



*The Love Poet
of Vermont*

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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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