

Baile And Aillinn

William Butler Yeats

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ARGUMENT. Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.

I HARDLY hear the curlew cry,
Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,
Before my thoughts begin to run
On the heir of Uladh, Buan's son,
Baile, who had the honey mouth;
And that mild woman of the south,
Aillinn, who was King Lugaidh's heir.
Their love was never drowned in care
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold
Because their hodies had grown old.
Being forbid to marry on earth,
They blossomed to immortal mirth.
About the time when Christ was born,
When the long wars for the White Horn
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,
Young Baile Honey Mouth, whom some
Called rather Baile Little-Land,
Rode out of Emain with a band
Of harpers and young men; and they
Imagined, as they struck the way
To many-pastured Muirthemne,
That all things fell out happily,
And there, for all that fools had said,
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.
They found an old man running there:
He had ragged long grass-coloured hair;
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;
He had puddle-water in his shoes;
He had half a cloak to keep him dry,
Although he had a squirrel's eye.
O wandering hirds and rushy beds,
You put such folly in our heads
With all this crying in the wind,
No common love is to our mind,
And our poor kate or Nan is less
Than any whose unhappiness
Awoke the harp-strings long ago.

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Yet they that know all things hut know
That all this life can give us is
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.
Who was it put so great a scorn
In the grey reeds that night and morn
Are trodden and broken by the herds,
And in the light bodies of birds
The north wind tumbles to and fro
And pinches among hail and snow?¹
That runner said: "I am from the south;
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,
To tell him how the girl Aillinn
Rode from the country of her kin,
And old and young men rode with her:
For all that country had been astir
If anybody half as fair
Had chosen a husband anywhere
But where it could see her every day.
When they had ridden a little way
An old man caught the horse's head
With: ""You must home again, and wed
With somebody in your own land."
A young man cried and kissed her hand,
""O lady, wed with one of us";
And when no face grew piteous
For any gentle thing she spake,
She fell and died of the heart-break.'
Because a lover's heart s worn out,
Being tumbled and blown about
By its own blind imagining,
And will believe that anything
That is bad enough to be true, is true,
Baile's heart was broken in two;
And he, being laid upon green boughs,
Was carried to the goodly house
Where the Hound of Uladh sat before
The brazen pillars of his door,
His face bowed low to weep the end
Of the harper's daughter and her friend
For although years had passed away
He always wept them on that day,
For on that day they had been betrayed;
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid
Under a cairn of sleepy stone
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,
Although he is carrying stone, but two
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.
We hold, because our memory is
Sofull of that thing and of this,
That out of sight is out of mind.
But the grey rush under the wind

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And the grey bird with crooked bill
rave such long memories that they still
Remember Deirdre and her man;
And when we walk with Kate or Nan
About the windy water-side,
Our hearts can Fear the voices chide.
How could we be so soon content,
Who know the way that Naoise went?
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,
Who being lovely was so wise –
Ah! wise, my heart knows well how wise.>1
Now had that old gaunt crafty one,
Gathering his cloak about him, mn
Where Aillinn rode with waiting-maids,
Who amid leafy lights and shades
Dreamed of the hands that would unlace
Their bodices in some dim place
When they had come to the matriage-bed,
And harpers, pacing with high head
As though their music were enough
To make the savage heart of love
Grow gentle without sorrowing,
Imagining and pondering
Heaven knows what calamity;
"Another's hurried off," cried he,
"From heat and cold and wind and wave;
They have heaped the stones above his grave
In Muirthemne, and over it
In changeless Ogham letters writ –
Baile, that was of Rury's seed.
But the gods long ago decreed
No waiting-maid should ever spread
Baile and Aillinn's marriage-bed,
For they should clip and clip again
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.
Therefore it is but little news
That put this hurry in my shoes.'
Then seeing that he scarce had spoke
Before her love-worn heart had broke.
He ran and laughed until he came
To that high hill the herdsmen name
The Hill Seat of Laighen, because
Some god or king had made the laws
That held the land together there,
In old times among the clouds of the air.
That old man climbed; the day grew dim;
Two swans came flying up to him,
Linked by a gold chain each to each,
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.
They knew him: his changed body was

Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp—strings
That Edain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.
What shall I call them? fish that swim,
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim
By a broad water—lily leaf;
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf
Forgotten at the threshing—place;
Or birds lost in the one clear space
Of morning light in a dim sky;
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,
Or the door—pillars of one house,
Or two sweet blossoming apple—boughs
That have one shadow on the ground;
Or the two strings that made one sound
Where that wise harper's finger ran.
For this young girl and this young man
Have happiness without an end,
Because they have made so good a friend.
They know all wonders, for they pass
The towery gates of Gorias,
And Findrias and Falias,
And long—forgotten Murias,
Among the giant kings whose hoard,
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword,
Was robbed before earth gave the wheat;
Wandering from broken street to street
They come where some huge watcher is,
And tremble with their love and kiss.
They know undying things, for they
Wander where earth withers away,
Though nothing troubles the great streams
But light from the pale stars, and gleams
From the holy orchards, where there is none
But fruit that is of precious stone,
Or apples of the sun and moon.
What were our praise to them? They eat
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat;
Who when night thickens are afloat
On dappled skins in a glass boat,
Far out under a windless sky;
While over them birds of Aengus fly,
And over the tiller and the prow,
And waving white wings to and fro
Awaken wanderings of light air
To stir their coverlet and their hair.
And poets found, old writers say,
A yew tree where his body lay;
But a wild apple hid the grass
With its sweet blossom where hers was,

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And being in good heart, because
A better time had come again
After the deaths of many men,
And that long fighting at the ford,
They wrote on tablets of thin board,
Made of the apple and the yew,
All the love stories that they knew.
"Let rush and hird cry out their fill
Of the harper's daughter if they will,
Beloved, I am not afraid of her.
She is not wiser nor lovelier,
And you are more high of heart than she,
For all her wanderings over-sea;
But I'd have bird and rush forget
Those other two; for never yet
Has lover lived, but longed to wive
Like them that are no more alive."