

A TALE IN TEN STANZAS

Two Years *and Older Lives*

*A short tale of two long-lost lovers,
destined to meet after long trials,
told in the space of two present years
and the lives that came before.*

Scarce two winters of this present age
Have held our voices on the trembling air;
Four watches of the night I kept the page
And found thy name still written, waiting there.

Two years of trial in this living dust,
A courtship carried only on the wind;
We have not touched, yet every midnight trust
Recalls a vow no calendar can bind.

Three kingdoms of the soul I crossed for thee
When we were parted by a different sea;
Two shores still keep the space we cannot close—
This latest flame, the lock, the older key.

Four meetings Time himself hath half-forgot,
All broken off before the flesh could stay;
Two returns were promised, both were not,
Yet still the blood remembers its old way.

Three omens in this brief and bitter span:
A voice across the dark, a stolen hour,
A glass that bids the gathered count to turn
And read the past to know the present power.

Zero comfort hath this present age allowed;
The line goes dead; the letter does not come;
The silence is the glass's hidden sum—
The nothing that the wiser heart must brave.

Two roads that will not meet in body yet,
Though Destiny still whispers they shall join;
Hold forth the gathered count against the glass:
The backward reading is the life begun.

Three paces and three more the world hath set
Between our hands, as other ages did;
The glass receives the count our souls have met
And turns it, that the older tale be read.

One life remains to finish what was started
Across the dust the quieter years record;
Add thou the numbers hiding in each verse,
Then hold that gathered sum before the glass.

Four bells have sounded since the heart first knew,
Five more shall sound before the last is told;
The sum of every stanza, read in reverse,
Unseals the meaning time would not unfold.

*Add the numbers named in each stanza;
that sum, read backward in the glass, is the true meaning.*