

The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS

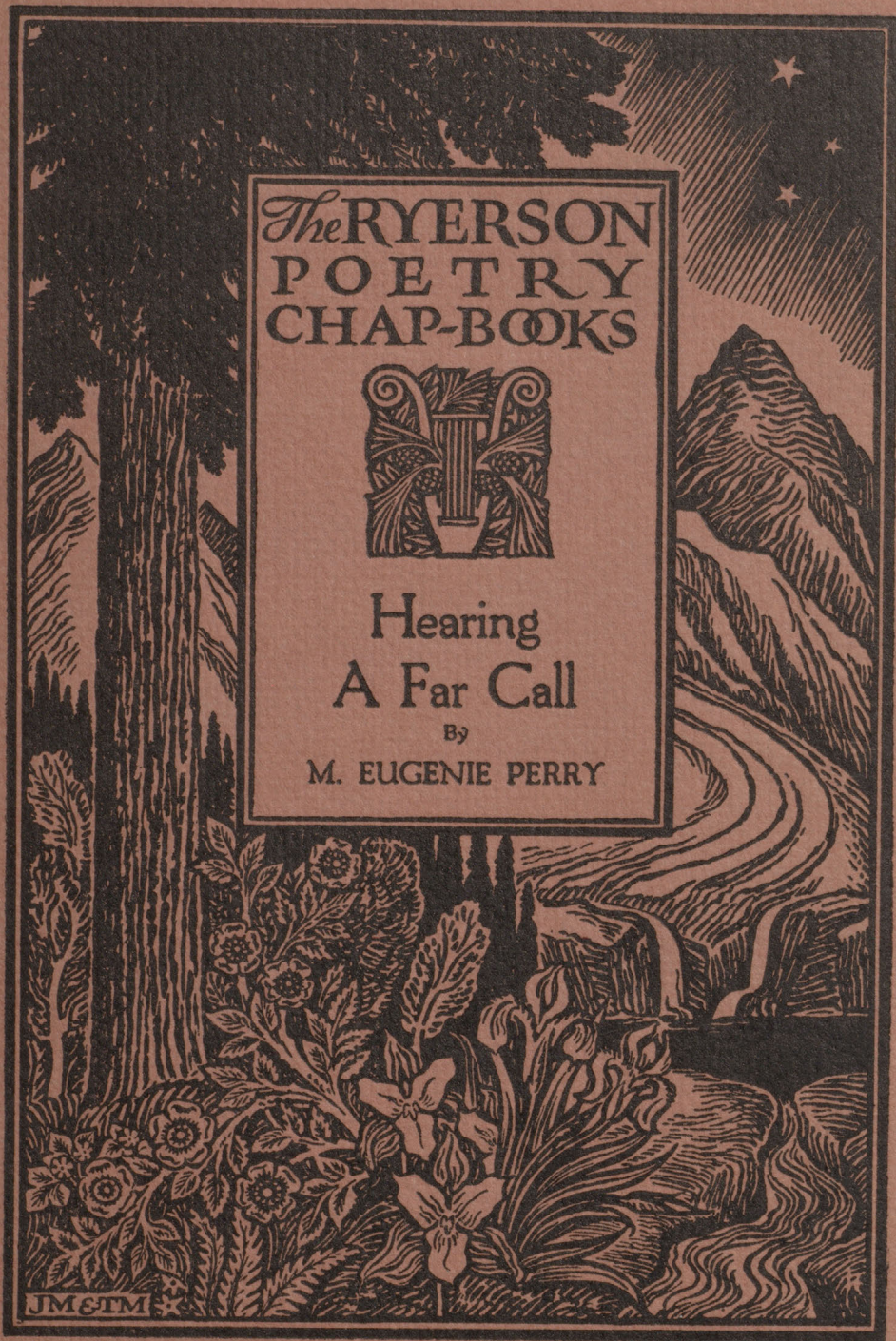


Hearing
A Far Call

By

M. EUGENIE PERRY

JM&TM



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M. Eugenie Perry is a third generation Canadian, born in Kirkfield, Ontario, of Irish-Scotch parents. She has lived for many years in Victoria, B.C., where she is an officer and past president of The Victoria and Islands' Branch of the Canadian Authors' Association. She is editor of the "Home Chat" page of the *Western Recorder*, under the name of Perry Page. Her work has appeared in scores of magazines and newspapers in Canada, the British Isles, and the United States, and consists of poetry, short stories, children's features, and plays.

The Ryerson Poetry Chapbooks

Hearing A Far Call

By M. Eugenie Perry

* * *

INTRODUCTION

"DORO-LYND, Doro-Lynd, Juliet!
She is the realest Juliet of them all!"

