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P O E M S

By

Laura Hillman





LOUISE WARREN McMILLAN
From an Oil Painting by Jos. T. Bill

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By

Louise Warren McMillan

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CONTENTS

	Page
The Amateur	1
Three Poems to Poetry:	
Why	2
How	4
When	5
Memory	6
Fait Accompli	7
Middle-Ground Road	8
Deserted Garden	10
'Til We Meet Again	11
Around the World and Home Again	12
His Duty Done	14
The Visitor	15
Winter Honey-Suckle	16
The Shirker	17
Easter Morning	18
Red-Birds	19
Summer Rain	20
Flowers Are Like People	21
Tongues in Trees	22
Three Poems to Cynthia:	
California Flower	24
Heart-Ache	25
Sublimation	26
The Mourning Dove	27
The Urn	28
The Church on the Hill	29
Faith	30
Layman's Advice	31
Idea	32
Inspiration	33
To Tschaikovsky	34
Heirlooms	35
Treasures for All	36
Forethought	37
Spider Lilies	38
The Hunters	39
Late Afternoon	40

RJM/c 27 Feb 51

THE AMATEUR

Ev'n tho' the song she needs must sing
Should ne'er appear on printed page,
Ideas she would muse upon
The mindfulness of none engage,—

They still would hold for her :
Sweet sublimation of desires, denied ;
A cherished dream,—
Its unattainability yet undecried ;
A cup to catch the over-flow
Of joy that needs must emanate
From deep appreciation of
All that is good in man's estate ;
A game of syllables and sounds
To play when days are grey and long,
When sometimes, paradoxically,
Seemingly there is no song.

The amateur, enamored of
His work, forever wooing it,
Asks nothing in return beyond
The sheer delight of doing it.

Three poems to poetry:

WHY HOW WHEN
WHY

Someone inquired : why do you string
Together verses one by one?
And this she pondered, wondering
From whence her love of song had come.
In far-off days when time stood still
And all was new and wonderful,
Her own adventures, strangely, were
In story-books they read to her :

Deep down within a shady wood
She found a violet blue,
'Its stalk was bent, it hung its head
As if to hide from view';
One day she walked with Lizzie to
The summit of a gentle hill,
'There all at once she saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils';
She watched beside her window-pane
The snow-flakes falling from the sky,
Thought 'flurries of the snow-birds were
Like gusts of brown leaves whirling by';
And often coming home from school
She paused at the blacksmith's door
To see 'the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing floor.'

Did the bards of old make audible
The airy voices to her ear
And cause the subtle vision of
The inward eye to be more clear?
She sees the rhythmic wave of wind
That sweeps the field of growing grain,
The rhythm of the river
Flowing onward to return in rain.
She hears the lyre within the brook,
The song of wind, of storm and sea,
And is aware that all creation
Is but poetry.

Three poems to poetry— (Continued)

HOW

She needs must waken early, spend
A few begrudging hours
To set her house in order, to
Bedeck it with fresh flow'rs.

Then next she notes the beauty of
The new green on the trees,
The fleecy dogwood swaying in
The brisk but balmy breeze.

She then must tune the strings of thought
To nature's joyful roundelay,
Forgiving and forgetting enmity,
Rejoicing in the day.

Created song does but reflect
The soul of him who singeth it,
And so if joyful song be sung,
The mind must sing from which 'tis wrung.

WHEN

'Tis true her room alone contains
A charm for her : the fire-light's glow ;
Old furniture and paintings that
Were once her mother's—long ago ;
Her shelf of books whose authors are
Companions, constant, always there ;
The record-player, ever ready
To provide sweet tunes for her ;

But more than meager furnishings
Are friendly faces—these she deems
Most decorative of the space
Within the four walls of her home.

But sometimes solitude is deep,
Then she must dream—not as in sleep
But in a waking dream of many
Thoughts of things that may not keep.

The victory in his who can,
When friends and dear ones are away,
Turn inward to find surcease from
The languor of the lonely day.

MEMORY

One must never call retreat they say,
Look forward, be intent upon
The urgency of future deeds,
Achieving goals yet to be won.

But when the spring comes back to bring
The blue of hyacinths can you
Forget an erstwhile lovely garden
Wherein they and violets grew?

