



*The Love Poet  
of Vermont*

William Graham

**William Graham**

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## **About the Author**

William Graham holds a BA and MA in English and a MS in Communications from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He lives in Stowe, Vermont. Visit his family's blog at <http://lifeinthestowelane.com>.



## The Love Poet of Vermont

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I learned this tale from the good village people  
Of Orion, Vermont—a village fair  
Near the border of Quebec. There lived a  
Man called Tristan Ecrivain—the town clerk.  
Tall and thin like a forest birch, with eyes  
That reflected the blue of a mountain pond.  
Tristan lived alone in a small cabin  
Tucked like a bruised memory in a deep  
Hollow with Johnson Peak looming above.  
In his sanctuary, Tristan wrote, it was told,  
Love poems to women he did not know well,  
Or even know at all. The women did not  
Know that Tristan was the poet that sent  
Them poems each Valentine's Day. This strange fact  
Was not revealed until after Tristan was  
Laid low into the rocky Vermont soil.  
His neighbor Hank Merchant found a book  
Of names that Tristan had gathered like grains  
Of gold through the years. And a letter  
Addressed to Hank that explained Tristan's poems.  
This is what Hank told me and what then  
Then travelled from his mouth to this page.  
In his youth, Tristan had fallen in love  
With a young girl with raven hair and legs  
Long and tapered like sturdy pine branches.  
Isabel Logue could climb mountains and  
Swim across a frigid lake with as much prowess  
As any boy. She and Tristan would spend  
Golden summer days tramping through the woods  
Of Northern Vermont. One day, Tristan asked  
Isabel to look under a boulder on Johnson Peak.  
There, with the Green Mountains spread at her feet,  
She read the first love poem that a man had ever  
Written to her. Beautiful words like yellow  
Butterflies drifted off the page and danced  
Around her eyes. Each day, Tristan would unveil  
A new poem hidden under a stone or  
Tucked neatly under a fallen tree trunk.  
Isabel fell madly in love with Tristan,  
Who promised her his unyielding devotion  
In actions and verse. But their tie would be  
Severed by nature's blind indifference.  
A late summer nor'easter blew in like  
An armed intruder. Mountain streams rose fast,  
Slashing away at banks and fields. Isabel

Went out into the storm looking for her dog  
Who had been frightened by the storm's fury.

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No one saw what happened next. Her body  
Was found downstream two days later—crushed  
And battered. At her funeral, Tristan  
Did not speak. He merely placed an envelope  
On her casket and then left the service.  
He would never marry. He would never  
Speak her name again. Years piled on. He  
Became the town clerk, a post solid but  
Unremarkable. In his letter to Hank  
He wrote: "Even though my love perished  
That summer day so long ago, my muse  
Still urged me to write. I started choosing  
Names of women from the village records—  
Some women I knew by sight; others were strangers  
To me. I felt all women deserved to  
Hear eloquent words, however—words that  
Told them how beautiful they were and how  
Someone longed for them like we long for the  
First blossoms in spring." Tristan's list grew larger  
Each year. Rumors flew about who had composed  
The poems. No one suspected boring old  
Tristan. In fact, the letters had all been sent  
From Quebec, not from Orion. After Hank  
Told me the tale, I revealed the name of  
The love poet of Vermont in the *Orion  
Constellation*, of which I was the editor.  
Then some women sent me copies of the  
Poems Tristan had written, and they asked me  
To publish them. I honored their wishes.  
A few women told me in confidence  
That Valentine's Day would never be the  
Same now that the love poet of Vermont  
Would compose no more lingering lines.  
They never thought they could miss words so much.

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## **Crumpled Letter**

In the throwing out  
The past reached out her hand—  
Transformed into a crumpled letter  
From twenty-six years ago.

How can two decades  
Pass in a flash when the time  
Between today and tomorrow  
Can flow like a glacier?

Love, anger, retribution  
All floated off the folded missive  
That had been jammed into  
The back of an obscure drawer.  
Emotion hung in the air  
Like a snowflake, and then  
Drifted down into the space  
Between regret and resignation.

I balled up the paper  
In my hand and then tossed  
It into the flames.  
As the words burned and  
Turned to ash, I wondered  
If the author felt a twinge  
As her words left this earth  
Forever.

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## Haikus

1.  
Moss-covered rocks sleep  
In the slanted winter light—  
A good example.

2.  
Light flashes across  
Infinite vaulted darkness—  
Rendezvous unknown.

3.  
Mountain streams scour rocks  
Like your resistance slowly  
Washes away hope.

4.  
Time accelerates—  
Whisking away our short lives  
Into the long past.

5.  
The smell of rotting  
Apples drifts through the silent  
Woods—death's aroma.

6.  
Love is fiery  
Red tongues crashing together—  
A passionate wreck.

7.  
I will soon forget  
You when I drink from the glass  
Of oblivion.



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8.  
When you left I tore  
The stars from the sky, leaving  
A bleak emptiness.

