



A FAR LAND

Poems by

MARTHA
OSTENSO

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MARTHA OSTENSO



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To

MY MOTHER

Certain of the poems in this book have appeared in *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse*, *The Measure*, *Voices*, *Contemporary Verse*, *The Canadian Magazine*, *The American Scandinavian Review*, *The Literary Review* of the *New York Evening Post*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, and *Munsey's Magazine*. The author's thanks are due to the editors for their kind permission to reprint them in this book.

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A FAR LAND

A Far Land

DARK cannot blot the dark
In the place I know,
Rain cannot drown the rain,
Wind cannot blow
The wind of that stormed land,
Where stillness falls
On sudden wings, like a band
Of quiet birds on ruined walls.

In Time of First Rain

ONCE again, and once, and once again,
In old returning tenderness,
The earth lies soft beneath dream-walking rain.
The wind grows less,
The light is falling,
And in the dripping air no bird is calling,
Too early in the Spring it is for calling,
For a bird's clear calling,
A cold and clear bird's calling.

Faint lie the fainting frost-dews, pollen-light
Within the hollow, withered lea,
And vanish in the rain as vanish white
Mists utterly.
Oh, stalk unshrouded,
Oh, weed and broken stem that death has crowded
Close beneath the bitter winds, unshrouded,
Grief, woe, unshrouded,
Old sorrow, all unshrouded.

Oh, wistful, darkling wood, you exquisite
Cool comrade of my bliss,
Weave of your glossy limbs a dimmer night
And under this
Shall I lie and listen
To the deep stir where the webbed roots glisten,
To the wet murmur in the underbrush—
Too early is the Spring for the singing thrush—
Too early for the gold viol of the thrush—
Only dark, wet leaves, old leaves that lie
In rainy willow-weft and die.

Blue

THE round, blue sky
Is a great god's eye;
On a day in Spring
Most everything
He sees is blue:
Clear globes of dew
A-swinging deep
Where spiders sleep;
Five robin's eggs;
Two beetle's legs;
A bluebird's wing
And a crocus ring;
A thimble of rain
And a bluer stain
In a blue snail's shell;
Oh, who can tell
Why Spring is blue?
Can you—can you?

Rain from My Window

RAIN is sweeping my front garden. Walk,
Wall, and gate, new grass and tulip bed
Ripple and gleam as the silver broom
Brushes them in swinging, gusty curves.
The gate-posts are vanishing ghosts that loom
High into the lost air. Bees have fled
And grasshoppers, quick-voiced, no longer talk
Within the shallow green of smooth-clipped grass
That leans away to let the sweeper pass.
Satin-collared tulips, fearing stain,
Lay their vesture broad upon the rain
And stiffen like jade wax their frail stems.
The pane is fretted so with running gems
That I can no longer watch this blurred
Silver world the silver rain has stirred.

April

LONG ago when a Jack-in-the-pulpit
Sun-worshipper, green and high
And straight among the bowing fern-fronds,
Was a leaf-bud taller than I,

I met April deep in the forest,
Deep in the green light, all alone,
And she was white as anemone blossoms,
White as anemones dew-blown.

Now I am old, and the Jack-in-the-pulpit
Is almost as tall once more as I;
I seek April deep in the forest,
But only a shadow passes by.

“Sing No More of Camelot”

SING no more of Camelot,
Nor dream of Guinevere—
Glamoured castles fashion not
Sea-green and sun-sheer,

Ebon no barge for white Elaine,
Nor armour Lancelot—
Nor plume a visored steed again
If thou hast once forgot—

If thou hast once forgot the dear
Token of the King—
Who ere he left thee set a tear
For a jewel on thy ring.

In the Pool

I saw a tiny fish like a tiny silver leaf;
I saw a great fish like a great silver leaf.
A path like a silver hair was carved by the tiny fish;
A path like a silver sword was carved by the great fish
Through the pool that was a blood opal in the sunset.
The path like a silver sword
Cut the path like a silver hair,
And a shadow covered all the pool.

