



# *Dreamers on Horseback*

*Collected Verse*

*by Karle Wilson Baker* ~  
*(Including Blue Smoke and Burning Bush)*



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# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

*(Collected Verse)*

BY

KARLE WILSON BAKER



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62. W. M. 6/28-121



To  
T. E. B.



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FROM  
*BLUE SMOKE*  
(1919)



## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BLUE SMOKE

**T**HE flame of my life burns low  
Under the cluttered days,  
Like a fire of leaves.  
But always a little blue, sweet-smelling smoke  
Goes up to God.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### DAILY BREAD

**M**Y little town is homely as another,  
But it is old,  
And it is full of trees,  
And it is covered with sky.  
My heart lives in a little house with a fire in it,  
And a pillow at night,  
And is fed daily by laughter and cares,  
And the dear needs of children;  
But my soul lives out of doors.  
Its bread is the beauty of trees,  
Its drink, the sky.  
There is a moment on winter evenings  
When the grey trees on the near hills turn rosy,  
And all the smoke is blue.  
Then I go forth with my basket for manna.  
And sometimes,  
When the air is very clear,  
And the moon comes before the dark,  
God himself brings me green wine in a cup of silver  
And holds it for me  
While I drink.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ALTAIR

**T**HREE of them walk together  
Joyous and fair and high,  
Through the still, heavenly weather  
Up in the summer sky. . . .

Under their feet are the fountains  
The night-bird's heart outpours  
Flooding the mimic mountains  
Of the shadowy sycamores.

Over the sky forever  
She leadeth her comrades sweet:  
No dream of our mortal fever  
Troubleth her straying feet.

She lifteth the years from my shoulders,  
She looseth the weight from my wings;  
Long hidden from all beholders  
An old, sealed fountain sings. . . .

Three of them walk together—  
She is the fairest of three;  
And sweet as the heavenly weather  
She maketh the heart of me!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### DAYS

SOME days my thoughts are just cocoons—all cold,  
and dull, and blind,  
They hang from dripping branches in the grey woods of  
my mind;

And other days they drift and shine—such free and flying  
things!  
I find the gold-dust in my hair, left by their brushing  
wings.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### A CLEAR NIGHT

I HAVE worn this day as a fretting, ill-made garment,  
Impatient to be rid of it.

And lo, as I drew it off over my shoulders  
This jewel caught in my hair.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE RAIN-POOL

**M**Y life is like a little pool  
Left by the passing rain  
Beside the village thoroughfare  
Where every path is plain;

A brown and useful little pool  
For childhood's dimpled glee,  
And thirsty dogs, and paddling ducks  
Who stir it mightily!

(But oh, it is so still and blue, beside the evening street,  
When little, wary stars come down, to cool their twinkling  
feet!)

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WINTER SECRETS

**G**OD wrote my heart a letter, I believe,  
And used the branches of the naked trees  
Against the winter sky, for characters.  
I cannot translate into mortal words  
The dainty hieroglyphics of the elm,  
The oracles in oak, the willow's rhyme,  
Nor any of the lovely dialects  
That write themselves across the setting sun.  
But, like some tonsured pedant of old time  
Who wooed his dimming parchment like a bride,  
And pored upon it, yearning, day and night,  
So, year by year, I take my lesson up,  
And dream out little meanings, one by one,  
Writ in the margin of God's manuscript.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### OF ITALY

WHEN I was young, it seemed to me  
That I should die for Italy!  
The beauty of my native glade  
Was as a barefoot beggar-maid  
To some proud youth, who burned the while  
And fainted for a princess' smile.

Now I am older, and I see  
Such beauty in a poplar-tree,  
Such pathos in my village spire  
Against the sudden western fire—  
Passion to make the spirit swoon  
In black boughs etched upon the moon—  
Till now it sometimes seems to me  
That I should die of Italy!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THRUSHES

**T**HROUGH Tanglewood the thrushes trip,  
As brown as any clod,  
But in their spotted throats are hung  
The vesper-bells of God.

And I know little secret truths,  
And hidden things of good,  
Since I have heard the thrushes sing  
At dusk, in Tanglewood.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### GOOD COMPANY

**T**ODAY I have grown taller from walking with the trees.  
The seven sister-poplars who go softly in a line;  
And I think my heart is whiter for its parley with a star  
That trembled out at nightfall and hung above the pine.

The call-note of a redbird from the cedars in the dusk  
Woke his happy mate within me to an answer free and  
fine;

And a sudden angel beckoned from a column of blue  
smoke—

*Lord, who am I that they should stoop—these holy folk  
of thine?*

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE POET

SAY'ST thou the heart hath missed her harvestings—  
A muffled harp, no hand to stir the rust?  
Some note shall yet be struck from out the strings  
That shall go singing when thy heart is dust.

Then soft, tread softly, clamorous heart bereft,  
The lamentable chamber of thy years!  
Fame brews her nectar from the sweet drops left  
In broken jars where Love hath stored his tears.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE LOST ONE

THERE are so many kinds of me  
Indeed, I cannot say  
Just which of many I shall be  
Tomorrow, or today.

Whence are they—princess, witch or nun?  
I know not; this I know:  
The gravest, gentlest, simplest one  
Was buried long ago.

Wrapped in the faded pride it wore,  
It slumbers, as is fit,  
And nothing tells the name it bore  
Or marks the place of it.

But all the other kinds of me,  
They know, and turn aside,  
And check their laughter soberly  
Above the one that died.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE RETURN

AND so at last I trod the ways  
I once had found so fair,  
To find the rose of memory  
Had drooped and faded there.

Noon on the strange-familiar ways;  
Dust, and the common things;  
Until at last the day spread out  
For flight its lovely wings,

And let their golden shadows fall  
Across the fields I knew;  
And then the sudden splendor came  
As it was wont to do.

Like the old smile across a face  
Whose early charm is spent,  
That light of unforgotten days  
Trembled—and came—and went!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE LOST IDEAL

'TIS not because I loved you in those years,  
Those early years that will not come again;  
That would not wake this wan old ghost of pain  
Who walks a stranger to the balm of tears;

Not that my spirit worshipped at your feet  
And made no marvel of so plain a thing;  
I would not grudge the bluebird to the spring,  
Nor wish an April niggard of her sweet;

Not what I gave, but something that I missed,  
Vexes my vision of the vanished years:  
Not that young love stored up so many tears,  
But that you broke the vase of amethyst!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### LOVE'S RETURN

**T**HE thorn beside the garden gate had stood all winter  
bare;  
Today, behold, the sudden green was all a-twitter there!

Today I visited my heart—I'd left it stark and lorn—  
And little throstle-throated joys were singing in the thorn!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### GOSSAMER

OUT of the common sun and stress  
I weave a cunning happiness:  
A cobweb, fine and frail and fair,  
That trembles in the passing air.

God lets me work till it is done,  
A breath of silver in the sun:  
He does not mind—unless I cry  
When His great, wrecking winds go by.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE TREE

**M**Y life is a tree,  
Yoke-fellow of the earth;  
Pledged,  
By roots too deep for remembrance,  
To stand hard against the storm,  
To fill my Place.  
(But high in the branches of my green tree there is a wild  
bird singing:  
Wind-free are the wings of my bird: she hath built no  
mortal nest.)

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE FLEETS OF MY FANCY

**T**HE fleets of my fancy  
Stir but to the winds of Fate;  
They skim like gulls when the winds blow—  
In the calm, they wait.

The tides of my spirit  
Obey but the moon of Fate;  
The Great Deep cometh and goeth  
Secret, elate.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### A PILGRIM SONG

AH, little Inn of Sorrow,  
What of thy bitter bread?  
What of thy ghostly chambers,  
So I be shelterèd?  
'Tis but for a night, the firelight  
That gasps on thy cold hearthstone;  
Tomorrow my load and the open road  
And the far light leading on!

Ah, little Inn of Fortune,  
What of thy blazing cheer,  
Where glad through the pensive evening  
Thy bright doors beckon clear?  
Sweet sleep on thy balsam pillows,  
Sweet wine that will assuage,  
But send me forth o'er the morning earth  
Strong for my pilgrimage!

Ah, distant End of the Journey,  
What if thou fly my feet?  
What if thou fade before me  
In splendor wan and sweet?  
Still the mystical city lureth—  
The quest is the good knight's part;  
And the pilgrim wends through the end of the ends  
Toward a shrine and a Grail in his heart.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE SPRING MOON

**D**ELICATE, scintillant Crescent-Lady,  
What do you seek through the fields of blue?  
Daintily going through April-blowing,  
O young Moon-Lady, may I go too?

A-dream you walk in your soft blue meadows,  
With a chance-plucked flower in your spun-gold hair,  
And a cloud-scarf trailing of silver veiling  
And a Star-Child stumbling beside you there!

Bluet, and larkspur, and violet purple—  
Knee-deep in the azure the Star-Child goes:  
And where you are leading her all unheeding  
O light Moon-Lady, who knows, who knows?

But oh, I wish that my feet were scaling  
Your floating ladder let down for me!  
For who would reckon when faeries beckon  
And the witch-moon shines through the willow-tree?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE LIGHTHOUSE

THE shadow of the lighthouse falls  
Beside my window in the day;  
By night a sturdy friend is he—  
The tall, dim lantern by the bay.

Yet I, his neighbor, only see  
A dusky tower, a hooded light;  
He hoards his strength and flings it far  
To guide the vessels through the night.

My Poet, too, is often dark  
To idle gazers near at hand;  
He may not shed his garnered light  
On easy folk that hug the land;

But they that quest across the deep,  
That roam, and cannot choose but roam,—  
To them he sends a gallant beam  
Across the thunder and the foam!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE MOOR-CHILD

AND you tempt me into your House of Love—  
I, who have come from far  
Through wintry forest and homeless heath,  
Friend of the wind and star?  
Ah, I fear me the warmth of the ingleside  
And the depths of your dear caress  
Will make me forget what I learned out there  
In the stubble and loneliness!

Ah, the sheltered folk in the House of Love,  
I have watched them, how blind they grow!  
They cannot feel for the folk outside  
Who walk barefoot in the snow.  
For love is a mantle and love is a fire  
And love is a velvet dress;  
I have seen them pass as I roamed the moor  
In my rags and nakedness.

I have long made friends with the open sky—  
Rough are its ways, but true;  
It will smile or frown on our cottage roof  
After I come to you.  
Oh, running I come to your house, good man,  
But let us not close the door!  
Leave a crack for the wail of the homeless wind  
And the scudding rain of the moor!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### RONDEL FOR SEPTEMBER

YOU thought it was a falling leaf we heard:  
I knew it was the Summer's gypsy feet;  
A sound so reticent it scarcely stirred  
The ear so still a message to repeat—  
"I go, and lo, I make my going sweet."  
What wonder you should miss so soft a word?  
You thought it was a falling leaf we heard:  
I knew it was the Summer's gypsy feet.

With slender torches for her service meet  
The golden-rod is coming; softer slurred  
Midsummer noises take a note replete  
With hint of change; who told the mocking-bird?  
I knew it was the Summer's gypsy feet—  
You thought it was a falling leaf we heard.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### HEART'S OCTOBER

AND shall I clutch at dear departing things  
While leaf and tree in silent splendor part?  
Go, little joys! and welcome, fluttering wings  
That brush my clinging sorrows from my heart!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WISDOM

**L**INE upon line, a little here and there,  
We scrape together wisdom with slow care.  
Wherefore? To blossom in a churchyard rose,  
Or to go with the spirit—if it goes?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### AFTER WRITING "OCCASIONAL VERSES"

**T**HE stars, my comrades, stand aloof from me:  
They say I wrought today with smiles for hire.  
The firefly winking past the maple-tree,  
He shames me with his small, essential fire.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

W. V. M.

(1910)

**D**EAD—even he. They told me, and that day  
Somehow my dreams went wailing, lost in space,  
Finding the beggared earth a homeless place.  
Then, as Death's violence to that vital clay  
Slipped from my heart (as, Heaven be thanked, it may),  
I saw his passing had but served to trace  
A subtler line in life's mysterious face:  
He is more friendly since he went away.

Grief is the treasure of his own: but I  
Who only touched his garment's hem, draw near  
And find in him increasingly my part,  
Fall into step, bespeak his company!  
Living, the nearest claim them; but the dear  
Great dead belong to any humble heart.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE YOUNG ENVOY

THEY sent me, but I must have lost my way—  
The Voices yonder—and they bade me come,  
Else I had fain stayed with the rest at home;  
And they said “Speak!” but try as still I may  
I have forgotten what they bade me say.  
Ah, but ’twas noble! By it, eloquent Rome  
Seemed but a noise of tumult; and mere foam  
Of sunny seas was Athens’ little day.

