

# Vain and Careless

By Robert Graves

Lady, lovely lady,  
Careless and gay!  
Once when a beggar called  
She gave her child away.

The beggar took the baby,  
Wrapped it in a shawl,  
"Bring her back," the lady said,  
"Next time you call."

Hard by lived a vain man,  
So vain and so proud,  
He walked on stilts  
To be seen by the crowd.

Up above the chimney pots,  
Tall as a mast,  
And all the people ran about  
Shouting till he passed.

"A splendid match surely,"  
Neighbours saw it plain,  
"Although she is so careless,  
Although he is so vain."

But the lady played bobcherry,  
Did not see or care,  
As the vain man went by her  
Aloft in the air.

This gentle-born couple  
Lived and died apart.  
Water will not mix with oil,  
Nor vain with careless heart.

Source: Country Sentiment (Alfred A. Knopf, 1920)



Robert Graves was an English poet, scholar/translator, writer of antiquity specializing in Classical Greece and Rome, and novelist. A rebel socially, as well as artistically, Graves left his wife and four children in 1929 to live in Majorca with Laura Riding, an American poet. After his break with Riding, Graves, inspired by studies of matriarchal societies and goddess cults, formulated his own personal mythology of the White Goddess which would affect all of his future work.

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