

Julia Boynton Green Selected Poems



Julia Boynton Green

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Green was born Julia P. Boynton in New York, and spent the first 29 years of her life in New York State and traveling Europe. She published one book of poetry, *Lines and Interlines*, when she was 26. *American Women: Fifteen Hundred Biographies*, published sometime in the early 1890s, notes that she married Levi Worthington Green in 1890 and that, after their six months in Europe and a move to Rochester, “her literary work has been seriously disturbed by so many changes and diversions.” She moved to California in 1893, but she didn’t publish her next book of poems, *This Enchanted Coast: Verse on California Themes*, until 1928 in Los Angeles with the Times-Mirror Press over forty years after the publication of *Lines and Interlines*. She published in such journals and newspapers as *The Boston Transcript*, *The Forum*, *The New York Times*, *American Poetry Magazine*, *Los Angeles Saturday Night*, *The Poetry Review* (London) and others. In the thirties, she published poems in the science fiction journals *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories*. Her final book, *Noonmark*, appeared in 1936, possibly self-published, out of Redlands.

Lines and Interlines. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1887.

This Enchanting Coast. Los Angeles: The Times-Mirror Press, 1928.

Noonmark. Redlands: Self-published, 1936.

Wild Iris

Down in the pasture, half in shade,
 Knee-deep in water flowing,
Like bare-foot children going to wade,
 Is fair blue iris growing.

No sweeter wildling finds the bee,
 A-roaming honey-laden.
Than this quaint peasant fleur-de-lys,
 This meadow gypsy-maiden.

In her Hippolyte I see,
 The precious zone defending;
Or Sheperdess of Domremy,
 Her sovereign's cause befriending.

This patch of sharp green blades, thick set
 In marshy water borders,
A troop is, dread with bayonet.
 And under marching orders.

The splendid squadron passed review
 In June; in gallant manner
Its bristling ranks stood, strong and true,
 With many a brave blue banner.

Alas! it was a brief campaign;
 I saw them when 't was over,
The dragon-fly came not again
 Nor any loyal lover.

With blades a-rust, not one blue flag,
 (How far they must have wandered!)
Save one pale, tattered azure rag
 Borne on a broken standard.

The Passing of Angels

From yon bright room I hear the sound
Of mingled voices this gay night,
And oftentimes the speech is drowned
In silvery waves of laughter light.

It flows and ebbs, and ebbs and flows,
That tide of soul from man to man,
Now faint as wind at even blows.
Now thunderous as the decuman.

Question and answer, plea and jest,
Warning, remonstrance,—till the stream
Falters a little in its zest,
And wavers like the speech of dream.

Swiftly a hush runs through the crowd,
As bidden by some secret Will,
The last stray words sound strange and loud,
They cease, and all the room is still.

'T is but a moment till the thread
Of talk is found, but while it last,
That brief sweet hush, I bow my head,
The Germans say an angel passed.

Birch Creak

In the Shandaken Valley

By Wittemberg and Panther and Belle-Aire
Loiters and strolls at will this gay trouvère,
 And gazes up with dreamy hazel eye
 Upon the fair green Mountains of the Sky.
 O fresh and sweet
 Through summer heat
He makes the valley for their royal feet;
 O copse and lea
 Forever be
More blithesome for his happy minstrelsy.

His vagrant path is crowded, left and right,
With woodland folk who listen with delight
 Bevy of bloom and riot of wild vine,
 Flower and weed in all their bravery shine.
 The goldenrod
 Doth sway and nod,
Fit for the helmet feather of a god.
 The glooms of fern
 To glory turn
Where the fierce scarlet bergamot doth burn.

Here glimmers pale the daisy's snowy disk,
And leaning headlong, careless of the risk,
 And of her treacherous foothold mid the rocks,
 The thirsty aster bathes her purple locks.
 Yonder displayed
 In dusky shade,
The cardinal-flower gleams like a murderer's blade.
 So sad and gay
 Make holiday
About the gentle minnesinger's way.

And scattered by their almoner, the breeze,

He doth receive the largess of the trees;
 Gold by the glittering handful lavished down,
 Mingled with glowing jewels from their crown.
 O bard, repeat,
 Thy lyrics sweet!
Enjoy thy summer, for the hours are fleet
 To do thee wrong;
 A foe erelong
Shall hush thy voice and smite the listening throng.

