From Katahdin to the Sea [Poems]

Lillian True Bryant

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FROM

KATAHWDIN

TO THE

SEA
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GIFT OF
Mr. James B. Vickery
MOUNTAIN LAUREL

I shall sing my sweet songs of blossom and bee
Regardless of critics and men
They shall swing far aloft on each swaying breeze
Sounding the paean of answering seas
Before they come home again.
But the dull, red envy of faithless hearts
Who scorn to carry their load
Shall lie far beneath them like burrs in the grass
Or writhing black snakes in the road.

So sing, little songs, go winging toward light,
You will find as you hasten away
Brave faces, true hearts speeding your flight,
For stars illumine the darkest night
Like the flowers and showers of today.
You comfort me and you comfort them,
In spite of a world of envious men
Your message must say; “God lives, all is right,”
Before you come home again.

Lilian True Bryant.
Love came laughing down the valley,
   Panting, rosy, all aglow,
Birches flung a shower of kisses,
   Maples flamed—they love her so.

Love on tiptoe paused in wonder
   At the splendor of your eyes,
All your slender beauty helpless,
   In your cloud of soft surprise.

Love in pity drew around you
   Tender mystery, magic spell,
Taught you hunger, famished longing,
   With her power—she knows it well.

Heart to heart she brought you fainting,
   Taught you rapture, softest bliss,
Then with dewy footsteps left you,
   In the dream of your first kiss.

Lilian True Bryant.
CAMP MOY-MO-DA-YO

Moy-mo-da-yo, lake of blue deep in the forest
Where the partridge trails her babies
Through the bracken and the briers,
Where the fish hawk circle slowly
Over dimpling, sparkling waters;
You have stolen all our daughters
Till the woods ring with their laughter,
Little daughters, little daughters, playing,
Leaping in the tender, fragrant forest,
Famished for their flying feet and their friendship sweet.

Moy-mo-da-yo, Moy-mo-da-yo, guard them closely,
You have taught them all your secrets
How to vanish into mist, spots where only sun has kissed,
Dryads, rough bark swells with pride,
Slipping from the horse they ride into canoe, class or dance,
Starlit still with Love’s sweet trance,
Lilies white and brown and gold, with all future yet untold
Are your teachers—Moy-mo-da-yo, comfort them—
With thy peace and sure content,
Teach them all that Nature meant.

Little daughters, little daughters, years hold memories dear,
Love and life and joy and fear,
Brooding o’er you, Moy-mo-da-yo bids you hear.
Time is nothing, spirit all, and like fairy shimmering lace
The blue lake lays its imprint on each face,
Tripping lightly girlhood past, into womanhood at last.

Lilian True Bryant.
Needles and pins, needles and pins,
That is how Nature's house keeping begins,
She covers with needles the slumbering pine,
The pins protect the blackberry vine.

The porcupine quills and the beechnut burr
Plainly show they belong to her,
If you are noisy or cruel, they say—beware—
Have a care—our treasures you shall never share.

But if you are gentle and go your way
Nor seem to watch them at their play,
The wee woodsy things will follow you,
Just to see what you mean to do.

Squirrels will chatter and bluebirds will call,
Woodcock will stagger from sunny wall,
Partridge will play hide and seek as you go,
One tells another you are friend, not foe.

None of their sweet woodsy things will they hide,
Love calls will flutter from side to side
From the gay forest lover to his little bride.
How do I know this? Because I have tried.

Lilian True Bryant.
Hiawatha, call the shadows dancing down the dimpling lake,
Put away the bow and deerskin, it is time for you to wake,
For the overshadowing mountain flings aside his mantle blue,
Frowning, smiling, bares his great heart, and his love is not for you.
Dusky lad of lawless pleasure, what is left for you to do?

See them steal among the shadows, slender, brown, like elfin brake,
All these dainty, silent maidens, slipping softly toward the lake.
Past the hamlets, gracious lodges, would they wander if they knew
All this beauty, all this dreamland, once held but the deer and you?
Draw the bow taut, sling the arrow, cut their girlish dreams in two.

Hiawatha, you are wounded—you are quivering through and through—
Does the pink tipped arrow startle—does a heart beat—it is you.
For their brown eyes sweeping upward, like a doe in quick surprise
Dusky warmth, young forest fragrance—found you first,
And she has seen you. There she stands—your forest prize.

Lilian True Bryant.
THE OSSIPEE TRAIL

The great, bold Trail goes loping ahead
With the swift sure pride of a conqueror’s tread,
And mile after mile of careless grace
Devours what once was endless space.

Gracious vistas, carefully planned
Reveal the beauty and strength of this land
Where mountain and meadow in ecstasy lie
Under a smiling or starlit sky.

Like a cable of courage linking mountain and sea,
Like a pathway toward Heaven it lures you and me,
Man’s hope and ambition and joys that enthrall,
No longer are visions; the Trail holds them all.

