The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman

By William Wordsworth

Before I see another day,
Oh let my body die away!
In sleep I heard the northern gleams;
The stars they were among my dreams;
In sleep did I behold the skies,
I saw the crackling flashes drive,
And yet they are upon my eyes,
And yet I am alive;
Before I see another day,
Oh let my body die away!

What effect is achieved by the making the senses of sight and hearing virtually interchangeable here?

This area of Canada is very close to the Arctic circle, where the Northern lights can be observed.

What explanation for the lights would be given by some native groups?

My fire is dead: it knew no pain;
Yet it is dead, and I remain:
All stiff with ice the ashes lie;
And they are dead, and I will die.
When I was well, I wished to live,
For clothes, for warmth, for food, and fire;
But they to me no joy can give,
No pleasure now, and no desire.
Then ere contented will I lie!
AloneI cannot fear to die.

What contrast is Wordsworth making between the fire and the woman?

What reasons did the woman have for wanting to continue living while she was well?

How is this contrasted with the feelings she has now she is ill?

What does the fire symbolise? How is the poet using it here?

What effect is created by putting this word at the beginning of the line?

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Alas! You might have dragged me on
Another day, a single one!
Too soon despair o'er me prevailed;
Too soon my heartless spirit failed;
When you were gone my limbs were stronger,
And Oh how grievously I rue,
That afterwards, a little longer,
My friends, I did not follow you!
For strong and without pain I lay,
My friends, when you were gone away.

What does the phrase highlighted in yellow imply about the woman's journey so far?

Look at the words highlighted in purple and those highlighted in blue. How effective is the poet's use of contrast here?

This word in this context means downhearted or dispirited.

What happened just after she was abandoned? What psychological effect is Wordsworth using here? (Think about what happens to your symptoms when you arrive at the doctor or the dentist!)

What are the woman's feelings for her child?

What happened to the woman's child? Why do you think this was?

What point is being emphasised in line 2?

What did she fancy the child was trying to do when he looked at her?

How does Wordsworth use contrast to show the feelings of the child? (The phrases highlighted in yellow will help.)

What does the reader learn about the woman in this stanza?

My child! they gave thee to another,
A woman who was not thy mother.
When from my arms my babe they took,
On me how strangely did he look!
Through his whole body something ran,
A most strange something did I see;
-As if he strove to be a man,
That he might pull the sledge for me.
And then he stretched his arms, how wild!
Oh mercy! like a little child.

What are the woman's feelings for her child?

What is meant by the phrase highlighted in blue?

My little joy! my little pride!
In two days more I must have died.
Then do not weep and grieve for me;
I feel I must have died with thee.
Oh wind that o'er my head art flying,
The way my friends their course did bend,
I should not feel the pain of dying,
Could I with thee a message send.
Too soon, my friends, you went away.
For I had many things to say.

What does the phrase highlighted in yellow imply about the woman's state of health?

If you use a message send.

What is the woman's address the wind? What message do you think she might want to send with it?

Why do you think she feels this?

What is being implied by the qualifiers highlighted in blue?

What do these three lines highlight in yellow imply about the woman's state of health?

Why does the woman address the wind? What message do you think she might want to send with it?

This word in this context means downhearted or dispirited.

What do these two lines suggest about a) her companions and b) the woman herself?

What do these lines highlight about a) her companions and b) the woman herself?

What are the woman's feelings for her child?
I'll follow you across the snow,
You travel heavily and slow:
In spite of all my weary pain,
I'll look upon your tents again.

My fire is dead, and snowy white
The water which beside it stood;
The wolf has come to me tonight,
And he has stolen away my food.

For ever left alone am I,
Then wherefore should I fear to die?

My journey will be shortly run,
I shall not see another sun,
I cannot lift my limbs to know
If they have any life or no.

My poor forsaken child! if I
For once could have thee close to me,
With happy heart I would then die,
And my last thoughts would happy be.

What does the woman think of doing? How does she imagine herself catching up?

What has happened to the woman's fire and to the water she was left? Do you think this is symbolic?

What has happened to the food that her friends left for her?

What is the woman's attitude to death? Why do you think she feels like this?

What journey is being referred to in the first line? How is this an appropriate metaphor here?

What does the woman say would make it easier for her to die? What do you think Wordsworth is saying about motherhood in this poem?

How has Wordsworth used repetition in this poem? Do you feel the poem is successful in creating sympathy for the woman's plight? What effect do the metre, form and rhyme scheme have on the meaning?