

When You Are Old Summary

Writer: William Butler Yeats | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Summary

Picture of Old Age: The poem begins with the image of an old woman sitting by the fire. She is tired, sleepy, and grey-haired. The poet asks her to take down a book and read it slowly. The book reminds her of her youth and her past beauty. It also makes her remember the time when her eyes were soft and full of life.

Memory of Youth: Yeats wants her to dream of her younger days. He asks her to recall how many people once loved her beauty and grace. Her eyes and face were full of charm. But now those days are gone, and she can only remember them through reading and dreaming.

True Love vs. False Love: The poet says that many people loved her only for her looks. Their love was not true or deep. But one man, Yeats himself, loved her soul. He loved her for who she was inside, not for her beauty. He also loved her even when sadness showed on her face.

Regret and Loss: At the end, Yeats imagines her murmuring sadly by the fire. Love has gone far away, hiding among the stars. She feels lonely and full of regret for not returning his love. The poem ends with a tone of sadness and longing for the lost days of youth and love.