Yet a little old road clings near by
Timid and tender, gentle and shy,
Green ribbons of grass line its rocky bed,
Stately pine branches meet overhead.

Sumach and lilies brush close to stone-walls,
Fragrance of flowers floats over all,
Sweet mystic shadows steal here and there,
Your heart stirs softly; you murmur a prayer.

A sudden turn brings a home into view
Mother and father are waiting for you.
The setting sun fills the Trail with light,
They comfort each other, “He may come to-night.

He is bearing his burdens and holding his place
In the great, mad throb of this turbulent race"
He draws her close, and says with a smile,
“Dear Heart, be at peace and rest awhile.

A Nation’s work has just begun
Tho’ the great Trail surges mile after mile,
Like us, at setting sun, work is done,
And the two roads meet as one.”

Lilian True Bryant
WHEN FOLLY CALLS

She is just a nice young girl, little Pete.
But she sets my brain awhirl
And she doesn’t know one thing
Of what marriage really brings,
While her sweet mouth clings and clings
Could we three make Life complete, little Pete?

All around the forest sings,
Love and magic, many things—
Soon we’ll all be underground—no one cares—
Shall we leave her, go upstairs,
Think of Mother, say our prayers
All forgotten, out of sight?

Little Pete, say good-night,
Old Dad’s tired but he’ll fight
For the right, half the night.
Put your hand across my eyes,
Mother dear will be surprised
When she meets us in the skies—say good-night.

Lilian True Bryant.
A yellow track eats into July heat
   Like an urn of brass on live coals pale,
While down the space come flying feet
   And the thoroughbreds swing on past the rail.

Veins are taut under satin flesh
   Eyes agleam for foe and friend,
Silence lies on the avid crowd
   Where pride and power and skill all blend.

This avid crowd of mottled men
   Clamoring for some thrill divine
To raise their dust from its lowly bed—
   So the thoroughbreds go racing down the line.

Ever the rose must grace the urn,
   Rainbows paint the azure blue,
Ever the sodden flesh must turn
   To that which through the years holds true.

Lilian True Bryant.
LITTLE PETE

Come sit on my lap, little Pete,
All day long Dad’s been on his feet
Lugging rocks, roots and sand
For a cable so grand
To go the whole length of this wonderful land.

Our truck is our home, little Pete,
Ropes, shovels, all tidy and neat,
Never mind if it hurts
If folks turn because of the dirt—
The cable is grand.

We need a nice girl, little Pete,
But when it is night, with girls all in sight,
We just shut the door tight, little Pete.
The rougher the man the quicker he can
Make a nice little girl’s heart beat, little Pete.

It’s beautiful dream, little Pete,
A sweet face is what seems
To hold heaven and earth in its span.
There—there—be my own little man,
Just you and I—we’ll do the best that we can.

Lilian True Bryant.
The lazy, droning river surges slowly toward the sea
Past wooded isle and mottled bank where fish dive lazily,
And his lazy, lawless children shrink 'neath stumps and stones in fright,
Eels and spiders, snakes and muskrats, hurrying with all their might.
He tells no tales of dead men's bones nor wanton hours at night,
The lazy, droning river slipping, slipping softly out of sight.

Man to him is nothing and the bridge which bears him down
The lazy, droning river in an hour can throw down
Farms and vales and roadside hold for him but scorn
Lawless, he could wreck them in any autumn storm.
So the lazy, droning river swings along his lawless way
Till there comes to him a vision on a bluelit summer day.

Her little feet are snowflakes, her limbs are fine and fair,
She splashes in the water and she dances in the air,
And the lazy, lawless river swings her gently toward the shore,
While the current of his will power would caress her evermore.
Slipping softly from beyond him toward the hated home of man
All in vain he calls and calls her to come backward if she can.

Foam flecked, angry, lashing waves to fairy lace,
In the sunshine, in the shadows, he can only see her face.
So he calls his ugly children, snails and muskrats, silly spawn,
And from dusky starlit hours till the coming of the dawn
Tells them of the dainty princess, stories of her lover, too,
Begs them turn and be just like her—so his story may come true.
Says to them, the droning river—dreaming dreams they never knew,
"Just perhaps—some day—the princess—may return and call for you,"
Poor lazy, droning river—chasing flowers among the dew.

Lilian True Bryant.
THE JADE

Around her smooth white throat
In triple folds a necklace winds,
Imprisoning the silver laughter
Which would wreck men’s minds.

Her pretty hands toss lightly to and fro,
Defects which they alone would shield and know,
Clinking them like children’s toys
Upon the altar of earth’s choicest joys.

A drifting leaf, and no man bids her stay
She lingers where she will from day to day,
If close to these she does not roam—
The sacred precincts of a home,

The hour when childhood says its prayers,
The room where motherhood lays aside its cares
To beg for gently on her bended knee
A greater portion of security.

