A Red, Red Rose Summary

The poem opens with the speaker comparing his love to a "A Red, Red Rose" and to a "melodie / That's sweetly play'd in tune!" In the second and third stanzas, the speaker describes how deep his love is. And it's deep. He will love his "bonnie lass" as long as he is alive, and until the world ends. At the end, he says adios, and notes that he will return, even if he has to walk ten thousand miles.

Stanza 1 Summary
Get out the microscope, because we’re going through this poem line-by-line.

Lines 1-2
O my Luve's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June:
The poem opens with one of the most famous similes of all time. The speaker is saying his love is like a really red rose that is "newly sprung in June." In other words, the speaker's love is like a flower that has just emerged from the ground. You know what that means, Shmoopers: his love is new, fresh, and young. It's doin' just fine. Oh, and didn't we tell you we're also experts in Scottish dialects? "Luve" is an older spelling of love, and "'s" is an abbreviation of "is."
Burns often spells things in strange ways, partly because he wrote over two hundred years ago and partly because he was Scottish (which means he pronounced and spelled words slightly differently).
One final thing before we keep right on reading: these lines have a bit of a jaunt to them, don't you think? In fact, they're written in iambic meter. The first line has eight syllables, which probably means we're dealing with tetrameter, and the second line has six, which is a sign of trimeter, sure as shootin'.

Lines 3-4
O my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune!
Not satisfied with the whole rose comparison? No worries. The speaker's got another simile for ya.
The speaker next compares his love to a melodie (an older spelling of the word melody) that is "sweetly play'd in tune."
The speaker's "luve," then, is like a song that is sung or "play'd" just right, so right in fact that it's kind of sweet.
Okay. Let's tally it up. So far, we know that the speaker's love is like an oh so red rose, and like an awesome jam. What's next?
And here's a question. Is the speaker talking about his love for a girl—a bonnie lass? Or is he talking about the girl herself?
These lines also repeat the metrical pattern we got in the first two lines. A line of tetrameter, followed by a line of trimeter. Only now we've added a rhyme scheme, too.
June and tune rhyme, which means that our rhyme scheme goes a little something like this: ABCB.
This repeated meter, combined with the catchy rhyme scheme, can only mean one thing: ballad meter. Check out our "Form and Meter" section for more.

**Lines 5-6**

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I:
The speaker says he is as "deep in luve" as the "bonnie lass" is fair (a word that, once upon a time, meant pretty, beautiful, or attractive).
Really, this is a fancy pants way of saying something that's not so fancy pants at all. Imagine a really hot girl or guy, and now imagine that you love that person as much as he or she is hot.
Bonnie, by the way, is a word that means beautiful or pretty (just like "fair"). It is, for the most part, a Scottish dialect word. As is lass, which just refers to a girl (although sometimes it means something like sweetheart).
This guy is one sweet talker.

**Lines 7-8**

And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry:
The speaker says he will "luve" his "bonnie lass" until all the seas dry up.
The word "a" is a shortened form of the word "all"; this elision (the removal of letters from a word) is very common in Scots English (i.e. the form of English spoken in Scotland), but you'll see it in regular English poems, too.
"Gang" doesn't refer to a group of people; it is an old word that means "go" or "walk." Say it to yourself. Doesn't it kind of sound like "gone" or "going"?
The seas will probably never "gang dry," so the speaker seems to be saying that he will love his "lass" forever. Or at least until the apocalypse.

**Lines 9-10**

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
With a healthy dose of repetition, the speaker tells us again that he will love his "bonnie lass" until the seas "gang dry"; he also tells us he will love her until the "rocks melt wi' the sun."
In the line 10, you have to pretend the word "till" is at the beginning; the lines are saying "till a' the seas…and till the rocks."
"Till" is just a shortened form of the word until, and "wi" is a shortened form of the word with, just in case you guys were wondering.
What does he mean by rocks melting with sun? Does he mean when the rocks melt in the sun? Or does he mean melt at the same time as the sun is melting?
Like the sea going dry, it is unlikely that rocks are going to "melt" (unless they get thrown into a volcano, or a meteor strikes the earth) so the speaker is again emphasizing the fact that he will love her forever or at least until long after their lives are over.