Unsung

Happy, thrice happy, those whom a firm voice,
Here shalt thou walk, forbiddeth to elect.
So many many priceless hours are wrecked
Just from the sole embarrassment of choice,
What joy to take among a world of joys.
The meteors of the possible reflect
Upon the real, its still skies intersect
With brilliance, and our souls lose equipoise.

Ah, my dead songs, the songs I might have sung!
What alien service claimed my faithless tongue?
The world's unworthy wage to me seemed good,—
Ah, my dead songs! it was the price of blood.
Who knows what glorious message God had sent,
Had he found one devoted instrument?

November

And now at last, from out the thoughtful sky,
Floats dreamily the winter's first white pledge.
The sparrows seek the shelter of the hedge.
The doves fly home. The crow's discordant cry
Reechoes through the stillness, drearily.
In leaf-choked pools, and in the river-edge,
The gathering ice films irk the whispering sedge.
In the wood margin towers stark and high
Sere golden-rod. The starwort thickets glow
With myriad downy disks, as white as snow.
The milkweed scatters all the faded sods
With the last treasures of her rifled pods.
Far in the purple north, a slender girth
Of dazzling primrose clasps the sober earth.

An Old Saw Refiled

Money makes the mare go;
How jolly 'tis to ride
A rattling pace, firm ground below,
And pleasure by your side!

But somewhere back two slaves, alack!
Reeking with stable soil.
Have fed the hack and smoothed the track—
Economy and Toil.

A Lullaby Up-to-Date

Bye, baby, bye,
There's a darling, shut your eye.
Birds are twittering, lambs are bleating.
You must go to sleep, my sweeting.
Mother has to lead a meeting,
So be good and do not cry.
Bye, baby, bye!

Bye, baby, bye,
Stars are twinkling in the sky.
Do be good, my sweetest kitten.
For my speech is not half written
And the thing begins at eight;
You'd not make poor mother late?
That would never do, Oh, fie!
Bye, baby, bye!

Bye, baby, bye,
I'm afraid you do not try.
Half an hour 's already spent;
Mother is the president.
So to happy dreamland roam.
Let me see, "The Ideal Home:
What It Is," Oh, where was I?
Bye, baby, bye!

Bye, baby, bye.
Kicking legs and face awry.
It is seven now. I'll never
Catch that seven-ten car! Endeavor,
Baby mine, to sleep. Oh, try!
Bye, baby, bye!

Bye, baby, bye.
Stop, is that papa I spy?
John, you 'll have to take him, truly;

I must go, he's so unruly!
You can get your dinner later.
There my baby, go to pater.
It's my speech, John; I must fly!
Bye, baby, bye!

Ballade of the Distracted Housewife

What! no meat in the cupboard? Fie!
Butter low, and terrible toll
Levied on cheese, a morsel of pie.
An olive or two, cold soup in a bowl,
A fig, and a doughnut. Upon my soul!
And what shall I give them for luncheon, pray?
I'd planned such a beautiful casserole;
But where is the mutton of yesterday?

How can they eat so? Appetites! My!
Hungry as bears at the frozen Pole.
“Dinner ready? We ‘re starved!” while
Would gladly fast and go for a stroll.
Oh, for the aid of some friendly troll.
With tempting food on a magic tray!
Luncheon-time, of their hopes the goal.
And where is the mutton of yesterday?

Here ‘s part of a fondu, fallen and dry.
Gingerbread burned to a nauseous coal:
Seems to me Hannah does n’t half try.
I find it certainly far from droll.
I teach and flatter and chide and cajole,
But whatever I do and whatever I say.
Bills go soaring beyond control.
Where is the mutton of yesterday?

ENVOY

Cooks a-many with learned scroll
Guide our steps on this toilsome way,
But “ex-nihilo”—what ‘s the whole?
Where is the mutton of yesterday?

Adaptable Euterpe

“They’re past,” I mourned, “the days of ode and lyric.

The Muse has fled, offended, sad, and hurt.”

I vented my dismay by lines satiric

In many a bitter spurt.

“The earth is grown,” I cried, “a loathsome welter.

Machines, machine-made men, command the stage.

Who could wax rhythmical upon a smelter?

O dull prosaic age!

“All inspiration’s dying,—or diverted!”

Just then I glimpsed Euterpe,—she was bobbed!

Young Artemis she looked, so briefly skirted;

I gazed and gasped and sobbed.

