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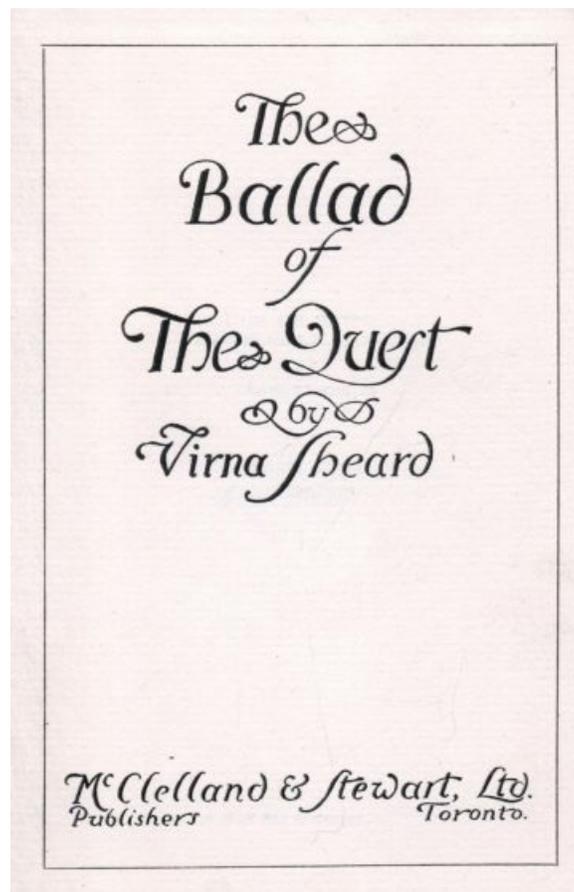
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The
Ballad
of
The Quest

by
Virna Sheard

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*To the sweet memory
of my Mother*

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CONTENTS

[The Ballad of the Quest](#)
[A Song of Poppies](#)
[The Shepherd Wind](#)
[In Solitude](#)
[The Slumber Angel](#)
[At Midnight](#)
[Dreams](#)
[A Southern Lullaby](#)
[When Jonquils Blow](#)
[Lament](#)
[The Sea](#)
[The Cry](#)
[The Bridge of Dreams](#)
[The Shells](#)
[Requiem](#)
[The Crosses](#)
[The Lonely Road](#)
[To One Who Sleeps](#)
[April Again!](#)
[Histories](#)
[Fireflies](#)
[The Vanished](#)
[Pathfinders](#)
[The Call](#)
[Before the Dawn](#)
[The Fairy Clock](#)
[The Temple](#)
[The Whistler](#)
[March](#)
[On Silver Nights](#)
[The Birth-Right](#)
[A Love Song](#)
[A Song](#)
[The Night of all Saints](#)
[In the Last Year](#)
[Ships](#)
[June](#)
[October Goes](#)
[The Lily-Pond](#)

"Some day," I said, "before Life is over,
I will shut my house door, and will be a rover."

Under the sky where the great stars roll,
I will search for my faith, and search for my soul.

I have fared without them this many a day
Through the market-place of the world's high-way.

The truth I gave in exchange for a lie,
And I bartered my dreams to a passer-by.

I have met Delilah,—her enchantments I know
As the man of strength knew them ages ago.

Fool's gold and fool's joy have been my reaping,
And my heart has nothing that's worth the keeping.

But the world is wide and the world is free,
And the things I have lost may come back to me.

I will follow the path of the bird that flies,
And look for a woman with honest eyes.

If I travel hard, and travel alone,
I may overtake Peace, and make it my own.

Only the Sun and the Moon's sweet light
Shall mark my day, or measure my night.

Silks and satins and embroidered things,
I'll exchange for blossoms and butter-flies' wings.

And under a thorn-hedge I will dine
On a handful of berries, as red as wine.

Or I'll earn my bread on the out-bound ships,
With the sun in my eyes, and salt on my lips.

And for the softness of beds and pillows,
I'll take a hammock that swings with the billows.

It may be the trail will lead me afar
To mountain paths, where the wild sheep are.

Or with simple people, and free from guile,
I will pitch my tent and will rest awhile.

I am weary of softness and things of ease,
And weary of Scribes, and of Pharisees.

On a morning road where the wind is strong,
I may learn again to whistle a song.

Down forest paths, or the ways of the sea,
My soul and my faith may come back to me.

And always and ever beneath the skies,
I will look for a woman with honest eyes.

I will follow no will at all but my own,
And the road I take I will take alone.

"Some day," I said, "before Life is over,
I will shut my house door, and will be a rover."

* * * * *

II

But the day when it came was a troubled day,
And the road I took was a troubled way.

Then never a will I had of my own,
And never a step did I travel alone.

We marched by day, and we marched by night,
Through the Sun's hot gold, or the Moon's cool light.

We marched with laughter, we marched with song,
Or in dreadful silence we marched along.

The man at my right cursed low at his fate,
The man at my left smiled early and late.

