

A Sad and Last Adieu: Poems for Funerals

A couple of earlier poems to start with, to the point and not too dreich. You may well want to skip them for something more modern.

Gude Night, and Joy be wi ye All
by Alexander Boswell (1775 – 1841)

Gude night, and joy be wi ye all,
your harmless mirth has cheered my heart,
may life's fell blasts oot oer ye blaw,
in sorrow may ye never part.
My spirit lives, but strength is gone,
the mountain fires now blaze in vain.
Remember, sons, the deeds I've done,
and in your deeds I'll live again.

When on yon muir our gallant clan
frae boasting foes their banners tore,
wha showed himself a better man,
or fiercer waved the red claymore?
But when in peace – then mark me there,
when through the glen the wanderer came,
I gave him of our hardy fare,
I gave him here a welcome hame.

The auld will speak, the young will hear:
Be canty, but be gude and leal,
yer ain ills aye hae heart to bear,
anither'saye hae heart to feel.
So ere I set I'll see you shine,
I'll see you triumph ere I fa'.
My parting breath shall boast you mine –
Gude night, and joy be wi ye all.

The Cypress and the Yew by Robert Allan (1774 1841)

Oh I hae twined wi muckle love
a garland for yer brow,
but withered are its sweetest flowers,
and broken is yer vow.
Syne I will tak the cypress wreath
and weave it wi the yew.

The gladsome hours of love are gone,
I wist na where they sped,
the lily pale has stained my cheek.
this is the damask red.
The cypress shall my chaplet be

to wind round my head.

Oh why does love so sweetly smile,
and gayest flowrets strew?
Oh why does love, the fairest flower,
still twine about with rue?
The rue was thine, but aye is mine,
the Cypress and the Yew.

As a contribution from Robert Burns, Farewell to Ayrshire – a recitation on the beauties of the country and a homage to friendship – may appeal to some.

Farewell to Ayrshire by Robert Burns (1759-1796)

Scenes of woe and scenes of pleasure,
Scenes that former thoughts renew,
Scenes of woe and scenes of pleasure
Now a sad and last adieu.

Bonnie Doon, sae sweet at gloamin,
Fare thee weel before I gang,
Bonnie Doon whare, early roamin,
First I weaved the rustic sang.

Bowers adieu, whare love, decoying,
First enthralled this heart of mine;
There the safest sweets enjoying--
Sweets that memory ne'er shall tyne.

Friends, so near my bosom ever,
Ye hae rendered moments dear,
But, alas! When forced to sever,
Then the stroke, oh how severe!

Friends, that parting tear reserve it,
Though tis doubled ear to me,
Could I think I did deserve it,
How much happier would I be?

Scenes of woe and scenes of pleasure,
Scenes that former thoughts renew,
Scenes of woe and scenes of pleasure
Now a sad and last adieu.

Next up is George Mac Donald, who was a clergyman, and writer of many books and poems, often writing poems in Scots. A short general poem. He does have a basically Christian outlook, as in "Syne begins a better sang," but it works as a

general expression of continuity and hope.

Ane by Ane by George MacDonald (1824-1905)

Ane by ane they gang awa,
the Gatherer gathers great an sma,
ane by ane makes ane an a'.

Aye when ane sets doun the cup,
ane ahint maun tak it up,
yet thegither they will sup.

Golden-heided, ripe an strang,
shorn will be the hairst ere lang.
Syne begins a better sang.

Time for a woman's voice.

The Licht Nichts by Violet Jacob

Ye've left the sun an the canle-licht an the starlicht
The woods baith green an sere,
And yet I hear ye singin doon the braes
I' the licht nichts o the year.

Ye were sae glad; ye were ae sae like the laverock
Wha's hert is i the lift
Nae mair for ye the young green leaves will dance
Nor yet the auld anes drift.

What thocht had you o the ill-faured dairk o winter
But the ingle-nooks o hame?
Love lit yer way an played aboot yer feet
Year in, year oot, the same.

