

AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE



JAMES
WHITCOMB
RILEY

ILLUSTRATED BY
HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY

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**An Old
Sweetheart of Mine**

James Whitcomb Riley

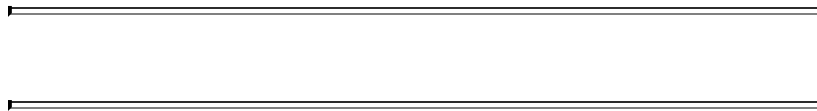
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To GEORGE C. HITT

The beginning of whose steadfast friendship was marked by the first publication of these verses which now, expanded by writer, honored by publisher and masterfully graced by artist, seem to be a worthier symbol of the author's grateful and affectionate regard for his earliest friend



- I Frontispiece—An Old Sweetheart of Mine.
- II A fair, illusive vision that would vanish into air
- III The *then* of changeless sunny days—The *now* of shower and shine
- IV The old bookshelves and prints along the wall
- V I find the smiling features of an old sweetheart of mine
- VI Its fate with my tobacco and to vanish with the smoke
- VII When my truant fancies wander with that old sweetheart of mine
- VIII The voices of my children and the mother as she sings
- IX For I find an extra flavor in Memory's mellow wine
- X O childhood days enchanted! O the magic of the spring
- XI To—smile, behind my lesson, at that old sweetheart of mine
- XII A face of lily-beauty, with a form of airy grace
- XIII When first I kissed her, and she answered the caress
- XIV I slipped the apple in it—and the teacher didn't know
- XV She gave me her *photograph*, and printed "Ever Thine"
- XVI And again I feel the pressure of her slender little hand
- XVII Where the vines were ever fruited, and the weather ever fine

XVIII And she my faithful sweetheart till the golden hair was gray

XIX The door is softly opened, and—my wife is standing there

*The ordered intermingling
of the real and the dream,*

—

*The mill above the river,
and the mist above the
stream;*

*The life of ceaseless labor,
brave with song and
cheery call—*

*The radiant skies of
evening,
with its rainbow o'er us
all.*

AN OLD SWEETHEART OF
MINE!—Is this
her presence here with
me,

Or but a vain creation of
a lover's memory?

A fair, illusive vision
that would vanish into air
Dared I even touch the
silence
with the whisper of a
prayer?

Nay, let me then believe in
all
the blended false and true

—
The semblance of the *old*
love
and the substance of the
new,—

The *then* of changeless
sunny days—
the *now* of shower and
shine—

But Love forever smiling,
—
as that old sweetheart of
mine.

This ever-restful sense of
home,
though shouts ring in the
hall.—

The easy-chair—the old
bookshelves
and prints along the wall;

The rare *Habanas* in their
box,
or gaunt churchwarden-
stem

That often wags, above the
jar,
derisively at them.

As one who cons at evening
o'er an album, all alone,
And muses on the faces

of the friends that he has
known,

So I turn the leaves of
Fancy,
till, in shadowy design,
I find the smiling features
of
an old sweetheart of
mine.

The lamplight seems to
glimmer
with a flicker of surprise,
As I turn it low—to rest me
of the dazzle in my eyes,

And light my pipe in
silence,
save a sigh that seems to
yoke
Its fate with my tobacco
and to vanish with the
smoke.

'Tis a *fragrant*
retrospection,—
for the loving thoughts
that start
Into being are like perfume
from the blossom of the
heart;

And to dream the old

dreams over
is a luxury divine—
When my truant fancies
wander
with that old sweetheart
of mine.

Though I hear beneath my
study,
like a fluttering of wings,
The voices of my children
and the mother as she
sings—

I feel no twinge of
conscience
to deny me any theme
When Care has cast her
anchor
In the harbor of a dream
—

In fact, to speak in earnest,
I believe it adds a charm
To spice the good a trifle
with a little dust of harm,
—

For I find an extra flavor
in Memory's mellow
wine
That makes me drink the
deeper
to that old sweetheart of

mine.

O Childhood-days
enchanted!
O the magic of the
Spring!—
With all green boughs to
blossom white,
and all bluebirds to sing!

When all the air, to toss and
quaff,
made life a jubilee
And changed the children's
song and
laugh to shrieks of
ecstasy.

With eyes half closed in
clouds that ooze
from lips that taste, as
well,
The peppermint and
cinnamon,
I hear the old School-
bell,

And from "Recess" romp in
again
from "Blackman's"
broken line,
To—smile, behind my
"lesson",
at that old sweetheart of

mine.

A face of lily-beauty,
with a form of airy grace,
Floats out of my tobacco
as the "Genii" from the
vase

And I thrill beneath the
glances
of a pair of azure eyes
As glowing as the summer
and as tender as the skies.

I can see the pink
sunbonnet
and the little, checkered
dress
She wore when first I
kissed her
and she answered the
caress

With the written declaration
that,
"As surely as the vine
Grew 'round the stump,"
she loved me—
that old sweetheart of
mine.

Again I make her presents,
in a really helpless way,

The big "Rhode Island
Greening"—
(I was hungry too, that
day!)—

But I follow her from
Spelling,
with her hand behind her
—so—

And I slip the apple in it—
and the Teacher doesn't
know!

I give my *treasures* to her—
all,—
my pencil—blue-and-
red;—
And, if little girls played
marbles,
mine should all be *hers*,
instead!—

But *she* gave me her
photograph,
and printed "Ever Thine"
Across the back—in blue-
and-red—
that old sweetheart of
mine!

And again I feel the
pressure
of her slender little hand,
As we used to talk together

of the future we had
planned,—

When I should be a poet,
and with nothing else to
do
But write the tender verses
that she set the music
to....

When we should live
together
in a cozy little cot
Hid in a nest of roses,
with a fairy garden-spot,

Where the vines were ever
fruited
and the weather ever
fine,
And the birds were ever
singing
for that old sweetheart of
mine....

When I should be her lover
forever and a day,
And she my faithful
sweetheart
till the golden hair was
gray;

And we should be so happy
that when either's lips

were dumb
They would not smile in
Heaven
till the other's kiss had
come.

But, ah! my dream is
broken
by a step upon the stair,
And the door is softly
opened,
and—my wife is standing
there:

Yet with eagerness and
rapture
all my visions I resign,—
To greet the *living* presence
of that old sweetheart of
mine.

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