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RHYMES
&
WHIMSIES

by "RICKETY KATE"

(M.A. Filson)



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*in memory of
a Pioneer of
Women's Suffrage*

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Filson, Minnie Agnes, 1898-1971.ⁱ
Rhymes & whimsies. [1939]

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Dedicated to
The Warrior — that Valiant One—
my Mother

INDEX

Adventure Bound	26
Affinity	2
Blue Mountain Reverie	18
Bounty	13
Calvary	17
Cameo—Middle Harbour	6
Challenge	8
Child-Wonder	11
Cruel Swallow, The	24
Dark Star, The	7
Escape	25
Flannel-Flower	4
Girl	21
Gran	19
Imperishable, The	16
Inasmuch	17
In the Gardens	9
Invitation	12
Morning Glory	5
Petition	13
Proof	19
Salvage	14
Sark	22
Shadow	4
Son of Mine	10
Spoilers, The	20
"Strictly Observed"	16
To a Moment	6
To the Main Roads' Board	3
Trespasser	15
Triolet	14
White Lilac	1

WHITE LILAC

White Lilac

Spilling on the air

Fragrance, wistful as a prayer,

Young as dawning, and as fair.

White Lilac

Did a fairy trace

On a cloud, like filmy lace,

The wonder of your petal face?

White Lilac

Pure and lovely things

Have touched you with their shining wings.

Essence of ten thousand Springs

White Lilac!

AFFINITY

I wonder if the cabbage knows
He is less lovely than the rose,
Or if he squats in smug content
A source of noble nourishment.
And if he pities for her sins
The rose, who has no vitamins,
Or, if one thing his green heart knows . . .
That same Fire that warms the rose.

TO THE MAIN ROADS BOARD

Leave me one road, an old road,
Of red dust or brown,
A road that swings through singing gums
Into some little town.

Leave me a road, a still road,
Deep fringed with bracken and grass,
Where a man may walk and birds may play,
Fearless of things that pass.

Leave me a road, a brave road,
Marked with incredible scars,
Where the scent of the dust is sweet in the
rain,
And small pools mirror stars.

FLANNEL FLOWER

How were you shapen?
Each tapering petal,
Out of what white
Unimaginable metal?
Paler than moonlight,
Softer than this:
The lips of a child,
Or the wind's kiss!
How were you margined
Finely with green?
With a quill from a peacock
Held by a Queen?

SHADOW

Over the rocks a swinging tree,
Leaning, chiselled delicately
Lovely, intangible, filigree
Turrets of jade . . . for the towns of the sea.

MORNING GLORY

Bacon cooking with crackling splutters,
Song of a girl in a golden morn;
Brown birds waking in questing flutters,
Gayly announcing a day new born.

Great beasts stretching and softly lowing,
Whinneying colts in the creaking stalls,
Dogs loud-barking and cocks a-crowing;
Deep in the gully . . . a magpie calls.

Song of the wind through a wheaten ocean,
Clinking of spurs, and a stock whip's crack:
Symphonies setting a world in motion . . .
"Reveille" sounds for the man outback.

CAMEO — MIDDLE HARBOUR

Below the rocks where the swamp oaks swayed
 The sea was a ribbon, a ribbon of jade—
 Old rocks some wizard had changed, I wist,
 From browns and greys to amethyst—
 Beyond the jade a sapphire sea,
 Joined with such cunning stitchery
 Never poet or painter knew
 Where the jade began, or where the blue,
 The blue deep fringed with its ribbon of jade
 That wound round the rocks where the swamp oaks
 swayed!

TO A MOMENT

If I could hold you in my hand
 Forever, tethered by some strand,
 Magical, defying time,
 As does a lovely master-rhyme,
 Would that high rapture and intense
 Flame then, as in your transience?

