The Exequy

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 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,
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
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.

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

1. Scattering.
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,  
But thou wilt never more appear  
Folded within my hemisphere,  
Since both thy light and motion  
Like a fled star is fallen and gone;  
And 'twixt me and my soul's dear wish  
An earth now interposed 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;  
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 calcine⁴  
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

³. The earth, which covers her body and so intervenes between her and her husband, is like an eclipse.  
⁴. Burn down to dust.
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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 stood⁵
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;
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
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
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.

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;

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

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.
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.

Thus from the sun my bottom 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,
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.

6. Vessel.
7. Vanguard.