

The Farmer's Bride by Charlotte Mew

Here is an 'immersed' version of Mew's poem. It can be used as a starting point before approaching the original version. It can also be used as part of revision, asking students to try to reconstruct the original by deleting non-Mew words and inserting the line breaks. A few alterations have been made to the grammar, e.g. 'us was wed' has been changed to 'we were wed' – but only a few.

It's been three summers since I chose a maid. She was too young maybe—but there's more to do at harvest-time than stay indoors and woo. When we were wed, she turned afraid of love and of me and all things human, it seemed. Like the shut of a winter's day, her smile went out, and she was more like a little frightened fay than a woman.

One night, in the fall, she ran away.

"She's out among the sheep, her be," they said. She should properly have been abed but sure enough she wasn't there. No, she wasn't to be found lying awake with her wide brown eyes staring. So over the seven-acre field and up-along and across the down we chased her. She was flying like a hare before our lanterns. We chased as far as Church-Town. She was all in a shiver and a scare when we caught her, fetched her home at last and turned the key upon her, fast.

She does the work about the house as well as most, but like a mouse. She's happy enough to chat and play with birds and rabbits and such as they. Yes, she's fine so long as men-folk keep away.

"Not near, not near!" her eyes beseech when one of us comes within reach. The women say that beasts in the stalls look round like children at her when she calls but I've hardly heard her speak at all. She's as shy as a leveret and swift as one! Yes, and she's straight and slight as a young larch tree – and sweet as the first wild violets. She's true to her wild self - but what is she to me?

The short days shorten even more and the oaks are brown. Now I notice how the blue smoke rises up into the low grey sky and how one leaf in the still air falls slowly down. I see a magpie's spotted feathers lie on the black earth which is spread white with rime frost. The berries redden up towards Christmas-time. Ah, but what is Christmas-time without there be someone other in the house than we two!

She sleeps up in the attic there, all alone, poor maid. There is but a stair betwixt us. Oh, my God! All I can think of is the down, the soft young down of her and the brown, the brown of her! Her eyes, her hair, her hair! But she is always up there and far away from me. She is never near me, never near...