Before Storm

Now the tawny unicorn
Beats a path around the moon,
And on the ashen air is borne
A twanging little tune,
A sudden lonely hollow note,
A lofty pool of pausing sound,
Where hot and numb the shadows float
Upward from the ground.
Across the misty moor there flies
Pale as snow and thin as air
With a ghost in both his eyes
A solitary hare.

The Tramp

OPEN wide the door—
What does it matter
That his dusty clothes
Are all a-tatter?
He carries moonlight
On his shoulder—
Open wide the door,
The night grows colder.
Heap the hearth fire,
Seat the stranger near.
Do not cringe, children,
There's naught to fear—
Though he comes and goes
With an alien tongue,
On his ragged sleeve
A thrush has sung.

Fay

Now my grief is spent:
I know that she was fay,
And that was why she went
So quietly away.

Now I weep no more
Where her garments were
For I know she wore
Gowns of gossamer.

Now I have no tears
For her who died so soon,
I know that fairy years
Will outlast the moon.

Now I do not sigh
Where hawthorn blossoms are,
I know that she is nigh
Glimmering like a star.

Monument

THINK of it! A cold grey stone
To help you to remember who
It was you had to bury there,
Who it was had eyes as blue
As cornflowers, and yellow hair
The sun would have been proud to own;
Who it was that caught the Spring
In a fairy net and kept
It in her hand, a singing thing,
All the year until she slept;
A cold grey stone with name and date,
And the years of one so young—
Does it say why the lark is late,
Or why the lark has not yet sung?
Or does it tell the thing it knows
Of one who 'mid the living goes?

The Mourners

THERE is a shadow over the pool,
And under the hushed trees.
There is a chill more than a cool
Breath on the wood berries.
There is a bruise on the white moth's wing,
And a break in the thorn,
And here where the thrush was wont to sing
Is a stillness forlorn.

Oh, let the red of fire blow
Over this haunt of grief.
Oh, let the dark rain take the woe
Of broken wing and leaf.
Oh, let the blind white mists fall
Forever over this place
And the pool and the moth and the thorn forget all
The dream that was her face.

Lexicon

THERE are dark, human things
You know not, simple grasses,
Colder than the cold wings
Of the lone wild duck that passes
Hereover in the late Fall;
Warmer than the warm stain
On the thorn where the tall
Stag winced in swift pain;
Harder than the strange stone
That grows not e'en a brier,
Softer than the mist blown
Athwart marsh-fire.
I have learned dark things
You know not, simple grasses,—
Teach me what your cricket sings
Until my learning passes.

The Farmer's Wife

He will not hear the cuckoo call,
The last faint snow will seal his eyes.
I shall see a lone star fall
Above the bare pine ere he dies.

My own heart and the clock will soon
Alone keep all the silence here—
Unless the foolish, crying loon
Or the chanting wind come near.

He will not hold the soil again
In his two hands, nor will his face
Lift to the power of the rain
That early April brings this place.

To the south his orchard lies,
His naked wheat-field to the west.
And well will *they* know when he dies
He loved me only second best.

Wasteland

HERE the lichens cling
To the grey rocks
Like the faltering
Ragged locks
Of an old she-fox.

Here a narrow band
Of water flows
No broader than a hand:
A black crow's
Quill sailing goes.

Here's a wrinkled grape
Like a blue knot
On a thread—the shape
Of life caught
In the death rot.

Here—listen long—
By windy word
Of reed, nor lacy song
Of wild bird
Is the dumb air stirred.

Here a man may own
His bare soul instead
Of a beauty blown
Rose, 'tis said.
But his soul is dead.

The Return

Oh, strong and faithful and enduring
As my mother's face,
The sowing of the years has wrought
No change in you, no ill,
Wild field that I loved! The generous grace
Of ragweed and of nettle caught
In the ruddy fall of sun
And in the silvering of rain enveils you still,
And here and there a warm rut of the dun
And patient earth with small, slow life is stirring.

Your stiff, pale grass and weedy flowers
Still proudly grow
Innocent of being beautiless—
(Even a little vain,
Trusting no leafed thing could be low
That the sky-born rain would bless)
And Oh! the sunny smell of you—
Of brittle stems, sweet spears long-matted lain
In spider web and gold-pricked dust and dew
Through the dream and languidness of humming hours.

