

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Walter de la Mare**

**- poems -**

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## **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 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

## **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

## **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

## **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

## Full Moon

One night as Dick lay half asleep,  
Into his drowsy eyes  
A great still light began to creep  
From out the silent skies.  
It was the lovely moon's, for when  
He raised his dreamy head,  
Her surge of silver filled the pane  
And streamed across his bed.  
So, for a while, each gazed at each --  
Dick and the solemn moon --  
Till, climbing slowly on her way,  
She vanished, and was gone.

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

## **How Sleep the Brave**

Nay, nay, sweet England, do not grieve!  
Not one of these poor men who died  
But did within his soul believe  
That death for thee was glorified.

Ever they watched it hovering near  
That mystery 'yond thought to plumb,  
Perchance sometimes in loathèd fear  
They heard cold Danger whisper, Come! --

Heard and obeyed. O, if thou weep  
Such courage and honour, beauty, care,  
Be it for joy that those who sleep  
Only thy joy could share.

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 Me.millo 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

## 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 to his head, as if he 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

## 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

## 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

## **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

## **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

## 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 Fool Rings His Bells

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 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 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, mambling in the garden.

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 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 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 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

## **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 mat. Tom 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

## **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