

Ruth Le Prade

Selected Poems



Ruth Le Prade

July 20, 1894 [Modesto, California] –

May 25, 1969 [Los Angeles, California]

Le Prade was born near Modesto, California to William and Mary Coward (she dropped her last name as a teenager). She moved to Los Angeles around 1913, where she spent the rest of her life. She was discovered by poet Edwin Markham in 1915 during his travels in Los Angeles when she was attending Manual Arts High School. J.F. Rowny Press published her first volume of poetry, with an introduction by Markham, *A Woman Free*, in 1917. A pacifist and socialist, Le Prade met her husband Harold Story while protesting World War I in Southern California. They wed in 1919. Le Prade edited the volume *Debs and the Poets* for Eugene Debs (with an introduction by Upton Sinclair) in 1920. The Poets Garden, which began with the naming of trees already in Le Prade's backyard for poets, was formally dedicated in 1927 by Markham with the planting of the Song Tree (a sycamore). A second volume of poems, *Song Tree*, appeared in 1943. Le Prade died 1969 in Los Angeles.

A Woman Free, and other poems. Los Angeles: J.F. Rowny Press, 1917.

Song Tree. Santa Barbara: J.F. Rowny Press, 1943.

The Mighty Rebel

Dedicated to the Great Adventure

I am the Rebel—the mighty Rebel!
My soul has burst its bonds with love.
In me is all power, all strength;
In me is that which is unconquerable but which conquers all;
In me the dream of beauty;
In me the perfect faith.

I am the Rebel—the mighty Rebel!
I am he who hopes all, dares all, wins all.
I am the Lover of men.
I will shake down every king from off his throne;
I will humble every empire to the dust.
The chains of men I will break asunder;
The prison doors I will fling wide.
The outgrown creeds and laws I cast aside.
The implements of war and death I burn up with the passion of my love.
Man shall be free—
He shall be free at last!

I am the Rebel—the mighty Rebel!
Over the world I hurl my song—and well may the Masters tremble!
Thruout all time they sought to bind me;
They hounded me and threatened;
They builded for me prisons;
They crucified my body;
But I was far above it;
My soul they could not touch.
The earth is fertile with my blood—
And from it shall spring Freedom!

I am the Rebel—the mighty Rebel!
Destructive and constructive—both am I.
With the potent passion of my love I burn ignorance, and lust;
All tyranny and greed to ashes turn.

Beneath the mighty passion of my love
The souls of men burst thru the husks
And dare!—
Dare to be free, to know, to love, to live—
Dare to be men
After centuries of pain.

I am the Rebel-the mighty Rebel!
I am the builder of the world!
I build with courage and with strength;
I build with beauty and with love;
I build the Dream into the hearts of men;
I build the great new world of Brotherhood;
The world where poverty is not,
The world that has forgotten war and greed, all evil,
The world where every soul shall live its fullest love
Unhampered and unbound—
The world of freedom and of joy.

I am the Rebel-the mighty Rebel!
I am the Lover of men!

Because Your Beauty Is

Darkness, Earthquake and Storm,
And I in the ruins alone,
With my crumbled heart at my feet.
Then the luminous whiteness of your soul shone down upon me;
And I lifted up my face unto your love—
A love which folds all creatures to your breast,
The love of Socrates and Christ:
Understanding all,
Forgiving all,
Hoping all—
And I was glad
Because your beauty is!

As I go the long road
And the dust is in my face,
I will remember.
As the silken bonds which comrades have made to hold me, I tear apart,
And the ground is moistened with my blood,
I will remember. .
When those who pass me strike
Because they cannot understand,
I will remember.
And when in utter loneliness I stand,
Torn with the pains of desolation,
I will remember.
Yea! even when my soul in darkness
Falls writhing with utmost agony,
I will remember.
I will forget the agony and tears;
I will forgive the bitterness and blows;
I will lift my face unto the mighty love;
I will be glad
Because your beauty is!

And when death has folded me in silent mist,
And the sunlight and the moonlight know me no more,

When the purple on the distant hills
Smites me no more with adoration,
When music moves me no longer,
And the tremulous mystery of spring
Wakens no answer in my heart-
The flowers will still grow toward you,
And the birds will still sing near you,
The tortured ones within your arms will smile,
They will be glad
Because your beauty is.

The Runner

Lithe and strong stands the runner poised for the race.
Lean is his body, freed from superfluous flesh;
Clean is the blood which flows within it.
He is suggestive of great strength;
Strength to achieve and overcome.

As you gaze upon him you know that he has not weakened himself with
alcohol or tobacco
He could not afford to weaken himself with alcohol or tobacco;
Neither has he weakened himself by sexual indulgence, or overeating—
He has conserved himself for the race;
And you feel as you gaze upon him
That he will be a winner.

Lithe and strong stands the runner, poised for the race.
The wind is on his face, it rumples his hair.
His muscles arc co-ordinated; his being is in harmony.
He is conscious of power.

The track is before him; his eyes are toward the distant Goal.
He waits, alert; power in every inch of him.
The signal is given; he leaps into the air—
The race is on.

Oh! to be a runner!
To be lithe, strong with coordinate muscles;
To be harmonious and conscious of power;
To be clean and full of strength;
To refuse to waste myself in sensuality;
To conserve myself for the race.

Oh, to be a runner!
To leap, and shout with the wind;
To be utterly free, mad, wild, exultant!

Oh, to be a runner!

To turn one's face toward the Goal;
And to reach the Goal;
Exhausted, if necessary, with blood streaming from the mouth and nostrils;
But to reach the Goal!

Oh, to be a runner!
To be strong, clean, powerful,
To conserve one's energy; to reach the Goal,
To be a winner in the race!

I Said to the Dry Professor

I said to the dry professor,
In the midst of his dust and cobwebs:
“There is something higher than reason.”
He laughed, thinking me a fool.

Oh these exalters of reason, of the cold intellect;
These worshippers at the tombs of the dead;
These men of petty vision and of rules!
With dead languages, dead philosophies, dead thoughts
They shut themselves from the sunlight,
And demand that others do likewise.

They are but ghouls
Feasting on the dead.

Unfinished

Poets have carefully carved their songs,
Toiling with words, phrases, stanzas,
Till all was finished.

But I do not carefully carve my songs,
Toiling with words, phrases, stanzas,
And all that I leave is unfinished—

That you shall be a poet,
Finishing each according to yourself.