The rising chorus rings through the vaulted hall.
Glowing, she smiles and bows, her ivory gown
Shimmering to her feet; and rippling down
Under her Juliet cap, her burnished hair.
Still, in the cobalt mystery of her eyes
A questioning shadow lies.
Applause—is it not enough
For the toil of the years, and the strife?
Fame—is it trivial as a silken puff
Gaudying the homespun sleeve of life?

There is a homelier glimpse veiled from the crowd,
Midnight and weariness totalling the day's score;
Then in the inner torment of her mind
The doubt is rampant: "Is there more, no more?"

"Your love had held me, Michael, had you been
But once a little wrong, or sensed the frail
Dream-wisps I spun for balancing my scale
Of days—I who must ever feel the thin
High air of freedom lightening my wings,
Preen in the rayed brilliance of the warm
Sun of approval, shunning the uniform,
I who must sing just as the field lark sings.

"So have I sung and played, and now my name
Illumines every capital. And this is fame!

"The plaudits, jewelled tributes to my play
Lie stricken in the dark and silence of
The theatre, and night snails on its way.
Free—I am free—but never from your love."

So, Doro-Lynd, now lost in reverie,
Speaks to herself, or to the attendant friend,
Tireless and kind, who, brushing her buoyant hair,
Smoothing, rehangng her gowns, is glad to lend
Attention where required.

Section I

REVERIE

1

"THERE never has been any other spring
As lovely as the spring when Michael came.
I saw him stand—the sun was gold on his hair—
To listen to a mating white-throat whistling;
And he was beauty, and he was strength and youth,
And he was for me a life-enduring flame.

"Disturbed, I ran deep in the pinewoods where
The early clumps of delicate-coloured Mayflowers braved
Late mischievous frosts. And, breathless, there,
I saw the most delightful thing:
The dark, the very ancient sentinel trees
Had shed their dignity, and bowed, and waved
New lemon-green tip-fingers to the breeze."

2

"Soon, I should meet him, and 'soon, soon, soon,'
I sang as a little song to a little tune.
I brushed and brushed my hair to copper fire,
Said: 'Mirror, mirror, will he notice me?'
Not beautiful, but—yes—with some appeal;
Eyes of the dusk-rimmed celtic blue that men admire.
Will he admire them? 'Mirror, don't say no.'
Yet, with his college laurels lately won
How dull this life must grow.
Ah! at the club recital, how impressed he'll be
When I play Rosalind in Ganymede's velvet suit.
'What would you say to me now and I were
Your very, very Rosalind?'
Only for him I'll speak, and he'll know."

"Or if he heard me sing! Will he come
To our Festival of the May in the maple grove?
The sly shadows dance
And hide around the cone of burning brush;
And quick young laughter thrills the hush
Of evening. Now the call above the mandolin's thrum:
'Oh, Doro, your Legend of the Maple Flute!
And as I sing, deep in my heart I'll say:
'But I am the shepherdess and *he* the Prince.'"

"Carve me a flute of maple wood,
Fashion it tenderly
That its silver tone ringing rood on rood
Will waken Spring in her flowery snood,
Flute of the maple tree,
Sweet flute of the maple tree.

"I was a princess gold of hair,
You but a shepherd boy,
Stealing my heart with your lilting air,
Till naught could loosen the silken snare,
Jewels or princely ploy,
Rich jewels or princely ploy.

"Under the maple tree I sleep;
Garner the tender shoot,
Fashion a pipe as you tend your sheep,
Pipe in lush corn that men may reap,
With magic of maple flute,
Sweet magic of maple flute."

"The sound of chopping reached me as I sang.
Against the gable, in the ell of the old house
A Balm o' Gilead tree wove shade for summer days;
And on a moist spring morning it would rouse
Even a sleepy-head like me with its fresh tang.

"Downstairs, and through the garden door I flew,
And tugged at my father's flailing arms:
'My tree, you can't, you must not cut it down.'
He said: 'It's nothing but a nuisance; every year
It's full of caterpillar tents.' Such a furious rage
Possessed me I belied my age.
My shining world of dreams shattered by worms,
By lowly worms! I stamped my foot and sobbed,
And knew my face all crumpled up and smeared:
'And now my robin has no place to nest.'

"Around the angle of the house Michael appeared:
'I wonder, Dr. Lindsay, if I may
Borrow your roller for my mother's lawn?'
He saw me and smiled in a young embarrassed way.
Again I ran and hid,
But near enough to hear my father say:
'It's this damned tree; that's why she's taking on.
The roller's in the shed.' And, thoughtfully:
'Don't mind her. Girls are queer!'
And then he went on chopping at the tree."

