

Stopford A. Brooke (1832-1916)

1 *The King and the Huntsman*

The king and his huntsman are gone to the chase  
And the huntsman's son with them,  
Two nights they lay, and two days they rode,  
Till they came to the forest's hem.

'O what are these meadows,' the king he said, 5  
'And this stream that runs in flood,  
And why is the grass as green as a corpse,  
And the stream as red as blood?

Is this the meadow and this the stream,'  
And he laughed both loud and free: 10  
'Where it's twenty years I loved a maid,  
And sorely she loved me?'

Then up and spake the huntsman dark,  
And he was deadly fell,  
'Now draw your dagger, my son,' he said, 15  
'And send this king to hell.

Revenge burns slow, but it flames at last —  
The maiden was my daughter,  
She broke her heart for thee and shame  
And died in this wild water. 20

Nor wife nor child, but the carrion crow  
Shall hear thy dying groan,  
And Ellen's stream shall be red with thy blood,  
And the wolves strip thy breast-bone.'

Then the king grew pale as the snow at dawn, 25  
And he bared his hunting-knife;  
'O woe that I left my good deer-hound  
For I should not lose my life.'

'I slew him first,' the huntsman said —  
And fierce at the king he ran; 30  
'Strike down at his back, my son, strike hard,  
For he shall not die like a man.'

And they washed their hands in the red red blood,  
And over the seas to Spain;  
And the only sextons that buried the king 35  
Were the wild beasts and the rain.

1888

(From *Poems*. London: Macmillan, 1888)