And the faces I saw at the edge of day,
Were young, young faces, turned old and grey.

The field where poppies flashed red in the wheat,
Was a hell we tramped through on stumbling feet.

I forgot I had said "before Life is over,
I will shut my house door, and will be a rover."

Out on the roads where the guns took toll
I gave little heed to my faith, or my soul.

In the trenches where only the dead could rest,
Life was a candle-flame—Death was a jest.

The stars swung round in a blood-red sky,
And the earth was red where the men reeled by.

I laughed—for I was living and strong,—
And I tossed them the line of a battle song.

May-day came in,—but the sweet o' the Spring,—
Who should know there was any such thing?

For the lovers were gone, who used to know
The English lanes where the hawthorns blow—

And the lovers from lands far over the sea,—
Ah! The watching moon only, knew where they might be.

I shook my impotent hand at the sky,
And travelled on with a battle cry.

* * * * *

III

On a desperate night—bitter black with pain,—
My soul returned to haunt me again.

We two kept vigil till break of day,
But the moon bore witness, I did not pray.

I dreamt I drifted with a name on my lips,
Where the clouds were sea waves, and the stars little ships.

I dreamt,—and lay on the shell-bitten sod,
Like a thing that had been forgotten of God.

I saw the smoke of the battle roll
Over many a swift departing soul,—

But when the dawn was a violet tide,
A shadow came and knelt at my side.

No—not a shadow—or mystery—
But a rose of the darkness, she came to me.

Mist-grey was her gown, and about her head
Was a shining band with a cross of red.

Her eyes were closed, for she dared not see
What the guns and the dark had made of me.

So I caught her gown in fear she would pass,
Like a lovely shadow, across the grass.

"Who are you?" I cried, "who have found me here
Where I have lain, this year upon year?"

"No! No! but one night, beloved,"—she said,
"While I searched for you all among the dead.

"But you were so strong you could not die,
Though Azrael touched you as he passed by."

And then by a flame that lit up the skies,
I looked once again in Delilah's eyes.

They had out-lived fear, and were sweet, and deep
As the eyes of an Angel, who bringeth sleep.

"O brave one!" she said, "You soon shall see
From your thirst and your pain I can set you free!

"Here! The water flask!—I will lift your head,—

Drink if you will, and spare not," she said.

"Be patient, and wait! See here in your arm,
The poppies of God shall work their charm."

So she spoke, while her voice seemed faint and far
As though it drifted down from a star.

"I have come," she faltered, "belovéd at last"—
"Even so"—I said, "from the long-gone past.

"I would know," I cried, "how you came to me
Through this hell where no woman should ever be?"

"I heard you call," she answered, "and then
I followed the road of the out-bound men.

"I followed the bearers, for far—and far,—
They travel wherever the wounded are.

"Picket and sentry, and the men who fly,
Made the holy sign as I hurried by."

"Here and there where the grass was red,
I stopped for a moment beside the dead.

"I pressed my lips to their tunic's hem,—
And often I folded the hands of them.

"But I could not stay,—and when dawn was near,
You called again—and I found you here."

"O Sweet—no more!" I said. "Tell me no more!
For Peace has come in through the morning's door.

"There is only this at the end of my quest—
Only you—and Love—and a spirit at rest."

* * * * *

Then came the bearers to lift me away—
But beside me her shadow moved—tender and grey.

A SONG OF POPPIES

I love red poppies! Imperial red poppies!
Sun-worshippers are they;
Gladly as trees live through a hundred summers
They live one little day.

I love red poppies! Impassioned scarlet poppies!
Even their strange perfume

Seems like an essence brewed by fairy people,
From an immortal bloom.

I love red poppies! Red, silken, swaying poppies!
Deep in their hearts they keep
A magic cure for woe,—a draught of Lethe,—
A lotus-gift of sleep.

I love red poppies! Soft silver-stemmed, red poppies,
That from the rain and sun,
Gather a balm to heal some earth-born sorrow,
When their glad day is done.

THE SHEPHERD WIND

When hills and plains are powdered white,
And bitter cold the north wind blows,
Upon my window in the night
A fairy-garden grows.

Here lilies that no hand hath sown
Bloom white as foam upon the sea,
And elfin bells to earth unknown,
Hold frost-bound melody.

And here are blossoms like to stars
Tangled in nets of silver lace,—
My very breath their beauty mars,
Or stirs them from their place.

Perchance the echoes of old songs,
Found here a resting place at last,
With drifting perfume, that belongs
To roses of the past,—

Or all the moonbeams that were lost
On summer nights the world forgets,
May here be prisoned by the frost,
With souls of violets.

* * * * *

The wind doth shepherd many things,—
And when the nights are long and cold,
Who knows how strange a flock he brings
All safely to the fold.

IN SOLITUDE

He is not all alone whose ship is sailing
Over the mystery of an unknown sea,
For some great Love with faithfulness unailing
Will light the stars to bear him company.