Under the blackbird swartly flying
From west to east,
Under the reach of the lark from north to south
You are my field—the same
Brown curve along the sky—even the least
Brown blade the same. To lay my mouth
On the quiet of your dew sweet face
And hear the deep earth of you call my name—
This is to know that I have found my place—
And the empty years have ended all their crying.

She Who Brings Winter

THE old, bitter witch,
She is older now,
Bitterer now,
And she carries a longer, stronger switch
From a crookeder witch-tree bough.

The mean green eye of the old bitter witch
Is meaner still,
Is greener still,
Than it was when she hid with the toad in the ditch
From the June moon high on the hill.

The hateful black tooth of the old bitter witch
Is more full of hate,
Say the star-folk, of late,
And they pretend it's because of a bowlful of rich
Elf-pudding she stole and she ate.

The old, bitter witch
Is older now,
Is colder now,
For the toad and the elves and the floating moon
Have gone to a place where it's always June,
And the land that they left will be dying soon
'Neath the switch of the witch-tree bough.

Cicily and Captain Q.

I

CICILY and Captain Q.,
Being young and being old,
Wear spectacles of clover dew
Rimmed with magic pollen gold.

Cicily and Captain Q.
On friendly days the wind can see,
With their spectacles of dew
Can spy upon him easily.

Oh, for spectacles of dew!
What he does is found in books,
But Cicily and Captain Q.
Will never tell just how he looks.

II

People smiled and pointed brow-ward,
Shook their heads and winked an eye,
When Captain Q., three-score-and-twenty,
Talking inly, passed them by.

Searching grassward through the garden,
How could plain townspeople know
That he had met a fairy walking
Just there, years and years ago?

III

Cicily thought a good deal about love,
And also some about marriage;
If she were in love, she would walk in a lane,
If married, she'd ride in a carriage.

Fine 'twere, indeed, to canter behind
Horses of bright patent leather.
But horses won't look for clovers four-leafed,
Which is pleasant when two are together.

IV

O Cicily, see what floats in the sun!
Is it of snow and gossamer spun
On the blue hills by the little men
For a wedding gown in the darkling glen?
Or can it be that Grandfather Fay
Stood in the wind till his wig blew away?

On a Stile

I

With lavender sachet,
And ruffles of lace,
And a yellow poke bonnet
Cupping her face,
With pantalets peeping
Demurely below
A rustle of cretonne
Trim ankles to show;
With rosette of pansies
Upon her slim wrist,
And lips made of bud pinks
That ought to be kissed,
Cicily wandered
The asters among,
And pouted, "I'm tired
Of being so young!"
So she glanced cautiously
Round and about,
Lest Aunt Priscilla
Might be walking out.
Then she lifted her hoops
And she scampered a mile
Till she came to the southerly
Side of a stile.

II

With coat-tails a-hanging
Sable and long,
With ivory hand leaning
On oaken cane strong,
And snug kerchief silkily
Muffling a cough,
And silver hair handsome
If most were not off;
With knee crook'd and foot slow
But eye bright on tree
Where high in the top the best
Nuts used to be,
Captain Q. down the lane
Ruefully strolled,
And muttered, "I'm tired
Of being so old!"
So, peering craftily
This way and that,
Lest Daughter be out
To see what he was at,
He flipped his stout cane
And he fished him a mile,
Till he came to the northerly
Side of a stile.

III

And Cicily climbed, and Captain Q. climbed,
And they sat side by side up on high!

The sun grew merry, the wind grew mild,
And a lark laughed out in the sky.

IV

Captain Q. sat him tight,
Captain Q. sat him bold,
And shouted, "I'm tired
Of being so old!"
"Tra la! I'm tired
Of being so young!"
Said C. So they swung
And they swung and they swung!

King

RICH red rooster crowing at the sun,
Bright green grass growing at the sun,
Fat white cow lowing at the sun,
Clean spring wind blowing at the sun
Who wouldn't be the sun?

The Unicorn and the Hippogrif

PITY the Unicorn,
Pity the Hippogrif,
Souls that were never born
Out of the land of If!