What was the word They gave me? Now and then  
The thrushes start to sing it, and the breeze  
Loitering by my ear when spring’s at hand  
Says a soft word in passing; then again  
Goes murmuring off, high up among the trees,  
Is gone, and I—I did not understand!

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## BLUEBIRD AND CARDINAL

### I

THOU wingèd symbol of the quiet mind,  
Thou straying violet, flying flower of spring,  
Heaven-hued and heaven-hearted! Thou dost sing  
As thou some sweet remembered thought didst find,  
And, counselling with thyself in musing kind,  
Didst softly say it over. Thy swift wing  
Knows but a quiet rhythm; thou a thing  
Of peace, to passion innocently blind.

Thy russet breast means married love, long hope,  
Sheltered experience, small and sweet and sure,  
All of the brown earth's natural purity;  
But something heavenly, beyond our scope,  
Steeped thy blue wing in color strange and pure,  
Intense and holy as the mirrored sky.

### II

Pulse of the gorgeous world, jubilant, strong—  
Thy song a whistled splendor, and thy coat  
A fiery song! From thy triumphant throat  
How I have heard it pouring, loud and long,  
Whipping the air as with a scarlet thong—  
The joyous lashing of thy triple note  
Which all the tamer noonday noises smote  
And clove a royal pathway through the throng!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Thou singest joy of battle, joy of fame,  
Glory, and love of woman; joy of strife  
With life's wild fates; and scorn'st, with jocund breath  
For prudence' sake to dim thy feathered flame—  
Thou heart of fire, epitome of life,  
Full-throated flouter of vindictive death!

### III

And lo, among the leafy, hidden groves  
Within my heart, they both do flit and nest,  
Saintly blue wing and vaunting scarlet crest,  
Yea, all of life and all its myriad loves.  
Even as Nature holds them, sifts and proves  
And balances, so shall my soul find rest  
In Her large tolerance, which without rest  
Or lagging, toward some wide conclusion moves.

So, though I weary sometimes of the stress,  
Leave me not, little lovers of the air,  
Dearest of Nature's fine antitheses!  
Thou of the musing voice and heavenly dress,  
Thou, royal firebrand,—neither could I spare,  
My scarlet Passion, nor my wingèd Peace!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### VEILED MOONLIGHT

**T**HERE is no passion in the world tonight:  
No waking bird's small liquid jet of song,  
No dank wood-wind with faint enchantments strong,  
No amorous moon to pour down throbbing light  
On the desirous meadows; sickly-bright  
She threads her way the listless clouds among;  
And none can say the world was ever young,  
And none can prove the dream of youth was right!  
O thou, my lost Illusion! O thou Doubt,  
With subtle eyes and pale, destroying hands!  
Thou walkest with me, hedging me about  
With sad philosophies from wise old lands,—  
And all my passionate days are spent, poured out  
Like rich wine spilt upon the desert sands!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### “THE HEART KNOWETH——”

SOMETIMES my little woe is lulled to rest,  
Its clamor shamed by some old poet's page—  
Tumult of hurrying hoof, and battle-rage,  
And dying knight, and trampled warrior-crest.  
Stern faces, old heroic souls unblest,  
Eye me with scorn, as they my grief would gauge  
A mere child, schooled to weep upon the stage,  
Tricked for a part of woe, and sombre-drest.  
“Lo, who art thou,” they ask, “that thou shouldst fret  
To find, forsooth, one single heart undone?  
The page thou turnest there is purple-wet  
With blood that gushed from Caesar overthrown!  
Lo, who art thou to prate of sorrow?” Yet  
This little woe, it is my own, my own!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### EVENING

GO, little sorrows! From the evening wood  
Faint odors rise, that touch the heart like tears  
With inarticulate comfort. Lo, she bears  
A weary load—small cares that drug the blood,  
Small envies, sick desires for lesser good—  
All day, till now the evening reappears,  
They drop away, and she with wonder rears  
Her aching height from needless servitude.  
The tree-tops are all music; light and soft  
The brook's small feet go tinkling toward the sea  
Bearing the little day's distress afar;  
While yonder, in the stillness set aloft,  
My one great Grief, still glimmering down on me,  
Smiles tremulous as a bereavèd Star.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### TO MY ENEMY

UNDER thy yoke of spears, O Time, I go;  
I, too, am mortal, though but yesterday  
I lifted thy huge gauntlet where it lay  
And flung it back with laughter. Now I know  
Too well its grievous weight; it hath laid low  
Youth's certitude at last. Man's crumbling clay  
I took to be the gods' rock-paven way:  
Hope lent the wingèd shoes; tired feet are slow.

I bow my neck; my soul I will not bow.  
Though now I may not bear my torch so high  
As when, its gusty light upon my brow,  
I danced derision of thy tyranny;  
Still, 'tis a torch I bear—a brand that thou  
Must seize, fling down, yea, trample, ere it die!

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## POET SONGS

### I

I SHALL not get my poem done  
Or hardly started, even;  
But God will understand, I think  
And let me work in Heaven.

Or, if His plan is different  
For Love, and Toil, and Art,  
He'll let some red, appeasing flower  
Burst from my buried heart.

### II

I cast my nets in many streams  
To catch the silver fish of dreams:  
In vain I pant, pursue and dip—  
They through the straining meshes slip.

And still I go my bootless way  
Through starry nights and striving days,  
With naught to show for all my greed  
But bits of shell and water-weed.

### III

Dropp'd feathers from the wings of God  
My little songs and snatches are,  
So light He does not hear them fall  
As He goes by, from star to star.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Dropp'd feathers from the wings of God  
I find, and braid them in my hair;  
Men heed them not—they only make  
My soul unto herself more fair.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### A CHILD'S GAME

NOR sleep, nor journey, nor affray  
Can justly image death to me:  
I am a little child, and Death  
The one who lets you go and see.

All children in a darkened room;  
And Death stands smiling at the door,  
His finger on his lips, and says  
So quietly, "Now, one child more!"

I have so longed and longed to know  
What lovely things the children find  
When they have gone beyond the door;  
But not a child that's left behind

Has ever been; for when they go  
He will not ever let them back:  
And when he beckons them, and we  
Stand tiptoe, watching for the crack,

Our strange, sweet playmate steps between  
And will not let us see at all;  
He smiles at our expectancy  
With "You may come, too, when I call."

And oh, within the darkened room,  
I have so longed and longed to know  
Just what it is they see and learn,  
The other children, when they go.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Do you suppose that I shall feel  
Afraid, to see him look at me,  
At last, and beckon with his hand,  
And smile, "Now *you* may go and see"?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BED-TIME

SHALL I yield up this shallow breath  
For breathings full and deep,  
Some night into the hands of Death,  
As now, tonight, to Sleep?

Shall I not know that peace is best,  
As I am sure tonight,  
Nor grudge a tired heart its rest  
From sorrow and delight?

So gladly come, as one who brings  
His soul for God to keep,  
To be washed clean among the springs  
Of silence and of sleep?

Yea, and betake me to my urn  
As to my bed tonight—  
A place to tarry and unlearn  
Until the morning light.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### CREEDS

**F**RRIEND, you are grieved that I should go  
Unhoused, unsheltered, gaunt and free,  
My cloak for armor—for my tent  
The roadside tree;

And I—I know not how you bear  
A roof betwixt you and the blue.  
Brother, the creed would stifle me  
That shelters you.

Yet, that same light that floods at dawn  
Your cloistered room, your cryptic stair,  
Wakes me, too—sleeping by the hedge—  
To morning prayer!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### MOTHER-SONG

WITHIN Life's throne-room, hushed and dim,  
Spent I shall lie, and still,  
Whilst thou thy small, indignant breast,  
O little soul, shalt fill  
With breath of strange mortality,  
And send thy homeless cry  
A-groping for thy mother's heart,  
Where, spent and still, I lie.

Oh, if God, entering there, should leave  
That august door ajar,  
And let the Wind that stirs His robe  
Chill-blowing from afar,  
Puff out my spirit like a flame  
That dieth in the night—  
God shield *thee* with His hollowed hand,  
O little, little Light!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### POSSESSIONS

ALL day he goes about his quest,  
A No connoisseur so keen as he:—  
A spool, a bug, a piece of string,  
A shoe-horn, thing of mystery,

A button or a domino,  
All wrought of wonder and delight!  
And when at last he seeks my arms  
He holds his latest treasure tight,—

From eager habit clutching still  
Some relic of his miser's store;  
Until, his busy day forgot,  
He lets it clatter to the floor.

And I, who hold him to my breast,  
Pearl of my crowded treasury,—  
(Ah me, the hunger of the world  
Hath bitten wiser folk than he!)

I, too,—they say,—from Her deep arms  
(That last great mother of us all)  
Shall drop my dearly-hoarded joys  
Nor stir, nor miss them when they fall!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### REPRIEVE

THE other day it dawned on me,  
A sudden shock across our play:  
He is so old—the miracle  
May happen any day!

The miracle: at any hour  
This small man-comrade at my knee  
May take upon his soul his first  
Clear memory of me.

Some trivial moment, slackened mood  
Imperishably there may trace  
My picture, as at heart I bear  
My sweet dead mother's face.

I—I, unworthy. Let me bow  
(Like kneeling page of old, to feel  
Laid on my shoulder, stiff and shrewd,  
The consecrating steel)

Abased in utter thankfulness  
Before the mirror of his eyes:  
He is so little yet—I still  
May make his memories!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### APPLE AND ROSE

**M**Y little daughter is a tea-rose,  
Satin to the touch,  
Wine to the lips,  
And a faint, delirious perfume.

But my little son  
Is a June apple,  
Firm and cool,  
And scornful of too much sweetness,  
But full of tang and flavor  
And better than bread to the hungry.

O wild winds and clumsy, pilfering bees,  
With the whole world to be wanton in,  
Will you not spare my little tea-rose?  
And O ruthless blind creatures,  
Who lay eggs of evil at the core of life,  
Pass by my one red apple,  
That is so firm and sound!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### A LITTLE BOY'S BATH

YOU would have thought he never would come clean,  
Yet here he is, shining like a sea-shell.

O Life, thou secret-hearted, ancient mother,  
Teach him the hidden paths to thy rock-fountains,  
Make them plain to his feet,  
And for the insult of thy deep pollutions,  
The dust, and sweaty grime, and clinging foulness,  
Give him to know thy laughing water-courses,  
And the clean brown pools  
Among the rocks.

I, his mother, have jealously kept his firm, small body:  
Keep thou his soul, O Life!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### STILLNESS

AS a gull loves the sea-spray,  
So I love stillness.

I love to creep

Under a blanket of stillness that muffles even the beat of  
my heart,

And tuck it in under my chin—or draw it up over my head.

I do not always want the feet of other people

Muddying up the springs of my mind.

Even the feet of the children, as they come whooping and  
splashing,

Shatter, unknowing, the fragile, bright mirror,

Often,

And send the leaves of my sky-trees flying in every  
direction,

And drown the strange flowers.

But then—the little feet themselves are so sweet!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BEACH-PLAY

**W**E count the waves, O little son—  
You whom with pain I bore:  
And you will be the sea, I know,  
And I must be the shore.

O youth, the unappeasable  
That can but break, and break!  
I think I shall be very wise  
For youth's remembered sake.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### FAERY MOUNTAINS

ALL summer long, sick for the mountains,  
Crouched under the scourge of the heat,  
I found them one night, of a sudden,  
At the end of my own village street!

Sheer, shadowy cliffs cutting skyward:  
Wooded slopes, soaring daintily!  
(By day 'twas our little church-steeple  
And a neighborly sycamore-tree—

But Beauty had found them, and set them,  
Her heavenly avatars,  
With a little blue valley between them  
Prickling all over with stars.)

So now, when the long day is ended,  
And the sun his last javelin has hurled,  
My heart climbs the sycamore mountains  
And drinks all the winds of the world!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SOME FELLOW-POETS

I LOVE to see them sitting solemnly,  
Holding their souls like watches to their ears,  
And shouting, every time they tick, "A Poem!"

