Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



When We Two Parted

by Lord Byron

Grades 8–11 · Common Core RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.5

Byron published "When We Two Parted" in 1816 but dated it 1808 to hide its subject. It is often linked to Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster, whose affairs became public gossip. The poem has four eight-line stanzas with short, clipped lines and alternate rhymes. Note how it begins and ends with the same phrase.

THE POEM

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning
Sunk chill on my brow—
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame:
I hear thy name spoken,
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me—
Why wert thou so dear?
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well:—
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met—
In silence I grieve.
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee?—
With silence and tears.

VOCABULARY

sever — cut apart; separate

foretold — predicted

thy / thee / thou — your / you (old forms)

fame — reputation

knell — the slow ringing of a bell for a death

rue — regret bitterly

wert — were (old form)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What details in stanza 1 show the parting was painful?

2. How does the "dew of the morning" become a "warning"?

3. What has happened to the lover's reputation? Quote a line.

4. Why does the speaker grieve "In secret"?

5. The poem begins and ends with "silence and tears." What does this circular structure suggest?

WRITING PROMPT

Write the former lover's reply to this poem, in poem or letter form, giving their side of the story.

When We Two Parted — Answer Key

1. “In silence and tears, / Half broken-hearted”; “Pale grew thy cheek and cold, / Colder thy kiss.”
2. Its chill on his brow “felt like the warning / Of what I feel now”: it foreshadowed later shame and grief.
3. “Thy vows are all broken, / And light is thy fame”: she is spoken of with scandal, and he shares “in its shame.”
4. The affair was secret (“In secret we met”), so no one knows “I knew thee”; he cannot mourn openly.
5. Nothing has healed: the relationship ends where it started, and a future meeting would bring only “silence and tears.” Accept supported answers.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/when-we-two-parted-lord-byron/