

The RYERSON
P O E T R Y
C H A P - B O O K S



Tanager Feather

By
Kathryn Munro

JM:EM *

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OF THIS EDITION OF *TANAGER FEATHER*, BY KATHRYN
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TO THE
MEMORY OF MY HUSBAND
JOSEPH FREEMAN TUPPER

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To *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, for "Monologue" and
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(an Award poem); to *National Home Monthly*, for "Airman".

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The Ryerson Poetry Chapbooks

Tanager Feather

by Kathryn Munro

SOUVENIR

This for remembrance. Should my songs recall
A greater song we heard one distant day—
Now many a barren league on league away—
The glory-march and drums of Parsifal,
Feel no regret for me. Our brother, Saul,
Felled by the thunderbolt, arose to pray . . .
That was; this is. Think not, with quick dismay,
“She walks alone above the canyon wall!”

You gave no token, and I asked for none;
You spoke in silence, that I might not hear.
Unknown, unknowing, comrade of the sun,
You took as forfeit all the golden year;
And so, to fashion dream, I snared and spun
A rainbow fleece. Accept my souvenir.

MONOLOGUE AT 2 A.M.

My tithes of yellow gold are turned to dross
By the high god above my candle-beam;
I come to blacken out the taper's gleam
And lay the altar with a shrouded cross.
My groping fingers mar the lily-gloss
Of reredos fashioned out of spirit-dream.
No matter. Soon each silver-broidered seam
Will seal and panel up my hoarded loss.

My fingers find the white, imperious flame.
Brave light, that I have cherished through the years,
I hold you in my palm . . . In death, no blame! . . .
Bright lance, now sear this flesh, nor heed my tears;
Find the firm bone, engrave thereon his name,
Then, unavailing, doom may chant its fears.

OLD APPLE ORCHARD

I

(In Spring)

The apple orchard is in bloom again,
And every wind is tremulous and sweet;
The years are put to rout, their drums retreat
Before young laughter and the lilting rain
Of children running in a grassy lane.
I hear the whitethroat where the spruces meet
Repeat his "Canada" and still repeat,
Weaving the spell of his immortal strain.

When snowy branches loose their petals now
No eager hand is cupped to snare their fall;
The whitethroat worships on the forest bough,
But only echo shares the ritual;
The orchard's heart is empty as a vow
When love is laid beneath his beggar's pall.

II

(In Autumn)

The ripened apple glistens on the tree,
The busy spider's dewlit tents are spun,
The goldenrod is flaming in the sun,
And I must journey back to Arcady,
The blooms are winnowed, but the honey-bee
Still haunts the wild-rose hedge and crickets run
Before my feet; hay-harvesting is done;
And over all the fragrance of the sea.

I find again the orchard that I knew:
Its barren arms are wide in welcoming;
I stand in twilight there among the rue
While shadow-playmates pass on silent wing;
The trees have grown aware of shadows, too . . .
Together we shall sleep, remembering.

CANADIAN PASTORAL

(For the Island of Cape Breton)

Fair is the dawn on these ancestral hills,
Fragrant the breath of tree and drowsy glade;
Enchantment folds each tear-webbed grassy blade
Where crystal rainbows the bright dew distils;
And I, abroad to greet my waking land,
Find joy and loveliness on every hand.

In from the wide horizons of the sea,
Lusty for battle runs the conquering tide,
Where prows against the east dip down and ride
Over the highways of immensity;
And gallant keels, their eager pennons furled,
Make harbour here from ports that rim the world.

The arrows of the sun have put to flight
The shadows bivouacked on tor and plain;
Now in retreat, with all their fallen train,
Those misty tribesmen who encamp by night
Are fled to gloomy caverns where they lie
And hear the regiments of day go by.

A sentinel beside an open door,
Cape Smokey rises from his giant bed;
Alike unheeded by that graven head
The cry of curlew and old Neptune's roar.
Scion of primal deep and native shard,
The ancient has his island home to guard.