Out in the silence of the mountain passes,
The heart makes peace and liberty its own,—
The wind that blows across the scented grasses
Bringing the balm of sleep,—comes not alone.

Beneath the vast illimitable spaces,
Where God has set His jewels in array,
A man may pitch his tent in desert places,
Yet know that heaven is not so far away.

But in the city—in the lighted city—
Where gilded spires point toward the sky,
And fluttering rags and hunger ask for pity,
Grey Loneliness in cloth-of-gold, goes by.

THE SLUMBER ANGEL

When day is ended, and grey twilight flies
On silent wings across the tired land,
The Slumber-Angel cometh from the skies,—
The Slumber-Angel of the peaceful eyes,
And with the scarlet poppies in his hand.

His robes are dappled like the moonlit seas,
His hair in waves of silver floats afar;
He weareth lotus-bloom, and sweet heartsease,
With tassels of the rustling, green fir trees,
As down the dusk he steps from star to star.

Above the world he swings his curfew bell,
And sleep falls soft on golden heads and white;
The daisies curl their leaves beneath his spell,—
The prisoner who wearies in his cell
Forgets awhile, and dreams throughout the night.

* * * * *

Even so, in peace, comes that great Lord of rest
Who crowneth men with amaranthine flowers;
Who telleth them the truths they have but guessed,
Who giveth them the things they love the best,
Beyond this restless, rocking world of ours.

AT MIDNIGHT

Turn Thou the key upon our thoughts, dear Lord,
And let us sleep;
Give us our portion of forgetfulness,
Silent and deep.

Lay Thou Thy quiet hand upon our eyes,
To close their sight;
Shut out the shining of the moon, and stars,
And candle-light.

Keep back the phantoms and the visions sad,—
The shades of grey,—
The fancies that so haunt the little hours
Before the day.

Quiet the time-worn questions that are all
Unanswered yet;
Take from the spent and troubled souls of us
Their vain regret;

And lead us far into Thy silent land,
That we may go,
Like children out across the field o' dreams,
Where poppies blow.

So all Thy saints—and all Thy sinners, too—
Wilt Thou not keep,
Since not alone unto Thy well-beloved
Thou givest sleep?

DREAMS

Keep thou thy dreams—though joy should pass thee by;
Hold to the rainbow beauty of thy thought;
It is for dreams that men will oft-times die,—
And count the passing pain of death as nought.

Keep thou thy dreams, though faith should faint and fail,
And time should loose thy fingers from the creeds;
The vision of the Christ will still avail,
To lead thee on to truth and tender deeds.

Keep thou thy dreams, through all the winter's cold;
When weeds are withered, and the garden grey,
Dream thou of roses with their hearts of gold;—
Beckon to summers that are on their way!

Keep thou thy dreams;—the tissue of all wings
Is woven first of them; from dreams are made
The precious and imperishable things,
Whose loveliness lives on, and does not fade.

A SOUTHERN LULLABY

Little honey baby, shet yo' eyes up tight;—
(Shadow-man is comin' from de moon!)—
You's as sweet as roses if dey *is* so pink an white;
(Shadow-man'll get here mighty soon.)

Little honey baby, keep yo' 'footses still!—
(Rocky-bye, oh, rocky, rocky-bye!)
Hush yo' now, an listen to dat lonesome whip-po'-will;
Don't yo fix yo' lip an start to cry!

Little honey baby, stop dat winkin' quick!
(Hear de hoot-owl in de cotton-wood!)
Yess—I sees yo' eyes adoin' dat dere triflin' trick,—
(He gets chillun if dey isn't good.)

Little honey baby, what yo' think yo' see?—
(Sister keep on climbin' to de sky—)
Dat's a June bug—it ain't got no stinger, lak a bee,—
(Reach de glory city by-an-by.)

Little honey baby, what yo' skeery at?—
(Go down, Moses—down to Phar-e-oh!)—
No—dat isn't nuffin but a furry fly-round bat;—
(Say, he'd betta let dose people go.)

Little honey baby, yo' is all ma own,—
Deed yo' is.—Yes,—dat's a fia-fly;—
If I didn't hab yo',—reckon I'd be all alone;
(Rocky-bye—oh, rocky, rocky-bye.)

Little honey baby, shet yo' eyes up tight;—
(Shadow man is comin' from de moon,)
You's as sweet as roses, if dey is so pink and white;
(Shadow-man'll get here mighty soon.)

The lines in brackets are supposed to be sung or chanted. The Southern "Mammy" seldom sang a song through, but interlaced it with comments.—V.S.

WHEN JONQUILS BLOW

When jonquils blow I think of one
Who sleeps beneath the green;
And all the light and song of life
And all the golden sheen,
Turn cold and still before my eyes,
While pearl-edged boughs of May
Seen through a sudden mist of tears
Are rimmed with ashen-gray.

LAMENT

Here in my garden where the tulips grow
I walk alone;
Dim are my eyes with tears, my feet are slow,
My heart is stone;
Though all the lovely earth again for me
New sweetness yields
It matters not,—only the dead I see
On battlefields.

