



## Easter, 1916

BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

I have met them at close of day  
Coming with vivid faces  
From counter or desk among grey  
Eighteenth-century houses.  
I have passed with a nod of the head  
Or polite meaningless words,  
Or have lingered awhile and said  
Polite meaningless words,  
And thought before I had done  
Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
To please a companion  
Around the fire at the club,  
Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn:  
All changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent  
In ignorant good-will,  
Her nights in argument  
Until her voice grew shrill.  
What voice more sweet than hers  
When, young and beautiful,  
She rode to harriers?  
This man had kept a school  
And rode our wingèd horse;  
This other his helper and friend  
Was coming into his force;  
He might have won fame in the end,  
So sensitive his nature seemed,

So daring and sweet his thought.  
This other man I had dreamed  
A drunken, vainglorious lout.  
He had done most bitter wrong  
To some who are near my heart,  
Yet I number him in the song;  
He, too, has resigned his part  
In the casual comedy;  
He, too, has been changed in his turn,  
Transformed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone  
Through summer and winter seem  
Enchanted to a stone  
To trouble the living stream.  
The horse that comes from the road,  
The rider, the birds that range  
From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
Minute by minute they change;  
A shadow of cloud on the stream  
Changes minute by minute;  
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,  
And a horse plashes within it;  
The long-legged moor-hens dive,  
And hens to moor-cocks call;  
Minute by minute they live:  
The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice  
Can make a stone of the heart.  
O when may it suffice?  
That is Heaven's part, our part  
To murmur name upon name,  
As a mother names her child  
When sleep at last has come  
On limbs that had run wild.  
What is it but nightfall?  
No, no, not night but death;

Was it needless death after all?  
For England may keep faith  
For all that is done and said.  
We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead;  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died?  
I write it out in a verse—  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

Notes:

*September 25, 1916*

n/a

Source: *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (1989)

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