“In Gotham who could frame a stanza Sapphic?”

I grieved, “Who rime,—in Hell?”

Then spied Euterpe in the maddest traffic

And making for the El!

“A poet might as well turn blacksmith, hedger!”

I grouched, “No Golden Age will come again.”

Later I saw the Muse perched on a dredger

And riding a steam crane!

“Parnassus!” scoffs the jade, “All gabble, gilding!

Forget that hoary nonsense and make shift

To attain your vision from the Woolworth Building

Via a speedy lift.”

She’s far from hurt or snobbish, then, I take it,

And no provincial. So, perhaps, when Greece

Went smash, she packed up gamely to forsake it

And reveled in release.

She landed here before the day of quotas,

No doubt a trifle homesick, shocked, surprized.
But she's adaptable,—good sports she'd vote us;
O yes, she's naturalized!

Well,—we are reconciled. We're doing a ballad
On Diesel engines. She, at luncheon hour,
Laughs at ambrosia,—swears beef, beans, and salad
Have far more staying power!

Low Tide

Here let us sit on this pale slope of shore,
Fingering the flotsam which the niggard sea
Vouchsafes us from her wonders. What might be,
Judged from these hints, those dim boudoirs, those hoar
Subaqueous chambers, that fantastic store
Free to the folk of scale and fin? And see
This weed dyed like the dawn! This drapery
Of sumptuous fringes that some Naiad wore!
This argent scrap of shell! These painted pairs,
Saffron and amethyst and pearl, that lie
Like the discarded wings of butterflies!
Here gleams a rainbow shard; that fierce wave bares
Another richly purple. Ah, to die
Bequeathing beauty thus to ravished eyes!

“God’s Acre” at Pauma Mission

A stretch of sterile sand, low mounds that rise
Grotesque with potsherds, remnants of the ware
That once knew household use, or made more fair
The dwelling; sea-shells, images with eyes
Of undimmed blue; void flasks laid marginwise;
And over all the noon’s unpitying stare.
It may be those swart mourners, unaware
Of symbol, ranged these fragments in the guise
Of rude unlettered ornament; but I love
To think, by shattered toy, by broken bowl,
By quenched lamp, by cup and flagon spent,
By sea-shell emptied of its life, they strove
In some vague way to figure how the soul
Steals to its own and leaves the vesture rent.

At San Juan Capistrano

The tawny hills lie sleeping in the sun,
Their shapely flanks hirsute with grasses. Blue,
Ah, blue as Eve's eyes when the world was new,
Paler than sapphire, tenderer than any one
Terrestrial pigment, lifts the sky, as spun
A peerless tissue, in aerial looms.
These for the setting. Here are cloistral glooms,
Pensive and cool. The agile lizards run,
Oddly exempt by those four nimble feet
From that antipathy as old as man.
Around the ruined apse the swallows flit,
Small Mission mothers they, in service fleet;
The quaint grey nests follow each moulding's span,
And in the doorways round the fledgelings sit.

Bougainvillea

Judge if I read the evidence aright.
Some strolling Titan fared this way last night,
His towering figure in its stalwart strength,
Royally vested, a resplendent sight.
Feeling his mantle irked him by its heat,
He flung it off, and cast its sumptuous length
Along this garden wall, a dazzling sheet -
Of vivid dye, that quenches neighboring bloom
As lightning pales the candles in a room.

In An Orange Grove

Charged with the memory of a royal folly
The sands of Pactolus still shine, they say.
The end of avarice is melancholy, .
Content lies hid in gifts of every day.

But here the Kingly Touch is full of blessing.
Our faithful Midas fingers these green spheres,
Gentle and warm, persuasive and caressing,
And lo! at last the precious gold appears.

The Mirage

I blessed the water when I glimpsed it first,
A miracle of azure in a land
Accurst. I guessed wave music from its strand;
I felt in fancy my parched flesh immersed
In its delicious depths. It fled as erst
It came. My soul cried, outraged and unmanned,
Reproaches on the unknown conjurer's hand
That could so juggle with a mortal thirst.

Perchance some happier pilgrim that day went
His way to whom the vision only meant
New interest, void of mockery; but it woke
In me, disheartened, fagged, undone, forespent,
Hot wrath some mighty vengeance to invoke
Upon the author of this Devil's joke.

The Phainopepla

A little lonely plaintive note
Reiterates from a lofty spray.
That single syllable, remote,
Aloof, has witched my joy away.