And noo my best, my bonniest and my dearest,
I'll lay ma hert tae sleep
And let the warld, that has nae soonds for me,
its watch o silence keep.

But, whiles an whiles, i the canle-licht an the starlicht
I'll wauken it to hear
The liltin voice that's singin doon the braes
I' the licht nichts o the year.

This version of the 21st psalm may appeal to some.

21st psalm, shepherd's version by Catherine Harvey

Wha is my Shepherd, weel I ken,
the Lord himself is he,
he leads me whaur the girse is green
an burnies quaet that be.

Aft times I fain astray wad gang
an wannert far awa
He fins me oot, he pits me richt,
an brings me hame an aw.
Tho I pass through the gruesome cleuch
fin I ken he is near
his muckle crook will me defen,
sae I hae nocht to fear.
His comfort whilk a sheep could need
his thochtfu care provides
though wolves an dogs may prowle about
In sauffy me he hides.
His guidness an his mercy baith
nae doot will bide wi me
while faulded on the fields o time
or o eternity.

Hugh MacDiarmid, author of many famous lyrics in Scots, also had a reputation as a rabble-raiser and his poem Crowdieknowe is crying out for consideration here. The dead of Crowdieknowe are so formidable that God is clearly not afraid of us (blate). This is a robust poem that might have a place in a service for a family elder where the sense of returning to his forebears is strong. But treat this poem with respect.

Crowdieknowe by Hugh MacDiarmid

Oh to be at Crowdieknowe
when the last trumpet blows
and see the deid come lowpin owre
the auld grey wa's.

Muckle men wi tousled beards,
I grat at as a bairn
'll scramble frae the croodit clay
wi feck o swearin

An glower at God an a' his gang
o angels in the lift,
they trashy bleezin French-like folk
who gar'd them shift!

Fain the weemun-folk'll seek
to mak them haud their row --
Fegs! God's no blate gin he stirs up

the men of Crowdieknowe!

Or how about another very famous poem, a mythical one from MacDiarmid's friend William Soutar?

The Tryst by William Soutar

O luely, luely cam she in
And luely she lay doun:
I kent her be her caller lips
And her breists sae sma and roun.

A' thru the nicht we spak nae word
nor sindered bane frae bane:
A' thru the nicht I heard her hert
gang soundin wi my ain.

It was aboot the waukrife hour
when cocks begin to craw
that she smoo'd saftly thru the mirk
afore the day wud daw.

Sae luely, luely cam she in
sae luely was she gaen,
And wi her aa my simmer days
like they had never been.

This interesting poem by Duncan Glen, one of his early poems, takes a philosophical and reflective look at a relationship and how it may last through memory and dream.

Time's gane oot by Duncan Glen

Time's gane oot
and we hae snibbed the door.

There's dreams I forget
an reasons I canna traik.
There's thochts and learnin, even
here. Here wi you abune the simmer burn.
I hae memories aw my ain
mumblins ayont aw sense.

Time's gane oot
makin room for us.

Here's daurks and mists no bent
or fixed by ony licht.
There's addin up that's richt.

I can dream o you
and time's gane oot.

The next one, by George Hardie, is a little more specific but with its steadfast optimism it could be a good choice for some:

Safe hame by George Harvie

Whan I cam hame ti you, my lass,
whan gloamin smoors ma sun,
I'll tak the road richt willanlie
wi never a waywart turn.

Straucht on, gaen naither richt nor left
ootower the lang laich road
whan airthly bonds, at last, are lowsed
and aisy sits the load.

Whan aa the brigs are burnan bricht
an aa the ties are cut,
I'll walk again a hamelie road
my feet hae lang forgot.

Tho snaa sud faa and snell winds blaa
and rivers rair and faem,
it's blythe we'll be, baith you and me,
when I am cum safe hame,

The next poem is a description of a harvest. This could work for country people or indeed the time of year, and there is the metaphor of gathering in. It's a longish poem so I have shortened it – I have used the whole poem as a Poem of the Month in the past. It is ok to select what you need from any text.