And when the scent of Mareschal Neils
Is once again within the air
Can one forget an ancient porch,
The trellised vine of rose there?

Magnolias bathed in moonlight,
Blooming high against a silver sky,
Inevitably shall recall
Enchanted nights of days gone by.

O gentle past that seemed to verge
On fairy-land, remain always,
For mem'ry is an anchorage
For pleasant thoughts of other days.

FAIT ACCOMPLI

(A thing already done)

Being grateful for the gift of life,
She wondered how she might include
Within her own life something to
Bespeak for aye her gratitude.

Perhaps one's written memoir would
The fragment of a truth portray,
Recorded reminiscences
A record of the day convey.

But days were full and time was fleeting,
Leisure for her cherished task,
Like a wil-o-the-wisp, was e'er before her,
Never quite within her grasp.
But ah (she mused), why fret, is not
A portion of infinity
Dealt out into the hands of all
(Though often held unwittingly) ?

As all things pass but to return
And nothing ceases utterly,
So influence—mere, intangible,—
Continues through eternity.

MIDDLE-GROUND ROAD (IN 1910)

Magnos homines virtute metimur
non fortuna.

The farmer and his daughter drive
Beyond the outskirts of the town
Toward where his lovely acres lie
Along the road called Middle-Groun'.

The distance isn't very great
But as the team is slow of gait,
The ancient surrey with its load
Moves leisurely along the road.

'Tis spring, the fields are newly plowed,
The orchards gaily blossomin';
The woods are decked with dogwood and
Entwined with yellow jasamin.

The oaks before the Roberts home
Hang purple with wisteria bloom;
And there the garden blooms with quills,
Blue hyacinths and daffodils.

They pass the path to Little's Spring,
A place wherein the forest heaves
A silence deep, disturbed by only
Little birds among the leaves.

They near the ancient homestead where
The farmer spent his days when young,
The grove of ancient water-oaks
With hanging moss and ivy hung.

'Twas here the enemy encamped
 Upon his march down to the sea ;
'Twas here the master called his slaves
 Into the grove and said : you're free.
From here the farmer, in his youth,
Forsook the country of his birth ;
In foreign countries studied music,
History, philosophy.

And when eventu'llly the land
Fell to the inexperienced hand
Of him who read of Schopenhauer,
Of Goethe, Schiller hour on hour,—
Poured o'er Napoleanic battles :
 Jena, Moscow, Austerlitz,—
Who at the organ needs must play
 The fugues of Bach, the tunes of Lizst,
And at a period in which
 The way of life was new and strange,
When all groped for a way to cope
With time's irrevocable change,—
Plantations vanished with the wind
 And he, in indignation, found
His lovely acres were but few
 Along the road called Middle-Ground.

With even mind he tells his child :
 True happiness comes from within,
Acquiring wealth is not the goal
 That man must ever strive to win.

DESERTED GARDEN

Alone I wander in your garden,
 Seeing there the fine array
Of summer's last bright flowers
 Blooming colorf'ly along the way.
I muse upon the fact that you,
 With only your own tender hands,
Have fashioned from this bit of earth
 A veritable fairy-land.
The grass you scattered underneath
 The fig tree, spreading over-head,
Is now a soft green carpet and
 The borders are your flower-beds.
The crimson glow of salvia,
 The orange flame of marigold,
The cloud of bright blue daisies, would
 That you were here, dear, to behold.

Why must you study botany
 Within a class-room far away,
And in your absence how can even
 Flowers be so bright and gay?

TILL WE MEET AGAIN

Along about the time when you
Were turning sweet sixteen, my dear,
Somehow you alawys seemed to like
To wear gardenias in your hair.

Each day you plucked a blossom, placed
It in your shining tresses where
It nestled, glad that fate had ruled
That it should lie and languish there.

And now beside your picture
Smiling sweetly here beside my chair,
Somehow I like to keep gardenias
Leaning there against your hair.

AROUND THE WORLD AND HOME AGAIN

His orders came, he went away
 (For ages, seemingly, was gone) ;
Returned, soon to depart, alas,
 For parts unknowable, unknown.

