

A. E. Housman (1859-1936)

5 *The Deserter*

“What sound awakened me, I wonder,  
For now 'tis dumb.”

“Wheels on the road most like, or thunder:  
Lie down; 'twas not the drum.”

Toil at sea and two in haven 5  
And trouble far:  
Fly, crow, away, and follow, raven,  
And all that croaks for war.

“Hark, I heard the bugle crying,  
And where am I? 10  
My friends are up and dressed and dying,  
And I will dress and die.”

“Oh love is rare and trouble plenty  
And carrion cheap,  
And daylight dear at four-and-twenty: 15  
Lie down again and sleep.”

“Reach me my belt and leave your prattle:  
Your hour is gone;  
But my day is the day of battle,  
And that comes dawning on. 20

“They mow the field of man in season:  
Farewell, my fair,  
And, call it truth or call it treason,  
Farewell the vows that were.”

“Ay, false heart, forsake me lightly: 25  
'Tis like the brave.  
They find no bed to joy in rightly  
Before they find the grave.

“Their love is for their own undoing,  
And east and west 30  
They scour about the world a-wooing  
The bullet to their breast.

“Sail away the ocean over,  
Oh sail away,  
And lie there with your leaden lover 35  
For ever and a day.”

*1922*

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