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE FAMILY

I N church I watched the preacher's wife and son,  
A kind, broad-bosomed woman, and a boy  
Still in knee-trousers, but already well  
Above his mother's shoulder. He would please her—  
One saw that; none the less, his sulky thoughts  
Rose up and settled on his Sunday face  
Like smoke upon a glass. She let him lean  
His great head on her cushioned arm, and yawn,  
And watch his father while he preached and preached  
With solemn words all tangled in his beard.  
But when, the benediction said, she turned,  
He was not there; while still the blessing hung  
In air, he'd bolted. She looked after him  
And smiled. . . . She did not know I saw her smile.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### AT THE PICTURE-SHOW

SHE sits with eyes intent upon the screen,  
A quiet woman with work-hardened hands.  
Beside her squirms an eager, shock-head boy;  
Upon her lap a little rumpled girl  
With petaled cheek and bright, play-roughened hair;  
While, bulwark of the little family group,  
Her husband looms, with one unconscious arm  
Lying along her chair-back. So they come  
Often, and for a few cents, more or less,  
Slip through the wicket-gate of wonderment  
That bounds the beaten paths of everyday.  
The Indians and the horses thrill the boy  
With dreams of great adventure; the big man  
Likes the great bridges, and the curious lore  
Of alien folk in other lands; the child  
Laughs at the funny way the people die.  
And she?

The way the hero's overcoat  
Sets to his shoulders; or a lock of hair  
Tossed back impatiently; or else a smile,  
A visible sigh, an eyebrow lifted, so,—  
They touch strange, buried, dispossessed old dreams.  
And while her hand plays with the baby's curls  
Unthinking, once again she sees the face  
That swayed her youth as ocean tides are swayed  
Until she broke her heart to save her soul . . .  
And fled back to her native town . . . and left  
In the grey canyons of the city streets  
All the high hopes of youth. . . .

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

She has picked up  
Her life since then, and made a goodly thing  
Out of the fragments; that is written plain  
Upon the simple page for all to see.  
I fancy that she hardly thinks of him  
Through all her wholesome days; but when, at night  
They go a-voyaging across the screen,  
And suddenly a street-lamp throws a gleam  
On wet pavement . . . a man sits alone  
On a park bench . . . or else goes swinging past  
With that expression to his overcoat. . . .  
She does not pick this player-man, or that,  
But all the heroes have some trick of his. . . .

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### FROM THE PULLMAN

ALL day I have sat gazing out of the window,  
Blessing my eyes with the silver of the little bare  
trees.

But now, in the dark,  
I am haunted by the faces of women in lonely shanties—  
Here an old one, there a young one, but always a woman  
In the half-opened door,  
Watching the world go by.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### UNSER GOTT

(1914)

THEY held a great prayer-service in Berlin,  
And augured German triumph from some words  
Said to be spoken by the Jewish God  
To Gideon, which signified that He  
Was staunchly partial to the Israelites.  
The aisles were thronged; and in the royal box  
(I had it from a tourist who was there,  
Clutching her passport, anxious, like the rest),  
There sat the Kaiser, looking "very sad."  
And then they sang; she said it shook the heart.  
The women sobbed; tears salted bearded lips  
Unheeded; and my friend looked back and saw  
A young girl crumple in her mother's arms.  
They carried out a score of them, she said,  
While German hearts, through bursting German throats  
Poured out, *Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott!*

(Yea, "Unser Gott! Our strength is *Unser Gott!*  
Not that light-minded Bon Dieu of France!")

I think we all have made our God too small.  
There was a young man, a good while ago,  
Who taught that doctrine . . . but they murdered him  
Because he wished to share the Jewish God  
With other folk.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

They are long-lived, these fierce  
Old hating gods of nations; but at last  
There surely will be spilled enough of blood  
To drown them all! The deeps of sea and air,  
Of old the seat of gods, no more are safe  
For mines and monoplanes. The Germans, now,  
Can surely find and rout the God of France  
With Zeppelins, or some slim mother's son  
Of Paris, some taut boy from Brittany,  
Can drop a bomb into the *Feste Burg*,  
And, having crushed the source of German strength,  
Die happy in his blazing monoplane.

Sad jesting! If there be no God at all,  
Save in the heart of man, why, even so—  
Yea, all the more—since we must make our God,  
Oh, let us make Him large enough for all,  
Or cease to prate of Him! If kings must fight,  
Let them fight for their glory, openly,  
And plain men for their lands and for their homes,  
And heady youths, who go to see the fun,  
Blaspheme not God. True, maybe we might leave  
The God of Germany to some poor frau  
Who cannot go, who can but wait and mourn,  
Except that she will teach him to her sons—  
A God quite scornful of the Slavic soul,  
And much concerned to keep Alsace-Lorraine.  
They should go godless, too,—the poor, benumbed,  
Crushed, anguished women, till their hearts can hold  
A greater Comforter!

(Yet it is hard  
To make Him big enough! For me, I like  
The English and the German and the French,

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

The Russians, too; and Serbians, I should think,  
Might well be very interesting to God.  
But do the best I may, my God is white,  
And hardly takes a nigger seriously  
This side of Africa. Not those, at least,  
Who steal my wood, and of a summer night  
Keep me awake with shouting, where they sit  
With monkey-like fidelity and glee  
Grinding through their well-oiled sausage-mill—  
The dead machinery of the white man's church—  
Raw jungle-fervor, mixed with scraps sucked dry  
Of Israel's old sublimities; not those.  
And when they threaten us, the Higher Race,  
Think you, which side is God's? Oh, let us pray  
Lest blood yet spurt to wash that black skin white,  
As now it flows because a German hates  
A Cossack, and an Austrian a Serb!  
What was it that he said so long ago,  
The young man who outgrew the Jewish God—  
"Not a sparrow falleth——?" Ah, God, God,  
And there shall fall a million murdered men!

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## EAGLE YOUTH

(1918)

THEY have taken his horse and plume,  
They have left him to plod, and fume  
For a hero's scope and room!  
They have curbed his fighting pride,  
They have bade him burrow and hide  
With a million, side by side:  
Look—into the air he springs,  
Fighting with wings!

He has found a way to be free  
Of that dun immensity  
That would swallow up such as he:  
Who would burrow when he could fly?  
He will climb up into the sky  
And the world shall watch him die!  
Only his peers may dare  
Follow him there!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### STREET-DOVES

**M**Y soul is a flock of doves  
Swooping and scrambling for grains of corn in the  
street,  
And I am their master,  
Vainly calling from a high casement.  
Greedy birds, soiling your white bosoms,  
Why do you not come oftener home,  
And be still in my breast?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WILD GEESE

WILD goose, O wild goose,  
Up in the high, wild weather,  
Tarry a moment, O brother!  
Let us go on together!

Yonder, at anchor,  
Fowls of your selfsame feather,  
Three fat burghers are dozing,  
Tied with a thong of leather,

Till they hear you, wild brother,  
And leap, and tug at the tether!  
And oh, but my dream goes calling  
Off through the high, wild weather!

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## SONG

WHERE do the sea-birds sleep?  
On the waves breaking?  
Sprayed by the plummy deep  
Sleeping and waking?

When will my thoughts give o'er  
Circling and flying?  
Must they go evermore  
Skimming and crying?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE TAPPING BUSH

**T**HE bare bush close to my window  
Taps and scratches on the glass—  
Taps and scratches. . . .

It was a maiden once, with the wild heart of a poet,  
Who would not come into the house  
And be tamed.

And some fret at the pane from the inside,  
And some from without.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE PLOUGHMAN

**G**OD will not let my field lie fallow.

The ploughshare is sharp, the feet of His oxen are heavy;  
They hurt.

But I cannot stay God from His ploughing,  
I, the lord of the field.

While I stand waiting,

His shoulders loom upon me from the mist,

He has gone past me down the furrow, shouting a song.

(I had said, it shall rest for a season.

The larks had built in the grass. . . .)

He will not let my field lie fallow.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SONG

**M**Y soul is an Eagle,  
On the wind she rides.  
But my heart is tender,  
A nest-defender  
(My heart is a Dove.)

My soul is scornful,  
Nowhere she bides.  
But my heart goes grieving  
From too-long leaving  
(I will turn home, Love.)



FROM  
*BURNING BUSH*  
(1922)



## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### FAIRY FIRES

**T**HEY burn on the window-pane  
When the day is soft and late,  
But you think they are out in the cold  
Between the bush and the gate.

Clean through the blaze you look  
At the dear, black, naked trees:  
No beautiful bough is burned  
By hungerless fires like these,

But no heart is ever warmed,  
And no spirit weds desire,  
And no house is ever home  
That wants for the fairy fire.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## NOVEMBER

### LEAVES

**M**Y great trees are stripping themselves,  
Throwing away their gauds,  
Preparing for the winter of their souls.  
But my little cedars  
Are picking up the twisted golden baubles  
And sticking them in their hair.

### OVERHEAD TRAVELLERS

There you go in your breathless wedge,  
Melting across the sky over my house like a clamoring  
shadow!  
My heart leaps, and I flap my wings wildly,  
But I cannot go just yet.  
My fledglings do not grow so fast as yours,  
I must scratch for them longer.  
But some day, we, too, shall take the air-lines—  
My mate and I.  
(Unless, indeed, I shall have found real wings in the  
meantime.)

In that case, it won't matter,  
For I shall go farther than you, then, haughty birds.)

### GREY DAYS

On a grey day  
When I am alone,  
My heart glows and blooms  
Like embers among ashes.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

On a grey day  
When I am alone,  
The tent-fires of nomads,  
And the road-fires of palmers,  
And the hearth-fires of builders  
Burn in my spirit.

### ACORNS

Now and then, all through the day and night,  
An acorn drops on the roof and goes rattling down the  
gutter.  
I cannot tell why the sound delights me,  
Or why I have such a pleased and noticed feeling,  
As of a child that shares a joke with its parent,  
When I think of the black old oak  
Stretching his craggy arms over my roof-tree  
And dropping his polished pebbles on my house.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### STARS

I AM so small: when I go out  
Beneath the heaven of All Souls,  
And see them twinkling all about  
Who won through to their briary goals;  
When I look up into the dome  
Their gathered constellations wreath—  
The Great, the Faithful, trooping home—  
I am so small, I scarcely breathe.

I am so great—for I am I.  
Not one in all that starry band  
Went just the way I travel by  
To overtake my fatherland.  
Forever seeking mine own Sign,  
Lord of my spirit's lone estate,  
My soul's a heaven where They shine  
A part of me—I am so great.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WINTER FLOWERS

**A**T the door of my kitchen I feed my flowers:  
My pigeons, the silvery lilies that sweep  
Over the garden the frost has slain,  
Wild as beauty, and soft as sleep.

My flowers bloom up over chimney and stack,  
Blue smoke-irises, bodiless things,  
Orchids of pearl that I could not reach  
Except that my hunger and thirst have wings.

And then, when my flowers of light have gone,  
Vanished and gone as a shadow goes,  
I kneel by the hearth in a little house,  
And warm my heart at a burning rose.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BURNING BUSH

MY heart, complaining like a bird,  
Kept drooping on her weary nest:  
“Oh, take me out under the sky,  
Find me a little rest!”

I took her out under the sky,  
I climbed a straggling, sandy street,  
Where little weathered houses sag,  
And town and country meet,

And in the corner of a yard  
Unkept, forlorn, and winter-browned,  
A single sprig of Burning Bush  
Thrust up from the bare ground.

It bore no leaf as yet—one flower,  
Three pointed buds of pure rose-flame:  
Up whirred my heart, circled in air,  
Back to my bosom came.

And that was all I showed to her—  
I could not find another thing—  
But, “Take me home again,” she cried,  
“And I will sing and sing!”

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## WAY-SONG

**G**IVE me your clearest hour  
And let me go:  
Days are too garrulous,  
Years are too slow.

Set me a Brownie's feast,  
Cake-crumbs and wine,  
Outside the tavern-door—  
Thus I'd dine.

The stars are so far apart,  
My steps so small,  
I must make haste who would  
Set foot in all.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### MORNING SONG

**T**HERE'S a mellow light just over the hill,  
And somewhere a yellower daffodil,  
And honey, somewhere, that's sweeter still.

And some were meant to stay like a stone,  
Knowing the things they have always known,  
Sinking down deeper into their own;

But some must follow the wind and me,  
Who like to be starting and like to be free,  
Never so glad as we're going to be!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BEEES

FROM some far home I brought a swarm of bees,  
Old honey-makers hiving in my brain:  
They find the small, green flowers of the trees,  
And the one poppy idling in the grain;

The sun is shepherd to my heedless flocks;  
In vain I bid them forage or be still:  
Their drunken wings sing down the solemn clocks,  
Fanning the flowers upon some timeless hill.

