

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

In 1861, Longfellow's wife Frances died from the burns she suffered after an ember from the fireplace set her dress on fire. Some say Longfellow grew his beard to hide the scars that resulted from trying to put the fire out. In today's poem he looks back on his wife's death, eighteen years later.

The Cross of Snow

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,
A gentle face—the face of one long dead—
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.
Here in this room she died; and soul more white
Never through martyrdom of fire was led
To its repose; nor can in books be read
The legend of a life more benedight.

There is a mountain in the distant West
That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

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