

**DU FU**

**TI MA FREIN, THE EREMIT WEI  
DROVER TOUN**

**TRANSLATED BY BRIAN HOLTON**

## TI MA FREIN, THE EREMIT WEI

In this life we twae niver cud get trystit  
nae mair nor vesper an daystern;  
we'll no get anither nicht like this,  
baith o's thegither in the caunle's leam.  
Juist callants no lang syne, it seems,  
our haffets nou are lyart an grey;  
we speir for freins: the hauf o them's deid,  
an our hairts are scaudit wi the gliffs we get.  
Little we kent it'd be twenty year  
afore I'd step owre yir yett again, sir.  
When I gaed awa, ye werena mairriet;  
but now there's lads an lassies in a raw:  
gentie ti their faither's auld billie,  
they speir at uis whit road A cam,  
an whan our wee bit blether's dune,  
the bairns sets out the toddie kettle,  
syboes sneddit in the forenicht's smirr,  
an brose new hottert frae the pat.  
The guidman says it's ti be a foy,  
eggs uis on ti a dizzen tassies -  
but wad a dizzen tassies mak uis as fou  
as the luv A've hed for ye in my hairt aye ?  
Bens an bealachs the morn'll twine us,  
an forrit, tho we guess an fear, we canna say.

## TO MY FRIEND, THE HERMIT WEI

In this life we two never could get to meet  
no more than evening and morning star;  
we'll not get another night like this,  
both of us together in the candle's gleam.  
Juist lads not long ago, it seems,  
our temples now are grizzled and grey;  
we ask after friends: half of them are dead,  
and our hearts are scalded by the shocks we get.  
Little we knew it'd be twenty years  
before I'd step across your door again, sir.  
When I went away, you weren't married;  
but now there's lads an lassies in a row:  
courteous to their father's old pal,  
they ask me by what road I came,  
then when our wee bit chat is over,  
the kids set out the toddy kettle,  
scallions cut in the evening's drizzle,  
and broth just now seething in the pot.  
The host says it's to be a party,  
eggs me on to a dozen glasses -  
but would a dozen glasses get me as drunk  
as the love I've had for you in my heart?  
Mountains and high passes tomorrow will separate us,  
and forward, though we guess and fear, we cannot say.

## DROVER TOUN

1

Reid clouds bourach up wastawa,  
Dayset faas owre the level land.  
Poutrie keckles inben the wicker yett,  
A fremt hame-comer's traivelt a thousan mile.  
Wife an bairns dumfounert at A'm here,  
The gliff gaed by, they dicht awa their tears.  
In a tupsalteerie warld A tholed a gangrel life,  
But cam hame in life, chancie tho it wis.  
Neibours stow the dyke-heids out,  
They're sicherin an sabbin, ilka yin.  
I the wee hours o the nicht A lift the caunle:  
The twae o's, forenent ilkither, like a dream.

2

In eild wis A gart ti tak ti the road,  
Hame's no sae awfu blithesome tho.  
Browdent bairns winna rise frae their knees,  
Feart their faither's for the aff ance mair.  
A mind the grand caller air langsyne,  
Auld trees that stuid about the stank.  
Strang's the souch-souch o the norlan wind,  
A hunner hairt-scauds, thinkin on the past.  
A lippen on the corns aa bein gathert in,  
An ken the dreep-dreep o the pat-still.  
Eneuch for the nou, ti fill lip-fou the tassie:  
Fine it'll dae, ti ease the e'enin o ma life.

3

A paircel o hens skirlin an skellochin -  
Guests come, wi the hens aa fechtin, tae.  
Yince A'd chased the hens inti the tree,  
A heard the chappin on ma wicker yett.  
It's fower or five auld yins that's here  
Ti speir about ma lang an ferawa traivels.  
In ilka haun a wee bit something brocht,  
The whisky pig's cowpit, it's drumlie, then fine:  
"Och, dinna nay-say a dram, wersh tho it be:  
There's nane ti plou our fields o corn.  
War an fechtin, an aye wi nae devaul:  
Our laddies taen, ilkane, eastawa ti the airmy."  
"Allou me nou ti gie ye a sang, auld yins,  
Sic hership maks ma hairt owre great, A vou".  
The sang dune, we leukt ti Heiven wi a souch,  
Ilka haffet begrutten wi our tears

## **DROVER TOWN**

1

Red clouds crowd together in the west,  
The light fades over the level land.  
Poultry cackle behind the wicker gate,  
An unfamiliar home-comer's travelled a thousand miles.  
Wife and kids flabbergasted that I'm here,  
Once the shock is over, they wipe away their tears.  
In a topsy-turvy world I endured a vagrant's life,  
But came home alive, lucky that I was.  
Neighbours pack the wall-heads out,  
They're sighing and sobbing, every one of them.  
In the small hours of the night I lift the candle:  
Both of us, facing each other, like a dream.

2

In old age was I forced out on the road,  
Home's not so very cheerful, though.  
Pampered kids won't rise from their knees,  
Afraid their father's going away again.  
I remember the fine fresh air of long ago,  
Old trees that stood about the pond.  
Strong is the sough of the northern wind,  
A hundred sources of grief, thinking of the past.  
I rely on the corn all being gathered in,  
And recognise the dripping of the pot-still.  
Enough for just now, to fill brim-full the glass:  
It'll do just fine to ease the evening of my life.

3

A parcel of hens screeching and squawking -  
Guests come, and the hens all fighting, too.  
Once I'd chased the hens into the tree,  
I heard the knocking at my wicker gate.  
It's four or five old guys that are here  
To ask about my long and faraway travels.  
In each hand a little something brought,  
The whisky jar's up-ended, it's cloudy, then fine:  
"Oh, don't turn down a drink, tasteless though it is:  
There's none to plough our fields of corn.  
War and fighting, and never an end to it:  
Our sons taken every one, east to the army."  
"Allow me now to give you a song, gaffers,  
Such hardship makes my heart too full, I vow".  
The song done, we looked up to Heaven with a sigh,  
Every cheek streaked with our tears.