Within the garden robins chirped
 Among the oak trees' leafy boughs,
But somehow springtime did but emphasize
 The sadness that was ours.

En route into the nearby city,
 Lingering along the way
Gave time to play, half-heartedly,
 A game that children like to play.

Throughout the night the distant trains
 With wailing whistles thundered by,
And each did seem to force the other
 Farther on and far away.

The silvered surface of the sea
Was smooth and calm as calm could be,
But through the boundless deep there were
The weapons of the enemy.

The task was hard in far-off places ;
 O'er the dark and wild terrain
One oft must wander many miles
 Some simple item to obtain.

At last the captive land was free,
And from its shores the braves embark;
But flags of war were yet unfurled,
The clouds yet heavy, low and dark.

Above a far-flung wilderness
The banner of the rising sun
Was seen afar by those who came
For duty that must needs be done.

At last the precious peace was won,
The happy homeward trek begun:
From far-off, foreign seas and sounds
Were sailing vessels homeward bound.

Then suddenly one morning as
Another day was dawning o'er
The hills of home one wakes to hear
Familiar footsteps at the door.

Ah, there he stands, his duty done.
Be proud, all mothers, of a son
Who, at the country's call would give
His all that freedom still might live.

HIS DUTY DONE

I watched you mow the lawn to-day
And, watching, was enchanted with
The sunlit shades of green upon
The velvet smoothness of the earth.

In places where the trembling trees
Created areas of shade,
The shadowed surfaces contained
The cooler, softer green of jade.

The scent of grasses, freshly cut,
Was pleasant, too; but ah, to me,
The wonder of it all, my dear,
The thought of which brings ecstasy,
Is that you're safely home again,
And now, before me I may see
You there, not fancifully as
Of yore, but in reality.

THE VISITOR

The guest arrived, remained awhile,
Departing, left within her wake
The mem'ry of a soul whose thirst
For beauty no amount could slake.

The flowers in the garden and
The budding trees about the door,
The singing birds, the April skies
Were each a source of joy to her.

But ah, fair guest, you're unaware
That you, within yourself, possess
A loveliness of spirit which
Is beauty at its very best.

WINTER HONEYSUCKLE

The petals of camellias are
Exquisitely symmetrical;
The colorful azalea is
Conspicuously beautiful.

The judas tree, with purple hung,
The dogwood shining in the sun
Or white against the forest green
Are wondrous sights to look upon;

But the tiny winter honeysuckle,
First sweet breath of early spring,
Excites a gladness in the soul
That finer flowers do not bring.

THE SHIRKER

I shall begin to sew, she said,
For spring is truly here,
And like the trees I too must have
A garment new to wear.
But when beyond my window-pane
I see azaleas bloom again
Against a ground of emerald green,
How can I sit and sew within?
When lilac buds are bursting into
Clusters of delicious bloom
And April skies are fair and blue
How can one sit and sew a seam?
My row of flow'ring shrubs is fast
Becoming a delightful mass
Of mingled pastel colors, far
Too lovely to forego, alas!

EASTER MORNING

The forest floor beside the river's rim
 Would be abloom, she knew,
For was this not the season when
 The wild, white lilies bloomed anew?

Beyond the stretch of stately pines,
 Below the old artesian well,
She came into the forest she
 Had ever known and loved so well.

Here in the cool, cathedral woods,
 Beyond the reach of human sound,
Beside Ogeechee's waters, once
 Again the lilies fair she found.
O wondrous lilies of the wood-land,
 As the stars the heav'ns adorn,
You glorify the paths of earth,
 Commemorate the Easter Morn.

You pass away, but lo, with spring
 You have arisen here again,
Arrayed in robes of loveliness
 Yet neither do you toil nor spin.

The river of one's years attains
 The ocean of eternity
And you, beside the wid'ning waters,
 Promise immortality.

RED-BIRDS

My porch is pleasant with the shade
Of pink mimosas overhead,
And peaceful with a quiet view
Of elms along the avenue.

I sit and knit and wonder if
The passing seasons render me
Content to be concerned with only
Birds in a mimosa tree.