O prodigal the seeing Hand that wrought
The idyls of Baddeck and Margaree;
The lyric Mira, running swift and free,
Surf-cradled Ingonish and Arichat;
Whycocomagh, above its sheltered bay,
Where beauty walks her white celestial way.

Here friendly acres nestle, cool and green,
Along the reaches of the Arm of Gold;
Where dearth is but a legend, half untold,
Noon is content and twilight is serene.
Like blossoms on a tranquil river's breast,
Night's starry cavalcade moves toward the west.

The shy arbutus, firstling of the year,
Here tints her lily-cups with philtered rose;
The wild brier shares with every wind that blows
The incense of her sylvan altars here;
And here the whitethroat, darling of the wood,
Weaves his immortal theme in solitude.

Though commerce build her temple, and our trade
And industry acquire a cosmic tongue;
Though gauntlet to our heritage is flung
In the arena iron gods have made;
Still shall our mother sing her own to sleep,
And moon and quiet glen their trysting keep.

THRENODY

(For Sir Charles G. D. Roberts)

Included in the Memorial Service to the poet, in Fredericton Cathedral,
May, 1944.

Blow softly, winds, above his house of rest,
His hallowed place of native earth and stone;
Break gently, tides, against his quiet breast
Whose latest pulse beat fondly with your own;
To you, his best-beloved, O Tanramar,
He comes again from journeyings afar.

Here he will find new solaces of dream
Where breath of sea and meadow fills the air,
Where drifts the wild rose, where the candle-beam
Of morning-glory lights its winding stair;
His heart will tryst with beauty as of old
When wonder robed the world in cloth of gold.

Now lost and dim the sunlit paths he knew
When, joy in hand, he fared to meet the day;
Forlorn the hill and the enchanted view
Where Roberts gleaned the early-flowering bay . . .
Ah, does remembrance come, on pilgrim feet,
Bearing forget-me-nots to his retreat?

Above the penuries of mortal song,
A richer music falls on listening ears:
Great Mother Canada sends forth her young
Singing his 'Child of Nations' down the years,
'Iceberg' and 'Tanramar' their heritage,
'Spirit of Beauty' theirs from age to age.

April will come again with daffodils,
And June with leafy canopies outspread,
Autumn will walk those ancient, holy hills,
And pale December snows enshroud his bed,
But through the inconstant seasons time will keep
A nation's vigil where he lies asleep.

SUMMER IS OVER!

Summer is ended and gone,
Now its tenure is over;
The net of the spider is drawn
From the path of the rover;
Ash in the censer of dawn
Is the bloom of the clover.

The woodland aisles are sighing,
And every wind replying,
"Summer is over and gone!"
"Summer is over and gone!"

The yellow bee is away
With his sugary plunder;
The blackbirds vanished one day
In a ripple of thunder,
Though the earth was green and gay,
And the sky full of wonder.

The woodland aisles are sighing,
And every wind replying,
"Summer is over and gone!"
"Summer is over and gone!"

RETREAT

When next we meet,
My thought shall not run with your thought;
Our spirits shall not walk hand in hand.

When you speak,
I shall raise a cynical eyebrow,
And abort an incipient yawn.

In a thousand small ways
I shall strike at the mortised plinth under our dwelling
But I will evade your troubled eyes;
I could not meet your dismay.

I shall go alone over the swaying bridge
Without the comfort of twined fingers;
Afterward, at tea, I shall pretend forgetfulness
And give you sugar instead of cream.

Tonight I shall visit a crematory
And study the art of the embalmer.
I will learn how to tap the rosy pulse
That raced under your hand,
And how to inject the death-fluid into my veins,
So that tomorrow when we meet
I shall not feel your nearness;
My defences will not crumble at your touch.

Tomorrow? . . . Tomorrow is too soon.
A decade from tomorrow.

Soul-cremation takes time.

