

“Elegy V: On the the Death of a Lady” by William Mason

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A **LITERARY GOTHIC** etext.

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The midnight clock has toll'd; and hark, the bell
Of Death beats slow! Heard ye the note profound?
It pauses now; and now, with rising knell,
Flings to the hollow gale its sullen sound.
Yes, ----- is dead. Attend the strain, 5
Daughters of Albion! ye that, light as air,
So oft have tript in her fantastic train,
With hearts as gay, and faces half as fair:
For she was fair beyond your brightest bloom
(This Envy owns, since now her bloom is fled) 10
Fair as the forms, that, wove in Fancy's loom,
Float in light vision round the Poet's head.
Whene'er with soft serenity she smil'd,
Or caught the orient blush of quick surprise,
How sweetly mutable, how brightly wild, 15
The liquid lustre darted from her eyes?
Each look, each motion wak'd a new-born grace,
That o'er her form its transient glory cast:
Some lovelier wonder soon usurp'd the place,
Chas'd by a charm still lovelier than the last. 20
That bell again! It tells us what she is:
On what she was no more the strain prolong:
Luxuriant Fancy: pause an hour like this
Demands the tribute of a serious song.
Maria claims it from that sable bier, 25
Where cold and wan the slumberer rests her head;
In still small whispers to Reflection's ear,
She breathes the solemn dictates of the dead.
Oh catch the awful notes, and lift them loud;
Proclaim the theme, by sage, by fool rever'd; 30
Hear it, ye young, ye vain, ye great, ye proud!
'Tis Nature speaks, and Nature will be heard.
Yes, ye shall hear, and tremble as ye hear,

While high with health, your hearts exulting leap
 Ev'n in the midst of Pleasure's mad career, 35
 The mental monitor shall wake and weep.
 For say, than -----'s propitious star,
 What brighter planet on your births arose;
 Or gave of Fortune's gifts an ampler share,
 In life to lavish, or in death to lose! 40
 Early to lose; while born on busy wing,
 Ye sip the nectar of each varying bloom:
 Nor fear, while basking by the beams of spring,
 The wint'ry storm that sweeps you to the tomb.
 Think of her fate! revere the heav'nly hand 45
 That led her hence, though soon, by steps so slow;
 Long at her couch Death took his patient stand,
 And menac'd oft, and oft withheld the blow:
 To give Reflection time, with lenient art,
 Each fond delusion from her soul to steal; 50
 Teach her from Folly peaceably to part,
 And wean her from a world she lov'd so well.
 Say, are ye sure his mercy shall extend
 To you so long a span? Alas, ye sigh:
 Make then, while yet ye may, your God your friend, 55
 And learn, with equal ease to sleep or die!
 Nor think the Muse, whose sober voice ye hear,
 Contracts with bigot frown her sullen brow;
 Casts round Religion's orb the mists of fear,
 Or shades with horrors, what with smiles should glow. 60
 No; she would warm you with seraphic fire,
 Heirs as ye are of heav'n's eternal day;
 Would bid you boldly to that heav'n aspire,
 Not sink and slumber in your cells of clay.
 Know, ye were form'd to range yon azure field, 65
 In yon ethereal founts of bliss to lave;
 Force then, secure in Faith's protecting shield,
 The sting from Death, the vict'ry from the Grave.
 Is this the bigot's rant? Away ye vain,
 Your hopes, your fears, in doubt, in dulness steep: 70
 Go sooth your souls in sickness, grief, or pain,
 With the sad solace of eternal sleep.
 Yet will I praise you, triflers as ye are,
 More than those preachers of your fav'rite creed,
 Who proudly swell the brazen throat of war, 75
 Who form the phalanx, bid the battle bleed;

Nor wish for more who conquer, but to die.
 Hear, Folly, hear; and triumph in the tale:
 Like you, they reason; not, like you, enjoy
 The breeze of bliss, that fills your silken sail: 80
 On Pleasure's glitt'ring stream ye gaily steer
 Your little course to cold Oblivion's shore:
 They dare the storm, and, through th' inclement year,
 Stem the rough surge, and brave the torrent's roar.
 Is it for glory? that just Fate denies. 85
 Long must the warrior moulder in his shroud,
 Ere from her trump the heav'n-breath'd accents rise,
 That lift the hero from the fighting crowd.
 Is it his grasp of empire to extend?
 To curb the fury of insulting foes? 90
 Ambition, cease the idle contest end:
 'Tis but a kingdom thou canst win or lose.
 And why must murder'd myriads lose their all,
 (If life be all) why desolation lour,
 With famish'd frown, on this affrighted ball, 95
 That thou may'st flame the meteor of an hour?
 Go wiser ye, that flutter life away,
 Crown with the mantling juice the goblet high;
 Weave the light dance, with festive freedom gay,
 And live your moment, since the next ye die. 100
 Yet know, vain sceptics, know, th' Almighty mind,
 Who breath'd on Man a portion of his fire,
 Bade his free soul, by earth nor time confin'd,
 To Heav'n, to immortality aspire.
 Nor shall the pile of Hope, his Mercy rear'd, 105
 By vain Philosophy be e'er destroy'd
 Eternity, by all or wish'd or fear'd,
 Shall be by all or suffer'd or enjoy'd.