Only the dead I see,—and strangely bright
Their faces shine
As though the God of Glory in the night
Had made them fine.
Place for the victors! Stoop my soul to touch
Their tunics' hem,—
'Tis those they loved who need tears overmuch
O weep for them!

THE SEA

The sea is but a cradle wide and deep,—
A cradle that the moon rocks to and fro;
What peace they find who there fall fast asleep,
What lovely dreams,—'Tis not for us to know.

But God hath sent the angel of the sea
To sing to them an endless lullaby;
And that they may not dread night's mystery,
He lights for them the candles of the sky.

They are infolded by the silken waves,
And wrapped in shining blue, and emerald green;
They drift through opalescent ocean caves,

That only God Himself hath ever seen.

The great salt wind that no man holds in thrall,
Touches them softly, as it passes by;—
I think the silver sea gulls know them all,
And greet them with their lonely tender cry.

For but a little, little round of years,
The sweet sun-sprinkled foam will be their bed,
And they will slumber—hushed from any fears—
To waken, when the sea gives up her dead.

THE CRY

They have laid him away;
Even he who was always so strong and gay
Will be locked in the earth till the judgment day;
"Dust unto dust" I have heard the priest say.

He will never return;
Though I weep my eyes blind, though I pray and yearn,—
Though the star-light goes out and the great suns burn
Into whitest ash,—he will never return.

So of weeping—no more;
It is tears fill the oceans from shore to shore;
They have made the wind salt—the wind at my door;
They harm the good ground—so of weeping—no more.

"Not again!" "Not again!"
Do you hear the sea singing that one refrain?
The pine trees, the wind and the wearysome rain
All whisper it; "Never again!"—"Not again!"

Who can tell me—who knows,
Where his lonely soul travels?
Whither it goes?—
Has he gone like the leaves?—Like yesterday's snows?—
Speak, dear Lord of Death! You who died—and arose!

THE BRIDGE OF DREAMS

The thought of thee is like a swinging tune,
A little swinging tune I seem to hear;
The thought of thee is like the breeze of June
Blowing across the winter of the year!

The thought of thee is like a golden star
Set all alone within the midnight blue;—
A heaven-lit candle shining from afar
Upon the road that we are passing through.

The thought of thee is like the woods in spring,
With silver-grey and silver-green o'erset;
The thought of thee is what the four winds bring
Over the banks of wild-blown mignonette.

And all the music of the twilight sea,
Echoes thy voice in tender undertone;
The sea-gulls seem but grey-winged thoughts of thee,
Caught on the salted wing and homeward blown!

God keeps the secret of His heaven well,—
But Azrael finds its gates, where'er they be;
And from the earth, to fields of Asphodel,
I build a bridge of dreams, and cross to thee.

THE SHELLS

O my brave heart! O my strong heart! My sweet heart and gay,
The soul of me went with you the hour you marched away,
For surely she is soulless, this woman white, and still,
Who works with shining metal to make the things that kill.

I tremble as I touch them,—so strange they are, and bright;
Each one will be a comet to break the purple night;—
Grey Fear will ride before it, and Death will ride behind:
The sound of it will deafen,—the light of it will blind!

And whom it meets in passing, but God alone will know.
Each one will blaze a trail in blood—will hew a road of woe;
O when the fear is on me, my heart grows faint and cold;—
I dare not think of what I do,—of what my fingers, hold!

Then sounds a Voice, "Arise, and make the weapons of the Lord!"
"He rides upon the whirlwind! He hath need of shell, and sword!
His army is a mighty host—the lovely and the strong,—
They follow Him to battle, with trumpet and with song!"

O my brave heart! My strong heart! My sweet heart and dear,—
'Tis not for me to falter,—'Tis not for me to fear;—
Across the utmost barrier—wherever you may be,—
With joy unspent, and deathless, my soul will follow thee!

REQUIEM

Weep for the dead; weep for the swift slain dead,
November skies;
Too few the tears that day and night are shed
From women's eyes.

Blow o'er them lightly with a soft caress,
Wind of the sea;
If you are tender they may miss love less—
Where'er they be.

Come, gentle moon, swing low your lantern light
On reddened fields,
And find the lonely harvest of the night
That battle yields.

Banish the darkness filled with quivering dread,
Lest they should know
Some last strange horror,—even they—the dead;—
Sweet moon, swing low!

Fold them at dawn, dear Earth, within your arms
So safe and strong;
Hold them asleep till they forget alarms,
And woe and wrong.

Master of Kings! If peace be bought with pain,
These paid the price;
O show Thy tortured world that not in vain,
Is sacrifice!

THE CROSSES

The little lonely crosses, the crosses low and white,
They haunt me most in the silver hour
That lies against the night;
Or when the rose-dusk dawn comes in,
With a star for candlelight.

The little lonely crosses in fields so far away,
They cast a shadow on my path—
And, take which road I may,
It follows, follows, follows—
Throughout the livelong day.