The ebon garb this minstrel wears
Fits all too well his mournful word.
What are his griefs? His tiny cares?
He is too serious for a bird.

Seen close, in sun, I know his dress
Would flash a myriad dazzling hues.
His shape, his crest, prove haute noblesse.
Is he a spell-bound prince, I muse?

The mocker yonder pours a flood
Of wild derisive melody;
No feathered thing in field or wood
Escapes his merry mimicry.

But not for me, my soul apart,
His shrill capricious carols float,
The phainopepla rives my heart
His little lonely plaintive note!

Carmel-by-the-Sea

Nursed fondly in a curving arm of coast
The little hamlet lies-still, sunny, sweet.
Its liquid Scriptural title we repeat,
Remembering Nabal and Elijah's boast
To Baal's prophets; but remembering most
How a lad's mother in the Syrian heat
Sought mountain-lodged Elijah, to entreat
Her son's life. This new Carmel has been host
To artist folk and poets in the room
Of seers and hermits; vagrant stepping stones
Entice to where her gardens, deep in bloom,
Dream in the sun, bee-haunted, fragrant, cool,
Beloved of birds for comfort of a pool,
Murmurous with sea's incessant overtones.

The Evolution of an Ace

THE FIRST FANCY

A wee lad watched, one summer day,
A brilliant oriole on its way,
A brown bee homing with its loot,
A wasp that flew from fruit to fruit.
“What fun,” he cried, “what fun to fly!
Oh, if I could! Sometime I’ll try.”

DISCOURAGEMENT

A youth strolled through a fern-sweet glen and cool,
Be ide a limpid brook made dreamy pause.
Splendid in azure and in glistening gauze
Hovered the dragonflies above a pool;
Kingfishers swooped to harvest from a school
Of lively minnows—rose with laden jaw.
“Strange—“ mused the stripling, “curious how the laws
Of flight still circumvent us. Man’s a fool.
Hundreds of years we’ve watched and longed. We boast
Ourselves creation’s lords, A moth, a gnat
Knows more than we do. See that buzzard coast!
Maddening—his ease—to soar and glide like that!
But has man ever done it? Never once.
The smallest midge outdoes him. Man’s a dunce.

SUCCESS

Came years of slow experiment,
The constant urge, the mouldering fire
Of purpose. Then—the wonder wrought!
The bright shape of a long desire.

A distant humming in the sky—
A flash of wings upon the blue—
A graceful turn, a dip, a rise—
A speed no condor ever knew.

A miracle too frequent now
To win more than a casual glance,
When two decades ago to fly
Seemed the far goal of rich romance.

Soon common as the swallow's dash,
The linnet's drop from bough to bough,
Will be the soaring plane, nor cause
The bored pedestrian to pause,
The laborer to check his plough.
And man, to his ambition true,
Will turn his mind to conquests new.

Radio Revelations

Before John's new receiving set
I listened, half-expecting
The music of the spheres to get,
Some stellar fugue or canzonet,
Man's chatter intersecting.
Instead, from empyrean heights
Celestial gossip drifted;
The greater and the lesser lights
It seems have frolics, feuds and fights,
Even as the less uplifted.

"It's scandalous how Orion goes,"
Quoth Vega in high dudgeon
"Can't he afford some pants and hose?
Or is it that he loves to pose
In just his belt and bludgeon?"
Then Vesta scolded, "Listen, pray!
Those wild beasts—where's their cager?
As I went down the Milky Way
To get my Pasteurized Grade A
He bit me—Ursa Major!

Of course, surprised, I had no show—
I whacked him with my slipper,
But Aries, Serpens, Scorpio
And Taurus joined the scrap and so
I brandished the Big Dipper.
The pranced up Sagittarius
And shot them! How I kissed him!
Wee two then harassed Pegasus
To Charle's Wain—absurd old bus—
And ranged the Solar System.

Now don't tell, Dearie, on your word
Of honor as a planet;
The cause of Mars' red face I've heard

Is booze! He's sure the gay old bird—
It's years since he began in."
Then burst forth Vega, "What's the use
Of Luna's mad endeavor
To change her figure and 'reduce'
When in one month—the silly goose—
She'll be as round as ever?"