AIRMAN

I know the urgent lift of wings
When day is new and poppy-blown,
When waking earth her *Ave* sings
Before the glory of His throne.

Or whether swings the faring moon
Her silver lantern in the sky,
Or whether witches laugh and croon
And ragged winds go whistling by;

Where falls the meteor's fiery hail
Through vasty solitudes afar,
I follow still the shining trail,
A joy-companioned avatar.

I range those dream-enchanted heights
That rim the last infinity,
Beneath the choiring Northern Lights
I span an opalescent sea.

Beauty unveils her starry face,
I touch the wonder of her hair;
Then, then she rides with me apace,
And oh, her speech is strangely fair!

Of saga, this I count the best,
Of rapture, this my spirit's thrall:
The chartless pilgrimage of quest,
The lost horizon's bugle-call.

PROFANED IMMORTAL

Your face, O Moon, is a leering mask
flung by a hidden hand into far, cold space.

The baleful stare of your patched eyes
reflects the growing infamies of man.

You have seen too much evil, gazed too long on torture,
on spoilers feasting in the house of famine,
on innocence dishonoured by the impious.

You have ridden with many a wolfish pack; your pale fingers
have probed the ravished sheepfolds.

The odours of death have befouled you; the fumes
of charnel earth have bleared your loveliness.

Once lampbearer of the gods, you now turn a grimy torch
on mad revellers at our world's whipping carnival.

Tonight, O profaned immortal, you are not beautiful;
you should wear a web of cloud.

HE SLEEPS UNCARING

Waken the sleeper gently,
Angel of Easter dawn;
Kneel by his shuttered window,
Whisper that night is gone.

Tell him that June is snaring
The wild plum's starry brood,
Above his lonely threshold
Within the glooming wood.

The whitethroat, too, is calling,
And he must rise to hear
"I love thee, Canada, Canada!"
Echoing far and near.

Along the Fundy's reaches
The tide is running free . . .
But ah, he sleeps uncaring
For tide or bird or tree!

You say he wakened early
And journeys now afar,
Over the Great Horizon,
Beyond the vesper star?

Sweet angel, spread your pinions,
Follow him where he goes,
And give him this for token—
My garden's first red rose.

ALWAYS IN APRIL

Always in April, when pale roots awake
Beneath the tapping of a master key,
When joy is surging in the tree and brake,
My heart returns to its Gethsemane.
Always in April there will come again
Dear ghostlings of delight, the afterglow
Of noon's desire, of sunset's lyric pain,
Of emerald tides, where tides no longer flow.
Can April's magic find you where you are,
Beyond the eye of day, the ear of night,
Beyond my reach, beyond the end of flight,
The universal moon, the utmost star?
If April finds you, she must bring me word,
That I may come at once when I have heard.

HARVEST

September brings me as a parting gift
Her frugal garnering of summer snow:
White petals fallen in a fragrant drift,
And rainbow gleanings where the cosmos blow.

Rosemary's garden memories are mine:
Flutings of dawn, the sun's olympic hour,
The vesper hush, the sacramental wine
For peasant grass and for patrician flower . . .
A year ago we came and lingered where,
With scarlet vestments delicately spread,
Young sumachs in the twilight stood at prayer.
"God's acolytes!" Then, wistfully, you said,
"Before the waning moon is newly grown,
Harvest this beauty that our hearts have known."

LOST GARDEN

Your garden grows the weed and thorny tusk
Where lately swung the censer of the rose,
Where nicotine, forgetful of repose,
Lit starry tapers for her lover, dusk.
The place that knew the mignonette and musk
Now only rue and ragged banewort knows.
November rains and January snows
Have hollowed out delight and filled the husk.

Another autumn when the fates are old
And going blind with unremembered years,
When the young aloe gleans her treasure-gold,
And grief is dead beside his fallen spears,
Our hearts shall listen to the tale retold
Without the sequel of defenceless tears.