No stretch of stony path, nor bitter seas,  
But must yield up some blossom, white or red,  
Some nectar-throated anguish, for my bees—  
I shall have honey, though I starve for bread.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ROAD-WISE

THEY told me to save my pennies,  
But I scorned to be prudent and wise,  
So I poured them out by the lapful  
To please the old Gypsy's eyes;

Yes, even my mother's luck-piece  
I laid in her wheedling palm,  
To pay for a broken breast-pin  
And a vial of Wayfarer's Balm.

So you need not flutter your ribbons  
And trinkets before my eyes;  
I have travelled since that May morning,  
And oh, I am very wise!

There's an old, dim shop in a city  
I'll be seeking before I die:  
For I've got just three gold pennies—  
And I know what I want to buy.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SONG

**T**HE Wind was my mother:  
The Wind is free.

Then why am I planted in one same spot  
Like a tree?

A Bird was my father:

A Bird is free!

No fruit shall they gather but sighs and songs  
From me.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### STORM SONG

**M**Y bosom with the beat of wings is troubled as the  
day is falling;  
Within my bosom hungry birds are circling on the wind  
and calling.

My breast is blinded by the rain and buffeted by weary  
flying.  
My bosom with the beat of wings is troubled, and with  
bitter crying.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SONG TO THE BEAT OF WINGS

O PEACE is a white bird,  
And Beauty is a castled cloud,  
And Love is a fierce fire that loves to be made kind;

And I have climbed the castled cloud,  
And I have caged the fierce fire,  
But the white bird, the white bird—her I cannot bind!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### I LOVE THE FRIENDLY FACES OF OLD SORROWS

I LOVE the friendly faces of old Sorrows;  
I have no secrets that they do not know.  
They are so old, I think they have forgotten  
What bitter words were spoken, long ago.

I hate the cold, stern faces of new Sorrows  
Who stand and watch, and catch me all alone.  
I should be braver if I could remember  
How different the older ones have grown.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### PRISONS

**M**ASTERS have wrought in prisons,  
At peace in cells of stone:  
From their thick walls I fashion  
Windows to light my own.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### I WEIGHT MY MIND

I weight my mind as best I can to keep it close to earth  
With chunky little platitudes and bits of twisted mirth;

For dust will gather in the house, and shirts unmended lie  
Unless you learn to keep your mind from gadding in the  
sky.

As well detain a puff of smoke, or cobweb-bind a bird!  
Answering to a sudden call some inner ear has heard,

It circles up from cloud to cloud, joyous, unsatisfied,  
Crying and crying after God—as minds have always cried.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### PINES IN THE RAIN

**T**HIS hour the rain has folded, was silver and green  
and brown—

And who would dream that a pine-wood could tell a heart  
so much?

Soft through the tufted branches the dim rain sifted down,  
Tipping with rayless jewels the low plumes I could touch,

While I sat and reached for a poem as tall and straight  
as a pine,

A poem to say to someone what the pine-trees say to me.  
I think their way of talking would be no better than mine  
If I were as sure and simple and quiet as a tree.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE LORD OF THE TREES

I SAID, "To make it small,  
One question sums them all:  
If You are God and King  
Unchallenged in Your place:  
If You are kindness furled  
In all-power: if You care  
At all, how could You bear  
To make a cruel world?"

I asked God to His face,  
"How could You do that thing?  
That answers all the rest."  
God cast His eye on me,  
Then turned into a tree  
And said, "Come build your nest."

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE FOUR KINGS

I CAME upon four tall young kings  
Filling the wood with smiling state,  
Ringed round with dark, furred councillors,  
Great servants of the great.

They drew the light from all the sky  
To flood that circle of dark wood:  
I think that grey day was hard-pressed  
To serve their golden mood.

They did not ask me to come in,  
They did not notice me, indeed,  
Nor tell me what they plotted there,  
Nor what fire-hearted need

Had made them turn from hickory-trees  
Whom I had found in friendly talk  
With the tall pines that ringed them round  
On many a summer walk,

To kings of light intolerable  
(Yet joyous, young, and void of wrath),  
Bright gods—I slipt away and left  
My shoes beside the path.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE WORLD AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE

THERE is a world that's floored with clouds,  
And hung with tall black trees  
Whose lustrous heads are weighted down  
With plumèd mysteries.

That world where pines grow upside-down,  
And you can see the air,  
Though it is clearer than clear glass—  
I have lost something there.

I hang above my lifted oar,  
And look, and look, until  
The water-spell has almost caught  
My heart, my dreaming will.

For very much I'd like to slip  
Down through the rippled floor,  
And dive for something I had once  
And haven't any more.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### GREY

UP among the grey clouds,  
Through the grey rain,  
The wild ducks are trailing  
Their wavering chain.

Frailer than a lace-thread,  
Through the waste of grey,  
Steadily the wraith-chain  
Drags my heart away.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### TREE TALK

SOME days, the pines upon my hills  
Speak nothing of their secret wills,  
But with an absent smile they say,  
“Dear, we can’t talk to you today.”

They are like nearest friends in this,  
Who leave me hungry with a kiss  
Sometimes: again, with two words said,  
Send me rejoicing, banqueted.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### I SHALL BE LOVED AS QUIET THINGS

I SHALL be loved as quiet things  
Are loved—white pigeons in the sun,  
Curled yellow leaves that whisper down  
One after one;

The silver reticence of smoke  
That tells no secret of its birth  
Among the fiery agonies  
That turn the earth;

Cloud-islands; reaching arms of trees;  
The frayed and eager little moon  
That strays unheeded through a high  
Blue afternoon.

The thunder of my heart must go  
Under the muffling of the dust—  
As my grey dress has guarded it  
The grasses must;

For it has hammered loud enough,  
Clamored enough, when all is said:  
Only its quiet part shall live  
When I am dead.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ALTERNATIVES

**M**Y years have limped; but I  
Have tried so hard to fly!  
And now, suppose Death brings  
Gulls' wings  
At last, for me to keep?

Yet comes he not so soon  
But I know what a boon  
Is—Sleep.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE HIGHWAYMAN

**H**E nurses there among his crags  
His haughty schemes—  
And he may snatch my elfin purse  
That's stuffed with dreams;

But I have wealth he cannot touch,  
Spoiler of kings!  
For I have tasted agony  
And worn joy's wings.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE MARCHING MOUNTAINS

THE clouds went past me after the rain—  
Mountains, continents, globes—  
And beauty lay on my heart with pain  
Like the weight of jewelled robes.

And I was glad that I shall not lie  
Forever under the grass,  
Never again to watch the sky  
Where the marching mountains pass.

And I was glad that I have shed  
The worst of beauty's pain,  
The thought that I shall soon be dead,  
Never to look again;

That they have no glory to declare,  
That they march to no heavenly town:  
The yoke of beauty is easy to bear  
Since I need not lay it down.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### TO ONE WHO SMILES AT MY SIMPLICITY

**I**F, as you say, O wise one,  
And as I one time said,  
Life cannot care for persons  
And all the dead are dead,

Yet, even so, I'll salvage  
Part of the desperate stake:  
I shall not sleep less deeply  
Because I thought to wake.

No roar of great wings passing  
Above my dusty head  
Shall mock me, if, you winning,  
Your dead world holds me, dead.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ANSWERS

**Y**OU smile at my answer—  
At yours I shake my head:  
You live on iron and jewels—  
But I need bread.

I adore your rubies,  
Admire your dynamo—  
You will not taste my manna:  
Yes answers more than No.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### DOGMATIC

**H**E whom the trees accept,  
He to whom the great clouds bow in passing,  
He to whom the bluebirds bring the back-door gossip of  
heaven—

He cannot be agnostic.

Soon or late, he must say, "I love":

Who loves, knows.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### NEW YORK FROM THE HARBOR

*Beauty speaks:*

“**I**N the dark of his heart he muttered  
    (Man, my greedy child),  
‘I will build me a black city  
Beside the waters.  
Of slate and iron will I build it,  
And the fierceness of my desire.  
I will build it high  
(That I may outreach my brother)  
With many ladders;  
And men in the ships shall look upon it  
To say, It is mighty and fearful.’

“And I laughed low in my heart and plotted,  
I will build *me* a blue palace  
Out of the waste breath of your striving,  
A blue palace upon a cliff,  
With many windows.  
I will deck it with plummy banners;  
And men in the ships shall look upon it  
And say, It is beautiful!

“And when he was come up by his many ladders,  
He found me waiting by my silver windows,  
Me,  
His mother,  
Dreaming.”

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### STREET-ENDS

I LOVE the ends of streets—  
Those high and narrow dreams  
That slip into men's sight  
For all their blinded walls;

I love the ends of streets—  
Wickets for morning-gleams,  
Last taverns for the light  
When evening falls;

I love the ends of streets!  
From those steep stairs, it seems,  
Something looks back, at night,  
And calls, and calls.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BOX-CAR LETTERS

**A**LONE on the hill where the sun goes down  
I plunder the earth from my little town;  
But the spoils I bring in my fairy sack  
Are scattered and spilled on the railroad track. . . .  
For there, on the siding, the box-cars doze,  
And this is the way their dreaming goes:

“Sault Sainte-Marie and Chicopee,  
Miami and San Antonio—”  
They call like a lover’s song to me,  
Call, and I want to go!  
Santa Fé, Norfolk and Kalamazoo,  
Sacramento, Mobile, Peru—  
How, do you think, you could tamely bide  
In the one small spot where your heart was tied,  
When those haughty drudges came creaking through,  
Tearing your anchored heart in two,  
Each with a name on its stolid side  
Two feet tall and ten feet wide,  
That rings like a chime for you?

The wanderer’s day will have one good hour,  
And every roadside one magic flower;  
They wither and droop if you stay too long,  
The perfume goes like an ended song.  
I would come back to the ways I know  
But I would not stay when I want to go!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Wichita, Bangor, and San José,  
Ypsilanti and Monterey—  
They flutter my peace like the tang of spray!  
From high dream-pastures homing down  
To the fold of my heart in the little town,  
I have to wait at the railroad track  
On a trundling train with a snorting stack!  
The engine's a genie, a grimy scamp  
Who turns a philosopher into a tramp.  
Denver, Seattle and Calumet,  
Natchez, New Haven and Laramie—  
Go on with your lumbering lure, and let  
A poor philosopher be!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE HILL STEPS

THERE'S a flight of steps running down the hill  
Toward the town that lies in the valley below,  
And down you come in the paling light  
While the roofs are pink with the afterglow.

And there—from the top of the steps—it lies  
Like the Town of Pearl in the Prince's dream,  
In every chimney a plume of blue,  
In every window a blazing gleam.

Then, down you come. And, one, two, three,  
Twelve steps, and your foot is on solid land—  
And in less than a minute you'll catch the smell  
Of onions down at the chilli-stand.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE ELOPEMENT

**T**HE pine-tree is a man-tree,  
The proudest tree that grows!  
Lifting his solemn head-plume  
Up in the air he goes;

His is the staunchest column,  
His is the stiffest leaf;  
And when he cries, a man's voice  
Groans with a strong man's grief.

The cedar-tree is a lady!  
Light as a ship she goes,  
Dipping her feathery rigging,  
Bending to wear the snows,—

Some night they will be married—  
Something will send for me—  
An owl will hoot in the blue starlight,  
And I'll slip out and see!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### TEMPERATE TRIBUTE

**Y**OU are a poet, sycamore,  
A minor poet.

You are not much good in a practical world;

You shed your ragged leaves early, and clutter up the  
landscape.

But you are lovely on winter evenings

Against the afterglow—

Bare and pale and a little disdainful,

But yourself.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### COLOR

**W**E belong to the blue serge world,  
Even in our village.

We have outgrown color as a child outgrows its toys,  
Regretfully.

Even our laughing yellow girls,  
Who whiten their smooth cheeks,  
And straighten their black hair,  
Love red like a secret sin;

And nearly all of us have learned to smile  
At the green hatbands of José and 'Ilario  
Who come to town for whiskey, Saturdays.  
We are very sober.

But Beauty outwits us;  
For when the Council lays new sewer-pipes,  
And tired, blind workmen hang red lanterns out  
At sundown,  
I, for one,  
Quite drunken-eyed stroll up the dusk-blue street  
Strewn with Aladdin's rubies. . . .