One has a golden horn,
One, they say, is golden shod,
Both have the lasting scorn
Of the animals of God!

One has an eye of fire,
One a misty silver wing.
Neither folk on earth would hire
Or buy for anything.

One pastures on the sun,
The other on the moon,
I think the earth will neither one
Visit very soon!

The Meadow

VAIN, the meadow, vain was he,
Listened to the wind, the trickster,
On the baneful first of April—
Could more folly ever be?

Heard him puff of when and where
He had seen the village planning
All to call upon the meadow,
All to see if he were fair.

Summoning the sun and rain,
Swelled the meadow with importance,
Ordered them to dress him gaily,
And to spare nor price nor pain.

Smock of velvet, elfin green,
Pricked in gems of dew at dawning,
Wore he; rows of golden buttons
With blue tassels slipped between.

Never in his mind a doubt;
When men built a picket round him
Sniffed he at the wind and boasted,
“This is just to keep you out.”

Came the day. Came cows and men,
Women, babies, pigs and laces,
Pickles, swains and maids a-giggling;
Turnips, every kind of hen.

Laughing, singing in the air,
Danced the folk on golden buttons,
Trampled they blue dew of tassels,
Oh, it was a jolly fair!

A Cat

How many ages
Of Chinese ancestry
In the fine pages
Of your sleek history
Must there be, feline,
Tortuous mystery?
Skeins of the night that
Silkened the sky
Over dusky pagodas
Glimmering lie
Down your long sides;
And, thinner than water,
Like water glides
Your bland shadow
Along the floor.
How many cinnamon
Blossoms bore
Delicate shade through
Nightingaled hours,
In that remoter
Life that was yours
Down by the yellow,
Asian sea,
In lustrous, mellow
Antiquity?
In towers of jade
And minarets ashen
With dawn, did an idol
Dream and fashion
Your lithe and beautiful
Demoniacal
Movement of fur,
And the curded sound
Of your inward purr?
Where did he find
The gloomy, sunny
Spheres of your eyes,
Like globules of honey?
Under the velvet
Fall of your paws
Needles the light of your
Polished claws. . . .
Were you a Favorite,
Ages ago,
Who purred at an Emperor's
Overthrow?

The Mermaids

SUN cannot see,
Moon cannot spy,
So faint are they,
So deep they lie.
Where sheer waters
Weave and flow,
They glide and wind
In spangled day.
Their webs of hair
With ambers glow,
A dream of silver
Lyres are they.

Their loveliness
Made white and cold
As apples under
Skins of gold
Rain cannot dim,
Nor singing wind
Make lull where walls
Of emerald loom;
Storm cannot flay
Nor darkness blind
Their fixed eyes
In opal gloom.

Soft as a blown
Sea-flower, no word
They breathe on the coral
Like ivory curd,
Where the sunless frond
And pale sea fern
Are ghosts of small
Drowned stars that steal
From their glimmering tombs
And faintly burn
While slow sea shadows
Wreath and wheel.

Here in the sea
Where all things blend
In a sibilant night
That has no end,
Where the gloamy, watrous
Silences twine
And merge in the smooth dark,
Coil in coil,
Where globed sea fruit
Like dim eyes shine,
And the soft fish move
In patterns of oil,

Comes to their ears
A threatening sound
Of tears and bells,
Like the deeply drowned

Hear where the shades
Of sorcery are,
Hear in the glamorous
Coves of the sea:
Floating laughter,
Sweet and far,
And a silver sound
Of eternity.

In Turkistan

In Turkistan, in Turkistan
Beside a cassia-tree there stood
A maiden with a jasper fan
Who blew a flute of sandal-wood.

And she was like a dim cocoon
All wound in mazing gossamer,
Like ivory toys in ivory shoon
Were the little feet of her.

And she was sweet of jessamine
And smooth as honey garnered from
A morning full of purple sheen
In swinging buds of saccharum.

And I would have her for my own
To love beyond a fabled sea,
A golden slave beneath my throne
To shine through veils of lazuli.

To make upon a flute a song
Lighter than a feather's fall,
And like a sunbird sing among
The sunbirds on the palace wall.

