



MEMORIAL DAY
THE UNMAKING OF A SONNET

Poems by
KEVIN J. M. KEANE

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Also by Kevin J. M. Keane

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for a girl who loved a sailor

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Memorial Day is a reflection on loss and renewal in time of war. It tells the story, in her own words, of a young American woman's falling in love, bereavement and remaking of her life after the death of her husband in battle.

She records her memories in a series of fourteen free sonnets, each of which is written according to the principle of 'centered form'. This simply means that each sonnet unfolds from its center.

This principle of 'centered form' is also reflected in the order of writing of the sonnets which is revealed in the two sonnets that open and close the series, the prelude and postlude. They comprise respectively the seventh and eighth lines of the individual sonnets, beginning with Sonnet 8 and ending with Sonnet 1.

The dominant meter of the poems is accentual and measured: there are generally six stresses per line, with a caesura, or rest, in the middle of each. The stresses and pauses are lighter or darker depending on the relative weight and colour which you choose to ascribe to her words. Their message follows.

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Preludium

how fey how free the mitered pages mild do sheen
that drill and flay and wield the timbal railing day
a dewy spinning glass strewn with darts of rhyme
the water's curtain glide and salt shimmer sand

like a fine thin veil across a faint thin smile
too soon to get over you but not too late
worn out by care your loss my only lair
my hushed chafed dear heart no self-pity no rage

on gloam paling light soul blent and fey
your dark toned breath and spark lit laugh
smooth and spiral fade and chiral as beneath the gaping wind

be free to speak and act to feel be brave be sure
no use their suck of power to keep the state insane
a force that aspired to choose the cause of truth not death

1

My story begins with you, your war, your truth and dreams.
For you, all were irony and hurt, all bitter salt,
whilst I found love, and laughed and sighed and soared and knew
that all my life was you, and all we'd have was mine.

I knew your laws of history, how they moved and stirred, and formed
a child of ardent heart and mind, clawed yet couth,
a force that aspired to choose the cause of truth, not death,
to pursue the course of light, not the quietening of a breath.

Yet how be free to choose, when life's but fortune's die?
And, say, what kindly rule thwarts indifference, cold or cruel?
How lose a love that's life itself and, parted, still be whole?

For what wounded life can be restored that roots can somehow bind?
What guide or truth that's sought could find such a law, or doom?
And how should I engage my mind, with your soul still restless, strewn?

2

What lord, what art or science can furnish me a chart
to plan my journey's course, to lead a worthy life?
What faults and harms to chide? What simple joys to treasure?
What life to form and want? What life to weigh and measure?
Forbear, and live the motto: no aim, no goal, too high!
To soar, to strain, to dream, endure, survive, defy;
be free to speak and act, to feel, be brave, be sure,
and back the weak and needy, live life to strive for more.
With work and family rich, with love and ease alive,
a share of bumps and flaws, and storms and wars besides,
yet wise, not short on fact: no peace, no calm assured,
so defend the cause that made you, and spend for freedom's sword.
And when the journey's over, when freedom's sword has swung,
we'll have a brand new motto: 'e pluribus a gun'.

3

In your way for a change, I took the chance to get
a taste of your air and peer into your sea.

The grain of salt in your talk sent a wave through
my voice that lent a savorous edge to our play,
while your look of crashed surf and shell-slushed sand,
your flair of beach fires, your spiced dusky hands,
your dark toned breath and spark lit laugh,
sent a tide through my mind that washed over the past.

Your stature could be said of the handsome devilled kind,
square-splayed trained in the shoulders, legs long-boned, spill-defined,
you stand tallish raked, with a gaze mainly floored.

Your nose is a tad too flat, your mouth a spit too dry,
your hair maniacally brown, your chin somewhat awry,
your smile, all grace, your mind, all board.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin J. M. Keane has been exploring the link between language and social development since 1996. Following the publication of his first collection of poetry *Winter Drei Winters Three Hivers Trois* in 2006, he has been experimenting with the oldest poetic form created for contemplative reading to find an answer to the question, “What is a sonnet?”

Born in London in 1958 to Irish immigrant parents, Kevin resides in Munich and Singapore.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE

Memorial Day is set in a revival of the Caslon face designed by William Caslon I (1692-1766) in 1722. Caslon's graceful bracketed serifs and elegant letterforms give it a homely charm. Its refined cuts and well-modelled forms placed it as a universal printing standard in the eighteenth century. Expressing formal dignity, Caslon served as a dominant type in the American colonies for the second half of the eighteenth century and was used in many historic documents, including the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

Memorial Day is designed as a sonnet story. A young American woman tells her story of falling in love, bereavement and the remaking of her life after the death of her husband in battle. It is a reflection on loss and renewal in time of war.

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