THE DARK STAR

Down the still skies he fled,
 The Desolate,
 Like a strange black star
 Turned from the gate
 Of God—a black star
 Articulate.
 Then all the air
 Shuddered with the voice
 Of his heart's despair.
 So might Lucifer
 Have cried as he fell
 Down, from the starry host
 To his lonely Hell,
 With that same anguished moan
 And frenzied yell;
 And with that scream,
 Wailed the abandon
 Of a splendid dream.
 So might Judas, slave
 Of Destiny,
 Have wildly cried, and Cain,
 And you, and me,
 Who mock our high designs
 With infamy.

I watched him go . . .
 Into the light . . .
 A carrion crow!

CHALLENGE

Can I grow old?

This throbbing pulsing ecstasy,

This I of I, this Me of Me,

Can I grow old?

The years have told

This thing: That form, that flesh, will change;

All that is fair grow different, strange;

You will grow old.

This, Time's reply:

You will grow old and cease to be.

But I deny exultantly:

Not I, not I.

No fleshly bond

Can leash these strange, these unnamed fires;

These surging thoughts, these dear desires . . .

They soar beyond.

And this, this Me

Moves on towards some great sublime,

And laughs at Death and laughs at Time,

Eternally.

IN THE GARDENS

The old men come to the Gardens

In old and shabby dress,

And, yet, they walk as ancient Kings,

Scattering largesse.

They toss their bread to the singing birds

And the morning makes them a Crown,

And I think of good St. Francis

When the birds come winging down.

The old men walk in the Gardens;

And there is a voice in the breeze:

"Inasmuch my brethren

As ye have done it unto these . . ."

The old men smile in the Gardens,

I think they hear the words

And walk with the Good Companion . . .

When they walk with His singing birds.

SON OF MINE

Wise men knelt at the manger;
 Kings called Him "King Divine,"
 But Mary held Him to her heart
 And whispered, "Son of mine!"
 "King of the Jews," a Roman wrote,
 "Traitor," the poor crowd whine,
 But Mary stood at the foot of the Cross
 And whispered, "Son of mine!"
 Triumphant then o'er Death He came,
 His last earth-battle won;
 Angels and men acclaimed Him,
 But Mary whispered, "My Son!"

CHILD-WONDER

When the little Christ Child first opened His eyes,
 I wonder did He get an awful surprise
 To find that His cradle was all made of hay.
 Oh! I wonder did He like it that way,
 Or if perhaps He started to cry,
 When He thought of the home He'd left in the sky.

When the angel-song first echoed down from above,
 That told of the birth of the King of all love,
 Did He, lying there so tiny and wee,
 Remember, and say, "Why they're singing of Me;
 So I musn't forget to be a good boy,
 And bring Mary and Joseph and all the world joy?"

Sometimes I think those Wise Men and Kings,
 When they brought their gifts, brought old-fashioned
 things
 To give to a baby so tiny and small.
 I do wish they'd brought Him a big coloured ball,
 A teddy to cuddle—like our Baby John,
 And a bike or a scooter to ride later on.

One night I said, 'Dear Lord,' in a prayer,
 'When we come to Heaven we're bringing our bear,
 Because, you see, those Wise Men and Kings
 Didn't remember to bring you such things.'
 And He said at once how happy He'd be
 To see Teddy coming with our John and me.

INVITATION

Come to the Gardens to see the trees,
 Blossom-laden, astir in the breeze.
 And if you look with seeing eyes,
 You'll see they're Princesses in disguise—
 Eleven elegant Princesses,
 In shimmering white and rose-hued dresses,
 Like maids from a fairy-tale of old,
 Who dance in the Spring by a lake of gold,
 Where a stately swan floats proudly by,
 White as a cloud in a sun-drenched sky.
 And if you look with seeing eyes,
 You'll know he's a Prince, a Prince in disguise,
 A Prince so filled with Love's delight
 That he guards the Princesses day and night—
 Eleven elegant Princesses
 In shimmering white and rose-hued dresses.

