**Strange Meeting by Wilfred Owen**

There are many interpretations of this poem, and I don’t suggest this is the true and most accurate one. Hopefully, it will help out those of you who are struggling with understanding the meaning of the text.

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| **The Poem** | **In plain English…** |
| It seemed that out of the battle I escaped | It seemed like I escaped the battle |
| Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped | And went down some really dark, ancient tunnel |
| Through granites which titanic wars had groined. | With rocks that had been carved out by massive wars |
| Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned, | And there were these groaning, sleeping men |
| Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred. | Too preoccupied or dead to be woken |
| Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared | Then, as I poked at them, one jumped up and stared |
| With piteous recognition in fixed eyes, | At me with his dead eyes as though he recognised me |
| Lifting distressful hands as if to bless. | He lifted his hands in distress as if he was trying to bless me |
| And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall; | And I could tell by his smile what this dark hall was |
| And by his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell. | I could tell by his dead smile we were standing in hell. |
| With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained; | His face was lined with deep pain |
| Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground, And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan. | Even though the blood and noisy gunfire didn’t reach down here from up above |
| "Strange, friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn." | I told him he had no reason to be sad here. |
| "None," said the other, "Save the undone years, | He agreed that he had no reason to mourn, except the years he hadn’t yet lived |
| The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours, Was my life also; I went hunting wild | And the hopelessness. He said my hopes were the same as yours. I went hunting |
| After the wildest beauty in the world, | For the wildest beauty in the world; for adventure (all those things a young person looks for) |
|  Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair, | It wasn’t the beauty of a pretty woman I was looking for |
| But mocks the steady running of the hour,  And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  | It was youth, liveliness, passion, adventure – that feeling you could live forever. |
| For by my glee might many men have laughed,  | My happiness might have brought happiness to others |
| And of my weeping something has been left,  | Even my tears made an impact on the world |
|  Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  | Which will die now. There is an untold truth |
| The pity of war, the pity war distilled.   | The pity of war. It’s like war draws out pity. It creates pure pity. (Even Owen’s traditional anger seems to have been distilled out) |
| Now men will go content with what we spoiled.  | Now some men will carry on happy with our wins and losses. |
| Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled. | Or the unhappy soldiers will fight and die |
| They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,  | The soldiers will be fast |
| None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  | They will be brave, even though what they are doing isn’t right. |
| Courage was mine, and I had mystery;  | I had courage and mystery |
| Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery; | I had wisdom and mastery |
| To miss the march of this retreating world  Into vain citadels that are not walled.  | The world is going backwards with this futile, pointless war |
|  Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels  I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  | When the soldiers are really upset by all the blood on their hands I would have used the beauty of my poetry to heal their souls with universal truths. |
| I would have poured my spirit without stint  | I would have given my whole self without stopping |
| But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  | But not to this sewer that war is. |
| Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.  | Men’s minds have been damaged or wounded |
|  I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  | I am the man you killed |
|  I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned  Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  | I recognised you in the dark, because you frowned at me exactly the same way you are now when you stabbed and killed me yesterday. |
| I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  | I fought you off but my hands were too cold AND I fought you off but my spirit just couldn’t be bothered anymore – I was cold inside and reluctant (loath) to kill anymore. |
|  Let us sleep now… | Let’s just go to sleep – I’m all worn out – all hope is lost. |

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