“Evening in spring, when every tendril twines
 Its appointed way, even as my way wound
 Along the hill-road scalloping the pines,
 Where Michael strode god-like against the sky,
 But human, with his small pleased smile when I,
 Walking old Collie, casually came by.
 The old dog wagged, and went. And then no sound,

“No stir of any bough, and no bird flew.
 Islanded there in Eden, all I knew
 My every year had flowered but for this—
 This moment—and that life was glorious.
 Fleeting, untellable—love and the first kiss:
 Words that are old, but ever shy and new
 For lovers; new and very sweet to us.

“An early whippoorwill began to call.
 Startled, I knew the evening sky had spent
 Its gold, and I emotion, coveting then
 The homely company of houses; to be again
 Careless, untrammelled; and to trade the thrall
 Of the dark pine trees’ incense for the scent
 Of apple blossoms near a garden wall.

“The world was faint with loveliness, and still
 There came that thin complaining from the hill:
 ‘Whippoorwill! Whippoorwill! Whippoorwill!’ ”

Section II

FRAGMENTS

1

LOVE, and the tender confines of a home,
 And these were Heaven to the new-made wife,
 Still crying treason that an end might come
 Even to exquisite desire.

Inevitably, the honeymoon was spent!
 Then, from a dull and creeping discontent
 Her garden, green things growing, rescued her;
 And soon the stirring of creative fire
 Flowed into metred line and rhyme, and so—
 These scribbled verses in a folio:

"I have a garden very small—
A few sparse handkerchiefs of loam,
An oak where vesper sparrows call,
Wild orange and currant by the wall
Girdling the constancy of home.

"My friend who boasts an aviary,
A greenhouse, and a liliated pool,
Will tour de luxe and seldom see
Her orchids or magnolia tree;
She sailed today for Istanbul.

"My garden is a personal thing;
Crushed by some evil-starred event,
I crouch within its sheltering ring
Where every flower and hurrying wing
Soon forge my mind's rearmament."

2

One year, and two, slipped by
Frivolled in this or the next inconsequence.

And then her son was born, and Doro knew
Here was her perfect role;
And, too, a living, warm reality
To bolster her thin defence
Against the inanities, the indifference
Of every-day.

But soon—and her mutinous verse will testify—
The hankering for applause, a wider audience, grew
In the strange ferment of her artist's soul.

"The boldest strokes of Nature's lavish brush
Nourish my brain's vividest happiness.
The crimson-orange-gold-splashed sunset sky
Drags at my chains; home is so colourless.

"Green, azure, orchid, flowers or jewelled gauds
Beckon me forth, flaunting their blazonry.
So, thinking all my ways and tastes so crude,
Of little worth, why did he shackle me?"

"Yes, having felt the world's most garish roads
Beneath my feet, slaked each exotic whim—
Worn gorgeous gowns, made lovely, flashing friends—
Then, bored, replete, I would return to him."

Pride, and resentment of such little deeds
 Spawning such great reproaches—so the sum leads
 Intolerably to tragedy for two who love.

One, favouring the hearth, found poetry enough
 In the eerie sough of the autumn wind in the pines;
 And one—the woman, criminally—would rove
 Free as the rose. So wove the inexorable trend
 To disillusion, and the day when Doro penned:

“Love is a song,
 Thrilling the arid chambers of my life
 With chords elysian;
 A swelling euphony, a swift diapason of joy,
 Dwindling until through muted melody
 The strain is stilled.
 Love is a pulsing song.

“Love is a poem.
 Beautiful winged words
 Well from my deeps;
 Little clinging sweetheart words,
 Smouldering, maleficent words
 Pregnant with passion and despair.
 Love is a living poem.

“Love is a dream,
 And very mine, unsmirched by soil of use.
 The song and poem mingle in its woof,
 And jewelled colours raying from the prism—
 Ruby and amber, sapphire and chrysoprase.
 Love is a shining dream.”

There is a last hard word, once spoken
 Too bitter even for love to compensate;
 Then is the daily mould—too round
 Or square for comfort—finally strained and broken.

Only remained to write the pitiful letter,
 Etched in her heart by its effort and its tears,
 A link to fetter the old to the beckoning new life,
 A memory—line by line—through the film of years.