O little lonely crosses that gentle hands have made,
You mean to us forevermore
The price that has been paid
For a heritage of Freedom,
And a People unafraid.

So, as a Pilgrim to his shrine, in dreams I rise and go,
To find the popped place of sleep,
And the crosses row on row;
The crosses carved with names beloved,
The crosses white and low.

THE LONELY ROAD

We used to fear the lonely road
That twisted round the hill;
It dipped down to the river-way,
And passed the haunted mill,
And then crept on, until it reached
The churchyard, green and still.

No pipers ever took that road,—
No gipsies, brown and gay;—
No shepherds with their gentle flocks,—
No loads of scented hay;—
No market-wagons jingled by
On any Saturday.

The dog-wood there flung wide its stars
In April, silvery sweet;
The squirrels crossed that path all day
On tiny flying feet;
The wild, brown rabbits knew each turn,
Each shadowy safe retreat.

And there the golden-belted bee
Sang his sweet summer song;
The crickets chirped there to the moon
With steady note and strong;
Till cold and silence wrapped them round
When autumn nights grew long.

But, oh! they brought the lonely dead
Along that quiet way,
With strange procession, dark and slow,
On sunny days and grey;
We used to watch them, wonder-eyed,
Nor care again to play,—

And we forgot each merry jest;
The birds on bush and tree
Silenced the song within their throats,
And with us watched to see,
The soft, slow passing out of sight
Of that dark mystery.

We fear no more the lonely road
That winds around the hill;
Far from the busy world's highway
And the gods' slow-grinding mill;
It only seems a peaceful path,
Pleasant, and green, and still.

TO ONE WHO SLEEPS

Fare not too far, my own,
Down ways all strange and new,
For I must find alone,
The road that leads to you.

Enchantments may arise
To lure thy little feet,
And charm thy wondering eyes;—
Yet,—wait for me, my sweet!

Already Earth doth seem
A phantom place to me,
And thy far home of dream,
Is my reality.

So this is just "good-night";—
Some stars will rise and wane,—
But sure as comes the light,
I'll be with thee again!

APRIL AGAIN!

April again! the willow wands are yellow
Rose-red the brambles that the passing wind knows,
Comes a robin's note like the note of a 'cello,
And across the valley, the calling of the crows,—
"April again!"

April again! and the marsh birds swinging
Over the rushes that belong to yester-year;
Silver shines the river, and young lips are singing
Songs as old as Eden—as old and as dear;
"April again!"

April again! with a wet wind blowing,
And along the western sky a pathway of gold;
Sounds a call to follow the road we're not knowing,
A new road—a wild road—o'er fairy lands unrolled,—

"April again!"

April again! with its wonder of gladness,
April with its haunting joy, and swift-stinging tears,—
Month of mist and music, and the old moon-madness,
Month of magic fluting, the spirit only hears,—
"April again!"

HISTORIES

I weary of the histories of men—
The garnered store of books in grim array;
Life's bitter salvage, leather-bound, and then
Left to the silence and a bloom of gray.

I weary of the stories that they hold;
The clash of arms sounds through them like a knell;
I weary of the Kings in crowns of gold,
The Kings victorious, and the Kings who fell.

There are too many tears on every page;
Too red a tide sweeps every chapter in;
There is no word of peace in any age,
Except the peace that death rode forth to win.

And old unhappiness, long wrapped in sleep,
And thrice-armed feud that passed in wrath and woe,
And white despair from many a dungeon keep,
Arise to haunt us still, where'er we go.

Yet through the years the sun was warm and sweet,
And pipers piped at morn, and night and noon,—
And there was carnival with dancing feet,
And love and joyance always came in June,—

O, to remember when the pages close—
Linked with the vision of the deathless brave,—
The nightingale, the moonlight, and the rose,
And all the beauty that the lost years gave!

FIREFLIES

(From an old Italian Legend)

True lovers' words are deathless things;
Eros, the little god, and wise,
Catches them all,—gives to them wings,

And turns them into fireflies!

Words that are sweet as a caress,
And wild, bright words no will can tame;
Soft words of haunting tenderness,—
Words that are like a blue-white flame.

The magic word, the jewelled word,
The word that hides a thousand fears,—
These all the perfumed winds have heard,
Through all the immemorial years!

Not one is lost;—by old sea walls,
And over beds of mignonette,
And through lost lanes,—when darkness falls,
In loveliness they sparkle yet.

* * * * *

Then down the velvet sea of night,
Like little lighted ships asail,
They pass away, and out of sight,—
Companioned by the nightingale.

THE VANISHED

I grieve to think the little gods have vanished,—
The half-gods with the vine-leaves in their hair;
I sorrow much the goat-foot Pan is banished,
And that the Dryads are not anywhere.

The shrine of Flora has no need of flowers,—
Diana seeks her arrows in the sky;
Apollo's beauty was a thing of hours—
And Artemis, herself, learned how to die.

I think Endymion released from sleeping,
Walks through the star-dust at the heaven's rim,
For he is gone—though still the Moon is keeping
Her tireless and beloved watch for him.