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### A FLOCK OF BIRDS

#### I.—A BLUEBIRD

**N**OBODY has ever told how a bluebird sings.  
It is like a butterfly whispering secrets to a pear-  
blossom;  
It is like the elf-high blades in the oat-field telling each  
other how it feels to be up;  
It is like the voice of a brook where it steps over a stone;  
It is like a happy thought talking;  
It is like the taste of spring-water;  
It is like the brown glee of the ploughed ground.  
Nobody has ever been able to tell how a bluebird sings,  
And neither am I.

#### II.—DOVES

Children like doves because of their sickle-wings,  
With whistles under them.  
Men like them for their gentle, still, grey manners—  
They are never ruffled, like women.  
Old people like doves because of their haunted voices:  
They understand what they mean.  
God likes doves because they are doves:  
They mourn softly.

#### III.—THE WREN

The wren's mind is in her tail,  
But it is a charming tail,  
And a brisk and whirring mind.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Once I caught a wren standing on tiptoe, peeking into my  
room.

I should have been shocked at such conduct in a thrush,  
But I didn't mind it in a wren.

### IV.—THE WOOD-THRUSH, OR BELL-BIRD

The thrush knows a secret.

He knows why we came here,  
And why we shouldn't mind dying.

He knows how the earth would look if you saw it from a  
star.

In winter he goes to heaven.

And yet, every spring,

He is just as pleased to see the first bluet,

And he takes just as good care of his children,

As if he didn't know anything else;

And I think cut-worms taste just as good to him

As they do to the wicked jay.

### V.—THE JAY

For the jay, you know, goes to the other place  
Every Friday.

There he eats little singers in their speckled eggs,

And fireflies with their lights on,

And slim, green, boneless little lizards,

All day long,

*Raw.*

I can fancy their innocent tails sticking out of his mouth

When he swaggers up to my respectable food-shelf,

And helps himself contemptuously,

To show me that the vaunted crumbs of virtue

Are a mere appetizer to the bold and bad.

I don't argue with him:

I just love the good birds best.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### VI.—THE CARDINAL AND HIS LADY

The redbird is the core of fire at the heart of my still  
living;  
And his little lady is the soft ashes covering the half-seen  
embers.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## COCOONS

### I

SCORN is a scourge:  
I need the scourge for myself.  
Love is a key:  
Except it open the one low door,  
I must stay in my cell with my scourge.

### II

I have fought for my triumph  
Bitterly and long,  
And I would have fought to the death  
For my soul's sake and yours.

But now that it is won—  
See, here is my sword:  
Take it away—I do not like to look at it.  
Let us play you are the conqueror.

### III

Out into a green backyard came a woman in a blue apron  
Carrying yellow meal in a bright tin pail.  
The chickens came running;  
And those little hungry sparrows that are my thoughts,  
All day teasing and quarrelling,  
Settled down on the grass among the plump flock,  
Greedy and pleased.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### IV

I never knew a farmer who scolded the bluebirds  
For thinking the fence-posts were made for them:  
And I guessed God will not be offended  
If my heart builds its nest in His fence-post.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### GARRETS FOR POETS

I FOUND a royal moth half-way out of his chrysalis,  
Powerless to go further.

I broke the hard, brittle shell with my fingers—too late.  
His crumpled wings were gorgeous,  
But they would not fly.

The limitations of a chrysalis are the strength of a  
caterpillar;

They help him to concentrate his mind on wings.

But when it comes to emerging,

Every caterpillar should arrange to be prompt and  
lucky—

If he wants to soar.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### DRESSMAKER

“**Y**ES, plain things do last longer—  
Straight lines always look stylish, somehow.”  
She knelt at my feet, hanging a skirt,  
Her mouth full of pins.  
Her tired face caught a faint light  
As she groped for the More behind her words:  
A Thought had touched her soul;  
She was a timid, rustic priestess  
Of Art.

And I, who had gone in drooping,  
Came out with a high head:  
“Aha!” I said to the housetops,  
“Plain things do last longer—  
Straight lines will always be stylish as trees.”

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

WHY, God may even go to church  
And listen to the hymns and prayers,  
Just as he walks among the corn  
And breathes its homely, incensed airs;

And those adventurers of God—  
His ragged, bitter, rebel clan—  
Forget He sometimes walks beside  
A comfortable righteous man.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### FULL MOON BEFORE DARK

**D**ELICATE as a flower of silk,  
A blown balloon of luminous shadow,  
The moon, a pale-gold bubble,  
Floats just above the trees.

If it were my bubble, the Methodist steeple  
would prick it.  
But nothing can prick God's bubble—  
Not even a church-spire.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## THREE SMALL POEMS

### TO GET WISDOM

I WILL spread out my mind  
As the wind spreads the skies:  
I will make my heart Argus,  
Full of love's eyes:  
So shall I grow  
Abysmally wise.

### MEEKNESS AND PRIDE

Meekness and Pride  
Are fruits of one tree:  
Eat of them both  
For mastery:  
Take one of Pride—  
Of the other, three.

### COURAGE

Courage is armor  
A blind man wears;  
The calloused scar  
Of outlived despairs:  
Courage is Fear  
That has said its prayers.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### NOT IN THE WHIRLWIND

**D**O I speak soft and little,  
Do I offer you a drop of honey in a bent brown leaf?  
Yet I, too, have been rent by the whirlwind;  
I have lain trembling under its bellowings,  
I have endured its fangs,  
I have heard it hiss and groan, "Bitterness, bitterness!"  
But all I have left,  
After its searchings and its rendings,  
May be told in a soft voice  
And is sweet—  
Sweet,  
Like a drop of thick honey in a bent brown leaf.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### VANITY

I KNOW why ladies dress themselves  
In silky sheens and peacock dyes:  
They hush their hungry little souls  
And feed them through their snatching eyes.

I know why ladies mince and strut  
And wrap themselves in mimic state:  
Despairing prisoners of the world,  
Their hearts are hungry to be great.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## SONGS FROM A STILL PLACE

### I.—THE WALL OF TEARS

PAIN is a house of glass  
High on a stony hill;  
Over it pours the rain,  
Spraying from roof and sill.

It is filled with a curious light,  
And the Soul says, peering out,  
“Were it not for my wall of tears,  
I could see what God is about!”

### II.—THE PLAITED WREATH

I’ve made my days into a wreath,  
Since I’ve no other crown,  
And no one sees, or calls me proud  
As I go up and down.

For it is woven of three strands  
To wear through rain and sun:  
One, agony; one, ecstasy—  
And hidden peace is one.

### III.—BEADS

How I have scrambled for my beads!  
And oh, what anxious care  
To pick them up, and sort them out,  
And braid them in my hair!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Rubies, and beads of amethyst,  
Gold like a baby's curl,  
And heavy beads of ebony,  
And pale ones, of dead pearl.

Why did I take so long to learn  
(And how my fingers bled!)  
This simple way of stringing them  
Upon a silver thread?

### IV.—PEACE

Hide a seed under a rock,  
Water the rock with tears:  
So may you pluck the flower  
After a hundred years.

Fall on the sword of God—  
See that it pierce you through:  
Out of that wet, red stalk  
The flower will blossom, too.

### V.—GIVING

I sat upon a stone alone,  
Hungry, and cold, and dumb;  
God's ravens had forgotten me,  
My wallet held no crumb.

Then one came toiling up the rocks  
Seeking my bruited store:  
I spread a banquet for us both—  
There was enough and more!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### VI.—FREE

Up on God's window-sill,  
Carolling high and shrill,  
Shaken with ecstasy,  
There clung my spirit—free!

God showed His glorious Head—  
Singing, to Him she said,  
“Who was it did me wrong?  
Why was I caged so long,  
Tangled in wires and strings,  
Under the stars?”

“Birdling, I made the wings—  
You made the bars.”

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## ORDERS

**S**HE is wise, the Ancient Mother,  
Her ways are not our ways:  
We cannot circumscribe her  
Though we watch her all our days.

On each of her questioning children  
She presses a different will:  
To one she says, "Keep busy!"  
To one she says, "Keep still!"

She said to me, "Wait and listen:  
I have plenty to drive and do—  
But, once in a while, when you are *sure*,  
Speak out a word or two!"

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ONE MORNING IN GYARA

Says Epictetus, "And where wilt Thou have me to be? At Rome or Athens? Only remember me there!" And again, "If you are in Gyara . . . be intent on this: how he that lives in Gyara may live in Gyara like a man of spirit."

Gyara was an island in the Aegean, used as a place of banishment.

ONE morning in Gyara  
My Soul shook me awake:  
"Then will you fight no battle,  
Do nothing for *my* sake?"

"My plumes are dull with drooping  
In the same maple's shade:  
The very air is furrowed  
With paths my wings have made."

That morning in Gyara  
She turned her sullen head  
And Socrates and Jesus  
Were standing by our bed.

Under the new-leaved maples  
Lord Buddha paced in brown,  
And by his side the wise Slave  
Went limping up and down.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

My Soul bent like a sapling  
Caught in a sudden gust:  
With wings her shamed face veiling  
She bowed her in the dust;

For thronging house and dooryard  
Of us who ill deserve,  
Were guests she had invited  
And then forgot to serve!

Rainbows of far-caught wonder  
From all their garments rayed:  
Round them the dooryard maples  
Rippled like seas of jade.

Uprisen in Gyara,  
Barefoot, rapt and whole,  
She went about among them,  
Bearing her plate and bowl;

For they had come from farther  
Than Athens is, or Rome,  
That morning, to Gyara,  
To find my Soul at home.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE CRIPPLE

A BIRD came hopping on my shelf  
With one good foot—a stump the other:  
It hurt my heart to see so maimed  
A feathered brother.

Yet when he spread his wings to go  
He seemed to launch himself with laughter,  
As though to shame my sorry thoughts  
That fluttered after;

For though he could not perch so well,  
Nor strut, nor swagger any longer,  
His wings were strong as any bird's—  
Or were they stronger?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### PRONOUNS

**T**HE Lord said,  
“Say, ‘We’ ”;  
But I shook my head,  
Hid my hands tight behind my back, and said,  
Stubbornly,  
“I.”

The Lord said,  
“Say, ‘We’ ”;  
But I looked upon them, grimy and all awry.  
Myself in all those twisted shapes? Ah, no!  
Distastefully I turned my head away,  
Persisting,  
“They.”

The Lord said,  
“Say, ‘We’ ”;  
And I  
At last,  
Richer by a hoard  
Of years  
And tears,  
Looked in their eyes and found the heavy word  
That bent my neck and bowed my head:  
Like a shamed schoolboy then I mumbled low,  
“We,  
Lord.”

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ROOT AND FLOWER

**P**AIN is the rich, dark loam  
Where my roots thrust and grope,  
Breaking their stubborn food,  
Fighting for scope;

But up in the delicate air  
That wraps leaf and bark,  
Joy, like a foam of flowers,  
Bursts from the dark.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## INITIATION

**N**OW God has given me  
The sureness of a tree:  
My heart flows out of my breast  
Into a tree, for rest.

Still must I fall like water  
Shattered in spray;  
Still must I go as the wind goes  
Feeling her way;  
Still, as a fire, eat upward  
Through smothering pain;  
Still break and yield as a flower breaks  
In beating rain:

But when I must have rest  
My heart flows out of my breast,  
Slips out of herself, is free.  
At last God gives to me  
The wisdom of a tree.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WINTER DUSK

THE black pines, and the pale-gold moon,  
And the cold blue sky,  
And the drumming whir of small hid wings  
In the bush close by;

And the sober rose in the leaden sheen  
Of the sedgy lake—  
This beauty feeds and heals my heart  
It used to break.

This joy that was a restless pang,  
Pain-edged, sword-bright,  
Now wraps me in stern tenderness,  
Secure delight.

I have come home to the heart of things,  
Made friends with pain,  
And God has given me sevenfold  
My joy again.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

EVERY evening now, for years,  
As I have gained the top of the hill,  
Three cedars have signalled me from across the valley.

I owe them a poem.

Companionable green angels,  
Ambassadors of loveliness,  
Princes in willing exile,  
Telling familiarly of the burning aloofness of beauty  
To all who will stop to hear—  
I kneel at your feet!  
Steadfast ardors,  
Too wise for importunity,  
Noble and negligent—  
Touch me with the edges of your ragged mantles;  
Give me of your way-worn, windy grace;  
Shed from your homely, aromatic wings upon me  
Healing and potency:  
Accept my salute.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ANNIVERSARY IN NOVEMBER

#### I.—BIRTHDAY

**T**HIS is her day. For, years ago,  
On such a bannered day as this—  
Dogwood and sumach flaming so—  
She died. I cannot go and kiss

Her forehead, as on birthdays gone;  
She is a birth ahead of me.  
Meantime, she knows I keep this one—  
This door of Time where she went free.

