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Forfeit and Other
Poems

by

KATHRYN MUNRO

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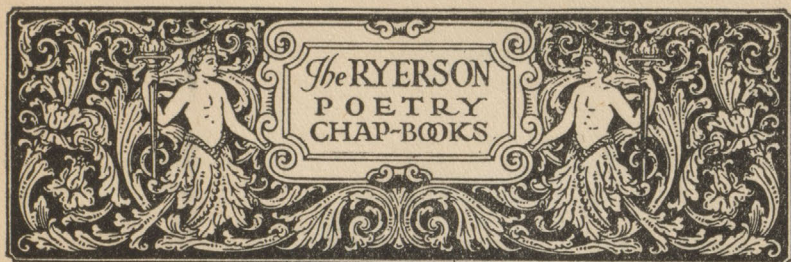
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Forfeit and Other Poems

By Kathryn Munro

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FORFEIT

THE bartered years foregather, one by one,
Within the sunless orbit of the past,
The barren years, unhallowed and undone!

They hold no memories of zealous noon,
No twilight wistful at the birth of stars,
No night gold-vestured by a harvest moon.

Had we on one far day—forgotten—dead,
Together watched the miracle of morn,
Or followed April where her laughter led

When the arbutus in its mossy snood,
With scented whisperings of sorcery,
Invoked the tardy children of the wood—

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Armed with the comradeship of such an hour
Against the ambushed arrows of despair,
A shield were mine, and sceptred battle-tower!

October comes, a sandalled acolyte,
With censer for the maples' altar-fires,
Lighting tall tapers for the primal rite,

While we stand hesitant, or walk apart,
Paying strange tribute to uncaring gods, . . .
In ash of leaf I trace love's erring chart!



REQUIEM

*(Written to the memory of Ross Marvin, who lost his life with the last
Peary Expedition)*

WHERE glaciers sentinel the Arctic night
In bloodless winter's dissonant domain,
You sleep unmindful of the storm's refrain,
High-candled by the Borealis' light.

The hoar-frost weaves its crystal filaments
About the snowy lintels of your cell;
Your alien pillow knows the surging knell,
The cloven fury of the elements.

Steadfast Polaris from his vizored place
Bends on your pallid brow his cosmic fire—
The blind god Hodr only could inspire
Such ghostly radiance on mortal face!

The challenge of great hazard lured you far,
Your fearless spirit scorned men's meaner creeds;
The mute, heroic measure of your deeds
Sings in the sky, a lone, uncharted star.

And we, your northern friends—you loved us well—
Find in our hearts a strange disquietude
(As troubled spirits on the mind intrude),
Which long effacing years can not dispel.

God comfort you and give your soul repose,
Young patriot and neighbour, gentle, true;
God cherish you and compensate to you
Your life's brief tenancy and awful close!



CHIMNEY TOPS

TALL, drab city chimneys
Wait patiently for the sun.

At night, they are grizzled headstones,
Around which spooky winds
Mutter and wail.

On a wet day, like yawning gargoyles,
They rise in defiant ugliness
To the dripping sky.

But at the touch of a wizard finger
Across the floor of Heaven,
Behold, a myriad obelisks of flaming gold,
Crevice and groove adrift with coral-dust,
Cornice and crown inlaid with iris-lode,
Whence amber-moted rings of brimming incense
Float high into the blue!

Tall, drab city chimneys
Wait patiently
Their hour of immortality.

AFTER RAIN

RAIN is over
A young tree between me and the sun,
Like a child nude from its bath,
Drips fragrantly.

The sun in going leaves a sudden space
Of paling blue; bereft of his embrace,
The widowed clouds grow desolate and old,
Like ashy ghosts upon a hearth of gold,
Until the god, repenting of his flight,
Looks back—they blush in riotous delight!

Dear one,
Against your going I have no redress,
No largess for my pain or happiness;
But with a miser's heart I hold in fee
These memories, my only surety:
A look that once you gave me, unaware;
A tender word; the homage of your care;
And like the suppliance of a mating dove
Your wordless messengers of questing love
Strong sun that thralls this frailty of me
Forever homeward through immensity.

The drifting dusk,
Smoke-black and crocus-rimmed,
Enshrouds the fading ramparts of the world.



