

Tristan And Isolt

Heather Dale

Who knows not the tragedy of Tristan and Isolt?
The fair-haired Cornish harper whose hands held steel
and string?
And Ireland's greatest treasure, borne like Helen
'cross the water
While the waves approaching bowed before her beauty?

All who've heard the telling know the blind and bitter
Fates
Placed the cup of love's sweet poison to unconsenting
lips
And as plank fell home to timber and the king beheld
his lady
Carols rang within the church and seagulls screamed.

All the harpers laboured on their agonies of passion
Unfulfilled and ever straining like lodestones to the
north.
But few will ever mention how the cold breath of the
Northlands
Let them lie at last as one without deceit.

When Tristan could no longer bear the shame of guilty
conscience,
He took ship to far Bretagne, half-hearted and bereft.
He cast aside his music, cut the strings which brought
him joy,
And took solace in the fury of the field.

Praise grew up around him like the corn around a
boulder
As the Cornishman did battle with demons in and out.
In singing sword and thunder, Tristan vainly sought
distraction
Yet she whispered in the silence of the slain.

In the way of warriors rewarding noble heroes,
Fairest Blanchmaine of the Bretons was given for his
wife.
But Blanchmaine knew no pleasure from her cold and
grieving husband
For the marble face of memory was his bride.

In that time the country was beset with Eden's serpents
And the basest of all creatures can bring the highest
low.
Two poisons coursed within him, and none could be his
saviour
But the healing arts of Ireland and Isolt.

Wings of hope departed, struggling North against the
tempest
With tender words entreating for mercy and for grace.
If his love no longer moved her, hoist the black into
the rigging
But if white brought them together, he would wait.

Daylight creeping downward, Tristan's demons massed
against him
And the words of his delusions brought hidden love to
light,
While the woman he had married but to whom he'd given
nothing
Sat her long and jealous vigil by his side.

Morning framed the answer walking lightly o'er the
water.
Like Christ's own victory banner, it flew toward the
shore.
It was white as angels' raiments, but when feebly he
begged her,
Fairest Blanchemaine softly told him, "'Tis of night."

Who can say which venom took the soul from Tristan's
body,
And the bells began their tolling as Isolt ran up the
strand.
The wind grew slow and silent as she wept upon her
lover,
And in gentleness it took her grief away.

Side by side they laid them with the earth their
separation.
Even yet, they were divided by the morals of the world.
But their spirits spiralled upwards, Ireland's briar
and Cornwall's rose,
And together at the last, they lay entwined.