

Lorena

lyrics by Rev. Henry D. Webster, 1856
melody by Joseph P. Webster

The musical score for "Lorena" is written in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a G chord and a melody starting on G4. The second staff continues the melody and introduces an Em chord. The third staff features a D7 chord and a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a G chord and a final note on G4. Chord progressions are indicated by letters above and below the staff lines. Triplet markings are placed over groups of three notes.

The Rev. Henry de Lafayette Webster wrote this poem (discretely titled "Bertha") in 1856 about a personal heartbreak. He was in love with 19 year old Martha "Ella" Blocksom, who sang in his choir. They were forced to end the relationship by Ella's family who would not allow her to marry a poor preacher. The poem was set to music by Joseph P. Webster (no relation). Discarding "Bertha" in favor of a 3-syllable name more suited to the melody, the song was re-titled "Lorena" as an homage to "Lenore", the lost love of Poe's "The Raven". It became a favorite for both Union and Confederate soldiers who dearly missed their loved ones during the war. Ella went on to marry William Wartenbee Johnson- Ohio Supreme Court Justice (1879-86) and have two children. She died on 3 March 1917 and is buried in Woodland Cemetery, in Ironton Ohio. In modern times, musicians have been known to play this tune at her gravesite on the anniversary of her death.

The years creep slowly by Lorena, The snow is on the grass again
The sun's low down the sky Lorena, The frost gleams where the flowers have been.
But the heart throbs on as warmly now, As when the summer days were nigh; Oh!
The sun can never dip so low, A-down affection's cloudless sky.

A hundred months have passed, Lorena, Since last I held that hand in mine,
And felt the pulse beat fast, Lorena, Though mine beat faster far than thine.
A hundred months, 'twas flowery May, When up the hilly slope we climbed,
To watch the dying of the day, And hear the distant church bells chime.

We loved each other then, Lorena, More than we ever dared to tell;
And what we might have been, Lorena, Had but our lovings prospered well —
But then, 'tis past, the years are gone, I'll not call up their shadowy forms;
I'll say to them, "Lost years, sleep on! Sleep on! nor heed life's pelting storms."

The story of that past, Lorena, Alas! I care not to repeat,
The hopes that could not last, Lorena, They lived, but only lived to cheat.
I would not cause e'en one regret, To rankle in your bosom now;
For "if we try we may forget," Were words of thine long years ago.

Yes, these were words of thine, Lorena, They burn within my memory yet;
They touched some tender chords, Lorena, Which thrill and tremble with regret.
'Twas not thy woman's heart that spoke; Thy heart was always true to me:
A duty, stern and pressing, broke The tie which linked my soul with thee.

It matters little now, Lorena, The past is in the eternal past;
Our heads will soon lie low, Lorena, Life's tide is ebbing out so fast.
There is a Future! O, thank God! Of life this is so small a part!
'Tis dust to dust beneath the sod; But there, up there, 'tis heart to heart.