The jade evading, in the church her doubts are bred,
Since in the holy font no light doth trace
A heavenly vision for her face—
For there the necklace turns to viper red.

Lilian True Bryant.
DAME NATURE'S CANOPY

Dame Nature grew tired of sombre green  
And delicate traceries fit for a queen  
So she called a master artist and said,  
"Paint me a canopy fit for my bed."  
"Assuredly, Madam, yet in return for this,  
You will honor me with a gracious kiss."  
Her startled blush flew like a flame through the wood  
Dismayed, she turned to evade if she could  
But maples caught the rosy light  
And oak trees glowed in soft delight.  
Fern and flower their fragrance threw  
Along the road in colors new,  
Bush and bracken, glen and bower  
Blazed from sombre to scarlet within an hour.

"Then pay me in gold," the master said.  
She smiled, and from overhead  
Beech leaves fluttered in showers of gold,  
Filling the air with glory untold.  
The Dame's mocking courtesy instantly grew,  
"I thank you," she murmured as she withdrew.  
The master smiled for well he knew  
The winter pall which over everything soon would fall,  
"Cover her gently," he softly said,  
"I have built a canopy for her bed."

Lilian True Bryant.
GRANDMOTHER'S BUREAU

Grandmother's dear little bureau
Goes capering by on a truck
To join a throng at an antique shop
Taking its share with the others
In the quota of good and bad luck.

Tired of doves and of moonshine
Spinet and candles and dust,
Lace and blue ribbons and bleeding heart,
Grandmother's dear little bureau
Goes speeding by to the mart.

Done in brown and pink roses,
Slender with innocence brave,
It perfumes with orris and white rose
The place which is only its grave
Since broken, if it dares misbehave.

There are memories of girlish white dimity,
Debris from here and there,
Sat'n slippers, pomade pot and buckles
And pasted far inside, a picture of Grandpa
And roses, when they ran away to hide.

But today the dear little bureau
Goes jiggiting along on a truck,
Barest hope, some young girl may buy it—
Time, with all of your elderly forethought,
Why do you bring us such luck?

Lilian True Bryant.
THE TOILERS

We who with unceasing toil
Have carried our burdens through many a high noon,
Asking only for strength to bear our load
Who now find ourselves flung into a quiet haven
By the resistless surge of younger life,
With tired eyes we rest 'mid sunny fields
Hugging our belief in a larger growth,
Where dreams come true and prayers are answered,
Waiting our message from those younger souls
Whom we have loved and lost awhile;
Yet perhaps the veil is kind,
They, too, are journeying down the years
With all their burdens, and the smile they give
May merely hold, like ours, unnumbered tears.

Lilian True Bryant.
Admire me—I am the stately Northern Pine,
Unflinching I stand through storm and shine,
The guardian of the forest.

Caress me—I am the slender white birch
Dainty and green with silken sheen,
I am the bride of the forest.

Pity me—a shabby fir—such a homely thing,
My branches prick and sting,
Once in seven years only my blossoms I bring.

Come to my shelter if you would be free,
An oak needs neither love nor sympathy,
Complete in itself, your refuge in the forest.

Pass us by—we maples are common folk,
So many of us we can only cloak
Our love and shame in crimson.

We set the woods aflame
With a splendor all untamed,
Yet we know we are seldom named.

Of all the trees we love best these,
They soften the mountains, they mantle the plain,
They seem to share our pleasure and pain.

They fling their banner all through our State,
Far northward even to Canada great,
Flaunting their freedom with glory elate.

And the grand old Dominion of powerful men
Unflinching, brave, unswerving as friends,
Chooses a maple leaf for its sturdy emblem.

Lilian True Bryant.
In softly undulating shroud when last I go
Down the village street where children love me so,
I shall carry with me laughter sweet where dollies play,
Boyish grief and courage, tears wiped away,
They shall not know that I, too, burdens bear,
When last I vanish into silver air.

Outside the wolves may howl and lick white teeth
For what they cannot understand and share,
Their lean chops smarting while they tear each child
Thinking that evil prescient good beguiles.
We shall not know, they cannot follow us where we go
Into the azure garden sweet with childhood’s grace,
Whence comes all glory, sent from boundless space.

Lilian True Bryant.
LIFE

Life is like a fugue,
Into the clear message of one voice
Another climbs, and still a third
With iron will, each clamoring to be heard,
Struggling, impatient to hold his place
Yet trembling now in swift embrace.
Chafing underneath the intricate design
Of laws whose clutch serves but to bind,
They merge into harmony near discord;
No touch of melody soothes, till at the close
They swell in tired sympathy from passion's throes
Resolving into their being's melody;
Then all is silence, the message spent
And harmony into silver meaning blent.

Lilian True Bryant.