On river banks the purple grapes are growing,
But Bacchus and his merry train have passed.
Where are the little Fauns—I would be knowing?
In all the world who heard and saw them last?

If but the small grey elves were still astraying,
Where shadows lace the golden forest ways,
What joy to meet them, and be long delaying
The sombre tasks that fill the working days!

* * * * *

I grieve to think the little gods have vanished,—
The half-gods with the vine-leaves in their hair;—
I sorrow much the goat-foot Pan is banished,
And that the Dryads are not anywhere.

PATHFINDERS

These were the men of the restless heart;—
The brothers to wind and tide;—
They followed the lure of the far away,
And they saw a vision by night and day,
Of lands that were free and wide.

They blazed the long and desolate trail,
And set their mark on the trees;
And sometimes only the star of the North,
Guided their little, lone ships that set forth
Upon the uncharted seas.

They marked a road through the shifting sand
Where never a road had led,—
And beneath the pavilions of the sky,
In a deep and abiding peace they lie
With the world forgotten dead.

The ice of the Arctic shut them in
And locked its crystalline doors;—
Or it may be a tide that was hot, and slow,
Drifted them in where sea-grasses grow,
On sun-bleached tropical shores.

They journeyed beyond the shadow of fear,
And past the ghost of despair;—
On the coasts of coral they made their bed,
Or they fell asleep where the ground was red,
And grey wings shadowed the air.

High adventurers! Gentlemen all!
Knights of the golden code;—
That we might ride softly, you rode hard,—
That we might go safely,—you without guard
Followed the perilous road!

THE CALL

Come to me out of the night,
In any way that you will,
As a radiance, unspeakably bright—
Or a shadow, close-hooded and still;
Nothing will touch me of fear—
Harken! I make thee my vow!—
Out of the darkness, my dear,
Come to me now!

This is the old haunted place,—
Haunted by ghosts of spent hours:
Decked by the ivy's green lace,
Sweet with the dusk-opened flowers;
This is the garden you know,
Moon-touched, and tranquil and dear,—
I, alone, walk to and fro,—
Come to me here!

BEFORE THE DAWN

In that one darkest hour, before the dawn is here,
Each soul of us goes sailing, close to the coast of Fear.

There in the windless quiet, from out the folded black,
The things we have forgotten—or would forget—come back.

Old sorrows, long abandoned, or kept with lock and key,
Steal from their prison places to bear us company.

All softly come our little sins—our scarlet sins—and gray.
To keep with us a vigil till breaking of the day.

And there are velvet footsteps; or oft we seem to hear
Light garments brush against the dark; so near—so very near!

From out the red confusion where men long watches keep,
New shadows come—we know they come—and in the dark we weep.

Then heavily, as weighed by tears, each haunted moment goes,
For dawn steps down the morning sky, in robes of gray and rose.

O fairies of the forest-ring, and little men in green,
And pixies of the moonlight, and elves no eye hath seen,
Brew us a magic potion, of deep and fairy power,
A draught of Lethe—for one night—to tide us past that hour.

THE FAIRY CLOCK

Silver clock! O silver clock! tell to me the time o' day!
Is there yet a little hour left for us to work and play?
Tell me when the sun will set—tiny globe of silver-grey?

It has been so glad a world since the coming of the morn;—
Oft I wondered, when I met any souls who seemed forlorn;
And I scarce gave heed to those who were old or travel worn.

Mayhap I have loved too well all the merry fleeting things;
Run too lightly with the wind,—chased too many shining wings;
Thought too seldom of the night, and the silence that it brings.

Well I fear me I have been but an idler in the sun;
All unfinished are the tasks long and long ago begun;—
In the dark perchance they weep, who have left their work undone.

And I know each black-frocked friar preacheth sermons that, alas!
Fain would halt the dancing feet of those careless ones who pass,
Down a sweet and primrose path, through the ribbons of the grass.

Silver-clock! O Silver-clock! It was only yesterday
Dandelions flecked the field, starry-bright and gold and gay;
You are but the ghost of one—little globe of silver-grey!

Tell me—tell me of the hour,—for there is so much to do!
Is it early? Is it late? Fairy-clock! O tell me true,
As I blow you down the wind, out upon a road of blue!

THE TEMPLE

Enter the temple beautiful! The house not made with hands!
Rain-washed and green, wind-swept and clean,
 Beneath the blue it stands,
And no cathedral anywhere
Seemeth so holy or so fair.

It hath no heavy gabled roof, no door with lock and key;
No window-bars shut out the stars,
 The aisles are wide and free;—
Here through the night each altar-light
Is but a moon-beam, silver-white.

Silently as the temple grew at Solomon's command,—
Still as things seem within a dream,
 This rose from out the land;—
And all the pillars, grey and high,
Lifted their arches to the sky.

Here is the perfume of the leaves, the incense of the pines,—
The magic scent, that hath been pent,
 Within the tangled vines:

No censor filled with spices rare
E'er swung such sweetness on the air!

