

## REMEMBER

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

### Lines 1-2

*Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;*

- And... here we go. "Remember" opens with the **speaker** —let's just say she's a woman (since we don't have any evidence to the contrary at this point)—addressing somebody.
- She tells this mysterious person to remember her when she is gone away, "gone far away into the silent land."
- As you may have guessed, the speaker isn't talking about going to some far-away library. She's talking about death, but she's essentially using a **euphemism**. Death? Yikes.
- Yes, she wants the person she's addressing to remember her after she's dead and gone. Now, so we don't have to keep writing "the person she's addressing," we're gonna go ahead and say that the speaker of this poem is addressing her lover, or boyfriend, or hubby, or whatever you wanna call it.
- Getting back to business, or bid'ness, as we like to say, what's the deal with the "silent land" stuff?
- Do people not talk in the afterlife or something? Hmm, we're not really sure but **here's some folks discussing the idea**.
- It's probable that what the speaker really means here is that, after she dies, she will no longer be able to communicate with her beloved. Thus, the afterlife will be a "silent land," but in a different way.
- Speaking of wanting to be remembered, we can't help remembering a bunch of other poems that Rossetti almost certainly read.
- To mention just one, our good buddy William Wordsworth once wrote a poem called "**Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey**".
- In that venerable lyrical masterpiece, Wordsworth imagines talking to his sister about his death and says, "If I should be where I can no more hear / Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams / Of past existence."
- We get lots of similarities here—death, remember me, more silent land business, etc., etc. Clearly Christina knew about the work of Willie W.

- Back to the poem: you may already know but this poem is a [sonnet](#). Lots of sonnets are written in that most famous of English meters, [iambic pentameter](#). From the looks of things, this poem is written in iambic pentameter as well. Head over to "[Form and Meter](#)" to read more on that stuff.
- Meanwhile, let's continue shall we?

## Lines 3-4

*When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.*

- Even though the speaker doesn't say "remember me" again, it is understood that she wants that little bit to carry over, so to speak.
- So, the speaker is telling her beloved to still remember her even when he can no longer ("no more") hold her hand.
- If we remember correctly, the repetition of the H sound there has a name. It's... wait, it's on the tip of our tongue... [alliteration](#). What's so great about it? Check out "[Sound Check](#)" for the answer.
- The speaker also wants her pal to remember her when she can no longer start to leave, but then turn back.
- So, how did we get *that* out of "half turn to go yet turning stay"? It sure sounds like the speaker is recalling a common scenario. Let's say all those times when she would step out to go to the market or something. Whenever Ms. Speaker would start to leave, she would turn back. And why would she do that? To say goodbye? To catch one last glimpse of her beloved before leaving? Did she forget her car keys?
- Who knows for sure (it's probably not the car keys, since cars weren't around), but since she would always look back, it was really more like she was half-turning to go. Make sense?
- In other words, she would make to leave, but then—poof!—turn back a little bit.
- So, while half turning to leave, she would also be turning to stay.
- Part of the confusion here, obviously, has to do with the repetition of "turn": "half turn [...] yet turning stay."
- It sounds all Shakespearean, with the cool alliteration the clever [rhymes](#).
- Wait, rhymes? We forgot to mention those. The first four lines of this poem follow this [scheme](#): ABBA.
- Just from the looks of it, it seems we may be dealing with a sonnet of the Petrarchan variety here.
- You can read more about this over at "[Form and Meter](#)" if you like, and if you're really curious about this Petrarch fellow, you can learn more about him [here](#).

## Lines 5-6

*Remember me when no more, day by day,  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:*

- Well, just in case the speaker's beloved forgets that he's supposed to remember the speaker, she tells him *again*.

- She reminds him to remember when he is no longer able to tell her every day of the future he planned for them.
- Now these lines have the potential to be just a little, ahem, tricky. This is because the order of the words is just a teeny, itty, little bit funky—but only a little bit.
- In normal conversation we would probably just say "remember me when you're no longer able to tell me day by day of the future you have planned for us." But then again, this isn't normal conversation. If this is your first foray into the wonderful world of English poetry, let us be the first to tell you that many times poets play games with the order of the words. Sometimes this is called by the oh-so-fancy term, inversion.
- Why do they do this, because they have nothing better to do than make your life harder? No. Sometimes, it just sounds more poetic to rearrange the order of the words. Other times, words have to be fiddled with in order to make the [meter](#) work.
- This is a very important consideration, you see. For many poets, Rossetti included, making sure the lines fit some specific metrical pattern is, well, of the utmost importance—the Utmost. You can read more about meter over at "[Form and Meter](#)."
- (Psst. If you want to see just how seriously and complicated metrical issues can be, check out [this abstract of a scholarly article](#) about Rossetti. And if you want to read just a little more about all these word order issues, go right [here](#).)

