My Favorite Old-Time Poem

For Love of the Game

"AS A schoolgirl, in the early 1950s, I loved poetry—not just reading it, but memorizing it. I particularly liked this story and can still recite it from memory," writes Carole Bridges from Riverside, California.

"The poem reminds us that with age come many precious gifts."

O for one hour of youthful joy!
Give back my twentieth spring!
I'd rather laugh, a bright-haired boy,
Than reign, a gray-beard king.

Off with the spoils of wrinkled age!
Away with Learning's crown!
Tear out life's Wisdom-written page,
And dash its trophies down!

One moment let my life-blood stream
From boyhood's fount of flame!
Give me one giddy, reeling dream
Of life all love and fame!

My listening angel heard the prayer,
And, calmly smiling, said,
"If I but touch thy silvered hair
Thy hasty wish hath sped.

“But is there nothing in thy track,
To bid thee fondly stay,
While the swift seasons hurry back
To find the wished-for day?”

“Ah, truest soul of womankind!
Without thee what were life?
One bliss I cannot leave behind:
I’ll take— my— precious— wife!”

The angel took a sapphire pen
And wrote in rainbow dew,
The man would be a boy again,
And be a husband too!

“And is there nothing yet unsaid,
Before the change appears?
Remember, all their gifts have fled
With those dissolving years.”

“Why, yes;” for memory would recall
My fond paternal joys;
“I could not bear to leave them all—
I’ll take—my—girl—and—boys.”

The smiling angel dropped his pen,—
“Why, this will never do;
The man would be a boy again,
And be a father too!”

And so I laughed,—my laughter woke
The household with its noise,—
And wrote my dream, when morning broke,
To please the gray-haired boys.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Holmes (1809-1894), a respected physician, also was regarded as one of America's best 19th-century poets. His son, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., was a Civil War hero who became one of the most widely cited U.S. Supreme Court justices, serving there for nearly 30 years.