

**Anne Bradstreet (1612/13 — 1678)**

In 1630, Anne Bradstreet and her husband, Simon, the son of a nonconformist minister, sailed to Massachusetts with Anne's parents. With the publication (perhaps without her knowledge) of her book of poetry *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650), she became the first female poet in America. Because the Puritan community disdained female intellectual ambition, it was thought advisable that her poetry was published with the assurance that Bradstreet was a diligent Puritan mother. Bradstreet's most remarkable poetry consists of thirty-five short reflective poems, explicit in their description of marital and familial love, many of which remained hidden in her notebooks until after her death and then published in 1867. The twentieth century saw a renewed interest in Bradstreet's poetry with new editions of her work published in 1967 and 1981. The mother of eight children, she writes of impending childbirth with apprehension and acceptance of the will of God in "Before the Birth of One of Her Children."

Before the Birth of One of Her Children  
by Anne Bradstreet (1678)

All things within this fading world hath end,  
Adversity doth still our joys attend;  
No ties so strong, no friends so dear and sweet,  
But with death's parting blow is sure to meet.  
5 The sentence past is most irrevocable,  
A common thing, yet oh inevitable.  
How soon, my Dear, death may my steps attend,  
How soon't may be thy Lot to lose thy friend,  
We are both ignorant, yet love bids me  
10 These farewell lines to recommend to thee,  
That when that knot's untied that made us one,  
I may seem thine, who in effect am none.  
And if I see not half my days that's due,  
What nature would, God grant to yours and you;  
15 The many faults that well you know I have  
Let be interred in my oblivious grave;  
If any worth or virtue were in me,  
Let that live freshly in thy memory  
And when thou feel'st no grief, as I no harms,  
20 Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thine arms.  
And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains  
Look to my little babes, my dear remains.  
And if thou love thyself, or loved'st me,  
These O protect from stepdame's injury.  
25 And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,  
With some sad sighs honour my absent hearse;  
And kiss this paper for thy loves dear sake,  
Who with salt tears this last farewell did take.

## Questions

1. The author had borne eight children , had lost two, and was battling tuberculosis when she wrote this poem. How are those circumstances reflected in the sentiments expressed in the poem? Margarita
2. How is the poem itself not only last wishes but also a legacy to her children? Caleb
3. Restate line 2 into more simple language. What might the speaker mean by the statement in general, and how might it apply to her situation in particular? Kelsie
4. How do you interpret the paradox in line 21? Explain the double meaning of 'remains' in line 22. Blakeleigh
5. Why does Bradstreet add 'If thou love thyself' to her qualification of 'or loved'st me' in line 23? What additional power does the word 'or' invoke? Rebecca
6. Although the poem is presented without stanza breaks, it falls into sections. Where are they? How do they form a sort of argument made by the speaker? Eli
7. How would you describe the tone of the poem? Try to do so in a pair of words, such as 'cautiously optimistic' or 'fearful yet hopeful.' Abby
8. What is the theme/message of this poem? What line or lines best expresses the theme? Margaret
9. How is this poem reflective of its time, and of the time of *The Scarlet Letter*? Jasey