

Lenore

By Edgar Allan Poe

Text, Summaries, and Notes

1

Ah, **broken is the golden bowl!**—the spirit flown forever!

Let the bell toll!—a saintly soul floats on the **Stygian river**:

And, Guy de Vere, hast thou no tear?—weep now or never more!

See! on yon drear and rigid bier low lies thy love, Lenore!

Come! let the burial rite be read—the funeral song be sung!—

An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young—

A dirge for her the doubly dead in that she died so young.

Stanza 1 Summary: The speaker is an insincere relative or acquaintance of Lenore. He asks that the bell toll for her as her soul floats into the afterlife. Lenore's lover, Guy de Vere, should weep for her, the speaker says, as she lies on a bier awaiting the funeral. He then directs the the funeral rite to begin asks the mourners to sing a dirge for this queenly woman who was so young when death claimed her.

broken . . . bowl: An allusion to Chapter 12, Verse 6, of Ecclesiastes (Old Testament). The golden bowl symbolized life. Breaking it symbolized death.

Stygian River: In Greek mythology, the River Styx, which surrounds the Underworld, or Hades. A boatman, Charon (pronounced KARE un) ferried souls across the river to reach the abode of the dead. .

2

"Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride;

And when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her—that she died!

How shall the ritual, then, be read?—the **requiem** how be sung

By you—by yours, the evil eye,—by yours, the **slandorous tongue**

That did to death the innocence that died, and died so young?"

Stanza 2 Summary: The speaker is Lenore's lover, Guy de Vere. He lashes out at the Stanza 1 speaker and his friends, calling them wretches and asserting that the kind and loving words spoken in Stanza 1 are hypocrisy. After all, de Vere says, the Stanza 1 speaker and his friends loved her only for her wealth and despised her for her rightful pride in herself. When Lenore died, de Vere says, the Stanza 1 speaker even pronounced a blessing in jubilation at her death. De Vere asks how the funeral rites can take place with dignity and respect when hypocrites pretend to honor Lenore.

requiem: In Roman Catholic theology, a Mass for a dead person; any funeral rite; a funeral song. In Latin, *requiem* means *rest* (as in *May she rest in peace*).

slandorous tongue: De Vere accuses the speaker of having slandered Lenore...

3

Peccavimus; but rave not thus! and let a Sabbath song

Go up to God so solemnly the dead may feel no wrong.

The sweet Lenore hath "gone before," with Hope, that flew beside,

Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have been thy bride.

For her, the fair and debonair, that now so lowly lies,

The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes

The life still there, upon her hair, the death upon her eyes.

Stanza 3 Summary: The speaker from Stanza 1 tells de Vere "we have sinned" (*peccavimus*). But he tells de Vere to stop raving with accusations, for he believes Lenore was a sweet and loving person. De Vere is wildly angry, the speaker says, because Lenore died before de Vere could marry her. She still looks lovely, with life in her yellow hair, but not in her eyes.

Peccavimus (pronounced pec AH ve mus): Latin for *we have sinned*.

4

"**Avaunt!** avaunt! from fiends below, the indignant ghost is **riven**—

From Hell unto a high estate far up within the Heaven—

From grief and groan, to a golden throne, beside the King of Heaven!

Let no bell toll, then, lest her soul, amid its hallowed mirth,

Should catch the note as it doth float up from the damnèd Earth!

And I!—to-night my heart is light!—no dirge will I upraise,

But waft the angel on her flight with a **Paeon** of old days!"

Stanza 4 Summary: De Vere again speaks. He says Lenore rises up from the Stygian depths and takes her place on a golden throne beside God himself. There she knows no grief or sadness. Therefore, no bell should toll for her, he says, lest its peal should rise up from earth and disturb her contented soul. De Vere ends by saying that he is happy and will sing no funeral songs. Instead, he will speed her soul to heaven with a hymn of joy and thanksgiving.

Avaunt: Go away; begone; get thee hence; fly away.

riven: torn apart; split. Here, de Vere says Lenore has been torn away from the Underworld and taken into heaven

Paeon(pronounced PE in): song of joy, praise, triumph, or thanksgiving.

Original Version (1831) of the Poem, Entitled "A Paean"

How shall the burial rite be read?

The solemn song be sung ?

The requiem for the loveliest dead,

That ever died so young?

II.

Her friends are gazing on her,

And on her gaudy bier,

And weep ! — oh! to dishonor

Dead beauty with a tear!

III.

They loved her for her wealth —

And they hated her for her pride —

But she grew in feeble health,

And they love her — that she died.

IV.

They tell me (while they speak

Of her "costly broider'd pall")

That my voice is growing weak —

That I should not sing at all —

V.

Or that my tone should be

Tun'd to such solemn song

So mournfully — so mournfully,

That the dead may feel no wrong.

VI.

But she is gone above,

With young Hope at her side,

And I am drunk with love

Of the dead, who is my bride. —

VII.

Of the dead — dead who lies

All perfum'd there,

With the death upon her eyes,

And the life upon her hair.

VIII.

Thus on the coffin loud and long

I strike — the murmur sent

Through the grey chambers to my song,

Shall be the accompaniment.

IX.

Thou died'st in thy life's June —

But thou did'st not die too fair:

Thou did'st not die too soon,

Nor with too calm an air.

X.

From more than fiends on earth,

Thy life and love are riven,

To join the untainted mirth

Of more than thrones in heaven —

XII.

Therefore, to thee this night

I will no requiem raise,

But waft thee on thy flight,

With a Pæan of old days.