And all the golden gloom of it holdeth no haunting fear,
For it is blessed, and giveth rest
 To those who enter here;—
Here in the evening—who can know
But God Himself walks to and fro!

And music past all mastering within the chancel rings;
None could desire a sweeter choir,
 Than this—that soars and sings,—
Till far the scented shadows creep,—
And quiet darkness bringeth sleep.

THE WHISTLER

Throughout the sunny day he whistled on his way;—
 Oh, high and low, and gay and sweet,
 The melody rang down the street,
Till all the weary, old and grey,
Smiled at their work, or stopped to say,
 "Now God be thanked that youth is fair,—
 And light of heart, and free from care."

What time the wind blew high, he whistled and went by;—
 Then clarion clear on every side
 The song was scattered far and wide!
Like birds above a storm that fly,
The silver notes soared to the sky;
 "O soul, whose courage does not fail
 But with a song can meet the gale."

And when the rain fell fast, he whistled as he passed;—
 A little tune the whole world knew,—
 A song of love, of love most true;
On through the mist it came at last
To one by sorrow overcast;
 "Dear Christ," she said, "by night and day
 They serve who praise, as well as pray."

Though the great world was white, he whistled in the night;—
 The sky was spangled all with gold,
 The bitter wind was keen and cold,
Yet, dear musician, out of sight,
You still put wintry thoughts to flight,
 For summer follows where you fare,
 O Whistler, so debonair!

And when the fog hung grey, he whistled on his way;—
 The little children in his train

With rosy lips caught up the strain.
Then I, to hear what he might say,
Followed with them, that sombre day.
"Is it for joy of life," quoth I,
"Good sir, you go awhistling by?"
He smiled, and sighed, and shook his head,
"I cheer my own sad heart," he said.

MARCH

Windy March weather, with a lone crow flying,
A little ebony airship careening down the blue,
And high, high above him a wild goose crying,
The leading cry, the clarion cry, that guides his grey lines through!

Windy March weather, with the pine trees singing,
Silver-red the brambles show and silver-green the birch,
And silver-grey a squirrel on a top branch swinging,—
A friendly elf who nods to me from his far perilous perch.

Windy March weather, with the tawny brook that hurries
Eager for the outward rush of rivers to the sea;
A tiny brook sun-dappled, that frets and sings and worries,
A rough adventurous little brook that calls and calls to me!

Windy March weather, and the old spring madness
Tempting us to take the trail that wanders free and far,—
Whispering of magic roads that wind to lands of gladness,
Where vanished joys and lost delights and garnered treasures are!

ON SILVER NIGHTS

On silver nights I cannot sleep;—
The ancient moon from far above,
Bids me arise, and run and keep
A rendezvous with one I love.

And in my heart a little song
Swings to and fro its clear refrain,
While down the stairs I haste along
As though the past were mine again.

Then is my spirit so beguiled
By all the night's white witchery,
That I am kin to all things wild,
And part of all things that are free!—

Then he comes back,—who long ago
Left these green paths his steps had trod;
Yes—he comes back,—I know!—I know!—
Light-footed from the fields of God.

So through the garden and the lane,
And where the lovely grass is deep,
We two go walking once again,—
On silver nights, that banish sleep.

THE BIRTH-RIGHT

Whate'er betides, all beauty still is mine,
I drink—as did the old gods—of its wine!
Though Times should dim my eyes, yet I have seen
The hills and hollows gay with gold and green:
Roses have charmed me with a dear delight,
And Iris brought me joy in cups of white:—
For me the fairies hung on bush and tree
The marvel of the frost's bright filagree
And well I know where at the grey of morn
They threaded dew on cob-web, weed and thorn!
Lights of the Northern skies—and dancing flames,
And flowing seas—your colors have no names!
Day-shine across the uplands how you pass
Chased by the filmy shadows on the grass!
Oh, I have watched the little swallows fly
Down silver reaches of the twilight sky—
While through the Western gates another day
In sweeping golden garments passed away,—
I know how morning hastening from afar
Catches upon her rose-edged robes a star;
And often I have seen at Midnight's hour
The blooming of the Moon's gold wonder-flower.
O look, look, out upon the lovely earth
And take the gift she gave thee at thy birth!
Whate'er betides—all beauty still is thine,—
Drink deep—as did the old gods—of its wine!

A LOVE SONG

Oh haste thee, Sweet! Impatient now I wait,
The crescent moon swings low,—it groweth late,—
A night-bird sings of Life, and Love, and Fate!—

Oh haste, my Sweet! Youth and its gladness goes;

Joy hath one summer time—like to the rose
Love only, lives through all the winter's snows.

So haste, my Sweet! These hours are all our own:
But see!—A rose-leaf on the night-wind blown,—
For thee I wait—for thee I wait alone!—
So haste, my Sweet!

A SONG

O heart of mine—if I were but a swallow—
A thing so fearless, swift of flight, and free—
On wings unwearied I would find and follow
Some path that led to thee!