"Michael,

 were all our rose-leaf promises
Thin as a fragile shell?
Good-bye is like a little death in life,
But to remain, unloved, a little hell.
Love should be tenderness and understanding;
Man's love, even a Michael's love, may soon become
A day by day, a year by year demanding.
And if I have no gift to be a wife—
Oh! you were cruel, even if right and I
A quite unnatural mother, our small son
Fare better with me gone. How could I stay
To bring him harm? Yet I have loved him, Michael,
Have loved you, in my own way.

"Armand is not my lover, or anything to me
Only as art is valued. How could you so mistrust
The simplest circumstances, you who must—
Or who should—know me best? He would but set
Me on the road to fame. He heard my Juliet—
'Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief?'—
The time I won the trophy in the county town.
Not just a flatterer, for I too know
I have the personality, the timbred voice
To sway great audiences. This is a hard choice;
But there is only weakness in delay.
Oh! could there be two Doros, one to go—
Tonight, and you away—
And one to be held close to you forever.

"The autumn wind is dirging through the pines;
The turgid harvest moon, another year,
Will rise above the pines, and I not know;
In spring the little bold hepaticas,
Mauve and pink and white, will pierce the snow
Beneath the pines, and I not here.
I who so naively welcomed love, to find it wanting
In ways so dear to me,
Must sky another star and dare the haunting
Of loneliness, of shame that I could fail—
To wake and think I hear my baby wail—
His eyes so like your grey eyes, Michael;
Your resolute chin—so little of him mine
That he would always find me less than right.
So, though I know regret tomorrow, each tomorrow,
This is good-bye; and I still sign,
And the pen wavering,
 your
 Doro."

Section III

DOWN THE YEARS

1

A LITTLE, then a little step ahead—
One goal attained, for one she valued, lost.
So Doro, faring down the motley years,
Must sometimes pause to tally up the cost.

“For every triumph, what a bitter toll
Of knowledge life exacts, limning the base
And mean in nature; times I have run the whole
Gamut of gloom for one winged hour of grace.

“And I have known a coveted prize, though won,
Wilt as a pierrot’s pricked balloon for me—
A friendship held unvarying as the sun
Nulled by the creeping solvent, jealousy.

“The search-light beam of gossip may illumine
My days, and yet the crowd that rolls the dice
For Fame see nothing but the palms that plume
Success; I, only, know the sacrifice.

“I must find solace in the world’s salaam,
And flaunt achievement as a glorious oriflamme.”

2

Humour is the condiment
Savouring the years.
In each great, each small event,
Humour is the condiment,
Scaling love or sentiment,
Weighing work or tears,
Humour is the condiment
Savouring the years.

“Life is not always solemn.
There was the slim young worshipper, waiting
At the theatre door, her book and pencil poised.
Clearly, my autograph—an easy favour.
Then—oh, my vanity!—I rating
Never a glance, she turned the glow
Of her young eagerness upon another—
The actor lately, by the critics noised:
My ‘perfect, complementary Romeo’!”

"And note—this golden key
Unlocked for me the freedom of a city
Owning a theatre of famed antiquity—
Agony to play in, but a required ordeal
For one who aimed to rise above the level.
There was a civic luncheon—usually
One of the milder forms of revel—
And I in sapphire velvet, gown and hat,
So perfectly turned out it seemed a pity
The burghers were—not to be too precise—
A trifle fat;
And one, sampling too generously
The wine—of the same vintage as the town—
Emptied the contents of his plate—soupe tortle—
Over my sapphire gown."

Who keeps the gift of laughter
Secure from harm or let
May hold undreamed-of treasure
Snared in a golden net.

And where sweet laughter havens
There is no "young" or "old,"
But oh! so warm assurance
Against the creeping cold.

Section IV

VIENNA INTERLUDE

A CROSS the tapestry of time for everyone
A few gold strands lighten the dark, or dun
Monotony; and Doro-Lynd's strands of gold—
All the harlequin gifts of fame—
Are many. And now the years are ten, as told
From her hour of wondering: "Is there more, no more?"
Her questioning the tempest of acclaim:
"Doro-Lynd, Doro-Lynd, Juliet!
She is the realest Juliet of them all!"

Again the tide of questioning has arisen;
And so the pregnant, the still vital years, await
The toss of that decision.

“There is no dream so rare, so glittering
But flowers in old Vienna. Within the Ring
That marks the Roman wall, above the fabled River,
The towers are gold, and through the palaces mazurkas hum,
And the light laugh flutes. High in the Belvedere
I'll rest and watch the city pass. 'Let me wait here.
Our friend will like the galleries and the museum.'”