There's Berenice! She's marveled her hair!
Her cute dog-star she's leading.
Here kids—take Cassiopeia's Chair.
What news?—You don't say! Did they dare!
Young Comet pinched for speeding?
Well! Well! I've, too, a tale to stir;
Now Venus is no pattern,
We all know that, but Jupiter
Is worse—I'm not much blaming her—
She has eloped with Saturn!

"Of course she's flirted lots, my dears,
But Saturn's been her 'steady.'
He has a bad 'case' it appears,
Old softy! Why he's had for years
A choice of rings all ready!"

"This Radio," I rejoiced, "what fun!
And cheaper than a movie."
Just then John's voice boomed like a gun,
"Wake up, old girl—it's half past one.
And put the cat out, Lovey."

The Peddler

A grey dame brought her offerings to my door;
Young, eager, rash I bought in joyous haste
Frail trinkets, jewels later proven paste;
And ever I demanded, "Show me more!"
Gloves, girdles, dainty shoes I chose that wore
But one mad dance; rich cloaks brocaded, laced,
That frayed and faded; (Ah, the cruel waste!)
Bland cented balms that left my hurts still sore.

At last I pondered little dull brown seeds
The weird old crone had forced on me. I laughed.
In bitter jest I gave them to the ground
And then forgot my planting. Lusty weeds
Pushed up—slugs gorged. I had no garden-craft.
But look—the strange sweet flower I have found!

Prodigious Proxies

Man loathes to bend his back and sweat. The terms
Announced in Eden he defies and feeds
Abundantly, unwearied, for he breeds
A race of metal-muscled pachyderms
To serve him beside which to ants or worms
Dwindle their human drivers. To his needs
Obsequious each prodigious proxy speeds
Godlike he bids, controls, denies, affirms.

But-are they tamed indeed-the engine, press,
And dredge? May they not rend their long duress
Enslave their lords? Will mutinous machines
Tread beauty, silence, peace, beneath their hooves
And, whether man denounces or approves,
Emerge the brutal end and not the means?

The Steam Shovel

The monster labors, wallowing in his pit.
Prate not of tackle, bucket-jib and boom.
This is a dinosaur. From some far tomb
The great beast sped obedient to the wit
Of regnant Man; he gulps this clay and grit,
As prompt to spew as avid to consume.
But he will leave at last a vast void room
Whereon a towering skyscraper shall sit.

All day the feast goes on; that neck of might
Bends for another Brobdingnagian bite,
Gouging huge teeth marks on receding walls.
While he who made the creature bridewise
Grins on the crowd with merry Irish eyes,
Mike, the mahout, in grimed blue overalls.

This Thing Incredible

This thing incredible that takes the air
Like a great heron, drawing still our gaze
Unsated with its wonder, will it share
Ever, the bird's shy silence? Are there ways
That patient Science yet will find to hush
The shrill propeller on its skyward rush?
Will shrewd Invention, further, give the plane
A singing voice unknown to stork or crane?

Here subtly wedded are the falcon's speed,
The pigeon's instinct for the distant goal,
The endurance of the albatross. Our greed
Envisions more; Machines must find a soul!
Well to be steady, powerful and swift,
We crave the nightingale's enchanting gift.
Spoiled, pampered, man would leap last barricades
To perfectness-correct those noisy blades.

We ask too much. This new epitome
Of conquest is enough; through fog and dark
And wind and cold to beat from sea to sea,
Can we not spare the music of the lark?

The Hangar

Here homes a giant bird. This is the cage
Where roosts the chief of a prodigious flock
Beside whose vast proportions Sindbad's roe
Would seem a wren. This creature would engage
To bear not Ganymede alone, as page
To Jove, but fifty travellers more-and mock
At lesser freight. Bewildered by the shock
f size, by this last marvel of the age,
This maze of metal and this mountainous roof,
wift fancy paints me the wee hummer's nest
With elfin warp of cobweb and with woof
f thistledown shaped by a jewelled breast;
And I can gaze again no more oppressed
At the great sky-fowl hovering there aloof.

Three Wives

JANE CARLYLE TO THOMAS

Why should I cavil, criticise, complain?
You do but demonstrate a hoary law,
Life features rhythm, contrast. Violets draw
Sewn on drab Winter's hem a richer stain.
After the wrath of March, May's freakish rain,
June seems more sweet, her blooms more void of flaw
Than ever yet. But with a spirit raw
From torment it is hard to measure gain.

Grieved by your moods I am too tired, too hurt
To welcome change-respond to tardy smiles.
You ask the impossible.

