

## The Wife's Lament

I wrack this riddle about myself  
full miserable, my very own experience.  
I can speak it—  
what I endured in misery,  
after I was grown, both new and old,  
none greater than now. Always I suffered  
the torment of my wracked ways.

(ll. 1-5)

My lord departed at first, from his tribe here  
over the tossing of waves—  
I watched a sorrow at dawn  
wondering where in these lands  
my chieftain might be.  
Then I departed myself to venture,  
seeking his followers, a friendless wayfarer  
out of woeful need.

(ll. 6-10)

They insinuated, the kinsmen of that man,  
by secret thought, to separate us two  
so that we two, widest apart in the worldly realm,  
should live most hatefully—and it harrowed me.

(ll. 11-14)

My lord ordered me to take this grove  
for a home — very few dear to me  
in this land, almost no loyal friends.

(ll. 15-17a)

Therefore my mind so miserable —  
than I met a well-suited man for myself  
so misfortunate and mind-sorrowing,  
thought kept close, plotting a crime.

(17b-20)

Keeping cheery, we vowed quite often  
that none but death could separate us.

(21-23a)

That soon changed...  
it's now as if it had never been —  
our friendship. I must, far and near,  
endure the feuding of my dearly beloved.

(ll. 23b-26)

My husband ordered me anchored  
in a woody grove, under an oak-tree  
within this earthen cave.

Ancient is the earth-hall:

I am entirely longing—

(27-29)

Dark are the valleys, the mountains so lofty,  
bitter these hovels, overgrown with thorns.  
Shelters without joy. So many times, here  
the disappearance of my husband  
seizes me with a stewing.

(ll. 30-33a)

All my friends dwell in the dirt,  
I loved them while they lived,  
now guarding their graves,  
when I go forth alone  
in the darkness of daybreak  
under the oak-tree  
outside this hollowed earth.

(ll. 33b-36)

There I may sit a summer-long day,  
where I can weep for my exiled path,  
my many miseries—therefore I can never  
rest from these my mind's sorrowings,  
not from all these longings  
that seize me in my living.

(ll. 37-41)

A young man must always be sad at heart,  
hard in the thoughts inside,  
also he must keep a happy bearing —  
but also breast-cares, suffering never-ending grief—

(ll. 42-45a)

May he depend only upon himself  
for all his worldly pleasures.  
May he be stained with guilt far and wide,  
throughout the lands of distant folk,  
so that my once-friend should sit under the  
stony cliffs,  
rimed by storms, my weary-minded ally,  
flowed around by waters in his dreary hall.

(ll. 42-50a)

My former companion may know a great  
mind-sorrow—  
remembering too often his joyful home.

(ll. 50b-52a)

Woe be to that one who must  
wait for their beloved with longing.

(ll. 52b-53)

—*trans. Dr. Aaron K. Hostetter*

(<https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/the-wifes-lament/>)