If you use this, consider the suitability to the occasion of the last line about the whisky bottle. It could provide a gentle smile – or you can simply omit the line. It's up to you how you use these poems – take control.

from Hairst by Margaret Gillies Brown

The last lang woosh of grain and aff the tractor speeds
stottin owre ruts, splashin through glaur,
throwin mud to the settin sun
to reach the hills o gowd heapin in the barn.
It seems the whole world's busy.
The flurry re-enacted on ilka fairm aroon.
Men at wark tae feed their bairns;
keep hoose and steadin wind and waterticht.
Clouds are charcoal against pink –

For a moment the sinkin sun flairs oot.
In the aftermath stubble turns a curious gowden- reed.
Aboon, late swallows jink about catching invisible thrips
and a hare, twa rabbits scamper from the last strip o standin grain.

Hairst ower for anither year.
An auld bonnet is thrown hich ow`re the silent combine
by way o praise.

The whisky bottle`s oot on the kitchen table.

This one is actually about death, but it wouldn't suit everybody. Apart from a few unusually difficult Scots words – skug is a shadow, slugged is blown, blad is a torn page of paper – it's an involved piece, but when you work it out, it's pretty good.

Eftir Somebody's Daith
by Robert Garioch after Tomas Tranströmer

Aince there came a shock
that left ahint a lang, blae, skimmeran comet's tail.
Thair we are inclusit. It gars the TV pictures shouggie.
It tinkles cauld draps on the aerials up i the lyft.

Ye can still shauckle alang on skis in the winter sun
among the plantings hingan still wi last year's leaves.
They are like blads riven frae auld telephone buiks –
the subscribers' names slugged by the cauld.

It is braw still to hear your ain hairt-beats.
But aften the skug feels mair real nor the body.
The samurai luiks jist a naething
aside his armour of black dragon-scales.

Funerals are so intensely personal that the poems I have chosen, however many I list, can only be instances. And you don't have weeks and weeks to prepare as you do for a wedding.

Here are couple of short poems to conclude. These really come in the category of "favourite poems" which you include simply because you like them, while bearing in mind our criteria of dignity, seriousness and reflection. You may have various other suggestions.

Hurlygush by Maurice Lindsay

The hurlygush an hallyock o the watter
a-skinlan i the moveless simmer sun
harles aff the scourie mountain wi a yatter
that thru ten-thousand centuries has run.

Wi cheek against the ash o withered bracken

I ligg at peace and hear nae soun at aa
but yonder hurlygush that canna slacken
thru time and space mak never-endin faa,

as if a volley o the soun had brocht me
doun tae the pool whaur timeless things begin,
and e'en this endless faa'an that had claucht me
wi ilka ither force was gether't in.

Ettrick by Lady John Scott (1810-1900)

When we first rade doun Ettrick
our bridles were ringin, our hearts were dancin,
the waters were singin, the sun was glancing,
an blithlely our voices rang oot thegither
as we brushed the dew frae the bloomin heather,
when we first rade doun Ettrick.

When we next rade doun Ettrick,
the day was dyin, the wild birds callin,
the wind was sighin, the leaves were fallin,
an silent an weary, but closer thegither
we urged our steeds through the faded heather
when we next rade doun Ettrick.

When I last rade doun Ettrick,
the winds were shiftin, the storm was wakin,
the snow was driftin, my heart was breakin,
for we never again were to ride thegither
in sun or storm on the mountain heather
when I last rade doun Ettrick.

Two more small ideas for a funeral in Scots: often you are asked to suggest music for entrances and exits. This could be a CD of Scots songs such as Sheena Wellington's songs by Burns, or Scottish music. Burns didn't always write in Scots and you will notice that some of his best loved songs are in English, but he is such a symbol for Scots language that I don't think it really matters.

Also remember you can put it about that the kilt is acceptable wear for a funeral, in case your friends are uncertain. Good luck, and we hope it doesn't happen too often.

Life by Hamish Scott

Lik a blinn body finin
their wey tae the ootgang
A mak ma wey throu this life
waitin tae see whit is ayont