I do but skirt

The areas of joy, its sunny miles
Forbidden. Vain to prate of ebb and flow-
All makeshift easement. Comfort? Ah, no! No!

“LA BELLE FERRONIERÈ”

Only a perfect face could bear that style
Of coiffure, sweet Lucrezia, or allow
It free of flower or net or laces. How
The sleek brown curtain sweeps each cheek! no smile
Within its austere frame. Did girlish guile
Choose that slim fillet holding on the brow
Its single jewel? Or did you meekly bow
To the great master's judgment, after trial?

What has such charm, such grace, to do with trade—
With clamor of the shop—with toil and grime—
This treasure tossed to undeserving Time
From Leonardo's largess? Scattered, strayed,
Her good man's ducats-records of his life.
Remains this lovely likeness of his wife.

ANTHIPPE TO A NEIGHBOR

No, he is not a handsome man I grant,
My husband-lips too thick, an ugly nose,
And eyes—well—they do bulge. But that just shows
I married him for love. When I descant
On life's afflictions, when I rave and rant
About my lot, believe me it's not those—
Socrates' features—that I mourn as woes
But his weird habits. And he's adamant!

Always the same old tunic—and no shoes—
Barefoot! My husband! He a sculptor once!
How happy I would be were he a dunce
If he'd go dressed like other folk, and pay
Our bills, and buy us food.

What, lad? You've news?
Speak plainer, imbecile! Hemlock? Today?

The Poet

He sees his fellows calm, efficient, wise
He envies them, aware of difference,
The while he pities that their slower sense
Misses his joys, his soaring ecstasies.
He knows that areas lovely to his eyes
To them, are pure mirage, and his defense
Is that he may afford intelligence
Of hidden wealth, interpret mysteries.

The more his nature shares the common gifts
The less is he a poet. Others plod.
His is the winged energy that lifts
All life, all living, sunward from the sod.
He feels should he deny the urge of song
The spheric scheme would falter and go wrong.

Why should he buy and sell when each new day
Loads him with treasure where no coin is passed?
What are possessions painfully amassed
To one free of Golconda and Cathay,
Who has charted Edens lost and blazed the way?
What use to delve and sweat when unguessed good
Accrues to those who idle, dream, and brood,
Fools wise enough to squander and to play?

The fragrant loot of a Sierra glen
Outshines the wares of Biskra, Nile, Aden.
The pearly towers of wind-wrought cloud make small
And mean the Alhambra and the Taj Mahal.
Last—best—this airy wealth entails no grief
Of dwindling values or the midnight thief.

A Mother of Athletes

The cup, Aglaia—I am thirsty, spent.
Then you shall hear how my adventure went.
Pomegranate juice and honey? Very good.
No—till I'm rested I will take no food.
A cushion—thank you. And a fan. Ah, now
I will begin. And first, I'll own I bow
To your opinion that my face and height
And slenderness quite surely would invite
Suspicion. But my voice is deep; my dress,
A laboring man's, I thought would halt each guess
As to my sex. To sacrifice my hair
Was hard; but it will grow; I did not dare
Do otherwise—the rule is very strict, .
“No women at the Games.” But guards are tricked
Sometimes. It is a foolish, cruel law.
At any rate three women dared—and saw!

That spectacle—Oh, marvelous! One poor soul,
A fine tall Spartan, dropped dead at the goal.
Your eldest brother won the hardest race.
Dion, my baby, took the proud First Place
In casting of the javelin; such a child—
Not eighteen yet, the darling! Honors piled
As high as Pelion on our other boys.
The seats went wild—such stamping and such noise!
Imagine Lysias with his palm branch! Piles
Of them lay on an ivory table. Files
Of stark nude victors trampled violets flung
By friends almost beside themselves. Among
The rest, of course, marched Dion. As he crushed
Roses to pulp he frowned, the youngster—blushed!
Heralds gave out their names; we saw the crowns
Awarded—wreathen olive.

Then some clowns
Or maybe scattered spies, caught me in tears,
Wrought thereto by the excitement and the cheers.

We had been listening as men commented
On the contestants. One stout neighbor said,
“If ten months in Gymnasium on dried figs
And cheese can build such heroes, we are pigs
To gorge on flesh!” Another man declared,
(While they all praised the athletes, and compared,)
“For height and symmetry I choose the youth
With auburn hair.” (Our Lysias!) “In truth
Glaucus could not surpass him. Mark those thighs.
The dark one next him is near Milo’s size
But shapelier.” That was Dion. Oh, I heard
Such talk my heart soared singing like a bird!

