

By Still Waters eBook

By Still Waters by George William Russell

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Contents

By Still Waters eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	8
Page 4.....	10
Page 5.....	12
Page 6.....	14
Page 7.....	16
Page 8.....	18
Page 9.....	20
Page 10.....	22
Page 11.....	24



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
A SUMMER NIGHT		1
DUSK		1
DAWN		2
DANA		2
THE HOUR OF THE KING		3
REFLECTIONS		4
NATURAL MAGIC		5
FORGIVENESS		5
PARTING		6
THE HEROES		6
BLINDNESS		7
A NEW BEING		8
ENDURANCE		8
THE TWILIGHT OF EARTH		9
THE PARTING OF WAYS		10
THE VIRGIN MOTHER		11



Page 1

A SUMMER NIGHT

Her mist of primroses within her breast
Twilight hath folded up, and o'er the west,
Seeking remoter valleys long hath gone,
Not yet hath come her sister of the dawn.
Silence and coolness now the earth enfold:
Jewels of glittering green, long mists of gold,
Hazes of nebulous silver veil the height,
And shake in tremors through the shadowy night.
Heard through the stillness, as in whispered words,
The wandering God-guided wings of birds
Ruffle the dark. The little lives that lie
Deep hid in grass join in a long-drawn sigh
More softly still; and unheard through the blue
The falling of innumerable dew,
Lifts with grey fingers all the leaves that lay
Burned in the heat of the consuming day.
The lawns and lakes lie in this night of love,
Admitted to the majesty above.
Earth with the starry company hath part;
The waters hold all heaven within their heart,
And glimmer o'er with wave-lips everywhere
Lifted to meet the angel lips of air.
The many homes of men shine near and far;
Peace-laden as the tender evening star,
The late home-coming folk anticipate
Their rest beyond the passing of the gate,
And tread with sleep-filled hearts on drowsy feet.
Oh, far away and wonderful and sweet
All this, all this. But far too many things
Obscuring, as a cloud of seraph wings
Blinding the seeker for the Lord behind,
I fall away in weariness of mind,
And think how far apart are I and you,
Beloved, from those spirit children who
Felt but one single Being long ago,
Whispering in gentleness and leaning low
Out of its majesty, as child to child.
I think upon it all with heart grown wild.
Hearing no voice, howe'er my spirit broods.
No whisper from the dense infinitudes,



This world of myriad things whose distance awes.
Ah me; how innocent our childhood was!

CREATION

As one by one the veils took flight,
The day withdrew, the stars came up:
The spirit issued dark and bright,
Filling thy beauty like a cup.

Sacred thy laughter on the air,
Holy thy lightest word that fell,
Proud the innumerable hair
That waved at the enchanter's spell.

Oh Master of the Beautiful,
Creating us from hour to hour,
Give me this vision to the full
To see in lightest things thy power!

This vision give, no heaven afar,
No throne, and yet I will rejoice,
Knowing beneath my feet a star,
Thy word in every wandering voice.

DUSK

Dusk wraps the village in its dim caress;
Each chimney's vapour, like a thin grey rod,
Mounting aloft through miles of quietness,
Pillars the skies of God.



Page 2

Far up they break or seem to break their line,
Mingling their nebulous crests that bow and nod
Under the light of those fierce stars that shine
 Out of the calm of God.

Only in clouds and dreams I felt those souls
In the abyss, each fire hid in its clod,
From which in clouds and dreams the spirit rolls
 Into the vast of God.

NIGHT

Heart-hidden from the outer things I rose;
The spirit woke anew in nightly birth
Unto the vastness where forever glows
 The star-soul of the earth.

There all alone in primal ecstasy,
Within her depths where revels never tire,
The Olden Beauty shines: each thought of me
 Is veined through with its fire.

And all my thoughts are throngs of living souls;
They breathe in me, heart unto heart allied;
Their joy undimmed, though when the morning tolls
 The planets may divide.

DAWN

Still as the holy of holies breathes the vast
Within its crystal depths the stars grow dim;
Fire on the altar of the hills at last
 Burns on the shadowy rim.

Moments that holds all moments; white upon
The verge it trembles; then like mists of flowers
Break from the fairy fountain of the dawn
 The hues of many hours.

