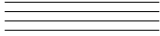


T H E T A L L Y



R O B E R T B . S H A W

Mother first, now my wife.
Dead within a year.
A joke unfunny life
has foisted on me here.

Past sixty, orphanhood
can't be unexpected.
It came: I understood.
Grief was calm, collected.

But that just months ahead
there would be a second
farewell to be said –
that I had not reckoned.

One, two: each blow hit home.
Each left the house more quiet.
Each time, the patient loam
obtained some profit by it.

The orchestra has stopped.
But faintly, unabating
though the baton has dropped,
two notes go on vibrating.

One, two: insistent pair
clinging to every thought.
Murmured to vacant air,
“One, two” adds up to nought.

One, two: my footsteps roam
from empty street to street.
Some tireless metronome
sets the relentless beat.

One, two: the pace I keep
requires no grace of art.
Whether I wake or sleep,
despoiled again, my heart

does all it knows to do:
as if it overheard,
it keeps the count – one, two –
will, till I make a third.