



The Lake

Alphonse de Lamartine

So driven onward to new shores forever,
Into the night eternal swept away,
Upon the sea of time can we not ever
Drop anchor for one day?

O Lake! Scarce has a single year coursed past.
To waves that she was meant to see again,
I come alone to sit upon this stone
You saw her sit on then.

You lowed just so below those plunging cliffs.
Just so you broke about their riven flanks.
Just so the wind flung your spray forth to wash
Her feet which graced your banks.

Recall the evening we sailed out in silence?
On waves beneath the skies, afar and wide,
Naught but the rowers' rhythmic oars we heard
Stroking your tuneful tide.

Then of a sudden tones untold on earth,
Resounded round the sounding spellbound sea.
The tide attended; and I heard these words
From the voice dear to me:

Pause in your trek O Time! Pause in your flight,
Favorable hours, and stay!
Let us enjoy the transient delight
That fills our fairest day.

Unhappy crowds cry out to you in prayers.
Flow, Time, and set them free.
Run through their days and through their ravening cares!

But leave the happy be.

In vain I pray the hours to linger on
And Time slips into flight.
I tell this night: "Be slower!" and the dawn
Undoes the raveled night.

Let's love, then! Love, and feel while feel we can
The moment on its run.
There is no shore of Time, no port of Man.
It flows, and we go on.

Covetous Time! Our mighty drunken moments
When love pours forth huge floods of happiness;
Can it be true that they depart no faster
Than days of wretchedness?

Why can we not keep some trace at the least?
Gone wholly? Lost forever in the black?
Will Time that gave them, Time that now elides them
Never once bring them back?

Eternity, naught, past, dark gulfs: what do
You do with days of ours which you devour?
Speak! Shall you not bring back those things sublime?
Return the raptured hour?

O Lake, caves, silent cliffs and darkling wood,
Whom Time has spared or can restore to light,
Beautiful Nature, let there live at least
The memory of that night:

Let it be in your stills and in your storms,
Fair Lake, in your cavorting sloping sides,
In the black pine trees, in the savage rocks
That hang above your tides;

Let it be in the breeze that stirs and passes,
In sounds resounding shore to shore each night,
In the star's silver countenance that glances
Your surface with soft light.

Let the deep keening winds, the sighing reeds,
Let the light balm you blow through cliff and grove,
Let all that is beheld or heard or breathed
Say only "they did love."