9.  
Florentine master:  
Touch my oval face with a  
Swift delicacy.

10.  
The moon leans backwards  
Like an exhausted lover.  
Intimacy wanes.

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## Locked

Locked to wed are we.  
Locked for eternity  
This lock shall not be picked  
To do so would be wicked.

No locksmith can sever the bond.  
No wizard undo with a magic wand.  
Wedlocked forever we said.  
No more talk—now off to bed.

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## **Your First Smile**

Your first smile launched one  
Thousand wishes yet to be realized.  
The yearning look in your eyes  
Revealed projects not yet begun.

You reached too far in a world  
That splits hope like rocks that  
Are being cracked with an iron spike.  
Your dreams remain unfurled.

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## Love's Madness

Am I mad to stay awake  
Listening for you in the wind?  
Should I instead sleep,  
Hoping you will invade my dreams?

No, no—I tell myself.  
I will walk to the sea,  
For there I will see you  
Rise from the waves.

Embrace me you must  
To end my madness.  
Come back to me you must  
To purge my eternal sadness.

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## When Love Begins

When love begins, the autumn leaves  
Rise up from the forest floor  
And turn green once more.

When love begins, the last streaks  
Of a dying day become the morning star—  
Dispensing light near and far.

When love begins, fields frozen  
Hard and brown explode with lush  
Grasses—soothing to the eye and to the touch.

When love begins, our desolate  
Spirits melt away with a smile,  
A whisper and words that beguile.

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## Transforming

I was a bleak gray sheet  
Made dark by leaden skies  
Until your dawn broke  
Over the boulevard,  
Releasing aromas  
And conversations at cafés;  
Liberating the flower vendors  
From their closed stalls.

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## Undiscovered Country

You—an undiscovered county.  
Me—a passionate pilgrim.  
I, on a wondrous whim,  
Sought soothing beauty.  
Your border was well guarded—  
Harsh hills of imposing stone;  
Valleys dark and windblown,  
Telling me not to tread.  
I left your pale provinces  
With a raw wind at my back,  
Stumbling over a well-worn track  
Until your realm vanished in the mist.

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## The Wind

North blew the wind  
The day we first kissed.

South blew the wind  
When you had faith in my promise.

East blew the wind  
On the day our chance was missed,

West blew the wind  
As I sat alone and reminisced.



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## **Moonlight Crept In**

Moonlight crept in like a lost lover—  
Cool, angular hands swept over her limbs,  
Arousing her from a soft slumber.  
She saw shafts of yellow light  
Navigate knowingly down her torso.  
She lay silently until the delicate  
Intruder slipped away at dawn.

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## Giving Due

Birches bow gallantly  
As you approach.  
They are charmed  
By your beauty.

Clouds pause and take a look  
As you stride  
Purposefully along a trail,  
Leaping like a deer over a brook.

The clouds then move aside,  
Telling the sun to shine  
Without reserve  
So you can glow before my eyes.

As you walk out of the forest,  
Stamped with nature's seal,  
I out-dueled the wind  
To give you the spring's first kiss.

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## Your Delicate Steps

In the panting darkness  
I hear your delicate steps advance  
Slowly toward my bed.  
This is reality I hope and not a trance.

Your soft shape I dimly see  
Waltzing through the shadows.  
Slowly, slowly gliding toward  
My arms, waiting to hold you close.

Please do not delay love's  
Opening act. Let our flesh meet  
Now. Ignite the light, chase away  
The shadows. Let our hearts together beat.

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## The Barn Painter

Red is the color of Valentine's Day,  
It has been said.  
Across the green hills of Vermont  
A thousand barns I will paint red.  
After each hill you climb,  
After you round every country bend,  
You will see a barn by me painted red—  
A sturdy symbol of the love I send.

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## Nature's Delivery

I was remiss in putting a card in the mail.  
Life's responsibilities fog the memory.  
But I did contact the wind and trees.  
Through the air my valentines do sail.

Every leaf glowing red tallies my love.  
Every crimson sunset signifies my passion.  
Every season signals my conviction  
That your smile is my treasure trove.

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## **Make Me a Rose**

All I need is a red petal or two  
And a sleek stem with a thorn.  
Then I am a rose that you see in the morn—  
The rose that whispers of my love for you.

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## Silent Steps

I saw tracks in the winter snow  
From unseen creatures I did not know.  
Silently they crept through the night—  
Furtive, wary—they hid from sight.

You too step barefoot and silent  
With your shy temperament.  
You glide across the moonlit floor  
With a natural grace I adore.

Do not hide from me tonight.  
Come, come to the firelight  
So that I may see your face glow  
With love's warmth until the dawn tomorrow.

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## All I Have

I don't have much to give today.  
I don't have much to say.  
I just have all the fields fresh and green—  
All of the clear, cool mountain streams—  
All of the brilliant starlight  
That burns in the vast mountain night.  
Of all these things I will softly tell—  
In them, and in my heart, you quietly dwell.



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