* * * * *

In Turkistan, in Turkistan
There vanished in a limpid gleam
Ivory shoon and jasper fan,
Like the dreaming of a dream.

White Feet

Who will come here when I am gone,
And who will visit the fay,
And hear the laugh of the leprechaun
After my day?

Who will follow the nimble path
And the footprints of white birch leaves?
Who will flee the hazel elves' wrath
And lurk where the witch owl grieves?

Who will lie and laugh in the sun
'Neath clusters of bursting blue
Where the sweet globes of wild grapes run
Through aisles of shadow and dew?

And who will have dreams of mist and silk
in the pool where the gold fins sleep?
And who will dip feet as white as milk
Where the pool lies emerald deep?

“What Need Have I”

WHAT need have I
Of a fine house shining
Under the sky,
When a green tree is twining
A roof and four walls for me,
Tenderly, dreamingly?

What could I do
With satins and laces
When the gold and the blue
Of sun-woven places
Clothe me each hour
In the grace of a flower?

What wine is there
I could buy me with money—
As a wood-pool clear,
Golden as honey?
And these two come to me
From the rain and the bee.

But what need have I
Except of sweet living?
Were tree, flower and sky
Not beauty-giving,
Love, you would be
All of beauty to me.

The Fisherman

THEN after all my fishing in the sea
With yellow, yellow nets of maiden's hair
For fishes finical, of ivory
And tortoises beshaded and ghost-rare,

I draw my nets and draw them like a strand
Of silken shine from out the watery light,
And loop them in across the winking sand
And weave of them a gloamy mantle bright

As sun-stones lying in a little pool
And looked upon by the first whitening star.
And now I wander inland where the cool
Calms of dew upon the evening are,

For fishes in the sea are silver-cold
And silver-pale as shavings of the moon,
And I would have a little thrush to hold,
And I would hear a little thrush's tune.

Caution

LET us go dressed in wind
That only the piquant buds of the white birch tree
May see us.

Let us go dressed in rain
That only the sad ghost swaying in the willow tree
May see us.

Let us not garland
The shining, naked bodies of one another,
Lest in the scattered silver of the moon
The white tulip tree blossom green with bitterness.

First Snow

STAND still in this strange, glimmering
Enclosure of whiteness.
There is no living sight nor sound.
A bodiless lightness
Are we, without form or motion,
Buoyant in the soft and slow
Interlacing, mazing ghost-drift
Of the froth-clusters of snow.

We are cloistered with enchantment:
Steep walls of pearl must be
Encircling us. We are alone,
We two. Draw near to me.
What is this waltz of white myriads?
Moths gay-winged with pearl and lace—
Wilderness of cool blossom-birds—
Brief souls of this dim place?

How solitary each descends!
Almost, two meet, then one
With swift preen of crystal pinions
Glides to faint death alone.

Draw near to me, lest we be two,
I, alone, and alone, you.

Romance

HIGH hangs the gauntlet on the wall,
Grey with dust—
The white steed stabled,
The glimmering scimitar sheathed in rust.
Oh, for the dream that knows no fading,
The quest that knows no broken trust!

Far are the hills, and vision-blue,
The window barred,
The strong door bolted.
Argosies of ivory, amber and nard. . . .
Oh, for the wind that knows no prison,
Oh, for the sea that knows no guard!

Adventure now but a flame in a grate—
Fear but fear
Of a hungry morrow.
Gather in from the storm for cheer. . . .
But oh, for the kiss that is not for comfort,
And the unwept sorrows of yesteryear!

On the Way to the Wood

“THERE is nothing for me here,” she said,
“Nothing on earth for me.
For love that was all my day is dead,
There is darkness, I cannot see.

So I shall go into the gloom of the wood,
Green silence will shroud me,” she said.
“And just the red leaves when they drop like blood
Will know that there’s someone dead.”

But toward the wood a sweet-briar caught
In its little bright hand, her gown;
And a stone with a soft eye kindly thought
To stay her, and tripped her down;

And a lark flew over her hair with a song
And a daisy kissed her knee—
“I think my heart has told me wrong.
There is something for me,” said she.

Brushwood

If there be anything of God left in the world
It must be here he walks on full-moon nights.