Thrown downward from that high companionship
Of dreaming inmost heart with inmost heart,
Into the common daily ways I slip,
 My fire from theirs apart.



DAY

In day from some titanic past it seems
As if a thread divine of memory runs;
Born ere the Mighty One began his dreams,
Or yet were stars and suns.

But here an iron will has fixed the bars;
Forgetfulness falls on earth's myriad races:
No image of the proud and morning stars
Looks at us from their faces.

Yet yearning still to reach to those dim heights,
Each dream remembered is a burning-glass,
Where through to darkness from the Light of Lights
Its rays in splendour pass.

DANA

I am the tender voice calling 'Away,'
Whispering between the beatings of the heart,
And inaccessible in dewy eyes
I dwell, and all unkissed on lovely lips,
Lingering between white breasts inviolate,
And fleeting ever from the passionate touch,
I shine afar, till men may not divine
Whether it is the stars or the beloved
They follow with wrapt spirit. And I weave
My spells at evening, folding with dim caress,
Aerial arms and twilight dropping hair,
The lonely wanderer by wood or shore,
Till, filled with some deep



Page 3

tenderness, he yields,

Feeling in dreams for the dear mother heart
He knew, ere he forsook the starry way,
And clings there, pillowed far above the smoke
And the dim murmur from the duns of men.
I can enchant the trees and rocks, and fill
The dumb brown lips of earth with mystery,
Make them reveal or hide the god. I breathe
A deeper pity than all love, myself
Mother of all, but without hands to heal:
Too vast and vague, they know me not. But yet
I am the heartbreak over fallen things,
The sudden gentleness that stays the blow,
And I am in the kiss that foemen give
Pausing in battle, and in the tears that fall
Over the vanquished foe, and in the highest;
Among the Danaan gods, I am the last
Council of mercy in their hearts where they
Met to mete justice from a thousand starry thrones.

REMEMBRANCE

There were many burning hours on the heart-sweet tide,
And we passed away from ourselves, forgetting all
The immortal moods that faded, the god who died,
Hastening away to the King on a distant call.

There were ruby dewdrops shed when the heart was riven,
And passionate pleading and prayers to the dead we had wronged;
And we passed away unremembering and unforgiven,
Hastening away to the King for the peace we longed.

Love unremembered and heart-ache we left behind,
We forsook them, unheeding, hastening away in our flight;
We knew the hearts we had wronged of old we would find
When we came to the fold of the King for rest in the night.

THE HOUR OF THE KING

Who would think this quiet breather
From the world had taken flight?



Yet within the form we see there
Wakes the golden King to-night.

Out upon the face of faces
He looked forth before his sleep:
Now he knows the starry races
Haunters of the ancient deep;

On the Bird of Diamond Glory
Floats in mystic floods of song:
As he lists Time's triple story
Seems but as a day is long.

From the mightier Adam falling
To his image dwarfed in clay,
He will at our voices calling
Come to this side of the day.

When he wakes, the dreamy-hearted,
He will know not whence he came,
And the light from which he parted
Be the seraph's sword of flame,

And behind it hosts supernal
Guarding the lost paradise,
And the tree of life eternal
From the weeping human eyes.

THE WINDS OF ANGUS



Page 4

The grey road whereupon we trod became as holy ground:
The eve was all one voice that breathed its message with no sound:
And burning multitudes pour through my heart, too bright, too blind,
Too swift and hurried in their flight to leave their tale behind.
Twin gates unto that living world, dark honey-coloured eyes
The lifting of whose lashes flushed the face with paradise—
Beloved, there I saw within their ardent rays unfold
The likeness of enraptured birds that flew from deeps of gold
To deeps of gold within my breast to rest or there to be
Transfigured in the light, or find a death to life in me.
So love, a burning multitude, a seraph wind which blows
From out the deep of being to the deep of being goes:
And sun and moon and starry fires and earth and air and sea
Are creatures from the deep let loose who pause in ecstasy,
Or wing their wild and heavenly way until again they find
The ancient deep and fade therein, enraptured, bright and blind.

REFLECTIONS

How shallow is this mere that gleams!
Its depth of blue is from the skies;
And from a distant sun the dreams
And lovely light within your eyes.

