

HENRY KING

The Exequy

Accept, thou shrine of my dead saint,
 Instead of dirges, this complaint;
 And for sweet flowers to crown thy hearse,
 Receive a strew¹ of weeping verse
 From thy grieved friend, whom thou might'st see 5
 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, 10
 Though almost blind. For thee, loved clay,
 I languish out, not live, the day,
 Using no other exercise
 But what I practice with mine eyes;
 By which wet glasses I find out 15
 How lazily time creeps about
 To one that mourns: this, only this,
 My exercise and business is.
 So I compute the weary hours
 With sighs dissolvèd into showers. 20

Nor wonder if my time go thus
 Backward and most preposterous;
 Thou hast benighted me, thy set²
 This eve of blackness did beget,
 Who wast my day, though overcast 25

1. Scattering.

2. Setting, death. "Preposterous": from the Latin, literally "hind side first."

Before thou hadst thy noontide passed;
 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, 30
 But thou wilt never more appear
 Folded within my hemisphere,
 Since both thy light and motiön
 Like a fled star is fallen and gone;
 And 'twixt me and my soul's dear wish 35
 An earth now interposèd is,
 Which such a strange eclipse doth make
 As ne'er was read in almanac.³

I could allow thee for a time
 To darken me and my sad clime; 40
 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, 45
 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 50
 A glimpse of thee, till that day come
 Which shall the earth to cinders doom,
 And a fierce fever must calcine⁴
 The body of this world—like thine,
 My little world! That fit of fire 55
 Once off, our bodies shall aspire
 To our souls' bliss; then we shall rise
 And view ourselves with clearer eyes

3. The earth, which covers her body and so intervenes between her and her husband, is like an eclipse.

4. Burn down to dust.

THE EXEQUY

3

In that calm region where no night
Can hide us from each other's sight. 60

Meantime, thou hast her, earth: much good
May my harm do thee. Since it stood⁵
With heaven's will I might not call
Her longer mine, I give thee all
My short-lived right and interest 65
In her whom living I loved best;
With a most free and bounteous grief
I give thee what I could not keep.
Be kind to her, and prithee look
Thou write into thy doomsday book 70
Each parcel of this rarity
Which in thy casket shrined doth lie.
See that thou make thy reckoning straight,
And yield her back again by weight;
For thou must audit on thy trust 75
Each grain and atom of this dust,
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. 80

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 85
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. 90
And think not much of my delay;

5. Agreed. "My harm": i.e., this event that harms me so much.

I am already on the way,
 And follow thee with all the speed
 Desire can make, or sorrows breed. 95
 Each minute is a short degree,
 And every hour a step towards thee.
 At night when I betake to rest,
 Next morn I rise nearer my west
 Of life, almost by eight hours' sail,
 Than when sleep breathed his drowsy gale. 100

Thus from the sun my bottom⁶ steers,
 And my day's compass downward bears;
 Nor labor I to stem the tide
 Through which to thee I swiftly glide.

'Tis true, with shame and grief I yield, 105
 Thou like the van⁷ 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. 110
 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, 115
 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. 120

ca. 1624

1657

6. Vessel.

7. Vanguard.