“Charming, the Baron; distinguished, and a Jew.
The Jew is famed for faithfulness in love.
Christian or Jew? Yet have I been so Christian?
Husband and child and home left, to pursue
An arid firefly gleam. Brightly filtering through
The chestnut boughs I see a procession move—
Sweet wreaths of lilac and syringa swinging,
And the sweet sound of thin young voices singing.
But now the voice of youth cuts like a knife.
Beyond the hills green forests mark his lands;
His people will be my people, and my life
Grow warm in forwarding their happiness.”

“The green of forests, green of the chestnut trees—
Frivolous with their blossomed heads, however old—
And the dark pines of home.
But Michael sleeps beneath their canopies,
And we shall never walk the hill again.
Not mine the role of unloved penitent returning,
So does the whisper of the pines grow weak,
For I have stood too high for such late unlearning,
So have I lost the key to the tongue they speak.”

“Listen—above all sounds, distant yet so compelling,
Rings in my ears the inexorable belling
Of the hungry pack of years.
Love and security, a noble house;
And, too, Vienna, where no lady dwells too old and plain
To lack the invitation to the dance, the perhaps vain
But grateful compliment. And the joy—feverish?
Who is the woman questions the voluptuous swish
Of artificial skein?”

“Soon in the theatre my sun will set;
So let it be: 'Down youth, and the brittle bauble fame;
And up, Vienna, and some nobler and more useful aim.'
'Yes, I am coming, Leo, down the long stairs.'
How many stairs I have climbed for this descending,
To find fulfilment yet
If I, and so late, may learn the art of giving,
The real, the ultimate secret of all living.”

Section V

DORO-LYND COMES HOME

THE wings of war are lowering, and again
The number of the garnered years is ten.
The "Anschluss" on the chronicles of Austria
Has soiled its despicable page,
And the haunted Jew, with his rich heritage,
His art and artifice, is moving on.
So Doro-Lynd's fate forsakes its meteor path;
For her, as for the meanest prodigal,
Home is the last post to the aftermath.

"Son—you are kind—I almost feared to come.
Air—I feel faint—is there no air?"

'The casements! Throw them wide. I'll lift her—so.'

"The pines—again I hear the old pines speak;
Their healing breath is around me. Is it fall?
Fall, and the pines, and—Michael—you are there.
I see your bright wind-riffled hair,
And feel your kiss. Your arms are strong—
And yet I left you—hearing a far call,
Seeing the bright mirage of fame.
My Michael—it has been so long.
No—I remember—you lie now—*beneath* the pines;
And I—have been through Hell! I, married to a Jew
In that grim madman's land—air—I need air—
But now—home—for I can smell the pines.

"How my breast burns. The murmur of the pines—
The faint beginning of the foam
Of voices in the theatre—hear them call:
'Doro-Lynd, Doro-Lynd, Juliet!
She is the realest Juliet of them all!'
Young I was then; slim in my satin gown; white-gloved.
I have been great; I have been much loved;
I have come home.

"It is so clean here, honest and so new;
Far from the murderous rage
Of nations lusting for power, corrupt with age.
There—we huddled together, sick with fears,
Day after day as brutal death swept by.

Then our time came; 'The Baron, see, he runs!
Stick the fat pig! Trade his lands for a thousand guns!
My hands before my face—I dare not look;
The shriek that rings and rings, still, in my ears!
Poor Leo, all your crime—to be a Jew.

“ ‘Hold her—the Baroness!’ Old Hans, protecting me,
They wrenched away. Oh! I was cruelly struck.
I feel it—here in my breast—it burns so.
‘Wait, she is English. Let the woman go—
Her and her Jewish crew.’
‘Pah! a Colonial.’ ‘Let her go, I say.
The arm of England reaches everywhere;
We would be friends with England—yet.’
So were my rings left, and the nestling pearls
Beneath my scarf; and paid for food—
Food for my poor ones, passage aboard the ship,
And brought me here—here to my pines—oh—air—”

‘Lift her! Bring water! We were warned
She should not talk.’
“It will not harm me now, my Michael’s son.
Is there a sound like crying in the pines?
Please do not mourn—soon I shall be quite well.
The smell of pine trees is so clean a smell.
Clean—I was weak—so weak—but trying not to mind
Stale clothes, the reek of bodies in the crowded train—
They pushed us in, they herded us like beasts.
The wails of children—oh, so quickly hushed;
‘Our lady, you will wake her.’ They were good to me,
Poor exiles—all they had to give.
They are my legacy—will you take them in?
They have a right to live.
The burning—in my breast—is gone.
Clean—my own land—pray God to keep it clean.
Fall, and the pines. Michael—I have—come home.”

The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books

Lorne Pierce—Editor

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