PETITION

Oh Great High God, if it could be,
 This, for my son, I would ask of Thee:
 A Dream of Beauty for him from You,
 Steadfast courage the Dream to pursue:
 And a Laugh (for the time that it doesn't come true).
 Grant, Most High, the Gift Supreme:
 Steadfast Courage, a Laugh, and a Dream.

BOUNTY

Wheat in the silos running over,
 Food for the worms and the birds that hover;
 Food for the mice, for the rats, a bed—
 And little children crying for bread!
 Food from the ocean, the land and the river,
 "Enough for All," saith the Great All-Giver.
 But whither are Wisdom and Justice fled—
 Men and women are crying for bread?

SALVAGE

When the last star floats in ashes
Down to the last abyss,
And the dead Sun reels and smashes
Earth's frail edifice,
There will be worlds of wonder
Beyond the veil of Things,
Unshaken by Dust's last thunder,
Built of our visionings.

TRIOLET

I had a dream when I was young
And climbed the way of loveliness,
A ladder 'twixt heaven and earth that hung.
I had a dream when I was young
And touched the stars the Gods had flung
Across the fields of Nothingness.
I had a dream when I was young
And climbed the way of loveliness.

TRESPASSER

The Gun In Hyde Park

You did not think to find me here
In this fair place where beauty dwells,
I, the sign of Hate and Fear,
Among these lovely miracles
Of grass and tree and shining flower,
Where butterflies wield golden power.

And, yet, I loved the clean, cool, earth,
Ere man-stoked Hells
Fashioned me for this re-birth
To vomit shells,
And with each tortured thundering breath,
To sob the song of dreadful Death.

And, so, I stand innocently,
Before the Shrine of Sacrifice,
Not mine, but yours, the infamy
Who make of me a death-device
Not from honourable metal wrought,
But from the stuff of some vile thought.

"STRICTLY OBSERVED"

(Armistice)

Let us remember them this day,
Their agony and bloody sweat . . .
And how they died.
Let us remember them this day
(For two minutes) . . .
And then—
Let us forget.

THE IMPERISHABLE

That splendid dust
—Least part of thee—
Impregnate is
With immortality;
Subject alone
To one decree . . .
Eternal change.
Death hath no part in thee!

INASMUCH

I met my Lord in a filthy street
And there were broken shoes on His feet;
The rags He wore could scarcely hide
The unhealed wound in the Sacred Side.
"Why art Thou here My Lord?" I cried;
His tragic eyes and voice replied:
"I must remain with these crucified . . ."
And then I saw that His Hands were tied.

CALVARY

Not by the rood, the nail, the thorn,
But by men's hate and by men's scorn;
By these was His heart anguished and torn.

Not that poor, sad, and tragic tree,
But that men, seeing, would not see . . .
This was His Cross, His Calvary.

BLUE MOUNTAIN REVERIE

Once God dug a chasm deep
And laboured gloriously,
As though He planned a Mighty Vast
To hold another sea,
But tossed instead a thousand hills
Into Immensity.
But still He dreamed of Oceans
And splashed their lovely hue,
Incredibly about the Hills
In misty seas of blue;
And crumpled them; and gossamer clouds,
Like foam, came drifting through.

PROOF

Fairies came, I know, last night—
Tiptoe, across the grass.
I did not see them coming
Nor did I hear them pass.
But since dawn my wattle tree
Is lovely to behold;
Fairies came and sprinkled it
Last night, with dust of gold.

GRAN

See, little son, how calm she sits,
And as she rests she thinks and knits.
To us a lacy shawl appears,
But for her the stories of the years
Are knitted into the pattern fine—
Her story, little one, yours and mine.

THE SPOILERS

The little clouds all curtsey low,
You do not wonder why, you know
With, Oh, what inward high delight
My Lady Moon fares forth to-night,
To scatter o'er the vale below,
Bounty of silver-and-golden glow!
And, as she rides by one great hill,
Silent you stand—and very still.
And so you mount from bliss to bliss,
(For twelve long months you've slaved for this).
So held are you in Beauty's thrall
That scarce you dare to breathe at all,
When some foul fiend from the pit
Breathes "Sweetly pretty, isn't it?"
And in response a drawled "Too right;"
Shatters the glamour of the night.