But—tears! To do so dangerous a thing!
No man would weep to see his son made king!

We’d braved the staring shepherds on the road,
Swaggered through villages, spat, jested, strode
With virile air safe in victorious guile;
We entered Elis; and—just hear this—while
We passed the huge stone arch that gives upon
The Stadium your kinsman, Telamon,
Unrecognizing, smote me on the back
And bellowed, “Greeting, Stranger! We’ve no lack
Of sport today—my cousin’s valiant lads
Will best them all; they’re wonders; knee-high tads
But yesterday it seems!”

Now fancy that—
To weather such a test! Yet when I sat
And oozed a mother’s tears of joy I doomed
My fellow-masqueraders, both. There loomed
A stern official—questioned us—and led
Us off to be examined. Oh, we plead,
Knelt, threatened—mentioned many an august name,
But they were stone. “You know the law—no claim
Have you to clemency,” they said, “you share
The common fate of culprits. You must bear
The utmost sentence.”

Woe is me—woe! woe!

It tortures me—it rends my heart to know
I have betrayed my friends.

There is a rock
That overhangs Alpheios—a huge block
Of stone above the torrent. Thither, tied
With thongs, they haled us, soldiers either side.
The custom is to slay transgressors there
And fling their bodies from the crag. They spare
No soul—or spared not hitherto—but, girls,
Hear this. When we had reached the rock the churls
Unsheathed their daggers. Then came couriers
Bearing reprieve for me!

What wealth is hers
Who rears men children, heroes, such as mine!
But—to leave Pyrrha—Clodia—. We did speak
Awhile—they neither blamed nor mourned, being Greek.

The soldiers took me back; they gave me wine;
And then I faced the magistrate. He said
Because I'd given the State such sons, and bred
To strength and high accomplishment the four,
I had been pardoned, the State sets such store
By mother-service and illustrious sons.
My friends' boys are—alas—ungifted ones.

My sons have saved my life. A very god
ur Dion with the discus. Lysias trod
The course like peerless Hermes.

But—my friends!
I urged them to this escapade—that lends
Wormwood to all my happiness. We sup
Nectar and gall from out the selfsame cup.
I've had my glorious day—but at what cost!
I live both proud and shamed. My friends are lost.

The Painted Cave

What artist wrought in this bleak studio
Ranging his simple records on the rock—
The proud horned leader of a mountain flock,
The sun en-rayed, a serpent, wheels, a row
Of ripples, sprawled batrachians? Who can know
All that these weathered symbols meant? A guess
The experts venture, but stark wilderness
Swallows in mystery the curious show.

Pondering the secrets of this barren land
I linger. Shadows grow—the desert greys.
Then—stealing from those lost, forgotten days
A nude swart shape beside me seems to stand
Jealous for all this labor of his hand,
Craving it might be some brief word of praise.

A Butterfly at Bay

I have saved long enough
Now I will spend—
Laces, and silken stuff
From the world's end,

Smooth creams in dainty jars—
Scent in a cruse—
Sapphires as though the stars
Dropped for my use.

I'll defy Fortune's cuff,
Squander my cash,
Stage a gigantic bluff,
Revel in trash.

Plodding's a tedious game
Better to dance;
Risky-but all the same
Let's take a chance!

Pray you-no homilies!
Quote me no code;
Never name Nemesis,
Point me no road.

I'll step in splendid pumps,
Snuggle in furs.
Life dealt my hand—no trumps—
Death's shown me hers!

Supreme Tribute

The sleeping instrument awaits his touch.
We know of old his mastery of it—
The thunderous chords, the swift arpeggios knit
Of living sound, strung like linked jewels such
As rajahs wreath upon a favorite's breast—
These, to the music's last delicious sigh,
Are in his gift. But rarer sovereignty,
The sway of spirits, he makes manifest.
The auditorium swarms from floor to roof
With restless folk. This man has but to turn
A long Slav face and wait, unsmiling, stern,
Till the mob feels his ocular reproof.
A breath he holds them silent, on their knees
To genius—then swings slowly to the keys.