## Lines 7-8

*Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.*

- Well, shucks. Just in case the dude forgets, the speaker tells him to just remember her one more time. Let's see, that's 3 times now that the speaker has used the word "remember."
- We get it that the poem is called "Remember," but this is starting to seem a little funny. It's almost like the speaker is worried that the guy will *not* remember her if she *doesn't* keep telling him to do so.
- All this dude has to do is remember her because, by the time she's dead and gone, it will be too late to "counsel then or pray."  
Counsel then or pray? Counsel who and pray for what?
- Let's tackle this praying business first. It sure sounds to us like what she means is this: "by the time I'm dead and gone, it will be too darn late to pray for me to come back, and to pray for whatever else you want to pray for."
- Now, as for this "counsel" stuff: 'tis a bit puzzling indeed. Still, it seems that by "counsel" she means something like "counsel me." In other words, we could paraphrase what she means like so: "after I'm dead and gone it will be too late to counsel me—to make me feel better like you always used to do, babe."
- Okay, maybe she wouldn't say "babe," but this is pretty much the gist of "late to counsel." With us so far? Great— on we go.

## Lines 9-10

*Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:*

- At long last we have arrived at line 9. Wait, is that supposed to matter?
- Well, actually yes it does. You see, this is a sonnet, and very important things tend to happen around line 9.
- Many times, the sonnet's tone or direction or overall feel or... something, will shift. This important moment is often called the turn (or *volta* for all you Italian scholars).
- You can read brief blurbs about it [here](#) and [here](#).
- The word "yet" opens line 9, a clue that things might be shifting just a little bit. And in fact, they sure are.
- So far, the speaker has used the word "remember" three times (count 'em). All of sudden, she introduces the word "forget" into the mix, and starts to explore a slightly different idea.
- Remember earlier we mentioned that it almost seemed like the speaker was worried her hubby might forget her? Well now it seems she's giving some vent to that idea and saying, "Hey hun, it's okay if you forget about me for just a little bit but then, eventually, come to your senses and remember me. Oh and don't get too upset about it sweetheart, it's quite alright."
- The other thing we need to tell about line 9 of a sonnet is that usually the [rhyme scheme](#) of the last 6 lines (often called the sestet) is a little different.
- The rhyme scheme of the first 8 lines (called the octet) is ABBA ABBA, which is fairly typical of a [Petrarchan sonnet](#).
- As for the sestet, the Petrarchan rhyme scheme rules there are a bit more flexible, *except* for the fact that they almost never, ever end with a [couplet](#).
- In the case of "Remember," we are given the oh-so-interesting CDD ECE. Hmm, well it's not the most common type of rhyme scheme, but it is perfectly within the rules.
- To read more about just what the whole point of this poem's rhyme scheme head over to ["Form and Meter."](#)

## Lines 11-12

*For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,*

- Okay, now it looks like we're about to get an explanation for just why the speaker tells her beau not to grieve. Before we break all this down, though, let's gloss a few little thingies.
- First, "darkness and corruption" sounds really bad, even if it is [aperiphrasis](#). And guess what? It is really bad. This is a reference to death—after one dies, the body decays, or "corrupts," as they used to say back in the day.
- Darkness refers to the fact that nobody knows what happens after death—the afterlife is [metaphorically](#) "dark," you could say.
- You could also say that "darkness" loosely describes the lover's emotional state after the speaker's death.

- This makes sense when you consider that it comes, like, four words after "grief." Just think about how people often refer to difficult periods in their lives as "dark times" and the like.
- Still with us, Shmoopers? Great. So, now that we've figured out corruption and darkness, let's figure out the whole thing.
- If despite the speaker's death (and the all the grief and sadness it will cause) some "vestige," or small remnant, of her thoughts remain (in the beloved's mind, presumably), then...
- ...something will happen.
- What? What?? What??? Tell us, please!
- We can't go there just yet; we have to tell you why this word "vestige" is very important first.
- It describes something leftover. In this case, it refers to things the speaker once thought and said that her beloved may still recall after she dies.
- Hmm, well why would he forget them anyway? That's like worrying about your best friend forgetting all the cool things you said.
- That's a good point, and we've touched on it before. The speaker seems just a tad bit worried that her beloved will not remember her, and that kind of freaks her out. She's thinking about this "vestige" or leftover because, she implies, this is how she will live on, even after death.
- Okay, now we get to find out what happens...