We deem our love so infinite
Because the Lord is everywhere,
And love awakening is made bright
And bathed in that diviner air.

We go on our enchanted way
And deem our hours immortal hours,
Who are but shadow kings that play
With mirrored majesties and powers.

THE DAWN OF DARKNESS

Come earth's little children pit-pat from their burrows on the hill;
Hangs within the gloom its weary head the shining daffodil.
In the valley underneath us through the fragrance flit along
Over fields and over hedgerows little quivering drops of song.
All adown the pale blue mantle of the mountains far away
Stream the tresses of the twilight flying in the wake of day.
Night comes; soon alone shall fancy follow sadly in her flight



Where the fiery dust of evening, shaken from the feet of light,
Thrusts its monstrous barriers between the pure, the good, the true,
That our weeping eyes may strain for, but shall never after view.
Only yester eve I watched with heart at rest the nebulae
Looming far within the shadowy shining of the Milky Way;
Finding in the stillness joy and hope for all the sons of men;
Now what silent anguish fills a night more beautiful than then.
For earth's age of pain has come, and all her sister planets weep,
Thinking of her fires of morning passing into dreamless sleep.
In this cycle of great sorrow for the moments that we last
We too shall be linked by weeping to the greatness of her past:
But the coming race shall know not, and the fount of tears shall dry,
And the arid heart of man be arid as the desert sky.
So within my mind the darkness dawned and round me everywhere
Hope departed with the twilight, leaving only dumb despair.



Page 5

NATURAL MAGIC

We are tired who follow after
Phantasy and truth that flies:
You with only look and laughter
Stain our hearts with richest dyes.

When you break upon our study
Vanish all our frosty cares;
As the diamond deep grows ruddy,
Filled with morning unawares.

With the stuff that dreams are made of
But an empty house we build:
Glooms we are ourselves afraid of,
By the ancient starlight chilled.

All unwise in thought or duty—
Still our wisdom envies you:
We who lack the living beauty
Half our secret knowledge rue.

Thought nor fear in you nor dreaming
Veil the light with mist about;
Joy, as through a crystal gleaming,
Flashes from the gay heart out.

Pain and penitence forsaking,
Hearts like cloisters dim and grey,
By your laughter lured, awaking
Join with you the dance of day.

IN THE WOMB

Still rests the heavy share on the dark soil:
Upon the black mould thick the dew-damp lies:
The horse waits patient: from his lowly toil
The ploughboy to the morning lifts his eyes.

The unbudding hedgerows dark against day's fires
Glitter with gold-lit crystals: on the rim
Over the unregarding city's spires
The lonely beauty shines alone for him.



And day by day the dawn or dark enfolds
And feeds with beauty eyes that cannot see
How in her womb the mighty mother moulds
The infant spirit for eternity.

FORGIVENESS

At dusk the window panes grew grey;
The wet world vanished in the gloom;
The dim and silver end of day
Scarce glimmered through the little room.

And all my sins were told; I said
Such things to her who knew not sin—
The sharp ache throbbing in my head,
The fever running high within.

I touched with pain her purity;
Sin's darker sense I could not bring:
My soul was black as night to me:
To her I was a wounded thing.

I needed love no words could say;
She drew me softly nigh her chair,
My head upon her knees to lay,
With cool hands that caressed my hair.

She sat with hands as if to bless,
And looked with grave, ethereal eyes;
Ensouled by ancient quietness,
A gentle priestess of the Wise.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

His head within my bosom lay,
But yet his spirit slipped not through:
I only felt the burning clay
That withered for the cooling dew.

It was but pity when I spoke
And called him to my heart for rest,
And half a mother's love that woke
Feeling his head upon my breast:



Page 6

And half the lion's tenderness
To shield her cubs from hurt or death,
Which, when the serried hunters press,
Makes terrible her wounded breath.

But when the lips I breathed upon
Asked for such love as equals claim
I looked where all the stars were gone
Burned in the day's immortal flame.

'Come thou like yon great dawn to me
From darkness vanquished, battles done:
Flame unto flame shall flow and be
Within thy heart and mine as one.'

PARTING

As from our dream we died away
Far off I felt the outer things;
Your wind-blown tresses round me play,
Your bosom's gentle murmurings.