GULLS AT SUNRISE

The chiming ray out of the Atlantic
that an hour before
kindled a halo on Smokey's massive brow,
now spanned Toronto bay.

From the upper deck of the *Cayuga*,
as she cleared the Eastern Gap,
We saw the flight of gulls.

The ultimate in rhythm,
no sound from the snowy throats,
they spiralled and soared and glided,
weaving a geometry of flashing silver curves
and rounded angles.

A Sabbath hush fell on the watchers.

Here was therapy for the frayed spirit!

None misjudged the feather's margin
from wing-tip to wing-tip;
No human error here to mar the rhapsody
of seraphim at heavenly mattins.

The beat of their shimmering wings,
like the sudden stroking of waves on a quiet shore,
quicken the pulse;
the air was vibrant with a whispered Benedicite.

For heart's delight,
I conjure a scroll of white wings
against a blue Canadian sky,
and the sorcery of early sun on jade-green waters.

MAPLES IN NOVEMBER

The trees, like a company of refugees,
Wait patiently at faded rags.

The harsh wind is a querulous spy;
he searches everywhere for hidden meanings.
Old leaves run before him on brittle feet.

The stealthy year
has taken the sun's golden flagon
and spilled its rosy ichor
over the world's rim.

Night, pitying the dispossessed,
drapes a nun's veil over her jewelled hair.

But for the disenchanting,
there is God's gift of dream.

From songless dawn to dawn,
their listening hearts hear the silver flute
of the Canada bird;
their barren arms cradle the twigged house
of the waxwing.

The white root of every tree remembers
it has tryst with April.

SOUL TRIUMPHANT

(To the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, at Easter)

O shining spirit, altar-flame of God,
Cleaving the shadows of a thousand years;
O mighty heart, unswayed by mortal fears,
That dared the challenge of the way He trod!
Serene, unbowed before the chastening-rod,
You turned its venom into ruthless tears,
A dew of grace, and presently appears
Love's immortelles upon an alien sod.

Again the spearhead quivers in His side,
The wimble-thorn is ruddy on His brow,
The Earth is shaken, He is crucified,
And hark, the crowing bird, the craven vow . . .
Before the radiant Lord of Eastertide,
The patriot soul of Gandhi worships now.

THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES

Westward you hymn those deities of height—
Temple, Assiniboine, and Eisenhower,
And all their mighty kin of God's great hour
That march with dawn and bivouac with night.
Eastward, immense, the plain of Ceres lies,
The granary of peoples yet unborn,
Unnumbered golden sheaves of wheat and corn
Rising in tented ranks beneath your skies.

O cloud, be mindful of the thirsty seed
Where glows the fevered footfall of the sun;
Despoiler wind, put down your savage reed
That flays the living kernel as you run;
And, wanton blight, betrayer to the weed,
Spare for the hungry every precious one!