'Twas in the early part of May
Two cardinals arrived one day,
And like a pair of engineers,
Absorbed in serious affairs,
Surveyed the clump of ivy leaves
Beneath the over-hanging eaves,
Concluded that in all the town
No nicer home site could be found.
Beneath mimosa blooms they mated,
Built a wondrous nest and waited
For the birdlings to appear
From three small eggs that nestled there.
Ere long three yellow mouths were seen
Uplifted there against the green ;
And soon young wings were learning how
To flutter to the nearest bough.

Oft when I hear a bird at dawn,
I wonder if he's one of three
Whose home was underneath the eaves
Beside the sweet mimosa tree.

SUMMER RAIN

Come faster, harder gentle rain drops,
Drench the drooping flowers; they
Are withering away but for
The want of your refreshing showers.
Ev'n the sweet petunias, always
Blooming graciously, of late

Have languished ere the buds have blossomed
To the flower's full estate.
The phlox and daisies, too, would fain
Unfold their petals to the sun,
But with the burning heat of day
Their heads are bowed 'til day is done.

Hark, hear the rumble of the thunder
From the rain clouds rolling by;
The erstwhile drooping flowers soon
Will lift their faces to the sky.

FLOWERS ARE LIKE PEOPLE

Somehow or other, flowers are
Like people, in a way;
The happy, carefree people,
Ever light-of-heart and gay:

The dogwood blooms like myriads
Of little faces say:
Come out into the lovely out-of-doors,
Be glad and gay.

And if petunias could but speak,
Most likely they would say:
We shall be blossoming for you
All summer, if we may.

The poppy sleeps (as you and I)
With petals folded, tight;
At dawn awakes, unfolding as
The day replaces night.

Primroses, scattered o'er
The meadows, delicate and fair,
Like little angels are for all,—
All over, everywhere.

Somehow or other, flowers are
Like people, in a way,—
Ah, would that people, everywhere,
Like flowers, might be gay.

TONGUES IN TREES

Beneath the spreading branches of
Her sturdy oak the day was warm,
And to the westward, rain-dark clouds
Bespoke the coming of the storm.
No single leaflet stirred above her,
Brooding stillness filled the air;
A heaviness was over all
And fell upon her, sitting there.

In pensive mood she pondered the
Perplexities of life, concerned
With : reasonings of those who'd seek
To block a chosen path,—as planned;
Dualities, however innocent,
That quell life's sweetest song;
The tangled web of circumstance,
Betimes irrevocably strong.

Across the way the oleanders,
Laden with abundant bloom,
Presented beauty to the scene
And offered all their sweet perfume.
The ancient oak, of noble height,
With branches lifted to the sky,
Prolonged its shade into the shadows
Of the lofty pine, nearby.
The lawn that did disguise the wrinkled
Earth with beauty, seemed to say:
Without my lovely areas
Of greensward where would children play?

Ah, but to sense within the God
Who is revealed in all without,
Thus to be rendered one with nature,
Selfless, passionless—no doubt.

Three poems to Cynthia

CALIFORNIA FLOWER

'Tis April in Topanga and
The bloom of California's spring
Has touched the highland hills and vales,
The canyon walls—and everything.
From yonder lofty summits to
 The surface of the ocean blue,
The poppy, purple sage and lupins
 Lend their colors to the view.

Somewhere within the fastnesses,
Within a cozy place there is
One little flower fairer than
All other flowers of the land.
What is this rare exquisite one
Unfolding there beneath the sun,
Caressed and kissed by balmy breezes
Blowing inland from the sea?

Of all the mountain blooms the edelweis
 Is counted as most rare,
But ev'n the wondrous edelweis
With *Cynthia* cannot compare.

HEART-ACHE

The silver plane came sailing in,
Alighted for its precious freight,
And with a rush and roar of wind
Was off into the sky again.

I looked with longing as it flew
Around the dome of azure blue,
And as it sped into the west,
Dissolving into nothingness.

But why be sad? perhaps I too
Shall sail away into the blue
To span the many, many miles
That keep me O, so far from you.

SUBLIMATION

My overwhelming love for you
Is an unselfish one, 'tis true,
So wherefore cruel fate bemoan
Now that you've left me here alone?

I still may quickly send to you
So many things you would enjoy:
Perhaps a dainty dress or two,
A picture-book, a brand-new toy.