By day there's not a sorry crow would tilt
A rusty tail upon the broken fence
That now and then leans on the empty air
As if it still kept something in or out.
The sun will show you traces of the flame
That lost seasons since came down the wind
And ate the very souls out of the trees;
Stunted, youngish poplars, overleafed
To hide the truth about their inner selves,
And willows blotched and matted at the roots—
Prayer rugs, you'll say, they're kneeling on.
The grass—it isn't grass. The earth is here
A wasted crone who wears a wig of thatch.
By day the lowest cloud will shun this place.
But when the light has gone, some secret gate
Swings open with the sound of coming wings,
Forgotten dreams steal in and wake the wood—
Perhaps a long gone lover comes and walks
With it and sings a tender little song.
It is a world of dew—and shadow-light,
And darkling shoals of silence where they blend.
And here the million little poplar discs
Quiver like a single misty gem
Fallen from some burdened star to earth.
You may pause and be a giant gnome
In a fairy forest where the dew
Is white wine cupped in shallow chrysoprase.
You may listen farther than the moon
To the enchanted converse of the stars.
You may listen just within the ring
Of glow-worm light you're standing in and hear
A wakeful little cricket's afterthought.
Or you may listen nearer 'til the mist
Encloses but the beating of your heart.

If there be anything of God abroad the earth,
I think he listens here when there's a moon.

The Stranger

SOMETHING—some fearful, unbodied thing haunts her,
See how too-softly she walks.
Something—some near thing and dark thing is listening,
Hear how too-softly she talks.

Something that's shaped like a hazel-tree's shadow
Clings to the ground at her feet.
And hear all about her the wing-sound of swallows
That makes the air hollow and sweet.

Something, some strong thing like wind on a hillside
Has fastened his hand on her wrist.
See, in the gloom how she fades into something
That shrouds her like moonlight and mist.

An Adventure

I WALKED on tiptoe down an empty, listening street
One night before the moon came up.
Not a single live thing like myself I met,
But glancing furtively aside
I caught the blinded houses nudge each other,
And, (believe me) wink.

Then, grinning stilly to myself at what
I thought unusual craft, I knelt
Beside the way and pocketed
A dozen bright, smooth pebbles, without sound.
Soft on tiptoe went I through the dusk,
And tossed the pebbles one by one before me
On the dim, grey-faced wooded walk.
They made a quick, hollow chuckle,
For the boards were raised a distance
From the damp ground.
The blinded houses all relaxed, and sat
Back upon their haunches like trained beasts
Goaded with a prick to good behaviour.

But I saw a shambling, narrow house,
Its paint a-scaling even in the dark,
Who had one slender window high between its gabled roofs.
The window bore no blind, but thrust
Its tall black maw upon the night
With fearful movelessness.
If only it would nudge, or beckon,
Even leer, or sneer! At length I craved
To feel the white of human features fill the jet
Of that eye carved in the night.
Feverishly I gaped, and threw my last
Round pebble down the echoing walk.
And daring not to stoop and gather more
Lest in the trice the sphinx-like window spring
To some appalling life, I broke the moonless spell
That bound the place.

And the brisk click of my heels hurried down
An ordinary street.

Call

SOUL that I loved while in beauty I dwelt with you,
Come to me here,
Here where the wild swan crosses the moon
With a clangor of fear,
And down the steep way of the forest
A white lance shivering throws
Into the heart of the pool
That unfolds like a silver rose.

Soul that I loved, here may we dwell
As light as a golden night-hawk's feather
Curved in the curve of a shadowy shell,
Alone, you and I together.
And only the mysteries of the pool,
Of deeps of sapphire and rainbow shallows,
The flame of a fin and the fire of a scale,
And an olive fleck of sunken shale,
Under the glittering wings of the swallows,
Under the willows bronze in the twilight—
These, only these shall know we are here,
Shall know that we hide in the limpid hollows,
And lie on the edges
Of satin sedges,
And listen alone
To a purple bird singing on a purple stone.

Now over each enfolded thing
Glooms the night as an emerald clear,
And the wind as a fern-flower is dark and cool.
Oh, if you want me, call for me here
And I shall come to you swift as a wing
Swift as a shadow over the pool.