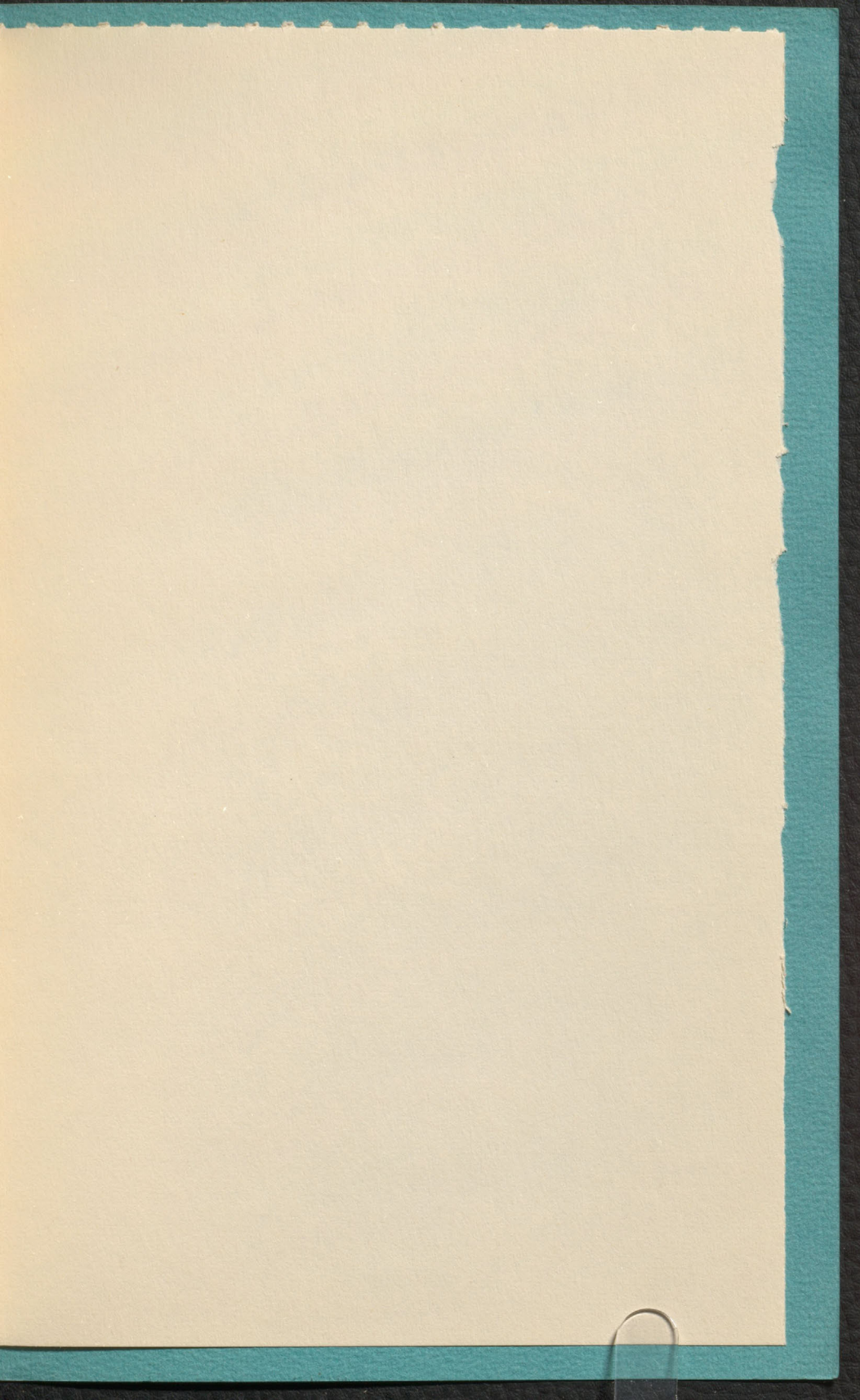
APRIL TRYST

The evening sky is tremulous with stars,
The wishing-moon is cradled in the west,
The pilgrimage of day has come to rest,
And no discordancy the stillness mars.
It is our trysting-hour, when I may lean
A little closer to your quiet heart,
And whisper news of earth to you apart,
Aprilian sorceries you have not seen:
The pussy-willows have come back again,
The trillium is spurred and helmeted,
The dog-tooth violet is out of bed;
And yesterday the sun-and-silver rain
That found arbutus in a fragrant wood
Brought young hepatica a beryl snood.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Chief of all gateways, warder of the West,
Whose rudest trail outvies an Appian Way,
Your Rocky Mountains brim the cup of day
With giant peaks beyond the end of quest:
Mount Robson, monarch of the mighty breast,
And Mount Cathedral, where the sun's first ray
Signals the traveller to kneel and pray
To Him who fashioned pinnacle and crest.

Nanaimo is a hoop of bridal rings,
And Lillooet a limpid purl of song;
A chime of bells in Capilano sings,
And Okanagan is a silver gong;
Dream-names that haunt the heart on whispering wings
Are yours, enchanted land, where dreams belong.



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