I, clinging to the windy sill,  
She, stooping from the wingèd air,  
Meet on this ledge of love's high will—  
Her birthday, that she lets me share.

#### II.—THE LIGHT IN THE WOODS

Your day has come again. Far overhead,  
Cross-stitched in wavering lines against the sky,  
Or gleaming buff and silver, wild and high,  
The geese slip by like phantoms, phantom-led.  
The air is blue as incense-smoke; flame-red  
The little maples, idly dreaming by,  
Trail their lit lanterns in the lake—and I  
Dream of your life among the living Dead.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Through the cathedral-windows of the year  
Once more the still November sunlight streams,  
And all my World—so low and dim and dear!—  
Turns like a maple-leaf to catch the gleams  
That tremble down from Yours—it hangs so near,  
Clearer than waking, richer than old dreams.

### III.—MIGRANTS

The wild, great birds, like disembodied Souls,  
Haughty with freedom, will not stoop to me,  
For all my yearning; but the little ones  
Flash for my joy through every bush and tree.

I wonder if the strong-winged spirits go  
Swiftly, like that, beyond our farthest scope,  
While smaller ones and gentler, stop and stir  
The trees about us with their love and hope?

### IV.—ALL SAINTS' DAY

This is my All Saints' Day. I think you come,  
Parting the broidered curtains of the year,  
And say to Those whom you have brought from Home,  
Softly, "Hush, look! She knows that we are here."

The woods are lovely as your world must be,  
Kindled by delicate, breath-shaken pyres  
To haunted light; angelic drapery  
Floats in the smoke above the maple-fires.

The air is tranced with beauty; beauty rained  
Just now, although the black-gum hardly stirred;  
My plain, white hours are shaken, beauty-stained:  
I wait and listen,—and I hear your Word.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### CLEAR HOUR

I HAVE been the wasted spray, the flying, fretted foam:  
Now I'll be the blue pool where water is at home.

I have been the haggard cloud, wind-driven like white dust:  
Now I'll be the smooth sky the littlest star may trust.

And I have been a free bird, to follow my own needs:  
Now in the cage of God's love, the stars are golden seeds.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE HOUSEWIFE: WINTER AFTERNOON

THE children's cat upon the window sill,  
The little sounds that make the house so still,

That old brown hunting-hat upon the rack,  
I give away, and John keeps getting back,

The jonquil blooming in the yellow bowl—  
I well believe that each one has a soul,

Each, body to some delicate, rich dream,  
As my blue tea-pot to its perfumed steam.

“The shadows of the angels' houses”—so  
Said William Blake of houses here below,

And if, at last, they'd set upon my grave,  
(As once they furnished forth the red-skinned brave),

My old blue tea-pot, and a bowl like this  
I think I'd sooner take root in new bliss,

And not come dreaming back, a happy fool,  
To wait, like this, till Johnny comes from school.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SOFT RAIN

**T**HERE is room for ladies in a world that holds soft  
rain,  
For delicate, undefended beauty  
And gentleness.  
There is room for slender young things, virgin-wistful,  
With minds like bridal veils;  
There is room for brittle old-lady minds  
That function like the tinkling of tea-cups.  
We have been too long blurry with rain,  
They say,  
And they are doubtless right:  
It is the hour for biting wind and stabbing sunshine.  
But I have walked in the soft rain today;  
I have seen the mist  
Sifting through the black mantilla of the bare elm;  
There was in it eternal beauty—  
It wrapped my heart in peace.  
And it was shown unto me  
That there will always be room for ladies—a little room—  
In a world that wearies, sometimes,  
Of its hausfrau harvest-zeal for corn and squashes,  
Of the feminist fury of its Wind-Valkyries;  
That lapses, even,  
From its male salt and sleet and thunder  
Into moods of rain,  
Soft rain,  
And mist.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE MIRRORED BIRD

**T**HE bird that flies under the water—  
O lustrous breast and wing!—  
The bird that skims under the water,  
I wonder, does it sing?

The bird that slips under the ripple—  
O gleaming wing and breast!—  
The flitter under the ripple,  
I wonder, does it nest?

If I could find one nesting,  
If I could hear one sing,  
In the thickets under the ripple  
That spreads in a silver ring,

I might surprise the secret,  
The music never heard—  
Trilling under the water  
In the throat of the mirrored bird.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### LABELS

I THINK I'll be going—  
A creature that sings  
Can't wait for the labels  
To stick to her wings!

If it's worth your while, catch me—  
(At least, if you're able:  
Aristides himself  
Was no match for a label).

*DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK*

(1929)



## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SONG OF THE FORERUNNERS

THE men who made Texas  
Rode west with dazzled eyes  
On the hot trail of the Future,  
To take her by surprise:

They were dreamers on horseback,  
Dreamers with strong hands,  
Trailing the golden Lion  
Who couches in far lands:

Old men and young men, little men and tall,  
Bad men and good men—but strong men, all.

The women who bore Texas  
Could see beyond the sun:  
They sat on cabin doorsteps  
When the long day was done,

And they crooned to lusty babies,  
But their look was far away—  
For they gazed straight through the sunset  
To the unborn day.

Stern women, laughing women, women stout or small,  
Bronzed women, broken women—brave women, all.

The men who made Texas  
Laughed at fate and doom—  
Dreamers on horseback,  
Men who needed room;

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

And the women in young Texas,  
Hanging homespun clothes to dry,  
Loved a prairie for a dooryard,  
For meeting-house, the sky—

Wide visions and wide spaces, man and land were large of  
lung:  
Texas knew not cheap and easy, slack and small, when she  
was young!

But the men who made Texas  
Left their work half-done—  
For nothing stands full-finished  
Beneath the spinning sun;

And the women who dreamed Texas  
Had much work to do  
When they lay down for their last sleep  
In a land still new;

And a yet-unbuilt Texas, cloud-paved and glimmering,  
Burns yet before the eyes of us, who toil and dream and  
sing.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WITHIN THE ALAMO

The story goes that Travis, just before Santa Anna's final attack upon the Alamo, drew a line on the floor with his sword-point, and asked that every man who was ready to die with him cross over to his side. James Bowie, who was too ill to walk, asked his comrades to lift his cot across. Every other man but one stepped over. Whether the legend is true or not, it agrees well with all that is known of Travis, particularly with his letters from the Alamo, which are preserved among the archives of the state of Texas.

**H**E drew a straight line  
Across the dirt floor:  
Within, it was death-still—  
Without, was a roar

And a scream of the trumpets:  
Within, was a Word—  
And a line drawn clean  
By the sweep of a sword.

No help was coming, now—  
That hope was done.  
No more the free air,  
No more the sun

Bright on the blue leagues  
Of buffalo-clover.  
Travis drew a line  
And they all crossed over.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Travis had a wife at home,  
Travis was young;  
Travis had a little boy  
Whose tight arms clung,

But Travis saw a far light  
Shining before:  
Travis drew a sword-cut  
Across the dirt floor.

\* \* \* \* \*

And now the old fort stands  
Placid and dim,  
Blinking and dreaming  
Of them and of him;

And now past the Plaza  
Other tides roar,  
Since Travis wrote "Valor"  
Across the sand floor,

And the guns they will rust,  
And the captains will go,  
And an end come at last  
To the wars that we know,

But as long as there travails  
A Spirit in man,  
In a war that was ancient  
Before Time began,

Here will the brave come  
To read a high Word—  
Cut clean in the dust  
By the stroke of a sword.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## SOME TOWNS OF TEXAS

### THE CITY OF THE ALAMO

I WENT but once to San Antonio—  
I brought away a thousand hours' delight,  
Remembering her sweet air, her subtle, bright,  
Insouciant smile. Hers is the darkling glow,  
The heavy-lidded fire of Mexico,  
Blown on by Northern airs, washed in the white  
Light of high plains. No net of words shall quite  
Snare her: for she will blow a kiss, and go—

Yet this is but the scabbard for her sword,  
The filigreed setting for her sombre, red  
One jewel. Leave the Plaza in the sun,  
Wayfarer: bare your forehead, speak no word—  
Here Bowie sleeps upon his bloody bed,  
Travis, across the carriage of his gun.

### NACOGDOCHES SPEAKS

I was The Gateway. Here they came, and passed,  
The homespun centaurs with their arms of steel  
And taut heart-strings: wild wills, who thought to deal  
Bare-handed with jade Fortune, tracked at last  
Out of her silken lairs into the vast  
Of a man's world. They passed, but still I feel  
The dint of hoof, the print of booted heel,  
Like prick of spurs—the shadows that they cast.  
I do not vaunt their valors, or their crimes:

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

I tell my secrets only to some lover,  
Some taster of spilled wine and scattered musk.  
But I have not forgotten; and, sometimes,  
The things that I remember rise, and hover.  
A sharper perfume in some April dusk.

### AUSTIN

She leans upon her violet hills at ease  
At the plains' edge: innocent and secure,  
Keeper of sacred fountains, quaintly sure,  
Greek draperies fluttering in the prairie-breeze.  
She stands tiptoe and looks across the seas,  
Where older lands and richer shrines allure,  
Wistful, that she is young and crude and poor—  
But secret-sure that she is proud as these.

Her sons bring delicate plunder home, to grace  
Houses discreet, and gardens sweetly walled—  
She is enamored of the fit and fair.  
Far-gathered treasures in her love find place:  
White peacocks where the prairie-schooners crawled—  
Italian roses in her sunburnt hair.

### DALLAS

Her birthday is Tomorrow; throbbing Power  
Dilates her heart. She has no time to love  
Old, gentle things; nor ever backward move  
The hinges of her iron doors, where tower  
The soaring exhalations of an hour  
Of iron music. But in vain Power strove  
With Beauty, ever. From her garden-grove  
She comes, and smiles: and lo, an iron flower!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

So I have seen this city, on a night  
Of rain, a-blossom in a mist of gold:  
So followed stamen-streets, that turned to bright  
Rivers of jewels, like the fabulous, old  
Torrents of emerald, ruby, chrysolite,  
Whereof, in rich old days, the travelers told.

## HOUSTON REMEMBERS THE OLD SOUTH

She dresses in the mode, and she assumes  
The visage of the hour—for she is wise  
And strong, and subtle in the mysteries  
Of power. She courts no backward-looking dooms.  
Yes, breathing through her spirit's secret rooms,  
Lovers may catch the perfume of old sighs,  
And in her heart are moonlit balconies,  
Tall, white old pillars, and magnolia-blooms.

For here that fragile Yesterday, apart  
In the still light of lovely, vanished things,  
By hasty mind and heedless eye unguessed,  
But faithful still to the remembering heart,  
Bends to a shadowy harp with muted strings—  
Her face star-white, and jessamines at her breast.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### TEXAS COWBOY

FROM garden-beds I tend, it is not far  
To those great ranges where he used to ride;  
Time's shadowy Door still stands a rift ajar,  
And Fancy, glancing backward and aside,

May glimpse him whirling in a storm of dust,  
A flashing bronze against a burning sky,  
Before a sea of tossing horns up-thrust,  
A peril thousand-pronged, to breast or die;

Or lying with locked hands beneath his head,  
Watching the stars beside a lonely fire,  
About him dim immensity outspread,  
Within, dim gulfs of question and desire.

He is a Thought; he is not flesh-and-bone;  
He is immortal Youth astride a Dream:  
The hungry flame that eats to ash and stone  
The gorgeous fruitage of the things that seem;

And I (who sank, with pang and toil enough,  
My roots at last down to the nether springs,  
Yet, born to coax the shapely from the rough,  
Have shunned the red and jagged edge of things),

A woman with a bird, a book, a flower,  
Who, sifting life, has kept the quiet part,  
Whose days like pearls are sorted, hour by hour—  
Why is it that he gallops through my heart?

*BEAUTY'S HANDS ARE COOL*

(1931)



# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## RECIPES

ONE came a-knocking  
At my hermitage:  
“What will make a bird sing?”  
“Blue sky—and a cage.”

“What will make a man sing?”  
“Three small words and brief  
Serve to tell of that thing:  
Joy—and lonely grief.”

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WHITE CLOUDS

WHITE clouds are good for heartache—  
If yours are made like mine:  
Especially at evening  
Above a pointed pine.

White clouds are very gentle  
And quick to understand:  
You may take out your sorrow  
And hold it in your hand

All unashamed before them—  
So piteous and small!  
Their downy wings can brush it  
And never hurt at all.