Betrothal

How will you want to find me when you come,
Dear one? (Pride, pride! How dare you ask him that?
Are you not as you are the sweet, sweet sum
Of all his dreaming? and if not, then what?
Ah me!) But I shall be as bright as honey
And cool upon your lips as porcelain. . . .
For old wives tell that maids in matrimony
Must be like apples hanging in the rain.
Or would you have me deaf to them, my dear?
For something tells me that I shall not hear
The simmer of their counsel when the near
Strange warmth of you again shall overbear
And quicken all my blood. Oh, let me wear,
Old wives or none, a red rose in my hair!

“This I Know”

THIS I know, dear, my dear,
I'd prefer to doubt you,
Than to never have you near,
Than to live without you,

Than to know a lonely place
Where you'd no more be going,
With the evening on your face
And a pale star showing,

Than to run to meet you there
My heart away before me,
And not to find you anywhere,
And a pale star o'er me.

The Witch

WHEN you were poor
I was a witch
And stirred my kettle
And made you rich.

Now I have given
You all my gold.
The night is dark
My broom is cold.

Now you are King
Why can't you carry
Me in your pocket
Like a fairy?

Fool's Song

RAIN and rill and brown cocoon
And little wind a-blowing.
I'll tell what I know as soon
As I'll tell what I'm knowing.

Green upon a little hill
And crocus buds a-swelling.
I'll not tell what I know until
There's no more need of telling.

Bees and purple irises
And honey for a season.
Now I have your lips to kiss
With not another reason.

Underfoot

Too close these western shores are, each to each,
And walled in smug detachment from the sea;
Too narrow now for the screaming eagle's reach,
Too narrow for the reach of the redwood tree.

To lie upon the salt-inwoven sedge
Along the beach is but to idly note
The sandpiper less slender than the edge
Of sand begrudged him by a man-made boat.

The orchis quails, the pale syringa dies,
The dog-wood globes no longer whiten, so
Too-skilled are these professing, avid eyes
And sheltered hands that teach them how to grow.

Surely as the gold threads from the weave
Of long dear-treasured tapestry, is drawn
The breath of beauty, and with none to grieve
Where even grief like some used ghost is gone.

Away to a wild, unblemished place, my soul,
Delicate with fawns and lancing ferns,
And cypress mystic with an untaught dole
Where mad in fruit the pomegranate burns.

Perchance upon some blue Caucasian hill
Sweet cyclamen and bitter aloes root
May slake the thirst that rose and daffodil
Have risen and died in vain for, underfoot.

In Sorcery

WHILE I know that somewhere
This little wind that sighs
Will pass on and find you
With the twilight in your eyes,

I shall dwell enchanted
In a fabled land
And your remembered kiss will gleam
Like a ring upon my hand.

And I shall dance in silent shoes
All dyed with cinnibar,
Like a little flame against the sun
Where birds and singing are.

And through the wood of Sorcery
Where waxen thorn-trees shine,
I'll ride a fawn with golden eyes
Like ewers of wild wine.

Morning shall be at my lips,
A silver flute, no less;
On the hilltop silver sheep,
And a silver shepherdess.

When I shall know that somewhere
This little wind that sighs
Will make a sound of dust within
Your remembered eyes,

I shall grow dim in Sorcery
And make no song nor sound,
Fading like the shadow
Of a cloud along the ground.

So I Say

DOWN into the unrevealed land
Of my long cherished sorrow
Shall I unfaltering go.
Well I know the way: On either hand
Unvoiced and still of wing,
Snared in nets of shade,
The wild and glistening
Birds of ecstasy complain and fade.

Down such caverns shall I go
That, returning, none will know
The witch-pale face, the lips of me
Sealed and cold as the frost-bound leaf
Of the wintry wormwood tree,
Sealed in a song of toneless grief.

So I say. And yet I sing
To a fairy harp, and faintly hear
The sunlit hoofs, a-dancing near,
And like the foam-thin seashell dare
Not tell the truer, darker thing,
Nor whisper of it anywhere.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover has been created for this ebook.

[The end of *A Far Land* by Martha Ostenso]