

## Poem for a birthday

*Lines written at the Tennyson Monument*

This is a sort of landmark in a life  
Something you once glimpsed from far away  
(a dot on the horizon, not much more)  
And knew one day you'd be there, but not yet.  
Other things obscured it through the days  
The path that brought you this far was not straight  
But took the long route, wandered up and down  
The usual maze that leaves you lost and turning  
No longer sure of what is north or south  
Or where the sun might rise, or where a star.

Now you tread onwards, upwards, and there  
Ahead and clear and suddenly quite close,  
Close enough to touch, this monument grown huge  
Rough stone, grey, solid, up against the sky.

Look at it like this: a chance to pause  
And catch your breath after the long climb.  
Turn around, survey the distant scene  
Take stock of that far country of the past  
All the roads you've walked and some  
You never took, fading as you gaze;  
no going back now. Those ways you never travelled  
The doors you didn't open, all are lost  
This was the way you chose, no other  
This point is where it brought you. Now,  
Bid the might-have-beens farewell

And look at what's ahead. There's a road  
Another, and another; the land is fair  
And rich with meadows, flocks and farms  
Downland and valleys lie before you  
Misty with distance, but glinting in the sun  
And off beyond the hill a gleam of blue  
That might be sky, half-hidden by the cloud  
Or something else, a tranquil shining sea.

**Heather Freeman**