I know the place for sorrows  
Is on God's dais-rim:  
Bright as new-minted pennies  
I'd bring my tears to Him:

But when I cannot find Him,  
The next best thing for me  
Is watching white clouds sailing  
Above a pointed tree.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SONG

**M**Y heart is a thorny bush  
In an old garden close:  
My song peeps over the wall  
And nods like a single rose.

My heart is a smothered fire,  
Sick of a blunted aim:  
My song is a leap to the light,  
My song is a tip of flame.

My heart is a bitter sea,  
A tossing, a restless grave;  
My song is the sunny foam  
That flies from the crested wave.

The rose and the flame and the foam  
Shine for the world to see;  
The urge and the smoke and the thorn  
Nobody knows but me!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### HALF-WAY STONE

I HAVE not much to show for all  
The dedicated years;  
A little tree of ecstasy,  
A little jar of tears;

No lordly forest of sweet shade  
To make my name be praised:  
No pyramid of living stone  
Such as my masters raised;

Not even any knotted scourge  
Or serpent-wreathèd rods  
Shall lie upon the altar-steps  
To prove I served the gods.

I shall not leave a noisy name,  
But there'll be two or three  
Who'll want me, not for oracle,  
But just for company.

They will be glad of one who went  
So softly on her quest,  
Still as an oak or daffodil  
Or bird upon its nest;

Who lived alone with lovely things  
And did not cry or strive,  
But waited, singing to herself  
To keep her soul alive;

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Who meant to wed the sun, at first,  
But finding him so far,  
Sat down at last upon a stone  
Abashed before a star.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### MY HEIRS

**T**O some who live on manna,  
And feast on desert fare,  
I'll leave my crumb of singing,  
My legacy of air;

To one a thrush's feather,  
To one a midge's wing—  
The rest will say, "The pauper!  
She didn't leave a thing!"

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### FOUND IN THE NOTE-BOOK OF A MIDDLE-AGED POET

SINCE poets, to be proper, should be dead  
(And since, in any case, I may not choose),  
Come, thou authentic bridegroom, awful Death,  
And make an honest woman of my Muse!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### FIRST LIGHT

LIFE,  
You are not a clean fencer.

I am an old campaigner:  
I know your ways.  
I no longer stand before you defenseless,  
As do young, soft, waiting things.  
I am a match for you when I am well awake.

But after I have wandered off down the Night's cypress-  
alleys,  
Past Time and Pain:  
Then, suddenly, I am aware of the soft, grey, summer  
light over the housetops,  
And *then* you plunge home your dagger—  
Ah! . . .

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### IF I COULD BE SOME HAPPY THING

**I**F I could be some happy thing  
Upon the earth, when I am dead,  
I think I'd bargain with the bee  
Whose honey is his daily bread.

Unless, indeed, my heart could hang  
A blossom on the linden-tree,  
No heavier than the honey-cup  
That holds the banquet for the bee.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### EARTH-QUESTIONS

**W**HY should little pointed leaves  
Help me when my spirit grieves?  
Why should furrows fresh and brown  
Lift me up when I am down?  
How can a round, rejoicing tree  
Open a hidden door to me  
And set my struggling spirit free?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE HAPPY DEAD

WHEN I'm alone, the happy dead  
Brush me with soft and silver wings—  
Drop smilingly on hands or head  
A touch that brings

Suddenest joy, as when, half-heard,  
An early leaf comes slipping down,  
Hinting a brief, secretive word  
Of autumn brown;

Or when the wild geese taunt my soul  
Awake with clamor in the night,  
Desiring urgently a goal  
Folded from sight.

So come the happy dead, to bless  
Still hours I hedge about for them,  
Bringing me peace, or holy stress,  
Joy like a gem—

Joy like the rosy red that dyes  
Old doorstep flowers with just the glow  
That lit my childish ecstasies  
Ages ago.

I wish the dear and happy dead  
Might reach me through the heavy noons  
When, spent with cares for cloak and bread,  
The spirit swoons;

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

But they would smother in that haze—  
They wait beyond that cloudy din.  
Their feet gleam down the quiet ways  
I yet shall win.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### TRANSMUTATION

I SAID in the graveyard, "Help me, dears,"  
And my mother came, with her heavenly years  
Curled about her like plumes of light,  
And my mother said, "It will all come right."

I said in the graveyard, "Help me, dears,"  
And my father, hearty and clean of fears,  
Patted my shoulder and smiling said,  
"Little daughter, be comforted."

The sexton pitied me, sitting alone,  
On my left and my right a graveyard stone:  
But the thorny pain that had brought me there  
Felt like rose-petals on my hair.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WINDOW-FIRE

**T**HERE is a fire that fuses my spirit,  
That kindles all the dry sticks of my mind  
Into a breathing splendor.  
It flames in the windows of old houses facing west,  
Every clear day at sunset—  
Gone in a breath, a heart-beat,  
As the blue dusk falls.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BARE TREES

I LOVE you, Trees,  
I love your gaunt black strength that is never angry,  
Or cruel.  
You can stretch without fretting;  
You never sit down to rest.  
I love your man's way of boasting of the nests you  
sheltered,  
Now the little birds are gone;  
How well you hid them,  
Smiling in your leafy beards!  
I love you, Trees;  
I rest in your craggy patience.  
Your gnarled peace comforts me.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### FOUNTAINS OF SHADOW

**T**HE trees are like fountains of shadow, silent as snow;  
Softly upspringing, they carry my heart as they go.

Tender and sharp, in the dimness of this grey day,  
Their trunks are like fountain-stems bursting in shadowy  
spray

That washes me clean of the dazzle, the fret and the  
smart—

I am clean as the wet winter woods while it falls on my  
heart.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### REDBIRD

**F**IERY one, fiery one,  
Lighting the rain,  
Where do you find  
That blazing stain?

You sit in the cedar  
And dazzle my eye,  
And taunt me like banners  
Streaming by.

Pensive grey titmouse  
And plain brown thrush  
Eat of my berries  
From every bush,

Bathe in my rain-pool,  
Drink at my pan,  
Yet grow no colors  
But grey and tan;

Peck at the crumbs  
On my doorstep-stone:  
You forage beside them—  
You burn alone.

Are you off at daybreak  
To slake your needs  
With some red comet's  
Sizzling seeds,

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Or blazing sunward  
Higher and higher,  
Do you bathe in a fountain  
Of primal fire?

Fiery one, fiery one,  
Thing apart—  
Coal in the cedar's  
Sombre heart,

Brand in the dimness,  
Flag in the sun—  
What is your secret,  
Fiery one?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE SUMMER TANAGER

“**B**ETTER come *here!*” he says, among the leaves,  
“Better come *here!*” up where the branches sway,  
His delicate, high, insistent speech he weaves  
Among the green hours of the summer day.  
A hundred times I catch his gay suggestion  
For one glimpse of his bosom’s rosy glow—  
That glow that sends dim memories back, to question  
Old gardens bright with zinnias in a row.

They say, O Free-born, that you only call  
Your green-gold mate, your splendor-dusted love,  
Nor dream of wistful, groundling me, at all,  
Smiling and peering for you, there above!  
*I* know you taunt me, Brother, for my good:  
“Better come here!”—How gladly, if I could!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### MOCK-SPARTAN

SOMETIME,  
S Long ago,  
On a night that I cannot remember,  
I am sure I must have gone poaching  
In the Forbidden Forest of the Gods.  
How else could I have come by the little silver fox  
I keep hidden under my mantle,  
Whose gleaming, neat, fire-pointed, tiny fangs  
Continually stab and worry at my heart?  
His name is Passion-for-Perfection:  
Isn't that a funny name  
For a fox?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### MARTHA

MARY, gentle Mary,  
Mary of Bethany,  
You at least had Martha—  
What about me?

She complained and scolded  
On her special days—  
Bitter, busy Martha,  
With her driving ways;

But through the level stretches  
That brought no famous Guest,  
She would say, "Don't bother—  
Run along and rest—

"I don't mind—I'd rather!"  
That was Martha, too.  
Mary, dreaming Mary,  
I envy you!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### PERVERSE

A LITTLE house—a little, weathered house—  
With bright-eyed cottage flowers along a path,  
White curtains breathing inward, tenderly,  
In a warm wind; a little, homely house  
Watched over by an old, indulgent tree,  
With mossy roots, and a hard, barefoot place  
Beneath a swing; with silly, clacking hens  
Puttering about the steps; a sunning pail  
Fiercely a-shine upon a scoured shelf;  
The glimpse of a blue apron through the door—  
Sometimes I think this is the loveliest  
Of all the things I see. But when, good sirs,  
Is it most lovely?

When I see it framed  
In a car-window; when I sit and feel  
The swift, unthinking wheels against the rails  
Hammering out their proud tattoo of power;  
Or when, secure in leather-cushioned ease,  
Insatiably I drink the flowing miles  
And give my heart up to the snatching wind—  
The heedless, heartless, homeless wind, who snaps  
His impudent fingers at all rooted things.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### MID-AFTERNOON

**I**T'S bitter loving folk with souls—  
So quick they are, so near,  
A flash may kindle cruel coals  
Not smothered in a year.

Trees, now; they never make you guess;  
They never make you thrill  
To lovely incompletenesses  
That only love can fill.

My whole life long I've gone to school  
To fiery pangs like these:  
Sometimes I think I've earned the cool  
Companionship of trees.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### A SILVER LANTERN

**A** SILVER lantern  
I made of my desire:  
A cloudy vessel  
That dreamed of fire.

I digged my silver  
In a dark mine:  
I crushed it and wrought it  
And hammered it fine;

With graven blossoms  
I made it bright,  
And buds of darkness  
Dreaming of light,

Till—burnished and finished  
And marked with my name—  
God blew upon it  
And gave the flame.

I carry my lantern  
Through the gusty rain:  
Shielded with silver  
The light streams plain.

I carry my lantern  
Through the fierce, bald noon,  
I carry my lantern  
Under the moon,

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Through dark and dazzle  
Threading the ray  
That picks out the climbing  
Hidden way.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ANTIQUÉ

*“Spill not thy soul”*

**T**RUST not thine Essence to the leaky bowl  
Of Circumstance, but make a silver cup  
Out of thy Purpose. Therein keep thy Soul,  
And bear it toward the heavens lifted up,  
Counting what happy chances may befall  
But flowers to wreath it for a festival.

Here is a gift the gods will not despise:  
They look, and see their steadfast, mirrored eyes.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### PURSUER

HOW often I have heard his feet  
Pad-pad-padding behind me!  
How often I have dodged into alleys,  
Or run up steps,  
Or held my head high and hummed a desperate tune,  
Only to have him whirl me about,  
And fling me down,  
And wrench my purse from my hands!  
How often have I stumbled up, faint and shaken,  
Brushing the dust from my clothing fumblingly,  
And wondering how many days I could snatch of uneasy  
peace,  
Before he should catch me again!

But today I turned about and faced him—

“Here’s my money:

Won’t you come home with me?”

His grim face was inscrutable

As he cast me a queer look

And fell into step.

And when we reached my door

I flung it open:

“Won’t you come in?

Have this chair by the window.

What’s the news

From God?”

You should have seen the look

That changed the fashion of his face.

Had he been the footpad I thought him

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

He would have said, "You're on!"

Being what he was—

(But who knows what he was?)—

He threw me a glimmering dark smile,

Drew his cloak about him, and rose awkwardly—

"I guess I'll be going, now."

Light flowed from beneath his cloak as he turned his back,

And the footprints on my wet steps glowed as I blinked

at them

Like the body of a firefly when you hold it in your

hand. . . .

If you ask me why God uses such strange messengers,

Or whether this one obeyed orders exactly—

Why,

You are as wise as I,

I understand

No more than you.

It seems to me, if I were God,

With Joy at my command,

(His servant, too,)

I'd not need Pain—

Queer, violent, cruel, hardly sane!

But there's one thing I know:

(I saw his footprints glow)

I'll always treat him so.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SUCH WERE THE SAINTS

WHEN you were with us, in this dusty inn  
Of ragged commonplace and everyday,  
We felt you as a check upon our play  
Of soul, and elbow; though you were so thin

And little, with your flashing mind and eye,  
You crowded us, somehow. We loved you, yes,  
But mixed a rueful humor, to confess  
You warped our orbits to your stormy sky.