And far away our faces met
As on the verge of the vast spheres;
And in the night our cheeks were wet,
I could not say with dew or tears.

As one within the Mother's heart
In that hushed dream upon the height
We lived, and then we rose to part,
Because her ways are infinite.

A PRAYER

O, holy Spirit of the Hazel, hearken now,
Though shining suns and silver moons burn on the bough,
And though the fruit of stars by many myriads gleam,
Yet in the undergrowth below, still in thy dream,
Lighting the labyrinthine maze and monstrous gloom
Are many gem-winged flowers with gay and delicate bloom;
And in the shade, hearken, O Dreamer of the Tree,
One wild rose blossom of thy spirit breathed on me
With lovely and still light, a little sister flower



To those that whitely on the tall moon branches tower,
Lord of the Hazel now, oh hearken while I pray,
This wild rose blossom of thy spirit fades away.

THE HEROES

By many a dream of God and man my thoughts in shining flocks were led:
But as I went through Patrick Street the hopes and prophecies were dead.
The hopes and prophecies were dead: they could not blossom where the feet
Walked amid rottenness, or where the brawling shouters stamped the street.
Where was the beauty that the Lord gave man when first he towered in pride?
But one came by me at whose word the bitter condemnation died.
His brows were crowned with thorns of light: his eyes were bright as one
who sees
The starry palaces shine o'er the sparkle of the heavenly seas.
'Is it not beautiful?' he cried. Our Faery Land of Hearts' Desire
Is mingled through the mire and mist, yet stainless keeps its lovely fire.
The pearly phantoms with blown hair are dancing where the drunkards reel:
The cloud frail daffodils shine out where filth is splashing from the heel.
O sweet, and sweet, and sweet to hear, the melodies in rivers run:
The rapture of their crowded notes is yet the



Page 7

myriad voice of One.

Those who are lost and fallen here, to-night in sleep shall pass the gate,
And wear the purples of the King, and know them masters of their fate.
Each wrinkled hag shall reassume the plumes and hues of paradise:
Each brawler be enthroned in calm among the Children of the Wise.
Yet in the council with the gods no one will falter to pursue
His lofty purpose, but come forth the cyclic labours to renew;
And take the burden of the world and dim his beauty in a shroud,
And wrestle with the chaos till the anarch to the light be bowed.
We cannot for forgetfulness forego the reverence due to them
Who wear at times they do not guess the sceptre and the diadem.
As bright a crown as this was theirs when first they from the Father sped;
Yet look with deeper eyes and still the ancient beauty is not dead.
He mingled with the multitude. I saw their brows were crowned and bright,
A light around the shadowy heads, a shadow round the head of light.

RECALL

What call may draw thee back again,
Lost dove, what art, what charm may please?
The tender touch, the kiss, are vain,
For thou wert lured away by these.

Oh, must we use the iron hand,
And mask with hate the holy breath,
With alien voice give love's command,
As they through love the call of death?

BLINDNESS

Our true hearts are forever lonely:
A wistfulness is in our thought:
Our lights are like the dawns which only
Seem bright to us and yet are not.

Something you see in me I wis not:
Another heart in you I guess:
A stranger's lips—but thine I kiss not,
Erring in all my tenderness.



I sometimes think a mighty lover
Takes every burning kiss we give:
His lights are those which round us hover:
For him alone our lives we live.

Ah, sigh for us whose hearts unseeing
Point all their passionate love in vain,
And blinded in the joy of being,
Meet only when pain touches pain.

BROTHERHOOD

Twilight, a blossom grey in shadowy valleys dwells:
Under the radiant dark the deep blue-tinted bells
In quietness reimage heaven within their blooms,
Sapphire and gold and mystery. What strange perfumes,
Out of what deeps arising, all the flower-bells fling,
Unknowing the enchanted odorous song they sing!
Oh, never was an eve so living yet: the wood
Stirs not but breathes enraptured quietude.
Here in these shades the Ancient knows itself, the Soul,
And out of slumber waking starts unto the goal.
What bright companions nod and go along with it!
Out of the teeming dark what dusky creatures flit,
That through the long leagues



Page 8

of the island night above

Come by me, wandering, whispering, beseeching love;
As in the twilight children gather close and press
Nigh and more nigh with shadowy tenderness,
Feeling they know not what, with noiseless footsteps glide
Seeking familiar lips or hearts to dream beside.
O voices, I would go with you, with you, away,
Facing once more the radiant gateways of the day;
With you, with you, what memories arise, and nigh
Trampling the crowded figures of the dawn go by,
Dread deities, the giant powers that warred on men
Grow tender brothers and gay children once again;
Fades every hate away before the Mother's breast
Where all the exiles of the heart return to rest.