GIRL

Slender as a boy she stands,
Cigarette in shapely hands,
At her feet a cricket kit;
Slacks and shirt a tailored fit,
And where a bun once used to sit
A razor yester eve did flit
To perfect a shapely shingle.
Small wonder that his pulses tingle
At sight of her—epitome
Of lovely femininity.

SARK

In the Isle of Sark, they say,
 Men live as in some yesterday.
 They have not progressed much, of course,
 They have no drunks and no divorce,
 And are so far behind the times
 They even haven't any crimes;
 Nor any sweet bewilderment
 To stir them from their quaint content
 Of being happy and very kind.
 They are so slow and strange of mind
 They do not pay an income tax,
 But they build seats in chimney stacks,
 Where wicked witches come and sit
 To warm their toes, perchance, and flit.
 The witches like to have it thus,
 And when 'tis so, they do not cuss
 The houses where this seat of state
 Is kept for them, inviolate.
 The folks are all asleep by nine,
 They haven't one electric sign—
 No other lights across the sky
 But moons and stars and such small fry.
 Although possessed of perfect health
 They, of course, have no real wealth.
 A surplus of ten thousand "pound"
 May seem, at first, to be quite sound;
 But then, you must not, please, forget—
 They have no jails or National Debt:
 Nor do they pay for trips o'er sea
 To enlighten their M's P.

For Oh—a very great disgrace—
 A woman seems to run the place,
 And settles all their little rows
 Re wives—or cabbages—or cows
 With not much fuss, and no expense:
 She simply uses—common sense.
 Oh! They've a ghost who has no head.
 (We've folks like that but they're not dead.)
 No petrol gas perfumes the air;
 There's hardly any beauty there,
 But sunlight flecks a granite wall
 And gorse and flaming pinks that fall
 Over the rocks above the sea
 Where flying things find sanctuary.

Oh, blessed Sark, could we, perchance,
 Exchange for such sweet ignorance
 Our fears and hates and filth and noise,
 And all our tragic, bloody toys,
 Then, we might hear Life's real refrain
 And gloriously start to live again.

THE CRUEL SWALLOW

A Lament by Anne Oyster

Here I will build my house and stay awhile
And listen to sea songs, and so beguile
Long hours with dreams that, through the witchery
Of change, beauty may be fulfilled in me —
A pearl, rosehued like lustrous foam to float
Upon the creamy sea of some fair woman's throat.

Ah! So I dreamed, reckless of fleeting youth,
While grinning gods withheld the awful truth.
Futility of dreaming! Now I wait
Poised halfway 'twixt curved lips and that foul plate
Whereon so short a time ago I lay,
Blinded by burning dust, now white, now black and gray.

Writhing rebellious in woeful agonies,
En-isled was I in sourly stinging seas.
Ah me! A moment now—I'll *sink* not float
Adown a dark abyss—her curving throat.
Bereft of ecstasy entire I'll glide
(Oh how I loathe fair women!) into her dark inside.

ESCAPE

I cannot write of Overseas
And all the tangled tyrannies
Which threaten our democracies.
I only know the amber bees
Float in golden galaxies
Above the yellow wattle trees,
While in a gum a magpie sings,
And butterflies with painted wings
Dance to his silver trumpeting;
And round the hills an errant mist
Has trailed a scarf of amethyst,
And Beauty keeps the age-old tryst.

.
And all the things beside can wait,
For Spring has tapped upon my gate
And drugged me with her opiate.

ADVENTURE BOUND

When I have solved Earth's final mystery,
I shall not seek that vale, Tranquility.
So, if you pray, pray not, "God give him rest,"
But, "Speed him onward, Lord, on some new Quest!"

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