## Lines 13-14

*Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.*

- At long last, the moment we've been waiting for: the summit, the coup de grace, the denouement, the big payoff—you get the idea.
- The speaker says that, even if some vestige of her thoughts survives, it is much better ("by far") that her beloved forget her and be happy rather than remember her and be sad.
- Whoa, Nelly. Now, wait just a minute. Let's get this straight.
- This whole time she's been telling him to remember her. In fact, the sonnet starts out by talking about memory, kind of like this: "remember me, don't forget me when I finally die."
- But, then it goes "Well, if you forget me for a short time, but then remember me, don't get too upset about it, that's fine."
- And finally, we end with: "Well, even if you remember some of the thoughts I once had, it really is better that you should forget me and smile, rather than think of me and be sad."
- Okay... so, this is totally confusing. Talk about a major change of heart here. How does it work that for most of the poem the speaker is obsessed with being remembered but then changes her mind?
- It must have something to do with the speaker realizing how deep her love is. Sure, she doesn't *actually* say that, but think about it like this:
- She really wants her beloved to remember her, but she also realizes that remembering her might be kind of painful—thinking about fond memories of somebody who is gone can be, well, sad to the max.

- In the end, then, "Remember" isn't super-inconsistent or contradictory or anything like that.
- It is a poem in which somebody (the speaker) has a change of heart, but one that is motivated by true love, a desire to keep her beloved from suffering after she's gone. All together now: awww.

## ● Iambic Pentameter Sonnet

- When it comes to the form and [meter](#) of "Remember," there are two things you need to know: [iambic pentameter](#) and [sonnet](#). Iambic pentameter, now that sounds familiar. You've probably heard that phrase tossed around here and there because, well, it's the only the most common type of meter in English poetry. In a poem of iambic pentameter, each line is composed of five ("pent-" means five) [iambs](#). An iamb is type of beat (often called a [foot](#)) that contains an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (daDUM). To hear what five of them together sound like, check out line 1:
- *Remember me when I am gone away.*
- Scanning through the poem, we've noticed that pretty much every line in "Remember" is very regular iambic pentameter (often, poets like to get cute and throw little curve balls in), a sign that Rossetti was still a young poet learning the ropes, so to speak.
- Now that we've covered that base, we need to talk about the form of this poem. It's got 14 lines, which means it's a sonnet. There's a whole lot to say about sonnets—heck, there are tons and tons and tons of books and articles written about them, like [this one](#). For now, you just need to know that sonnets have 14 lines, and that they come in two basic types: the Shakespearean (named after our pal William "the Man" Shakespeare) and the Petrarchan (named for Petrarch, the famous Italian dude who pretty much invented the form).
- "Remember" is a Petrarchan sonnet. This means that the poem can be divided into a group of eight lines (called the octave, lines 1-8) and a group of six lines (the sestet, lines 9-14). In most Petrarchan sonnets, there is a noticeable change of direction around line 9 (called the *volta*, or turn). Sometimes the sestet will solve a problem posed in the octave, while at others the octave will explore one idea, but then the sestet will take things in a completely different direction.
- And you know what? This is kind of what happens in "Remember." In the first 8 lines of the poem, the speaker is obsessed with telling her beloved to remember her after she dies. Starting around line 9, however, the speaker starts to shift her focus away from remembrance to forgetfulness. By the end of the poem, the speaker actually says it is better for her beloved to forget about her than to remember her and feel sad. Sheesh, the two sections of this poem are almost polar opposites. Talk about a change of heart.
- Now besides this structural characteristic, Petrarchan sonnets also have fairly specific [rhyme scheme](#). Most of the time, the octave, follows this scheme: ABBA ABBA. The rhyme scheme of the sestet, on the other hand, is much

more flexible, with a whole variety of options on the poetic table. The octave of "Remember" follows your basic ABBA ABBA scheme, while the sestet has the unique, but still perfectly legal, scheme CDD ECE.