Were I a rose out in the garden growing
My sweetness I would give the vagrant breeze—
For he, perchance, might meet thee all unknowing—
Yet bring thee memories.

THE NIGHT OF ALL SAINTS

It is an old belief that on the night of All Saints, "Hallowe'en," the spirits of the dead return, so each year there is made a beloved feast.

He will come back across the roads unmeasured—
Lit by old moons and flaming sun and star;
There are so many things he loved and treasured
To call him from afar.

Joy of the distant heaven, howe'er entrancing,
Never could charm him from the earth he knew,
Scent of the rose-leaves—music, mirth and dancing—
He will come back to you.

He will come back—no golden bars can hold him—
He will come back to fire and candle shine;
He will be near, though you may not behold him,
And though he gives no sign.

IN THE LAST YEAR

We are forgetting all the old grey saints,—
A bloom of dust lies on the martyrs' shrines;
From storied windows that the sunlight paints,
We rarely read the dear familiar lines;
They seem a part of things so far away,
These haloed ones—the saints of yesterday.

We are forgetting all the ancient lore
Of time-dimmed battles, with their unnamed dead;
All, all have vanished,—we will nevermore
In dreams unfurl their banners stained with red;
A tidal-wave has drifted them away
Into the limbo of Life's yesterday.

We are forgetting all the mighty men,—
The knights in clanking armor of the past;
We care not that by forest and by fen,
Their fighting done, they soundly slept at last;
They all belong to grief so far away;
The long and bitter tears of yesterday.

We are forgetting all the hours of peace,
The sweet sun-sprinkled hours of gold on green,—
The careless hours we thought could never cease,—
The merriest hours the world has ever seen.
They are so very, very far away,—
Those white untroubled hours of yesterday.

For Death goes to and fro upon the earth;—
It follows in the wake of marching men;
And we who knew the olden peace and mirth,
Will never, never know the same again.
The scented wind across the boughs of May,
Brings but the memory of some yesterday.

SHIPS

The great grey ships! We saw them in our dreaming,
The strong grey ships—the ships of our desire,
Watched by the stars, and by the dawn's white gleaming,
And followed by the winds that never tire.

O, but we trusted them through days of weeping,
Blessed them each one, and bid each one depart
With all the brave we gave into its keeping,
The priceless, garnered treasure of the heart!

Long, long they haunted us when gales were blowing,—
Dim wraiths of ships, like shadows in the rain;—
Little we slept on winter nights of snowing,
Thinking of those who might not sail again.

Yet—dear grey ships—the spirits of the fearless,
Lost many a day beneath the deepest blue,—
The souls of mighty sailors, bright and tearless,
Arose from out the sea to sail with you.

And not alone you kept your banners flying,—
And not alone you met each bitter day,—
For dauntless ones,—unseen, and death-defying,
Swept outward with you on your darkened way!

JUNE

Now by every meadow-side the buttercups blow—
(O June, you are spendthrift of your gold!)
Green are the uplands where the little lambs go,
Green and glad the forests that are old.

Once again the summer weaves on her magic loom,
Cloth of clover,—fairy web of wheat;—
Only Mary's alabaster box of perfume
Ever made the passing wind more sweet.

Even through the city where the dusty roads run,
Blue runs now the river to the sea.
Tender is the twilight when the long day is done,—
Infinite the stars' tranquillity.

Not forever are the rains or the winter snows,
All these past—nor shall be overlong,—
And with every lovely June cometh the rose,
The sweet blue dusk,—a night-bird's wonder-song!

OCTOBER GOES

October goes, and its colors pass:
At dawn there's a silver film on the grass,
And the reeds are shining as pipes of glass,

But yesterweek where the cloud waves rolled
Down a wind-swept sky that was grey, and cold,
Sailed the hunter's moon,—a galleon of gold!

And now in the very depth of the night
It is just a little flame, blown and white,
Or a broken-winged moth on a weary flight.

But the steadfast trees at the forest rim,

And the pines in places scented and dim,
Still wait for one hunter, and watch for him.

And the wind in the branches whispers, "Why?"
And the yellow leaves that go rustling by,
Say only, "Remember," and sigh,—and sigh.

THE LILY-POND

On this little pool where the sun-beams lie,
This tawny gold ring where the shadows die
God doth enamel the blue of His sky.

Through the scented dark when the night wind sighs
He mirrors His stars where the ripples rise
Till they glitter like prisoned fireflies.

'Tis here that the beryl-green leaves uncurl,
And here the lilies uplift and unfurl
Their golden-lined goblets of carven pearl.

When the grey of the eastern sky turns pink,
Through the silver sedge at the pool's low brink
The little lone field-mouse creeps down to drink.

And creatures to whom only God is kind,
The loveless small things, the slow, and the blind,
Soft steal through the rushes, and comfort find.

Oh, restless the river, restless the sea,
Where the great ships go and the dead men be;
The Lily-pond giveth but peace to me.

[End of *The Ballad of The Quest*, by Virna Sheard]