

# Mrs. Kessler

By Edgar Lee Masters

Mr. Kessler, you know, was in the army,  
And he drew six dollars a month as a pension,  
And stood on the corner talking politics,  
Or sat at home reading Grant's *Memoirs*;  
And I supported the family by washing,  
Learning the secrets of all the people  
From their curtains, counterpanes, shirts and skirts.  
For things that are new grow old at length,  
They're replaced with better or none at all:  
People are prospering or falling back.  
And rents and patches widen with time;  
No thread or needle can pace decay,  
And there are stains that baffle soap,  
And there are colors that run in spite of you,  
Blamed though you are for spoiling a dress.  
Handkerchiefs, napery, have their secrets  
The laundress, Life, knows all about it.  
And I, who went to all the funerals  
Held in Spoon River, swear I never  
Saw a dead face without thinking it looked  
Like something washed and ironed.

n/a



The 1915 publication of *Spoon River Anthology* made Edgar Lee Masters famous by bringing into American poetry a scandalous subject matter and an innovative method: the secret lives and loves of a small town's citizens, told in their own voices from beyond the grave. The book was a popular and critical triumph; nothing Masters published subsequently equaled its success.

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