**Home they brought her Warrior Dead by Alfred Lord Tennyson**

Home they brought her warrior dead:
She nor swooned, nor uttered cry:
All her maidens, watching, said,
‘She must weep or she will die.’

Then they praised him, soft and low,
Called him worthy to be loved,
Truest friend and noblest foe;
Yet she neither spoke nor moved.

Stole a maiden from her place,
Lightly to the warrior stepped,
Took the face-cloth from the face;
Yet she neither moved nor wept.

Rose a nurse of ninety years,
Set his child upon her knee—
Like summer tempest came her tears—
‘Sweet my child, I live for thee.’

**Summary**

This poem is made up of four stanzas, each consisting of four lines each. The whole poem is written in third person with the narrator describing a particular incident. The incident in question is a recently-widowed woman’s reaction to her husband’s death in battle.

In the first stanza, the narrator describes how the husband’s corpse was brought to his home after he had passed away while fighting in the war field. All the onlookers had expected the wife to faint at the sight of her dead husband, or to start weeping uncontrollably. However, the wife shocked everybody. She stood stock still, and she did not shed even a single tear. However, this was not a sign of strength, thought the onlookers. They believed she was in shock, and had not accepted her husband’s death as true till then. All of the widow’s women, who were surrounding her, watched her and finally they said that she must cry, or else she would perish. They said this because they believed that all the pain that the widow was keeping pent up inside her would eventually have an adverse effect on her health, and that she would not survive from the misery inflicted on her by her husband’s death.

In the second stanza, the narrator describes how the maidens who had come to visit the widow tried in various ways to make her aware of the loss she had been through so as to evoke an emotional reaction from her. They spoke in gentle tones while praising her dead husband, and said that he had deserved all the love she had given him. They did this to remind her of the deep relation between husband and wife that she seems to have ignored in her shock. Perhaps reminding her of how close she had been to her now-gone husband would bring tears to her eyes, and these tears would ease her pain and relieve her mind of the pressure to hide her emotions in front of the crowd of onlookers. The maidens also said that had been the “truest friend” and the “noblest foe” they had ever seen. Such praise of the husband, not just from the wife’s point of view, but from society’s point of view, was aimed at reminding the widow of the nobility and dignity her husband commanded from the world at large. That his loss was a loss to all who knew him might be a greater realization for the wife, reasoned the maidens. However, none of their words seemed to have any effect on the wife. She still stood motionless and silent.

In the third stanza, the narrator describes how one particular maiden made a concentrated effort from her own side to make the widow cry, and thus express her grief. This maiden walked up slowly and quietly to the corpse, and removed the face-cloth that covers the faces of dead bodies from the face of the woman’s husband. Perhaps seeing her husband’s countenance would prove to be too difficult an experience for the widow, and she would at last dissolve in uncontrollable tears. However, once again, the widow surprised every onlooker. She refused to move, or to shed a tear.

In the fourth stanza, the apparent mystery of the widow’s motionlessness and silence is solved. The narrator describes how an old nurse of ninety years’ age placed the widow’s child on her knee, and then, to everyone’s relief, the widow’s tears came down with the force of a storm like the ones that occur in summer months. In addition to this, the widow uttered her first words since seeing her husband’s corpse, and told her child that she would go on with her life for the child’s sake. Thus it is apparent that all the while the widow had been thinking of her child who would have to live life without a father. This concern of the widow’s had kept her paralyzed and speechless in worry. But in the end, she resolved that she would care for her child in every way and never let the child feel abandoned or unloved.

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**Analysis**

Context: The first part of the poem explanation focuses on the context in which ‘Home they brought her Warrior Dead’ was published. This short lyric was published in 1847. It appeared as a part of the fifth canto of Tennyson’s much-acclaimed long narrative poem The Princess. Since The Princess is known for being a poetical treatise on women’s higher education, this lyric may seem inconsistent with its theme. However, grief is an essential part of Tennyson’s poetry as seen in one of his most famous works In Memoriam which consists of lyrics written over a span of seventeen years, all commemorating the death of his dear friend Arthur Henry Hallam. Thus ‘Home they brought her Warrior Dead’ may seem atypical in the context of The Princess, but is quit typical in the larger context of Tennyson’s poetic oeuvre as a whole.

Rhyme Scheme and Rhetorical Devices: The second part of this poem analysis focuses on what gives ‘Home they brought her Warrior Dead’ its musical quality. The rhythm that is inherent in the poem is a result of the simple rhyme scheme used by Tennyson. Each of the four stanzas of this poem uses an ABAB rhyme scheme. This makes reading the poem an easy and enjoyable experience.

The rhetorical device used by Tennyson that greatly enriches this poem is simile. A simile is used in the third line of the forth stanza. The narrator uses the simile to compare the widow’s tears with a storm that occurs in summertime. The relatively calm summer months do not provide any clue to what violent storms can occur during this time. The storms come down suddenly, and without warning, in a great and forceful manner that shocks everybody. In the same way, after the widow had refused to seem fazed by her husband’s death for so long, her tears had also shocked and amazed all the onlookers. Her tears too had come down suddenly and with great force.

Contrasts: This part of the poem explanation focuses on the multiple contrasts that Tennyson has brought into the poem, that testify to his superior poetic craft and skills. The first contrast that we observe is between the form and the content of ‘Home they brought her Warrior Dead’. While the rhyme scheme used by Tennyson is light and cheerful, the content of the poem is heavy and distressing. Death and grief are hardly things we take lightly. However, the rhyme scheme does not detract in any way from moving the readers of the poem into experiencing profound emotions when confronted with the brevity of all mortal men’s lives.

The second contrast that we observe is between the visible and the invisible signs of grief. The visible signs of grief are the ones that the onlookers expect to see in the widow, such as swooning or weeping. On the other hand, the invisible signs of grief are the widow’s immobility and speechlessness. This lack of words and actions speaks of the shock that has resulted from the grief over her husband’s death.

The third contrast is between old age and youth. The nurse who places the widow’s child on her lap is ninety years old. As opposed to this, the child is young, and reminds the woman of her duty to her family. It is the youthfulness of her child that jolts her back to reality, and finally makes her cry.

The fourth contrast is between death and life. It is not the lifeless corpse of her husband that moves the widow, but her flesh-and-blood child that tells her that life must go on. The movement of the poem is from death towards life, from shock and despair towards hope, and this provides a clue into Tennyson’s mind as well, for he believed that death is not the be all and end all of life. ‘Home they brought her Warrior Dead’ is a testament to this belief of Tennyson’s.