

Charles Stuart Calverley (1831-84)

2 *First Love*

O my earliest love, who, ere I number'd
Ten sweet summers, made my bosom thrill!
Will a swallow — or a swift, or some bird —
Fly to her and say, I love her still?

Say my life's a desert drear and arid, 5
To its one green spot I aye recur:
Never, never — although three times married —
Have I cared a jot for aught but her.

No, mine own! though early forced to leave you, 10
Still my heart was there where first we met;
In those "Lodgings with an ample sea-view,"
Which were, forty years ago, "To Let."

There I saw her first, our landlord's oldest
Little daughter. On a thing so fair
Thou, O Sun, — who (so they say) beholdest 15
Everything, — hast gazed, I tell thee, ne'er.

There she sat — so near me, yet remoter
Than a star — a blue-eyed bashful imp:
On her lap she held a happy bloater,
'Twixt her lips a yet more happy shrimp. 20

And I loved her, and our troth we plighted
On the morrow by the shingly shore:
In a fortnight to be disunited
By a bitter fate for evermore.

O my own, my beautiful, my blue-eyed! 25
To be young once more, and bite my thumb
At the world and all its cares with you, I'd
Give no inconsiderable sum.

Hand in hand we tramp'd the golden seaweed,
 Soon as o'er the gray cliff peep'd the dawn: 30
Side by side, when came the hour for tea, we'd
 Crunch the mottled shrimp and hairy prawn: —

Has she wedded some gigantic shrimper,
 That sweet mite with whom I loved to play?
Is she girt with babes that whine and whimper, 35
 That bright being who was always gay?

Yes — she has at least a dozen wee things!
 Yes — I see her darning corduroys,
Scouring floors, and setting out the tea-things,
 For a howling herd of hungry boys, 40

In a home that reeks of tar and sperm-oil!
 But at intervals she thinks, I know,
Of those days which we, afar from turmoil,
 Spent together forty years ago.

O my earliest love, still unforgotten, 45
 With your downcast eyes of dreamy blue!
Never, somehow, could I seem to cotton
 To another as I did to you!

1872

(From *Fly Leaves*. Cambridge, 1881)