But now you have gone on; the years have fled,  
Since in the dusty inn you lay at rest,  
Your small, imperious hands upon your breast,  
Most delicately noble of the dead;

And now your fiery will to do us good  
We fear no more; nor troubles from the sky  
Your vigilant wilfulness, the urgency  
Of your beneficence and certitude.

And we who loved you—but resisted, too—  
Aspiring but to call our souls our own,  
Discover now how strangely we have grown  
At ease to love, and to be loved by you.

As children, whom the mother calls and calls,  
Who shout at play, and lag, and will not come,  
Dreading the irksome blessedness of home,  
Yet gather, scurrying, when the darkness falls,

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

So now we feel above us, as a dove  
Might spread her tenting wings, your blessing spread  
Welcomely, over each unbending head:  
Safe from your power, wrapt wholly in your love.

“Such were the saints”—I wonder, were they not?—  
Gadflies of God, foes of poor mortal peace,  
Poisoners of the shady pools that ease  
The fret and famine of the common lot,

Yet who, when that strange enmity was done,  
Seemed then, to common men, to lay away  
Their wilfulness with the discarded clay  
And live but in their nobleness alone.

“Such were the saints”: and such are you become  
So soon, to me, O Watcher in the Light:  
A trumpet-note; a windy torch at night;  
Steadfastness, drawing like the roofs of home.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### GRANDFATHER

SEVENTY-ONE—and I, not seventeen,  
Coming from soft and flowery dreams awhile  
To visit on the little mortgaged farm  
He pottered over, still. Alone he met me  
With the spring-wagon and a smart bay team—  
He'd have no other kind. Spry, eagle-eyed,  
Though bent and worn into a wisp of grey—  
(You would have said that he was made of wire  
Under his clean, patched clothes)—he helped me up,  
Braced his right foot, chirped to the team, and flicked  
The whip across their flanks. A jaunty nod  
Rewarded the frank stare of two or three  
Upon the station-platform, who were saying,  
“Old John R's daughter's girl, come out from town.”  
He hadn't always been a farmer, then  
(You saw it in the corner of his eye)  
Nor old, nor poor! He held the horses up  
Smartly: with flying manes, they made a swerve  
Circling the school-house grove; till, church and store  
And station left behind, he let them jog  
A little. “How's the folks?” Both fond and shy,  
Manoeuvring against pauses, we exchanged  
The family news—scouring our brains for scraps.  
At last, “Grandmother,” I inquired, “how's she?”  
“Oh, so-so. Pretty well.” He seemed to brood  
The fraction of a second; brooding longer  
Was not within his scope. Then, with a flash  
Of protest, and impatience, “She's so darned  
Pessimistic!”

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

I remember how I felt,  
Gazing with wonder on his quick old eye,  
His hawk-nose, and his little wasted frame;  
Seeing him, too, against a cloud of sorrows  
That seemed all black to my young tenderness—  
Dead sons, lost battles, failing hopes and powers;  
Seeing Grandmother like a withered leaf,  
Tremulous now, in any breath of wind,  
Waiting with weak old happy tears to kiss me  
At our small journey's end: and there he sat,  
Jerking his grey old head impatiently  
At mortal fear and weakness. He was called,  
Through all that countryside, an "infidel";  
And Heaven knows what fortunes of what wars  
He thought to try, even yet. In my soft youth  
I saw with eyes of marvel, through the smoke  
Of almost legendary battlefields—  
The cloudy family-lore a child picks up—  
That dim old war-horse sniffing victory still.  
Then, when he turned, a touch of wistfulness  
Softening his smile, the picture in my mind  
Dissolved and changed: I saw Tithonus there,  
Slipped from my books of wonder back at school,  
And sitting by me on the wagon-seat:  
Tithonus—but not shrilling for release,  
Not he! The gift was good, on any terms;  
*He* would have clutched it tight, at seventy,  
Undaunted by its chill, its dubiousness,  
Resourceful, unsuspecting of the gods.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## THE LOST GROVE

### I

**H**ERE rose my grove of pines; my citadel  
Of shadowed peace, where shafts of splendor fell

On mossy log and feathered weed, and on  
Pine-carpets, spiced and bright as cinnamon.

Here no one came but me, although it loomed  
So close to where men dwelt; so proudly plumed

You might have thought the whole town would have turned  
Pilgrim, until that mastery were learned.

I came to learn it, scarcely knowing why  
I climbed the long hill through the wet and dry,

Heavy and sad and baffled, plodding up  
To lift my hollow need, a burning cup

That bubbled in the stillness rich and dim  
And flowed with sudden sweetness at the brim.

### II

Beside me on a fallen log I laid  
The apron of my spirit, grimed and frayed,

And from the blue above each lifted crown,  
Thistle-light and softly, floated down

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

A new-spun wedding-garment of delight.  
Sometimes the level splendor rested bright

On little distant roofs, where evening smoke  
Breathed still and blue; or, emerald-splintered, broke

Across a field of winter oats, where stood  
An old white horse, and listened toward the wood,

As if I, folded in that glory dim,  
Still as a prayer, were somehow known to him.

Upon the brown trunks for a moment came  
A secret, rosy lustre without name,

Nor may you see that color, nor that glow,  
Save on a pine-trunk when the sun is low.

### III

Upon a day of rain, the sky would dip  
At my wood's edge; or at the most, a strip

Of fallow field, where doves swooped sickle-wise,  
Was shut within my silver draperies.

Sometimes a wire-thin warbler-note would vary  
The stillness of my chill, sweet sanctuary,

Where grey, and dripping green, and velvet-black  
Sponged out old fever-dreams of woe and lack.

Their breath was peace—peace at the edge of pain—  
Those proud, plumed fortitudes that loved the rain,

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Those Towers—that now are little lengths of wood,  
That feed a fire to cook a laborer's food,

Or painted boards that shelter from the rain  
Some weak young mother in her first birth-pain.

### IV

Nobody needed it but me; and so  
I spread my spirit's hands, and let it go.

For men that hewed for hungers and for greeds  
Were sweating for the glory that God needs;

God heaved the axes, and He bade them make  
Money and houses for their own souls' sake.

But me He bade to save each sacred bole  
High on the glimmering uplands of the soul,

To spread about their roots my quiet page,  
And keep their shadows for my heritage.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE GUEST

I KEEP a chamber still and bare  
For Beauty's coming;  
I set it like a tender snare  
To tempt her, roaming.

Upon the gleaming casement-sill  
Where sunlight dances,  
I set a laughing daffodil  
To lure her glances,

And on the table whitely spread—  
Like fairy money,  
A butter-pat, gold-crust'd bread,  
A jar of honey.

And suddenly behind my chair  
Her mantle swishes,  
Her leaf-light touch is on my hair,  
I hear, "Three wishes!"

But, dumb as any boor you'd meet,  
I wait upon her,  
Until she leads me to my seat,  
Abashed with honor,

And plies me with the proffered bread  
Her fingers sweeten;  
I know not if a word is said,  
Or what I've eaten,

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Till eyes that cannot keep away  
Lift to her brightness—  
There's but the sunlight's empty ray,  
The table's whiteness!

But in the room a perfume stays,  
An elfin shining:  
And through a month of starveling days  
I still am dining.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### SONG IN PRAISE OF FIVE FRIENDS

**B**ENEATH the oaks that shelter me,  
Long since, my friends have come to dwell:  
And one was Emperor in Rome,  
And one was King in Israel,

And one, a crippled Slave; and one  
Held all of Greece within his span  
Of luminous amenity;  
And one, the Jewish village-man

Whose piercing love could not endure  
The bitter feud of flame and clod—  
So, nerved a palm of flesh to hold  
The fiery essence that is God.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE KITE

**T**HERE is a kite trying to follow the wind—  
Tugging, tugging,  
Throbbing, alive. . . .

My hopes used to be like kites,  
Made of thin, brittle sticks and tissue-paper.  
I used to send them up on windy days:  
Shyly they would dart and gleam,  
And make timid, soft little sallies.  
They would give up, and try again,  
Tentative, apologetic,  
Keeping up a gentle, anguished tugging—  
Unable to resist the wind,  
Unable to forget the string. . . .

Now I loose my hopes in joyous flocks—  
Every day I open a new cage in my heart,  
And send them forth, singing.  
They mount up with wings as eagles;  
They circle, white pigeons in the sun, fan-wings like silver  
flowers;  
They flash through the garden bushes,  
Redstarts and orioles. . . .  
How glad I am to see them go!  
Some day, somewhere, I shall find every one waiting.  
On the violet-tinted tooth of some high mountain,  
Leaf-hid in a bough that shades a long white road,

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

Screaming exultant through some thunderous sea-dawn,  
Or bell-clear at dusk in a dim and tender wood:  
So shall I find again my prisoners.  
And at last, among the trees of paradise,  
Jewelled with apples of silver,  
I shall come again upon the wild one, the honey-throated,  
Flooding the limpid and delicate air of heaven,  
Shaking the dew from the light-hung, glittering fruit,  
With the golden songs she used to dream and whisper,  
Long ago—  
The wild one, the honey-throated!—  
In the dim cage of my heart.

Poor kite,  
Fluttering against your string,  
I wish you, too, were a bird!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### CITY LIGHTS

GOD made, they say, the country,  
And man, they say, the town—  
But God forgets his handiwork  
When the sun goes down!

Stars, to be sure, on lucky nights,  
Moon, when her seasons fall—  
The darlings won't work overtime:  
They are too punctual.

Moon takes her rest on rainy nights  
All muffled in her cloak;  
She will not tramp the soggy lanes  
With poor belated folk;

But ah, that is the very time  
To see the pavement shine!  
The gutter-child may then outstare  
Aladdin in his mine.

God's a master-workman,  
Man, a 'prentice-clown;  
But God was in the heart of man  
When he lit the town!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### THE LITTLE HOUSE THAT WEARS A PLUME

**T**HE little house that wears a plume  
Dreams at the thicket's edge:  
Its shutters echo pine-green peace,  
Its roof, brown oak and sedge.

The sturdy chimney shoulders up  
And puffs blue laughter out:  
Grey winds that sniff out feathered things  
Scatter blue shreds about.

A little house that dreamed itself,  
And made itself come true—  
It flaunts, to ease its joyfulness,  
That smoky plume of blue.

# DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

## DESIGN

I RIPEN in a charmèd air:  
I draw one ray from years of sun,  
And from the floods beneath the grass  
One ichored drop—and only one.

I wrestle with the quarreling winds  
That from the sundered quarters blow,  
But one cool breath that is my own  
I seize—and let the others go.

I build a bubble out of bronze:  
Quarry a dewdrop from the rock—  
A sphered fragility to hang  
And shine above the thunder-shock.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### BEAUTY'S HANDS ARE COOL

**B**EAUTY'S hand are cool:  
They fall on fevered clay  
And mute the sob half-uttered  
Into a listening breath;  
Beauty's hands are cool  
As a crab-apple spray,  
And Beauty cares no more for tears  
Than Death.

Come thou before her  
Shriven of thy sighs,  
Lay aside thy tumults  
Like a tattered dress;  
Beauty's hands are cool  
As her quiet eyes—  
She will not dim her lucid peace  
With bitterness.

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### ELM-LACE

**T**HE old, old elm has put on clouds of lace  
Delicate as a bride's. A dawn-like grace  
Covers a million dark-twigged memories.  
A dryad gaiety is in her face,  
And, light as lilac-spray against the skies,  
New wonder is upborne by ancient stress.  
I marvel at a mortal thing so wise  
To heal the feud of Time and Loveliness!

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### LET ME GROW LOVELY

**L**ET me grow lovely, growing old—  
So many fine things do:  
Laces, and ivory, and gold,  
And silks need not be new;

And there is healing in old trees,  
Old streets a glamour hold:  
Why may not I, as well as these,  
Grow lovely, growing old?

## DREAMERS ON HORSEBACK

### WINTER NEST

ON a day of drifting rain, in a tree-tip high and bare,  
The little round nest of a bird snared my heart in  
its cup;

Nestling its chill, soft hollow, into the wintry air,  
Folded in dusky silver, she trilled this carol up:

“Tip of a lacy tree,  
Be the fit home for me!  
Full in the summer-glow,  
Build high, brood deep, and go!  
Home for the spirit-free,  
Tip of a lacy tree!”

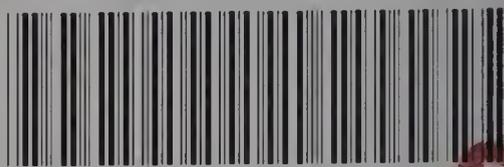






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