A NEW BEING

I know myself no more, my child,
Since thou art come to me,
Pity so tender and so wild
Hath wrapped my thoughts of thee.

These thoughts, a fiery gentle rain,
Are from the Mother shed,
Where many a broken heart hath lain
And many a weeping head.

THE MAN TO THE ANGEL

I have wept a million tears:
Pure and proud one, where are thine,
What the gain though all thy years
In unbroken beauty shine?

All your beauty cannot win
Truth we learn in pain and sighs:
You can never enter in
To the circle of the wise.

They are but the slaves of light
Who have never known the gloom,



And between the dark and bright
Willed in freedom their own doom.

Think not in your pureness there,
That our pain but follows sin:
There are fires for those who dare
Seek the throne of might to win.

Pure one, from your pride refrain:
Dark and lost amid the strife
I am myriad years of pain
Nearer to the fount of life.

When defiance fierce is thrown
At the God to whom you bow,
Rest the lips of the Unknown
Tenderest upon my brow.

ENDURANCE

He bent above: so still her breath
What air she breathed he could not say,
Whether in worlds of life or death:
So softly ebbd away, away
The life that had been light to him,
So fled her beauty leaving dim
The emptying chambers of his heart
Thrilled only by the pang and smart,
The dull and throbbing agony
That suffers still, yet knows not why.
Love's immortality so blind
Dreams that all things with it conjoined
Must share with it immortal day:
But not of this—but not of this—
The touch, the eyes, the laugh, the kiss,
Fall from it and it goes its way.
So blind he wept above her clay,

Page 9

'I did not think that you could die.
Only some veil would cover you
Our loving eyes could still pierce through;
And see through dusky shadows still
Move as of old your wild sweet will,
Impatient every heart to win
And flash its heavenly radiance in.'
Though all the worlds were sunk in rest
The ruddy star within his breast
Would croon its tale of ancient pain,
Its sorrow that would never wane,
Its memory of the days of yore
Moulded in beauty evermore.
Ah, immortality so blind,
To dream all things with it conjoined
Must follow it from star to star
And share with it immortal years.
The memory, yearning, grief, and tears,
Fall from it and it goes afar.
He walked at night along the sands,
And saw the stars dance overhead,
He had no memory of the dead,
But lifted up exultant hands
To hail the future like a boy,
The myriad paths his feet might press.
Unhaunted by old tenderness
He felt an inner secret joy!
A spirit of unfettered will
Through light and darkness moving still
Within the All to find its own,
To be immortal and alone.

THE VESTURE OF THE SOUL

I pitied one whose tattered dress
Was patched, and stained with dust and rain;
He smiled on me; I could not guess
The viewless spirit's wide domain.



He said, 'The royal robe I wear
Trails all along the fields of light:
Its silent blue and silver bear
For gems the starry dust of night.'

'The breath of joy unceasingly
Waves to and fro its folds starlit,
And far beyond earth's misery
I live and breathe the joy of it.'

THE TWILIGHT OF EARTH

The wonder of the world is o'er:
The magic from the sea is gone:
There is no unimagined shore,
No islet yet to venture on.
The Sacred Hazels' blooms are shed,
The Nuts of Knowledge harvested.

Oh, what is worth this lore of age
If time shall never bring us back
Our battle with the gods to wage
Reeling along the starry track.
The battle rapture here goes by
In warring upon things that die.

Let be the tale of him whose love
Was sighed between white Deirdre's breasts,
It will not lift the heart above
The sodden clay on which it rests.
Love once had power the gods to bring
All rapt on its wild wandering.

We shiver in the falling dew,
And seek a shelter from the storm:
When man these elder brothers knew
He found the mother nature warm,
A hearth fire blazing through it all,
A home without a circling wall.