- Now, it's our job to tell you that rhyme schemes aren't just for kicks. They are an important part of any poem's sound and meaning. In the case of this poem, Rossetti's choices actually mimic the poem's general trajectory. In the octave, we start with A, then get a few B's, then back to A, and then back to B. In the sestet it's very similar—C, then a few D's, then E, then C again, then E again. These rhyming patterns are cyclical, meaning things always manage to come back to where they started.
- Of course, one of the major ideas in "Remember" is the cyclical nature of life. Think about it like this: the speaker is thinking about death. She knows she will die, and that death is pretty much permanent. But she also knows that remembering somebody is a way of keeping them alive, at least metaphorically. In other words, we could summarize the poem as saying "there is life, but then there is death, but then there is kind of life again"—A to B to A again. So heads up, out there: as you continue to study this poem, be alert to the various ways in which its rhymes reinforce that meaning. Rossetti was using both form and content to get her ideas across.

Being remembered after death—it's just what makes the speaker of "Remember" tick. She keeps telling her beloved to remember her, because, well, she's obsessed with death. Okay maybe obsessed is putting it a little strongly, but she's clearly somebody who is really thinking a lot about death.

And why might that be? Well, for one thing, this poem was written in the middle of the nineteenth century. People died much more suddenly, and much more frequently, than they do nowadays. That's one reason. Another reason may be because this speaker has a few, well... let's just call them hangups. She's not quite goth or EMO or anything like that, but she's definitely thinking about death a heck of a lot, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. The speaker is at least realistic.

And not only that, she's definitely a very caring person. Sure, the whole "remember me remember me remember me" business might seem a tad selfish, but by the end of the poem the speaker shows us how selfless she actually is. In the poem's final lines, she essentially says "On second thought, it's actually better if you forget about me, because remembering me will only cause you sadness." Wow, talk about the ultimate gesture of selflessness. She would rather the man she loves be happy than remember her. She just can't bear the thought of him being unhappy.

Now we're sure you're wondering if the poem is spoken by a "real" person or not. Technically no, but technically... yes. Let's explain. In poetry, it's never a good idea to confuse the speaker with the poet, even if the poem is written from a first-person perspective ("I," "me"). Here, though, that rule may need a bit of bending. In many ways the speaker of this poem *is* the young Christina Rossetti, at least a little bit. If you've read our "In a Nutshell" or "Calling Card" sections, you know Rossetti thought about death a lot, and that she was well aware of how short life really can be. Moreover, she suffered a mini nervous breakdown sometime in the 1840s, which likely contributed to some of her, ahem, compulsions.

# ANALYSIS: SETTING

- [BACK](#)

- [NEXT](#)

## Where It All Goes Down

"Remember" sometimes seems like the kind of poem you would hear from somebody lying on their death bed. The repeated "remember me" business sure sounds like the kind of fare you hear from people just before they shuffle off this mortal coil.

Speaking of death, this poem indirectly gives us an idea of what kind of "place" death is: it is a "silent land" where couples can no longer share their dreams of the future with one another and a place where darkness reigns. Okay, okay, so the speaker doesn't go out of her way to bemoan the horrors of death, but all these indirect comments give us the impression that it is scary. Like [Hamlet once said](#), death is an "undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveler returns."

Of course, the pleas for remembrance represent the speaker's attempts to establish another kind of setting. What's the only thing that can trump deathland? Loveville, population her and the addressed. She calls upon their relationship as a basis on which memory dude will do his thing, and keep her memory alive in spite of her passing. This is a kind of anti-silent land, which allows the speaker to live on, after she's gone.

Finally, when it comes to settings, you should also know something about the circumstances surrounding the poem's composition. With an Italian ex-patriot-turned-professor for a father (Gabriele Rossetti), a well-read mother, two siblings who became writers, and another (Dante Gabriel Rossetti) who became an influential painter and poet, the Rossetti household was a hot bed of intellectual and cultural discussions of all kinds (a steady stream of intellectuals frequently passed through the Rossetti home). The wide variety of available books in the house (Italian works, English novels and poetry, fairy tales, etc.) in particular bred in the young Christina Rossetti a love for literature, and a deep familiarity with the sonnet, a form she would utilize with tremendous success.

- Remember Themes

- 

- [Death](#)

- Even though the word "death" never shows up in this poem, "Remember" is definitely a "death" poem if there ever was one. It might as well have been called "Remember me... after I'm good and dead,"...

-



- Memory and the Past

- If "Remember" is a "death" poem, it is just as much the opposite as well: a "life" poem. Remember that part in Jurassic Park where Malcolm says "life... finds a way"? Yeah, that could be totally be...

- 

- Love

- Romeo and Juliet this poem is not, but love is definitely in the air. Hand-holding, plans for the future, turning back for one last glance—yep, that sure sounds like love to us. "Remember" is def...

- 

- 

-