

Song: Go and catch a falling star by John Donne

'*Song: Go and catch a falling star*' by John Donne is a three stanza poem that is separated into sets of nine lines. The lines follow a consistent rhyme scheme, conforming to the pattern of ABABCCDDD. The lines also stick to a syllable pattern that changes within the different sets of rhyme. For example, the first four lines are the same, with seven syllables. The next two contain eight, then there are two disyllabic lines. Finally, the stanza ends with a seven syllable line. This is a very unusual pattern that works best if read aloud. The fact that Donne titled this piece '*Song...*' makes it clear that it was meant to be read, or sung.

Throughout the poem, Donne employs a light and sometimes humorous [tone](#). He is annoyed by the general theme of the poem, the inconstancy of women, but seems to have come to terms with it. He speaks as though this is just how things are, and one must make the best of a constantly bad situation.

While this piece does not feature the characteristics of metaphysical [conceit](#) found in other of Donne works, there is an interesting [comparison](#) presented between the stanzas. He compares the impossibility of something like catching a star to finding an honest and beautiful woman. While a clear exaggeration, it appears to be the [speaker's](#) own true belief that he'll never come upon a woman who will treat him fairly and not run off with someone else.

Summary of *Song: Go and catch a falling star*

Song 'Go and catch a falling star' by [John Donne](#) tells of a speaker's belief that there are no women in the world who are to him both beautiful and faithful.

In the first lines of this piece the speaker begins by giving the reader a number of impossible tasks. These include catching a "falling star" and teaching him how to "hear mermaids singing." It is not until the second stanza that one comes to realize that Donne is comparing these impossibilities to the locating of a beautiful and faithful woman. He believes that one is just as likely to figure how why the devil's foot is cleft as find a woman who has both of these traits.

The speaker goes on to tell the listener that if one were to venture into the strange unknown, they would come across endless wonders, but not a woman who would please him in totality. In the last stanza, he explains how if he thought that such a woman did exist that he's suffer to find her. He'd go on a pilgrimage and do anything he had to. The speaker does not believe it is really possibly though. In fact, he states that one might think they've found a woman of his liking but she would eventually turn out to be "False."

Analysis of *Song: Go and catch a falling star*

Stanza One

Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,

Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.

In the first stanza of this piece, the speaker begins by telling the listener to "Go and catch a falling star." It is for this line that the poem is best known and is only the first representative of the outlandish tasks the speaker sets out. The next is to "Get with child," or impregnate, a "mandrake root." Both of these statements have a magical [mood](#) about them. The mandrake root is commonly associated with witchcraft or hallucinogens (delusion/illusion/fancy).

He goes on to ask the listener to "Tell" him facts about the past, an impossibility as no one can truly know history. The next statement refers to the "cleft" in the devil's foot. He wants to know how it got there, or more simply, how it was decided which form the devil was to take.

In the next section of the first stanza, he asks the listener to teach him to "hear mermaids singing" or alternatively how to "keep off envy's stinging." There is an interesting contrast in these requests between personal need and personal interest. In the final tercet (3 lines stanzas) of rhyming lines he adds that he wants to know what makes people honest. What "wind" or for what reason are some people honest and some deceitful.

Stanza Two

If thou be'st born to strange sights,
Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand days and nights,
Till age snow white hairs on thee,
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,
All strange wonders that befell thee,
And swear,
No where
Lives a woman true, and fair.

In the second stanza he reveals the true purpose of this piece, to complain about the unfair way he has been treated by women. He expresses his belief that there are no women who are "true, and fair" or honest and beautiful, in the world. In the first lines he tells the listener that maybe if "thou be'st born to strange sight." Or more simply, if you are used to seeing unbelievable things, then you should "Ride ten thousand days and nights" and seek as many "strange wonders" as can be found.

He believes that anyone who attempted this would have to ride until their hair turned white and still they would not come upon a woman “true, and fair.” It is interesting to consider how the speaker came to this conclusion. It is not clear why he believes this to be the case, but obviously something in his past tuned his mind in this direction. He is having trouble finding love, or perhaps he doesn’t believe in love at all.

Stanza Three

If thou find'st one, let me know,
Such a pilgrimage were sweet;
Yet do not, I would not go,
Though at next door we might meet;
Though she were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
Yet she
Will be
False, ere I come, to two, or three.

In the final nine lines of *'Song: Go and catch a falling star'*, the speaker states that if “thou find'st” a woman who is both of these things, true and fair, then he will go on a “pilgrimage” to find her. He would suffer if there was a [chance](#) he could find the perfect partner. He knows that this isn't going to be the case though so he does not go.

The speaker states that there is always the possibility that a woman who seems true and fair comes to him, but he thinks more than likely that “she / Will be / False” eventually. There might be a period of time before the realization comes to pass, but he knows that it eventually will. These lines are clearly problematic from a contemporary prospective. Donne does not explain what flaws these women have nor does he include women who are not to him beautiful. He therefore separates women into two categories, those who are beautiful and faithless and those who are ugly and not worth considering.