Your mother also will derive
Enjoyment helping you undo
The packages. 'Tis not so long
Since she was little too,—like you.

THE MOURNING DOVE

The mourning dove that sings so softly
From the bough of yonder tree,
Combines both sweet and sad refrains
Within his plaintive melody.

So are my thoughts of you both sweet
And sad: sweet with the memory
Of you; sad, knowing that for yet awhile,
With you I cannot be.

THE URN

The urn had been the center of
Her mother's pleasant garden, now,
Within a new environment
Seemed strangely out of place, somehow.

The quaint old garden, she recalled,
Would bloom awhile then fade away,
But never in her mem'ry was
The urn without its bright bouquet.

The blossoms overhung the sides,
Obscured the sculptor's deft designs
Of Bacchus, clustered grapes and wreathes
Of twining vines, Acanthus leaves.

Perennials her mother planted,
Yet are blooming in the urn
And there through all the years to come
The blossoms will with spring return.

The sunlight lends an added brightness
To her cherished blooms at noon ;
By night the urn is dimly white
Beneath the visiting moon.



“THE URN”

THE CHURCH ON THE HILL

The summer day now fades away,
The evening shadows fall
As church bells chime across the way
For prayer, calling all.

The day is ours, not so the night;
'Tis comforting to hear
The sacred song of twilight bells
Upon the evening air.

But hark, the knell of one lone bell
Begins when the rest are done:
'Tis from the negro's church there on
The hill against the sun.

The timid tones, continuing,
Become more sweet, less shrill
Recalling gentle souls now in
The churchyard on the hill.

How strange the sound of a ringing bell,—
A thing intangible,
Remains the same when all is changed,—
A thing unchangeable.

The sun is down, the bell is still,
But mingled from afar,
Are cries of laughter, tinkling sounds
Of banjo and guitar.

FAITH

The butter-colored butterfly
Serenely drifts among the flowers,
Unaware that hidden dangers
Lie amid the leafy bowers.

There the enemy, unseen,
Alert within his silken lair,
Awaits with innate subtlety
The lovely creature to ensnare.
How oft the web of circumstance
Enfolds with thread so intricate,
'Twould seem that, like the insect, man
Is not the master of his fate.

But He who clothes the grasses, feeds
The fowls and sees the sparrow fall,
Who stills the sea, arrays the lily,—
Watcheth over all.

LAYMAN'S OPINION

*'Thus saith the Lord . . . ask for the old paths,
where is the good way, walk therein and find rest
for your souls.'* Jer. 6:16.

They said it was a work of art,
But surely, looking, one might see
That in the painting truth
Had forfeited to unreality.

One hears, at times, the measured
Dissonances of a symphony,
And marvels that the unsweet sounds
Achieved are really meant to be.

* * * *

The sunset casts a crimson glow
Of loveliness on all below ;
The moon appears, a silver light,
Behind the forest of the night.

One hears the whispering of pines,
The endless murmur of the sea,
The laugh of happy children and
The bird that sings in yonder tree.

* * * *

The Master Mind creates with beauty
And simplicity of line ;
Well might His creatures emulate
The works of Him who is Divine.

IDEA

Were I an artist bent upon
Creating 'Pink Camellias' from
My palette, would I paint the leaves
And petals of but single blooms?
Ah no, instead I should portray
A fairy-land where children play
And stoop to gather fallen flow'rs
To string into a lovely lei.

My 'Roses' would be roses plus
A quaint old-fashioned garden where
A woman bends to gather armfuls
For the children standing there.

My 'moonlight' would portray the shadows
Of a tall magnolia tree
Upon a wide veranda where
Two lovers dream the night away.

'Tis well and good transcribing nature
(Always handsomely designed),
My opus also would reveal
The hidden heart, the secret mind.

INSPIRATION

At times she says : the muse is gone,
Euterpe has forsaken me ;
No more shall I be moved to pour
My musings into poetry.

And then she sees the rains descend
Upon the parched and thirsty land ;
She notes the lightning's flash, the peal
And roar of passing thunder and

Again she feels the pow'r and majesty
That guides the universe ;
Again would fain acclaim the wonder
Of God's deity in verse.

