

**WHITNEY**

**HELEN HAY**

HERBS AND APPLES

Helen Whitney  
**Herbs and Apples**

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# **Helen Hay Whitney**

## **Herbs and Apples**

I give you this, the bitter and the sweet.  
It holds my heart, can you not hear it beat?  
So poor a gift to put within your hand—  
Apples and Herbs!—but you will understand.

## TO NEIGHBOR LIFE

Neighbor Life, I love you well,  
Have you any goods to sell?  
Let me buy or let me borrow  
Joy, to tide me o'er the morrow;  
I will give you in exchange  
Baskets full of thoughts that range,  
Bright utensils of my brain;  
Coins of feeling you shall gain.  
All I ask in equal measure  
Is your store of joy and pleasure.  
Neighbor Life, I love you well,  
Have you any joy to sell?

## THE UNBURIED

In the wood the dead trees stand,  
Dead and living, hand to hand,  
Being Winter, who can tell  
Which is sick and which is well?  
Standing upright, day by day  
Sullenly their hearts decay  
Till a wise wind lays them low,  
Prostrate, empty, then we know.

So thro' forests of the street,  
Men stand dead upon their feet,  
Corpses without epitaph;  
God withholds his wind of wrath,  
So we greet them, and they smile,  
Dead and doomed a weary while,  
Only sometimes thro' their eyes  
We can see the worm that plies.

## UP A LITTLE ROAD

Up a little road with the morning in my arms,  
Drenched with dew and tipsy with the madness of the May,  
Leafy fingers on my face, I stop not for your charms!  
Love is waiting round the turn, to be my Love to-day.

Shouting as I ride on the springing ringing sod,  
Ah! my pony knows the goal to which his course is laid,  
Galloping thro' dawn he knows he bears a little god  
Bacchus-mad with happiness who burns to meet his maid.

## ON CEDAR STREET, NEW YORK

I, whose totem was a tree  
In the days when earth was new,  
Joyous leafy ancestry  
Known of twilight and of dew,  
Now within this iron wall  
Slave of tasks that irk the soul,  
To my parents send one call—  
That they give me of their dole.

Thro' the roar of alien sound  
Grimy noise of work-a-day,  
Secretly a voice, half drowned,  
Whispers thro' the evening's grey,  
"Child, we know the path you tread,  
Ghost and manes, we are true;  
Cedar spirits, long since dead,  
Calm and sweet abide with you."

## **CHE SARÀ SARÀ**

Deep as the permanent earth is deep,  
Fierce as its central fire,  
Man is his own conclusion,  
Woman her great desire.

## THE DEAD WANTON

She was so light, so frail a thing,  
She had no wisdom but her face,  
Which caught men's fancy like the Spring  
Yet held them but a moment's space.

She is the youngest of the dead,  
And so the great lean round her feet;  
They strive to learn from her fair head  
Why far-forgotten life was sweet.

For now she knows what Plato knows,  
And lapped in languor she agrees  
With Kant, and as her soft hair blows,  
Smiling, she flouts Demosthenes.

## LEAVEN

Others furnish bread and meat,  
Busy hucksters on the street,  
They will give you what you need,  
All the facts your life to feed.

Mine are not these wares of earth,  
I can give my love but mirth;  
Let, oh let this part be mine,  
I would be your salt and wine.

## QUAERITUR

What if to-day, when I have made so sure  
That love is utterly and wholly mine,  
What if I found that faith should not endure  
And all my trust in you I should resign;

That when I send my thoughts like homing birds  
To your dear heart they find no resting place,  
But all misunderstood, far, foreign words,  
They die away like strangers at your face.

Love, make me certain, make the circuit true,  
And when I wonder, give the faith I seek  
Perfectly trusting, let me end in you  
Heart against heart, and cheek upon your cheek.

## LOVE LAND

Where is El Dorado?  
Where is bright Cathay?  
These are lands where we should go  
To live and love to-day.

Miles of glistening beaches  
Over all the sun,  
Tropic, spicy-laden breeze  
To lull when day is done.

