two clear amber eyes fixed fast,  
His haunches on his poised a lump of sugar on  
His nose; then, 'Trust! ' says he;  
Stiff as a guardsman sat his Tim;  
Never a hair stirred he.

'Paid for! ' says Tom; and in a trice  
Up jerked that moist black nose;  
A snap of teeth, a crunch, a munch,  
And down the sugar goes!

Walter de la Mare

# Unstooping

Low on his fours the Lion  
Treads with the surly Bear;  
But Men straight upward from the dust  
Walk with their heads in the air;  
The free sweet winds of heaven,  
The sunlight from on high  
Beat on their clear bright cheeks and browns  
As they go striding by;  
The doors of all their houses  
They arch so they may go,  
Uplifted o'er the four-foot beasts,  
Unstooping, to and fro.

Walter de la Mare

# Up And Down

Down the Hill of Ludgate,  
Up the Hill of Fleet,  
To and fro and East and West  
With people flows the street;  
Even the King of England  
On Temple Bar must beat  
For leave to ride to Ludgate  
Down the Hill of Fleet.

Walter de la Mare

# Wanderers

Wide are the meadows of night,  
And daisies are shining there,  
Tossing their lovely dews,  
Lustrous and fair;

And through these sweet fields go,  
Wanderers amid the stars --  
Venus, Mercury, Uranus, Neptune,  
Saturn, Jupiter, Mars.

'Tired in their silver, they move,  
And circling, whisper and say,  
Fair are the blossoming meads of delight  
Through which we stray.

Walter de la Mare

# When The Rose Is Faded

When the rose is faded,  
Memory may still dwell on  
Her beauty shadowed,  
And the sweet smell gone.

That vanishing loveliness,  
That burdening breath,  
No bond of life hath then,  
Nor grief of death.

'Tis the immortal thought  
Whose passion still  
Makes the changing  
The unchangeable.

Oh, thus thy beauty,  
Loveliest on earth to me,  
Dark with no sorrow, shines  
And burns, with thee.

Walter de la Mare

# Why?

Ever, ever  
Stir and shiver  
The reeds and rushes  
By the river:  
Ever, ever,  
As if in dream,  
The lone moon's silver  
Sleeks the stream.  
What old sorrow,  
What lost love,  
Moon, reeds, rushes,  
Dream you of?

Walter de la Mare

# Winter

Clouded with snow  
The cold winds blow,  
And shrill on leafless bough  
The robin with its burning breast  
Alone sings now.

The rayless sun,  
Day's journey done,  
Sheds its last ebbing light  
On fields in leagues of beauty spread  
Unearthly white.

Thick draws the dark,  
And spark by spark,  
The frost-fires kindle, and soon  
Over that sea of frozen foam  
Floats the white moon.

Walter de la Mare

# Winter Dusk

Dark frost was in the air without,  
The dusk was still with cold and gloom,  
When less than even a shadow came  
And stood within the room.

But the three around the fire,  
None turned a questioning head to look,  
Still read a clear voice, on and on,  
Still stooped they o'er their book.

The children watched their mother's eyes  
Moving on softly line to line;  
It seemed to listen too -- that shade,  
Yet made no outward sign.

The fire-flames crooned a tiny song,  
No cold wind moved the wintry tree;  
The children both in Faerie dreamed  
Beside their mother's knee.

And nearer yet that spirit drew  
Above that heedless one, intent  
Only on what the simple words  
Of her small story meant.

No voiceless sorrow grieved her mind,  
No memory her bosom stirred,  
Nor dreamed she, as she read to two,  
'Twas surely three who heard.

Yet when, the story done, she smiled  
From face to face, serene and clear,  
A love, half dead, sprang up, as she  
Leaned close and drew them near.

Walter de la Mare