**Lines 11-12**

I will luve thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.
Oh for crying out loud, we get it, dude. You really dig this girl.
Yet again, the speaker pledges that he will love his lass for a really long time—as long as he lives, to be exact.
That's where that "sands o' life shall run" comes in. It's an interesting phrase, don't you think? It means, "while I'm still alive." So the metaphor here is of an hourglass, or some other device that measures time with sand.
The words, however, make us think of the "sands o' life" running out; the phrase "I will luve thee still" makes us think the speaker wants to say "I will love thee still, even after the sands o' life shall run out." He doesn't say that, but we can't help thinking it, can we?
After all, we're thinking that the sands of this guy's life will probably run out long before the rocks might melt and the sea may burn.
Form-wise, things have gotten a little shakeup. We've got a new rhyme scheme on our hands, because in these final two stanzas, not only do the second and fourth lines of each stanza rhyme, but the first and third do, too. This pattern is commonly referred to as—wait for it—common meter. Check out our "Form and Meter" section for more.

**Lines 13-14**

And fare thee weel, my only Luve,
And fare thee weel a while!
Suddenly, it's time to say goodbye. Or in this case, "fare thee weel." Hey, same diff. "Weel" does not mean "wheel" but is rather an older form of the word "well"; say it aloud, and you'll see that it sounds really Scottish.
The phrase "fare thee weel a while" means something like "farewell, for now" or "farewell for the time being."
But it could also mean "take care of yourself for now" or "may you be well." The word "fare" can be a verb that means do or go.
For whatever reason, these two lovebirds are splitting like a banana. But we think they're gonna be just fine at the whole long-distance thing. We mean, if your love outlasts the sun, what's a few miles?

**Lines 15-16**

And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' it were ten thousand mile.
Okay, let's just get this out of our systems.
The speaker says his final farewell; he tells his Luve that he will come again, even if he has to walk ten thousand miles (that's a long way!).
So hey, at least we know he's head over heels.
Here's hoping these two crazy kids can make it work.

**Symbol Analysis**

**Nature**

Roses, seas, rocks, sun. There's a whole lotta shakin'—oops, we mean nature going on in this poem. The speaker uses nature in various ways to describe the depth and power of his love.
But hey, this poem comes from rural Scotland—the land of lochs and glens and heaths. Is it any wonder this guy would use nature to write about his love?

Lines 1-2: The speaker compares his love to a red, red rose. And because he uses the word "like," this is a simile.

Lines 7-8: The speaker says he will love his bonnie lass until the seas dry up. The evaporation of the "seas" appears to be a metaphor for the end of the world or for something that can't ever really happen. So really he's just avowing his undying, eternal, everlasting (and other cheesy things) love for his special friend.

Lines 9-10: The speaker mentions the seas going dry again, and adds that he will also love his "bonnie lass" until the "rocks melt w' the sun." Melting rocks are also a metaphor for the end of the world, or for something that isn't likely to happen.

Love

It's a love poem, plain and simple. In fact, "A Red, Red Rose" just so happens to be one of the most famous love poems of all time, too. Nearly ever line in the poem says something about love, so it makes sense that this puppy has been slapped on more than its fair share of greeting cards.

Lines 1-2: Here it is, the most famous love simile ever. Or it's at least in the top five, right? The speaker's comparison of his love to a red, red, rose has gone down in history as pure romance.

Lines 3-4: The speaker says his love is like a "melodie" that's "play'd in tune." Since he uses the word "like," this comparison is a simile. Yep, another one.

Lines 5-6: The speaker says he is as "deep in love" as his "bonnie lass" is "fair." Since the word "as" occurs in this comparison, this is also a simile.

Lines 7-8: the speaker says he will love his "bonnie lass" until the seas dry up; the evaporation of the "seas" is a metaphor for the end of the world—you know, something that can never happen (zombie apocalypses aside).

Lines 11-12: The speaker will be all about his lady love, at least while the "sands o' life shall run." "Sands of life" is a metaphor; one's time on earth is compared to something like an hourglass that has sand in it to measure time.

Farewell

The entire last stanza of the poem is a big farewell. The speaker is going somewhere, and it's not clear where (here's hoping it's Vegas). He makes it seem like he won't be back for a while; he says farewell twice, then says he will come again, even if he has to walk ten thousand miles. The concluding farewell makes the poem just a little bit sad; after all, when people are in love it's never fun when one of them has to leave for a while. But we're holding out hope that the rumors are true—absence really does make the heart grow fonder.

Line 13: The speaker says, "fare thee weel" to his "bonnie lass." Wait, where you goin', dude?

Line 14: The speaker says, "fare thee weel again." Talk about the long goodbye.

Lines 15-16: The speaker says he will come again, even if he has to walk ten thousand miles. Never mind the state of him when he gets there.