WHEN LOVE'S AFAR

WHEN Love's afar—
Beauty's a thorn,
Music a wingèd arrow at the side,
Tree-tops against the sky are babes forlorn—
When Love's afar!

An early star,
The vibrant fluting of the whip-poor-will,
Sunrise, and faery tears on tasselled grain,
Are whispered pain—
When Love's afar!



TWILIGHT FOLK

AN ANCIENT pine against a paling sky
Wherein no cloud remains to mourn the day;
A bird's high call before it cleaves its way
Through the still air that answers with a sigh.

Warm, cobwebbed grasses where pale creatures lie,
Asleep beneath the spider's baneful sway;
And timid toads that needs must fare and prey
When hunger-ridden, just as you or I.

The bat, poor tenant of a sunless room,
Flings madly through the dusk-illuminated door
Of mossy haven and inverted floor—
Hearing the owl he flutters back to gloom.

In a dim garden at her ebon loom
An ageless fay refashions o'er and o'er,
With noiseless shuttles weaving evermore,
The twilight people's destiny or doom.



APRIL NIGHT

THE YOUNG moon's silver snood is in the west,
Low-poised against the tender April sky;
White stars, foregathered at the night's behest,
Drop crystal ladders earthward far and nigh.

The questing winds have crooned themselves to sleep
Beneath the canopies of vanquished day,
To dream of rhythmic dawn on wooded steep
And canded pathways of the sheltered bay.

Slim, shining birches by the water's edge—
Nude nymphs on tiptoe deep in mirrored thrall—
With elfin fingers woo the pallid sedge
And broider o'er the ghostly seaweed-pall.

Close-cradled still within the brooding sod
The sheathed grass and saffron-hooded grain;
The myriad fragrant souls that breathe of God
Awaiting each His whisper, "Rise again!"



THE DESERTED CAMP

*(Written to commemorate the departure of the Nova Scotia Highlanders from
Aldershot Camp for Overseas in the autumn of 1916)*

NOW VEILED October fills her amber urn,
With iris leaves and tasselled golden-rod;
Her burnished sandals brush the fronded fern,
She whispers, and the maples dream of God.

An opal mist ascends the coppery wold,
White incense on the altar of the morn,
When, suddenly, the air is ashy cold
The gossamer has vanished from the thorn!

Across the barren sky, pale, vagrant clouds
Drift aimlessly beyond the sun's embrace;
A keening wind stirs wistfully the shrouds
Of silent tents left desolate apace.

Long, waiting trains, and music sorrow-sweet,
Familiar music of love-lidded days;
Hot, futile tears, and anguished eyes that meet
In mute farewell—the sundering of ways!

But yesterday, the sound of busy drum,
The skirl of pibroch and the bugle-call,
The daily pageantry and measured hum
Of soldiery afield in martial thrall.

The lilting march along the dusty way,
The crooning of the pipes among the hills,
Where now their plaintive rune the aspens play
And tread of phantom troops the silence fills.

Reveill  speeds no more out-ushering
The drowsy shadows of awakened night;
I listen vainly for its echoing
Across the meadows, up the wooded height.

Now muted Grief, tear pallid, wanders down
Each dappled path so memoried and dear,
Each truant path so renegade and brown
We gaily followed in the yesteryear.

"Who will return?" the winds go questing by,
"Who will return?" the winnowed spaces sing;
Ah, Time, wise carrier, must bring reply—
And Time lies impotent on palsied wing!

The vestal hour between the sun and dusk
Kindles the stars above the ghostly plain;
Their misty rays reveal the spectred husk
Of home when thitherward I turn again.

• • •

YOU

BELOVED,
The sweet-lipped dawn salutes you,
And the flowers unveil their eyes
To see you pass!

Grey-sandalled twilight brings white stars
To sing of you!
The timid grasses sheathe themselves
Within the letters of your name.

The night is tremulous with sighs
For you!
The whip-poor-will plaints his sorrow
From the troubled trees.

More gracious are you, Beloved,
Than a leafy tent at high noon,
A brook in the thirsty desert,
Or a cooing babe to a barren woman!

And bitter as the knell of rain
On a new grave
Will be the alien years
Untenanted by you!

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