The Swan

by Saint Saëns

On silver poised, a shape of moulded snow,
Pride's perfect symbol—dignity and grace
Embodied. Through a fragrant dusky place
Arrased by vines, all dreamfully and slow
The great swan floats; and glimmering below
His pearly plumes, etched on the waves, keeps pace
His lovely double. The exquisite brace
Of creatures drift in silence—to and fro.

Play me the piece again. Ah, by the notes
Evoked the picture comes. I glimpse once more
That form of pure enchantment, from the throat's
Consummate curve to where the crystal wake
Wrinkles beyond him on the shining lake.
And—hark! The singing ripples on the shore!

Mirage

Who loves the desert loves its very peril
But arms himself against untoward chance.
He loves the unstable sand, hot, silent, sterile,
The rattler's patterned coils, the lean sparse plants.

He learns the scanty priceless wells far-sundered
By arid leagues, and travels safe, serene,
Where many pilgrim folk less wise have blundered
Lured by aerial pictures richly green,

Oases, painted by an unseen wizard
With heavenly promise of a spring's cool gush.
He sees untempted as the basking lizard
The scenic marvels of that subtle brush.

Fashioned of airy nothing, evanescent,
The bright imposture cheers his sober day;
And then he turns to where a thread-thin crescent
Hangs beautiful-and real-on arching grey.

He ponders on the office of illusion-
Is it a ruse divine that counteracts
Life's hurt, the thrust, the torturing contusion?
Balm for the hard brutality of facts?

But never for himself that fairy figment!
Leave it for age, for weaklings, and for youth.
He craves no mask, no touch of rosy pigment
Between his vision and the naked truth.

Who loves the desert loves its very danger,
Points you unnumbered pleasures to atone,
To prove its austere charm intenser, stranger,
Than the accustomed bounties of the sown.

The Cantaloupe

On the cool porcelain lies the jade-green sphere
Netted in russet, thickly over-traced
With curious cryptic symbols such as placed
Those dusky hirelings on the Alhambra. Here
Demeter scrawls a message; where's the seer
To read her cypher? Warning against waste
Mayhap—or charge with reverent lip to taste
This sumptuous offering of the liberal year.

Were these neat grooves designed to guide the blade?
I choose to slash quite counter to the hint;
And lo! I have a fluted chalice made!
I plunge my spoon in fragrant pulp aflush
With tender salmon, an enchanting tint,
Too sweet to leave—too exquisite to crush!

Forest Counsel

Tented by brooding boughs
Arrased by scented fern
Here will I dream and drowse,
Here will I listen and learn.

Whatever hurts I feel,
Faithful in ministry
Silence will soothe and heal,
Beauty will balsam me.

Nettle with rapier thrust,
Moss of the elm's rough knee,
Fungus, pale globe of dust,
Yield me your mystery.

More than yourselves you are.
Cyphers we bum to read,
Bramble's unblemished star,
Burr, and cocoon, and seed.

Flash of a painted wing,
Strength of a fluted bole,
Crimsoning leaf, you bring
Hints of the fugitive soul.

Waters that lisp and croon,
Voice of a hidden bird,
Breathe through the hush of noon
Tidings—a waited word.

Far off they toil and earn.
Here I may rest and browse
Arrased by scented fern
Tented by brooding boughs.

A Eucalyptu Citriodora

It seems presumption, sacrilege, to touch
Your satin bark
You lovely high-born lady of the Park.
Never was such
A princess of a tree.
Elusively
Through the pale creamy lustres of your shape
The tender flesh tints flicker—glow—escape.

A slim arboreal Godiva you—
No artist ever drew
A comelier model dazzling from the dark.
But the high-lifted leafage of cool green
Affords no screen
For the fair naked beauty of your limbs,
Your shining innocence,
The melting rondures that your lover hymns
So haltingly—but with all reverence.

Autumn Aquarelle

November's palette runs to tempered hues,
Umber and ochre and the weathered gold
Of clustered cottonwoods. Tall weeds uphold
Trusses of silver fleece. On duller blues
Or sombre grey heaven's far flotillas cruise.
The birds are pensive, and the year is old.
Yet summer is not dead—she's but paroled;
June waits with all the wiles that charmers use.

Now has each day one glorious hour that takes
The breath with beauty, when the low sun makes
Of the dark heights a ruby rampart lit
By inner flame; the apotheosis
Dazzles—and fades. Night's curtain gathers, knit
Of shadows sable as the cloak of Dis.

