

1862

STOLEN WATERS

Lewis Carroll

Carroll, Lewis (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898) - English novelist, poet, photographer, and mathematician, best known for his fantastical childrens' classics. He was a mathematical lecturer at Oxford. Stolen Waters (1862) - One of Lewis Carroll's poems. Opening lines: The light was faint, and soft the air / That breathed around the place;...

STOLEN WATERS

THE light was faint, and soft the air That breathed around the place;
And she was lithe, and tall, and fair, And with a wayward grace
Her queenly head she bare.

With glowing cheek, with gleaming eye, She met me on the way:
My spirit owned the witchery Within her smile that lay: I followed her,
I know not why.

The trees were thick with many a fruit, The grass with many a flower:
My soul was dead, my tongue was mute, In that accursed hour.

And, in my dream, with silvery voice, She said, or seemed to say,
"Youth is the season to rejoice" I could not choose but stay: I could not say her nay.

***She plucked a branch above her head; With rarest fruitage laden:
"Drink of the juice, Sir Knight," she said: "Tis good for knight and maiden."***

Oh, blind mine eye that would not trace Oh, deaf mine ear that would not heed
The mocking smile upon her face, The mocking voice of greed!

I drank the juice; and straightway felt A fire within my brain:

My soul within me seemed to melt In sweet delirious pain.

"Sweet is the stolen draught," she said: "Hath sweetness stint or measure?
Pleasant the secret hoard of bread:

What bars us from our pleasure?"

"Yea, take we pleasure while we may," I heard myself replying.

In the red sunset, far away, My happier life was dying:

My heart was sad, my voice was gay.

And unawares, I knew not how, I kissed her dainty finger-tips, I
kissed her on the lily brow, I kissed her on the false, false lips
That burning kiss, I feel it now!

"True love gives true love of the best: Then take", I cried, "my
heart to thee!" The very heart from out my breast I plucked, I gave
it willingly: Her very heart she gave to me
Then died the glory
from the west.

In the gray light I saw her face, And it was withered, old, and gray;
The flowers were fading in their place, Were fading with the
fading day.

Forth from her, like a hunted deer, Through all that ghastly night I
fled, And still behind me seemed to hear Her fierce unflagging
tread; And scarce drew breath for fear.

Yet marked I well how strangely seemed The heart within my
breast to sleep: Silent it lay, or so I dreamed, With never a throb or
leap.

For hers was now my heart, she said, The heart that once had been
mine own: And in my breast I bore instead A cold, cold heart of
stone.

So grew the morning overhead.

The sun shot downward through the trees

His old familiar flame: All ancient sounds upon the breeze From
copse and meadow came
But I was not the same.

They call me mad: I smile, I weep, Uncaring how or why:

Yea, when one's heart is laid asleep, What better than to die? So
that the grave be dark and deep.

To die! To die? And yet, methinks, I drink of life, to-day, Deep as
the thirsty traveler drinks Of fountain by the way: My voice is sad,
my heart is gay.

When yestereve was on the wane, I heard a clear voice singing So
sweetly that, like summer-rain, My happy tears came springing:

My human heart returned again.

“A rosy child, Sitting and singing, in a garden fair, The joy of hearing, seeing, The simple joy of being
Or twining rosebuds in the golden hair That ripples free and wild.

“A sweet pale child Wearily looking to the purple West Waiting the great For-ever That suddenly shall sever The cruel chains that hold her from her rest
By earth-joys unbeguiled.

“An angel-child Gazing with living eyes on a dead face: N The mortal form forsaken, That none may now awaken, That lieth painless, moveless in her place, As though in death she smiled!

“Be as a child So shalt thou sing for very joy of breath So shalt thou wait thy dying, In holy transport lying
So Pass rejoicing through the gate of death, In garment undefiled.”

Then call me what they will, I know That now my soul is glad: If this be madness, better so, Far better to be mad, Weeping or smiling as I go.

For if I weep, it is that now I see how deep a loss is mine, And feel how brightly round my brow The coronal might shine, Had I but kept mine early vow:

And if I smile, it is that now I see the promise of the years The garland waiting for my brow, That must be won with tears, With pain- with death- I care not how.

May 9, 1862.

THE END