

Rosalie Kercheval

Selected Poems



Rosalie W. Kercheval

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Kercheval was born in Los Angeles, the daughter of poet Albert Fenner Kercheval. Her first poems appeared in local papers when she was a teenager. Her extant known poems appeared as an addendum to her father's collected works, *Dolores, and Other Poems* which appeared in 1883.

Dolores, and other poems. San Francisco, A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1883.

Dawning

Dimmer want the tapers
 O'er the Orient world;
Softer wreathe the vapors
 Through the silence curled.

Distant, dim, uncertain,
 Pale and gray and wan,
Lifts the misty curtain
 O'er the rising dawn.

Far and faint and tender,
 Tinged with golden light,
Breaks the tide of splendor
 On the shores of night.

Fading farther onward,
 Still the shadows flee;
Crests of crimson downward
 Fleck the silver sea.

Where the roses clamber
 O'er each crested height,
Like a wave of amber
 Breaks the yellow light,

Through the silence solemn
 In splendor rolled,
Over spire column,
 In flood of gold.

“Tête D’Armée”*

An alien from all kindred lands
Forever banned and barred
Still lone Helena silent stands
Where sullen seas guard;

That held the heart of high desire
Within its keeping cast,
Till burned with its consuming fire
To ashes dim at last.

But to the dying exile lone,
Came other scenes than these;
Nor recked the tropic tempest’s moan,
That scourged the writhing seas.

What glamoured reflex of the past,
Bent with its luring thrall,
Whose fitful fancies mocking cast
Their mirage light o’er all?

Low bends above, the gloomy arch,
And hark! upon the breeze,
The fateful tread—the hurried march;—
Or was it murmuring seas?

Upon the vision dim across,
A glimpse of serried lines,
Where stormy branches wave and toss,
As thrilled with martial signs.

What matters where he lowly lies,
Beneath the clouds low hung,
And sees with those dim, failing eyes
The battle standards flung—

The memory of the past recedes—

The years of exile pain,—
Before the conquering hosts, he leads
To victory once again.

The ranks in combat toss and sway,
The tropic thunders thrill!
And one again—Ah! “Tête d’Armée!
Head of the army still.

*The last words of Napoleon, as, an exile, he lay dying in a tropic thunder storm.

Along the Shore

The gray tide that loiters,
 Creeps outward and in,
 While billows swell far
 Beyond the white bar
 Where strange sea-gulls skim;
Day's light o'er the waters
 Broods cheerless and dim.

The sea-weed that lingers
 All clammy and cold,
 Convulsively clasps
 With faint, nerveless grasp,
 When billows are rolled,
Like clutch of dead fingers
 That seek for some hold.

And darkly resisted
 By rude billow shocks,
 That circle and swing
 The faint mosses cling,
 Like pale, yellow locks
All tangled and twisted,
 Around the dark rocks.

Then back with each token
 The dark current slips,
 That sobbing sinks lower
 Along the far shore,
 That oozes and drips
Through silence unbroken,
 Of cold, clammy lips.

From caverns long buried,
 Pale sea-shells are tossed,
 Like white spectral hands
 Across dark sands

In penitence crossed,
Then outward are hurried
Forever, and lost.

And when the wild surges
In passion are flung,
And treach'rous hands reach
Along the far beach—
With strange, mournful tongue,
The dark moaning dirges
Are chanted and sung.

Through swift billows breaking
When wild murmurs swell,
What dazzling tints bright
Swift leap to light
From sea-weed and shell,
Till waters forsaking
Dissolve the bright spell?

With wild longings tender
For phantoms as frail,
Still o'er the dim lands
We lift our faint hands,
Then murmur and wail,
To find that their splendor,
Is worthless and pale.

Still colder and firmer
Around their pale graves,
What secrets untold,
Thy dark waters hold
Within their far caves,
Faint swept by the murmur
Of low distant waves?

Cold, colder and cruel,
Unmeasured, unknown,

What phantoms unfold
Within thy dark hold
Through silent depths lone,
With treasure and jewel
And mystery strown?

And o'er the far spaces
In solitude spread,
Where waters sink low
With faint, sobbing flow
Like wild words unsaid,
O'er white, solemn faces
In secrecy dread,

What bright lives unclouded
Here ended as one,
Within thy dark tide
Laid low in their pride;
What laurels unwon,
What fond hopes enshrouded,
Forever undone!

With no dream elating
Thy dark memories,
In restless regret
Thou wouldst not forget
Make moaning for these;—
For fond hearts still waiting
Beyond the dark seas.

Inspiration

She heard strange sweet-voiced singers
 Across the unseen seas;
And caught with fitful fingers
 The mystic melodies;

The tide of rich expression
 From some strange source unknown;
The boundless fire and passion,
 As from some central throne.

And followed phantoms fleeting
 O'er fancy's purple seas,
Where mirages retreating
 Melt into mysteries.

She turned and left the schemer
 Forever to his schemes—
And stood henceforth a dreamer
 Within a land of dreams.