Page 10

We dwindle down beneath the skies,
And from ourselves we pass away:
The paradise of memories
Grows ever fainter day by day.
The shepherd stars have shrunk within,
The world's great night will soon begin.

Will no one, ere it is too late,
Ere fades the last memorial gleam,
Recall for us our earlier state?
For nothing but so vast a dream
That it would scale the steeps of air
Could rouse us from so vast despair.

The power is ours to make or mar
Our fate as on the earliest morn,
The Darkness and the Radiance are
Creatures within the spirit born.
Yet, bathed in gloom too long, we might
Forget how we imagined light.

Not yet are fixed the prison bars:
The hidden light the spirit owns
If blown to flame would dim the stars
And they who rule them from their thrones:
And the proud sceptred spirits thence
Would bow to pay us reverence.

Oh, while the glory sinks within
Let us not wait on earth behind,
But follow where it flies, and win
The glow again, and we may find
Beyond the Gateways of the Day
Dominion and ancestral sway.

THE DREAM

I did not deem it half so sweet
To feel thy gentle hand,
As in a dream thy soul to greet
Across wide leagues of land,

Untouched more near to draw to you
Where, amid radiant skies,



Glimmered thy plumes of iris hue,
My Bird of Paradise.

Let me dream only with my heart,
Love first, and after see:
Know thy diviner counterpart
Before I kneel to thee.

So in thy motions all expressed
Thy angel I may view:
I shall not on thy beauty rest,
But Beauty's ray in you.

THE PARTING OF WAYS

The skies from black to pearly grey
Had veered without a star or sun;
Only a burning opal ray
Fell on your brow when all was done.

Aye, after victory, the crown;
Yet through the fight no word of cheer;
And what would win and what go down
No word could help, no light make clear.

A thousand ages onward led
Their joys and sorrows to that hour;
No wisdom weighed, no word was said,
For only what we were had power.

There was no tender leaning there
Of brow to brow in loving mood;
For we were rapt apart, and were
In elemental solitude.

We knew not in redeeming day
Whether our spirits would be found
Floating along the starry way,
Or in the earthly vapours drowned.

Brought by the sunrise-coloured flame
To earth, uncertain yet, the while
I looked at you, there slowly came,
Noble and sisterly, your smile.



Page 11

We bade adieu to love the old;
We heard another lover then,
Whose forms are myriad and untold,
Sigh to us from the hearts of men.

SONG

Dusk its ash-grey blossoms sheds on violet skies,
Over twilight mountains where the heart songs rise,
Rise and fall and fade away from earth to air.
Earth renews the music sweeter. Oh, come there.
Come, acushla, come, as in ancient times
Rings aloud the underland with faery chimes.
Down the unseen ways as strays each tinkling fleece
Winding ever onward to a fold of peace,
So my dreams go straying in a land more fair;
Half I tread the dew-wet grasses, half wander there.
Fade your glimmering eyes in a world grown cold;
Come, acushla, with me to the mountains old.
There the bright ones call us waving to and fro—
Come, my children, with me to the ancient go.

THE VIRGIN MOTHER

Who is that goddess to whom men should pray
But her from whom their hearts have turned away,
Out of whose virgin being they were born,
Whose mother nature they have named in scorn
Calling its holy substance common clay.

Yet from this so despised earth was made
The milky whiteness of those queens who swayed
Their generations with a light caress,
And from some image of whose loveliness
The heart built up high heaven when it prayed.

Lover, your heart, the heart on which it lies,
Your eyes that gaze, and those alluring eyes,
Your lips, the lips they kiss, alike had birth
Within this dark divinity of earth,
Within this mother being you despise.

Ah, when I think this earth on which we tread
Hath borne these blossoms of the lovely dead,
And made the living heart I love to beat,
I look with sudden awe beneath my feet
As you with erring reverence overhead.

Here ends *By Still Waters, Lyrical Poems Old & New* by A.E., printed upon paper made in Ireland, and published by Elizabeth C. Yeats at the Dun Emer Press, in the house of Evelyn Gleeson at Dundrum in the County of Dublin, Ireland, finished on All Soul's Eve, in the year 1906.