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POEMS... *in the Manner of Housman*

by JOHN Mc ANDREWS

I

Only to look at you
Without the mask,
Only to touch your hand
Is all I ask.

Never so clean and straight
Did one man grow,
Never so to my heart
Did a smile go.

When with a glance one day
You sought my eye;
When in a word you spoke
I found no lie—

Then did I turn my hope
Within my breast,
Then did I find content
Without the rest . . .

Oh I have never loved
This much before—
And oh may I never hate
A young lad more!

II

In the evening through the darkness,
Lad, I searched your window light,
Four streaks through the heavy shadows
And your words upon the night:

«Friend, we never come together,
Save upon this doorway's sill,
You and I will live forever
Far from sin and far from ill.»

Here's my hand to prove it, fellow,
I can smile my whole life through,
Sink my happiness as always
In the love I bear for you.

But I pray you, leave me nothing
I may think on when I'm old,
Yearning, touch, nor empty pining
When I shiver and grow cold.

III

I lived a century each day
I looked at you for one thin hour,
And wondered what would make me breathe
When winter's end left me no power.

The wine is here, but you are not,
For in your arms you have your maid,
And I, through mesh of curtain look,
Await your knock but am afraid.

I cherish dear my empty heaven,
Where once I drew a rainbow's flight,
A hope that you would know I lived
For you alone and your delight.

Oh lad when I forget your lack,
I'll try recalling black, black eyes,
And every weakened smile and greeting
I did within my mind devise.

You will not give of your great store
More than a shoulder-clasp for me,
And I for all my love of you
Will never voice my little plea.

V

«'Tis but a small town is my home,
'Tis never free nor gay,
Yet I have lived there all my life,
Far from all sin away.»

Ah, well I understand you, lad,
I, world-struck though I am,
Respect your living through the strife
Of dull and petty sham.

Forget all this; you are my guest
And I may see you more,
And trust your lips when there is time
Hold bravest love in store.

Your hand has touched me, though I fear
It will not touch again,
Till I with all my little woes
Am scorned and stoned by men.

IV

Of all the lads I love least
I fear you are the one,
The race is to the swift, friend,
And ah, you are outrun.
I felt your arm the night through,
It never touched my breast,
Your body there beside me
Lay still with no request.

The gentleness I dreamed of
Seemed far and long away,
I love you only best, lad,
Now when you cannot stay.
The fields were greener last night,
My heart was tired and free,
But oh, you did delay, youth,
To try to comfort me.

Blue's the sky above us,
Careless the wind and free,
Torn the hearts within us,
Dwelling by this dead sea.

No one lives in our town,
Saving us two, we friends,
No one comes to visit,
Never his hand extends.

Ashes fill our streets, man,
Dust in the corners lies,
Clays that were fired in heaven
Ever our earth baptize.

VII

Lad, religion is a thing
For those who are not strong,
And a coffin no fit place
For man to lie in long.

If your mind thinks on your grave
You cannot learn to sing;
When there's earth above your face
Death has a bitter sting.

Youth's a better thing by far,
Love and wine and sin;
Time enough when you are old
To let the beggar in.

Are you chary with your touch
To keep it for your God?
There's no good in pressing hands
Cold beneath the sod.

«Gain a body, lose a soul,»
Is no way to live,
Heavy words when one is young
And has so much to give.

Still, if nothing's to be done,
I'll eat this meagre fare,
And take the last drops from the cup,
If God has some to spare.

VI

Still we go our own paths,
Always we go apart,
Tend our shrubs alone, lad,
Care for them with our art.

Eat this ruddy apple,
Found in the farthest lane,
There will be ashes in it,
Dust and the seeds of pain.

Drink this water slowly,
Tasting of salt and death,
Food you cannot have here
Waits on your last hour's breath.

VIII

I'm not one who sees you always,
Morning, day and night,
If I find you anywhere, lad,
Oh my day seems right!

How I hate the foolish fancies
Crowding in on me,
When I see you with your comrades,
One or two or three.

Earthy clods who do not love you,
Think you but a boy,
Though for me without your presence
There is nothing to enjoy.

When I see you smile and greet me—
Oh you always do!
Then I hug my torture near
And run away from you,

Wonder when I'm round the corner
If you're searching me,
Hope you are but know you are not,
With your comrades three.

IX

There the road turns to the valley,
There the river to the sea,
There the man turns to his maid,
As you turn away from me.

Lad, you'll lie awhile beside her,
Seek your comfort in caress,
Then with all your body sated,
Rise to go your sins confess.

I could give you more than she does,
With a wrong that's not as great,
But since you have left me lonely,
I can train myself to hate.

X

I have loved you all this year,
But this you could not know,
Every smile and glance you gave
Made my living glow.

'Tis only right you look to wed
Now you are grown and gone,
And I may comfort me to think
The lads come on and on.

But oh the pain to think that you
Did never tell me this,
That sure within the fortnight come
You would your maiden kiss.

And all the nights till you are tired
In your arms will she stay,
You'll take your bliss; you are but young
And not yet come to clay.

But oh the pain to hear that you
Had told this to the rest,
And never sent a message to
The one who loved you best.

XI

The twigs are heavy with the frost,
The sun is bright and gay,
The wind is like the breath of gods
For the time you stay.

The secret that you keep for me
Can never come to light,
And I have wrecked my duty, lad,
To have you in my sight.

I wonder what the price of pride
Can be when you are near,
And how this brief and little love
Will change throughout the year.

There is a danger that I know
And try to put away,
'Tis that which comes to all poor fools
Who do their hearts obey.

Your face has all the charm of sin,
Your body beacons me,
Your hands, your lips, your yellow hair
Have not a silent plea.

Oh, I will love you for a space,
Then turn away in pain,
For you will disappoint me, lad,
And I a new love gain.