Laetitia Pilkington, â??Sorrowâ?•

Description

LAETITIA PILKINGTON

â??Sorrowâ?•

While sunk in deepest solitude and woe,
My streaming eyes with ceaseless sorrow flow,
While anguish wears the sleepless night away,
And fresher grief awaits returning day;
Encompassed round with ruin, want and shame,
Undone in fortune, blasted in my fame;
Lost to the soft endearing ties of life,
And tender names of daughter, mother, wife;
Can no recess from calumny be found?
And yet can fate inflict a deeper wound!
    As one who, in a dreadful tempest tossâ??d,
If thrown by chance upon some desert coast,
Calmly awhile surveys the fatal shore,
And hopes that fortune can inflict no more;
Till some fell serpent makes the wretch his prey,
Who â??scapâ??d in vain the dangers of the sea;
So I who hardly â??scapâ??d domestic rage,
Born with eternal sorrows to engage,
Now feel the poisâ??nous force of slandâ??rous tongues,
Who daily wound me with envenomâ??d wrongs.
    Shed then a ray divine, all gracious heavâ??n,
Pardon the soul that sues to be forgiven,
Though cruel human-kind relentless prove,
And least resemble thee in acts of love;
Though friends who should administer relief,
Add pain to woe, and misery to grief,
And oft! too oft! with hypocritic air,
Condemn those faults in which they deeply share:
Yet thou who dost our various frailties know,
And seeâ??st each spring from whence our actions flow,
Shalt, while for mercy to thy throne I fly,
Regard the lifted hand and streaming eye.
    Thou didst the jarring elements compose,
When this harmonious universe arose;
O speak the tempest of the soul to peace,

Bid the tumultuous war of passion cease;
Receive me to thy kind paternal care,
And guard me from the horrors of despair.
And since no more I boast a motherâ??s name,
Nor in my children can a portion claim,
The helpless babes to thy protection take,
Nor punish for their hapless motherâ??s sake.
Thus the poor bird, when frighted from her nest,
With agonizing love, and grief distressâ??d,
Still fondly hovers oâ??er the much-lovâ??d place,
Through strengthless, to protect her tender race;
In piercing notes she movingly complains,
And tells the unattending woods her pains.
And thou, my soulâ??s once fondest, dearest part,
Who schemâ??d my ruin with such cruel art,
From human laws no longer seek to find
A powâ??r to loose that knot which God has joinâ??d,
The props of life are rudely pullâ??d away,
And the frail building falling to decay,
My death shall give thee thy desirâ??d release,
And lay me down in everlasting peace.

NOTES:

9 *calumny* Slander, â??a false statement about a person that is made to damage their reputationâ?• (*OED*).

16 *â??scapâ??d* Escaped.

25-26 *friendsâ?¦ add pain to woe, misery to grief* The poet Jonathan Swift, once patron and friend to Pilkington, would after her divorce disavow her and call her â??â??the most profligate whore in either kingdom.â?• (*History Ireland,* vol. 17, no. 2, Mar/April 2009).

39-40 *And since no more I boast a motherâ??s name,/Nor in my children can a portion claim* Post divorce Pilkingtonâ??s husband assumed all their possessions and disallowed her seeing their children. (*History* Ireland, vol. 17, no. 2, Mar/April 2009).

49 *And thou, my soulâ??s once fondest, dearest part* â??Mem. My Husband, who was then suing for a divorceâ?• [Authorâ??s Note].

SOURCE: *Poems by Eminent Ladies,* vol. II (London, 1755), pp. 255-57. [Hathitrust]

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