

## ***Remember - CHRISTINA ROSSETTI***

### **Summary**

"Remember" is a Petrarchan sonnet.

The speaker addresses her beloved and encourages him to remember her after her death. She asks him to remember her even when his memory of her begins to fade. Eventually, the speaker gives this person her permission to forget her gradually because it is better to "forget and smile" than to "remember and be sad."

### **The octave**

The speaker reminds her beloved that when she is gone into the silent land of death, he will no longer hold her hand; he will no longer plan or speak of their future life together (seemingly her illness has prevented them from marrying); he will no longer be able to comfort and counsel her and pray for her. Her request of him is that, with all this that they will lose, he remember her. The theme is being remembered after death. The speaker is self-centred: she is thinking only about herself.

### **The sestet**

The narrator's tone changes in the sestet. The narrator even renounces the need to be remembered, which is ironic because the poem is titled "Remember." She wishes for her beloved to be happy, even if that means forgetting her. The narrator sacrifices her personal desire in an expression of true love.

### **Repetition**

Rossetti repeats the word "remember" throughout the entire poem, as if the narrator fears that her beloved will not heed her request.

She also uses repetition to emphasise the vast boundary between life and death, writing "gone away," and later, "gone far away."

### **Line 1**

*Remember me* – commanding tone

*when I am gone away* – euphemism for death. She tries to soften the impact that she will be gone forever. This emphasizes the narrator's loneliness without her beloved rather, which is stronger than her fear of death itself.

### **Line 2**

*Gone far away* – she will not be able to return. Sense of finality.

*far* – emphasises distance between them

*into the silent land* - In Christianity, the phrase is a symbol for and an implied metaphor for death: going into the silent land is going into the land of death. After she dies, she will no longer be able to communicate with her beloved. Thus, the afterlife will be a "*silent land*".

*the* - conveys a sense of certainty, no doubt that she is about to die.

*Silent* – can mean peacefulness (Heaven). She will be at peace because she will no longer suffer any pain.

### **Line 3**

*When you can no more hold me by the hand* – She has accepted that she is going to die. She is telling her beloved to still remember her even when she will not be physically present. This physical representation of love will be impossible once she is dead. This emphasises her fear that he will forget her.

holding hands – This is a symbol of love.

### **Line 4**

This line reflects her indecision. She knows that she does not have any control over death. She accepts that she is going to die (*half turn to go*). She is on the brink of death. However, she wants to spend as much time as possible with her beloved because of her love for him (*yet turning stay*) – she cannot choose between dying or being with her beloved. She. Unlike any other journey, she cannot turn back.

### **Line 5**

*Remember me* – She reminds him to remember her. This conveys her anxiety that he must not forget her.

*when no more* – euphemism for death

*day by day* – emphasises that he must remember her every day/ all the time.

### **Line 6**

*You tell me of our future that you planned* – The couple anticipated that they would share a future together, but this was not to be. The speaker succumbed to some disease or “corruption” (line 11) that eventually led to her death. This future no longer exists. This conveys a sense of permanent loss.

*you planned* – Women in Victorian England were expected to be dominated by the man. This does not necessarily mean that that she had no say in the planning.

### **Line 7**

*Only remember me* – This line emphasises the speaker’s fear that her beloved will forget her. She has a pleading that he does not forget her. She does not want a short- term mourning period, with fancy gestures. She desperately wants an assurance that he will not forget her.

### **Line 8**

*counsel* – advise. Prayers and counsel are needed when she is alive. They will be useless after she is dead. Neither *prayers* nor *advise (counsel)* could prevent her death. She believed that after death the spiritual fate of the departed is sealed and cannot be changed.

### **Line 9**

*Yet* – introduces a change in her attitude. This is reinforced by the replacement of ‘remember’ with ‘forget’.

*For a while* – She is anticipating those times when life will intrude into his mourning and distract him. The demands of living will cause him to forget her. This is the momentary forgetfulness caused by the distractions of being alive.

By acknowledging that he might "*forget for a while*", she is being realistic.

### **Line 10**

*And afterwards remember* – A softening of her attitude. She is more realistic. She accepts that he will not be able to mourn her all the time. She also realises that he not completely forget her.

do not grieve: She is consoling him. She knows that he will forget her even if it is just a little bit. She tells him not to be upset/feel guilty about it.

### **Line 11**

*darkness* – euphemism for death.

*corruption* – the illness that led to her death

Alternatively, she was a source of light in his life. Without her, there will be darkness in his life. Corruption – problems/grief that he will face as a result of her death.

### **Line 12**

A vestige – Any trace of her memories

*of the thoughts that once I had* –The speaker tells her beloved that if forgets her or occasionally remembers her, even just a little bit, he must not feel guilty.

### **Line 13**

*Better by far you should forget and smile*

This line emphasises the change in her tone & attitude. She even renounces the need to be remembered, which is ironic because the poem is titled “Remember.”

### **Line 14**

*Than that you should remember and be sad.*

She wishes for her beloved to be happy, even if that means forgetting her because remembering her will cause him too much pain. This change of heart symbolizes the speaker's love, as she would rather sacrifice her memory, or rather metaphorically kill herself, than ask her lover to endure any pain. She sacrifices her personal desire in an expression of true love.

## Themes

- Death - the dying poetic speaker is preparing herself and her beloved for what is to come. She has been fighting to recover and renew her strength to stay alive. She foresees the time when her effort will fail and wants her beloved to be prepared, "you understand," for her death.
- Mortality and immortality - The speaker faces her mortality by accepting the pull of death "into the silent land."
- loss or grief and mourning and how best to cope with it.
- The poem is about the importance of remembering, and the importance of letting go of memories can cause pain.

## Tone

- melancholy (quiet, contemplative sadness)
- hopeful
- conciliatory
- selfless
- acceptance - resigned tone
- consoling
- nostalgic
- tolerant (about death)- tolerates/ understands the fact that she'll be forgotten
- self-assurance
- beseeching/imploring
- contemplative

## Questions

1. Identify the tone at the beginning of the poem and how does it change? (3)
2. Was Rossetti was a deeply religious person. Substantiate your response. (3)
3. Which line of the poem shows that the couple expected to share many years of life together? (2)
4. What does "to counsel" (line 8) mean in the context of the poem? (2)
5. Which of the following descriptions best fit the speaker: egocentric; self-sacrificing; thoughtful? Justify your answer by referring to imagery and/or diction. (3)
6. The speaker seems worried. Critically discuss this statement. (3)
7. The speaker has commands in this poem ("remember," "remember," "remember," "do not grieve"). Critically discuss the tone of these commands. (3)
8. Refer to lines 1-2. How do these words set the initial mood of the poem. (2)
9. Explain what the use of the phrase "the silent land" conveys about the speaker's state of mind. (2)
10. Refer to line 4. Discuss the significance of this description in the context of the poem. (3)