Gypsy lass and lover  
With the tides we'd rove;  
We be natives of no land  
Save the land of love.

## BY THE WESTERN GATE

You and you only!—By the Western gate  
That fronts the falling sun I shade my face  
And watch for you. As one who's lost the race  
Tries to demand no further gift from Fate  
Lest he be hurled more low, so I, who wait  
And want you, ask no pity of your grace  
On my defeat, I only long to trace  
My lost heart; come to me, my need is great.

I see the young men with their crystal eyes,  
They stand about my door, their hearts, I know  
Are breaking in the poppies that they bring.  
I cannot love them for I am not wise;  
Ah, come, or else forever let me go,  
I grow so tired with waiting in the Spring.

## FOR MUSIC

The Indian Summer and Love have fled,  
Oh, red, red lips like a crimson rose,  
Oh, slender hands with the tips of red,  
You are lost in the land of Nobody-knows.

The sweet breeze blows but it comes not back,  
The water flows in a silver stream,  
But never returns on its moon-white track,  
They are gone, past recall, like a lovely dream.

Ah, crimson lips like a tilted flower,  
Where sweetest honey awaits the bee;  
Come back, come back for a single hour,  
Dear Love, my Summer, come back to me.

## THE LITTLE GHOST

The little one who loved the sun  
Who only lived for play,  
Ah, why was she the one condemned  
To dark and dreams for aye!

The perfect perfume of her life  
Was as a rose's breath,  
And now she treads eternally  
The gusty walks of Death.

## MADONNA EVE

From what far spicery derives your hair  
The sweet faint fragrance that enslaves my sense?  
What subtle love trick taught you to be fair  
With overt lure and covert reticence?

Madonna Eve, you bear upon your breast  
A hungry emerald like the desiring sea,  
But warm upon your heart lie pearls of rest  
What man could exorcise such witchery?

## A CONVERSATION

"Laddy, leave your pedant's task,  
Rove the world with me.  
Fields and towns and pretty lands  
Together we would see.  
There be workers everywhere,  
You would not be missed.  
Come, ah come, and take for yours  
The mouth you never kissed!"

"Lady, I am fain for play,  
So I may not go.  
Only those who hate to toil  
The true enjoyment know;  
But could you love a larrikin  
Whose task he'd so resign?"  
"Yes!—I'd love a larrikin  
If only he were mine."

## BE BRAVE

Be brave about yourselves, you little ones,  
If in the crazy warp and woof you gleam  
With the insistence of determined suns,  
Shine, being true and modest in your dream.

If to the peace of nature you respond  
Draw from her breast your milk, nor weep the high  
Duties for lack of which you now despond,  
Made for historic planets thro' the sky.

Knowing yourself a gay and careless weed,  
Be you courageous in your light despair;  
Sure that you fill a space of unknown need,  
Idle and green in the bright coat you wear.

Strive to the uttermost to find your worth,  
Jester or Gypsy, Body, Brain or Soul,  
Filling with perfect cheer your place on earth,  
So shall the tapestry of Time be whole.

## FORFEITURE

So I have lost you. When the utter ache  
Shall fade at length to mere despondency  
What will the answer to this problem be?  
They say that nothing dies, that all we stake  
Brings some unknown return; what then shall make  
An adequate exchange for love, to see  
Your hand held out in friendship?—as for me  
The episode is ended, for life's sake.

You want me still for that small joy I gave,  
But now it ends for you. I am not brave  
To love you seared; I have no happy days  
To brood upon at dusk, and so I claim,  
As all the wager that good fortune pays,  
Complete obliteration of your name.

## THE SEARCH

I tire of the struggle, the search for the ultimate I,  
There hangs the chalice of sapphire, the infinite sky,  
Why thro' the space of despair should my spirit be hurled  
Seeking for truth, when beneath lies this pearl of a world?

Seers may direct us thro' pain to discover the soul,  
Comforting joy may not give us the absolute whole,  
But if the seers should be wrong, may the truth not be ours  
Thanking dear Life for its light and its beautiful hours?

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