

Three songs by Frank Bridge

The Last invocation (1918) text by Walt Whitman

Into her keeping (1919) text by H.D. Lowry

What shall I your true love tell (1919) text by Francis Thompson

Bridge did not write these three songs as a set, but they are particularly poignant as each song expresses a range of intense emotions surely experienced during the long goodbye of Alzheimer's. "The Last invocation," with its steady, chordal accompaniment, invokes a stately and dignified response to death, the response one would expect from a religious service where death is viewed as the logical conclusion to life. Bridge does, however, allow a singular break from this stoicism in the final climax, "Strong is your hold, O Love!" Lowry's poem "Into her keeping" expresses the grief of a man mourning the loss of his wife. Bridge artfully amplifies this grief, particularly in the second stanza where he uses louder dynamics, increased chromaticism, and increased rhythmic activity in both the piano and the voice. The first verse is then repeated much more quietly and with a sparser accompaniment, reflecting his emptiness and the futility of his loss. "What shall I your true love tell" has a stark and barren accompaniment over which the singer tells of a dying girl being asked what she would say to her absent lover. The girl's fervent responses are sung at a higher pitch level than that of the questions until the pitch of the girl's final answer falls as she utters, "I who loved with all my life, Loved with all my death."

The Last invocation

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful, fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks—from the keep of the well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks—with a whisper,
Set open the doors, O Soul!

Tenderly! be not impatient!
Strong is your hold, O mortal flesh!
Strong is your hold, O love.

Into her keeping

Now that my love lies sleeping
How call me glad or sad,
Who gave into her keeping
Ev'rything I had:

All love I held for beauty
And all I knew of truth,
All care for any duty
And what I kept of Youth!

Now that my love lies sleeping
There's neither good nor bad,

I gave into her keeping
Everything I had.

What shall I your true love tell
What shall I your true love tell,
Earth forsaking maid?
What shall I your true love tell
When life's spectre's laid?
"Tell him that, our side the grave,
Maid may not believe
Life should be so sad to have,
That's so sad to leave!"
What shall I your true love tell
When I come to him?
What shall I your true love tell
Eyes growing dim?
"Tell him this, when you shall part
From a maiden pined;
That I see him with my heart,
Now my eyes are blind."
What shall I your true love tell
Speaking while is scant?
What shall I your true love tell
Death's white postulant?
"Tell him love, with speech at strife,
For last utterance saith:
'I who loved with all my life,
Loved with all my death.'"