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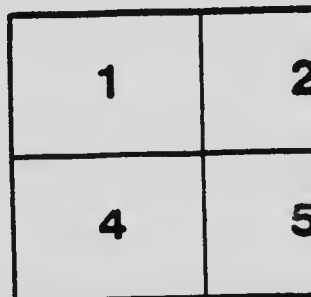
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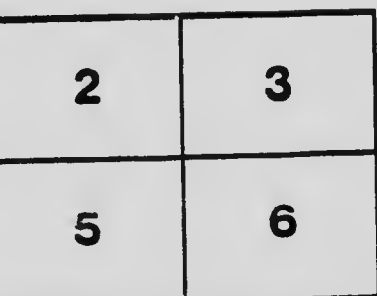
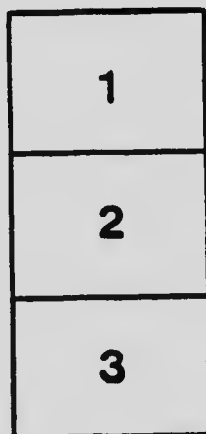
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# When Love Came to the Poet



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*Jessie Mackintosh, Poet*

# When Love Came to the Poet



By JESSIE MACKINTOSH.

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## When Love Came to the Poet

B. JESSIE MACKINTOSH

He was a poet. The long hair, the ascetic face, the scholarly hands, the meditative gait, said as much. As a child, when others had whipped their tops, or played leap-frog, he had philosophised—a habit, according to his maiden aunts, prophetic of early death. Now he was alone in the world. His closest friends had perished in the war. His parents had been long dead. The only woman he had ever loved had died, without giving him the opportunity to speak his thoughts.

This spring afternoon he walked the street, vainly trying to dispel melancholy. There were home fires reflected in youthful faces and on parlour ceilings. He might watch from the pavement, but might not participate. A rotund old gentleman alighted from the bus with a friend. The poet heard his parting words, "No, old chap. Thanks all the same, but my wife's expecting me home. Lucy's birthday to-day and high tea."

The poet saw a vision of a birthday cake in the centre of a crowded tea-table, of presents, and a sly half-crown from grandpa; of games afterwards, and of the gay old gentleman at length fallen asleep from weariness. He half produced his note-book to write a poem on domestic bliss, then he put it back with a jerk, and buttoned his overcoat more closely.

"James Petrarck Brynne, you think you write poetry, and that the thrills you feel will be repeated in other people—you are mistaken. There's your latest poem returned with polite regrets, and your 'Complete Edition' which nobody buys. Your thoughts rise with the wind, but they fade in an echo on the distant hill-slopes. You never ennobled the world; you never uplifted your own soul; you were born to exist, not to live; to be numb, not to feel; to love few, and not to be loved.

"She did once shed tears over that 'Dirge of Life,' and she know, I wonder, that it was the expression of my own experience: that the spirit of spring was her coming into my life, and that the quickly falling mists of autumn signified my despair of her love, and the world's cold reception? Her last words, as she looked into my face, her eyes full of tears, were, 'Mr. Brynne, this is beautiful!'"

The poet sat for a moment on a wayside seat. It was fine now, and the children came trooping home from school. One youngster, attracted by the man's face, came near and put her hands upon his knees.

"You look nice. Shall I say my piece I've been learning at school? Mother says it's the nicest she's heard for a long time; she says it makes her eyes smart less to hear it when she's mending. Grandma, she says it makes her young again, and grandpa, he always takes out his pipe to listen. Here, shall I tell you a secret?"

"Yes; what is it?"

"It's Lucy's birthday to-day. She's two years older than me—thirteen—isn't it an awful age? And we're having a birthday-cake. After tea we shall all sit by the fire, and I shall stand on a hassock and say my piece. I'll say it now for practice—

"The world was glad at Maytime,  
And old folks danced for joy.  
Said Grandpa, "I could climb the pole  
As well as any boy,"  
And Grandma turned the turkey spit  
With twinkles in her eyes.  
"And I could dance with any lord——"

There's Lucy calling. Goodbye. I'll say the rest some time."

The blue bonnet vanished. The lane was full of sunshine, and the poet laughed till he shook the raindrops from the trees. It was his own poem.