TO TSCHAIKOVSKY

The Russian country is majestic and
Magnificent, you say;
Did love of native land inspire
The music even now I play
And, hearing, am transported to
A realm to which the soul may wing
Its flight and there delight in tunes
The heav'nly choristers should sing?

Well must you have revered mankind,
Bequeathing all a legacy
Of melodies so sweet as to
Imbue the heart with ecstasy.

The soil of Klin is hallowed ground;
There you, the lonely heart, alone,
Composed. O proud must be the nation that
Can claim you for its own.

HEIRLOOMS

These treasures she, of late, received
Are truly lovely, all agree,
But dear they are not only for
Their loveliness and artistry :

The vases are not only rare
Because of pale pink chinaware
Exquisitely embossed and wreathed
In fragile Meisen, silver-leaved ;

And neither are the paintings
Only well beloved because they show
That someone poured his very soul
Into their making, long ago ;

It isn't only that the chairs
Of rose-wood and mahogany
Are made of wood that has withstood
The usage of a century ;

But because of long companionship
These things are also very dear,
And time can ne'er efface the place
They hold in mem'ry's yesteryear.

TREASURES FOR ALL

The crimson rose that grows beside
Her door-way is as lovely as
Its counterpart would be composed
Of rubies centered with topaz.

Ambrosial perfumes that rejoiced
The heart of Solomon were not
More wonderfully fragrant than
Her own tea-olive's subtle scent.

Is there a master potter in
Old Sevres or Dresden who presumes
To boast a substance comparable
To petals of magnolia blooms?

The harp is sweet and did, of old,
The heart of Saul with gladness fill;
But mocking-birds about her home
Make music that is sweeter still.

What earthly artist could devine
The intricacies of design
As does the passion-flower yield,
This lowly blossom of the field?

A wealth of treasures God has given
To His creatures here below;
Upon the lowliest doth He
His many gracious gifts bestow.

FORETHOUGHT

I sing of long lost kinsmen,—
Even some of unknown names,
Who, for posterity, encased
Their images in sturdy frames.

That they were lovely, elegant,
Their countenances clearly show;
And but for these small photographs
This pleasant truth I would not know.

These faces, from their gilded frames,
Some smiling, others pensive, sad,
Look into mine and seem to say:
“You are of me” and I am glad.

SPIDER LILIES

When summer's done and in the air
We feel the dying of the year,
Ah, then it is the season when
Red spider lilies reappear.

Within the cool and quiet earth
All year they've lain forgot, then lo,
Along the hedges over night,
They've gathered in a crimson row.

When Ceres from celestial heights
Perceived Proserpina in flight,
Relenting, she allows the growth
Of this last offering to earth.

THE HUNTERS

The time is very near, my dear,
When once again we two shall trail
Across the fields and through the forest
Hunting down the timid quail.

How many autumn afternoons
We've roamed the country-side together,
You intent upon the hunt
While I enjoy the lovely weather.
Over barren cotton fields,
Beyond the stacks of hay, piled high,
The sycamores are golden and
The oaks are red against the sky.

The once bright flowers of the fields
Are now but seeds within a pod,
But here and there a ling'ring daisy
Mingles with the golden-rod.

With dog and gun we homeward turn,
The chill of night comes o'er the earth,
And O, how good to contemplate
At home the fire upon the hearth.

LATE AFTERNOON

A farewell gleam of evening sun-light
Penetrates her window-pane
And seems to glide across the room
Within a bright gold-dusty lane.
And as it sheds its beams about,
A sort of brilliant twilight reigns ;
The paintings, books, the walls and all
Are as if splashed with golden strains.
It lights a crystal bowl that holds
The season's first chrysanthemums,
Depicts the shade of shutters there
Upon the carpet of her rooms.

Beyond the window-pane she sees
The red and gold of autumn trees
Made even more resplendant by
Reflections from the evening sky.

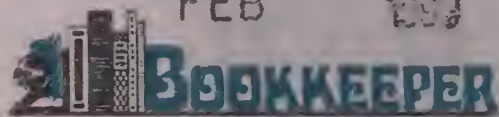
The sun grows older ; soon to fade,
Hangs low upon the firmament.
She sips her cup of tea content,—
Content with her environment.

THE END.

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