

W. M. Thackeray (1811-63)

11 *The Willow-Tree*

Know ye the willow-tree  
Whose grey leaves quiver,  
Whispering gloomily  
To yon pale river?  
Lady, at eventide 5  
Wander not near it:  
They say its branches hide  
A sad, lost spirit!

Once to the willow-tree 10  
A maid came fearful;  
Pale seemed her cheek to be,  
Her blue eye tearful.  
Soon as she saw the tree,  
Her step moved fleeter;  
No one was there — ah me! 15  
No one to meet her!

Quick beat her heart to hear  
The far bells' chime  
Toll from the chapel-tower  
The trysting time: 20  
But the red sun went down  
In golden flame,  
And though she looked round,  
Yet no one came!

Presently came the night, 25  
Sadly to greet her, —  
Moon in her silver light,  
Stars in their glitter;  
Then sank the moon away  
Under the billow, 30  
Still wept the maid alone —  
There by the willow!

Through the long darkness,  
By the stream rolling,  
Hour after hour went on 35  
Tolling and tolling.  
Long was the darkness,  
Lonely and stilly;  
Shrill came the night-wind,  
Piercing and chilly. 40

Shrill blew the morning breeze,  
Biting and cold,  
Bleak peers the grey dawn  
Over the wold.  
Bleak over moor and stream 45  
Looks the grey dawn,  
Grey, with dishevelled hair,  
Still stands the willow there —  
THE MAID IS GONE!

*Domine, Domine!* 50  
*Sing we a litany,*  
*Sing for poor maiden-hearts broken and weary;*  
*Domine, Domine!*  
*Sing we a litany,*  
*Wail we and weep we a wild Miserere!* 55

1843

(From *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*. Vol. 13.  
London: Smith, Elder, & C., 1899)