He stayed out of doors till the last scolding blackbird had flown off for the night; then he turned to his lodgings with a song in his heart.

Next morning the poet rose early. The sight, through the open window, of fields flooded with sunshine, persuaded him to wear the only coloured tie he possessed. Something was calling him, a spirit intangible. He followed it through the leafless beechwoods, across the fields to the brook.

The stream was glad and called him to rejoice in the heralding of spring:

"Men may come, and men may go,  
But I go on for ever."

"I thought to go on for ever—once. Now I only wish to receive decent burial and refuge from the world's cynicism."

The stream laughed in mockery, then, changing its song to a tenderer note, cast a ragged bunch of papers at his feet. He kicked it away, then picked it up and scanned it curiously. It was part of a volume of poems, much marked and noted. On the first blank page was written:

"To my well-loved friend, Samuel Featherleigh, I give this book, in remembrance of many happy hours spent in its perusal. February, 1905."

"Why, he's had ten years' pleasure out of it! Lucky writer to have given so much joy even to one."

He adjusted his glasses, then nearly fell into the brook. Here was his "Complete Edition."

Leaving the brook, he proceeded up the hill, among the pine-trees. He left the open track for a mossy side-path. The spirit called him still. The pine arms hurried him. The wild birds circled excitedly. All Nature seemed moved. He walked in a dream until he heard the quiet toll of a steeple bell. Where the pine branches parted he saw a grey church with its resting-place.

The spirit called him yet.

He followed through the lichened gate, by the sundial and the porch, till he noticed a grave half hidden by trees. He parted the trees. He read the name—"Alice Charleswood"—and, below, the epitaph.

Not for a long while did he realise the words were the choicest measures from the *Dirge of Life*. When he did, he was glad the churchyard trees hid his face.

Mrs. Macdermott's parlour was dull and horribly stuffy. The family photos, which adorned the walls, were none of them beautiful. Antimacassars of the most distressing colours abounded, and a pair of china dogs on the mantelpiece kept guard over their mistress's possessions.

The poet told them what he thought of them, and was inclined to do the same to Mrs. Macdermott, when she appeared.

"A letter for you, sir."

"Thank you. Kindly shut the door."

There were two letters in the envelope, one open, the other sealed. He took the first, which ran thus—

"Dear Sir,—I have been trying in vain to find your address. Not until I read the review of your *Dirge of Life*, in the *Daily Reflector* did I learn the place of your residence.

"Miss Alice Charleswood, who died three years ago, gave me this note to deliver to you. As she was too ill to speak, it was impossible to obtain your address from her. Her relatives said they did not know you.

"Trusting you will forgive the enforced delay, I send the letter herewith.

"Yours, etc.,

"JOHN BRUCE."

The poet took up the unopened missive. The voice from the dead spoke of things too sacred for other eyes to see. One paragraph, however, must be given.

"I have spoken of the beautiful hours we spent together. Don't think I did not understand. You were struggling. You were thinking and expressing wonderful thoughts; more than you thought, the world was stretching out its hands to take them. I, too, unknown to you, was struggling, but without success.

"I shall not be here when you read this, so I can say what I feel I must. I know that you care for me, and I know that I care for you. That was why I could forget my own failure in watching the development of your genius, and in awaiting its recognition in the hearts of men.

"You are discouraged: wait and hope. You have called: the world will answer. If you never hear the response, remember you have thought noble ideas that you have expressed worthily. And I believe that you will do yet greater things. I go with nothing greater behind me; you will follow with tributes to your memory."

And the poet's heart knew a resurrection greater than that of the springtime. No longer was he alone, an isolated outcast. Away in the Beyond someone was waiting for him; for her sake he would strive to give his best, work his best, live his best—not for any reward or recognition the world might bestow, but because she loved him and believed in him—and he must not fail her.

And into his work there came a new note, a new hope—the message of one who has grown strong to help others through his own suffering. The world heard it, and was helped by it; and forthwith it acclaimed him a genius, and strove to do him honour.

But the poet craved no recognition for himself. "If there is a genius," he declared, "it is the genius of the woman who taught me to forget myself in serving others. The honour is due to her."

