

WHITNEY

HELEN HAY

GYPSY VERSES

Helen Whitney

Gypsy Verses

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Helen Hay Whitney

Gypsy Verses

*To
G. V. W.
because she is my friend*

Acknowledgment is made to Messrs. Harper and Brothers, the Century Company, and the Metropolitan Magazine for courteous permission to reproduce certain of the verses included in this volume.

Oh, you were not so idle—
You wore a sprig of green;
You wore a feather in your cap,
The reddest ever seen.

Your face was laughing gypsy brown,
Your eyes were of the blue;
You wandered up and down the world,
For you had much to do.

For oh, you were not idle,
Whatever men might say—
You made the colour of the year
Magnificent and gay.

ATARAH

With painted slender folded hands
She waited what might come,
Her head was tyred with jewelled bands,
Her mouth was sweet and dumb.

Her cymar was of ardassine,
Fire red from throat to hem,
Broidered with Turkis stones therein—
She gave her soul for them.

Faint cassia and love-haunted myrrh
Made perilous her hair,
And what was Sidon's woe to her
Whose face was king's despair?

Nor life nor love from those cold lips,
But ah, in what degree,
Her passionate lover leans and sips
Her death-bright poesy.

AGE

Blindness, and women wailing on white seas,
Seas where no placid sails have ever been,
Dreams like wan demons on waste marshes seen
Thro' dulling, fevered eyes. The dregs and lees
Of wine long spilt to dead divinities.
Grey, empty days when Spring is never green,
Can the heart answer what these riddles mean—
Can the life hold such hopelessness as these?

Love lying low in the long pleasant grass,
Youth with his eager face against the sun,
They may not guess the hours when these shall pass,

In what drear coin such lovely dreams are paid,
At what grim cost their flowery days are won,
When man is old and lonely and afraid.

LOVE AND DAWN

Dawn shaking long light pennons in the East—
Is love the least
And love the greatest of the morning's woes?
See how the rose
Breaks in a hundred petals down the sky.
Darkness must die,
And in the heart, where flutters sad desire,
Wakes the new fire
Silver and azure of the open day.
So, grief, away!
We will be glad with flagons, drown old pain,
And Dawn shall bring us to her own again.

L'AMOUR AMBIGUEUX

You are the dreams we do not dare to dream,
The dim florescence of a mystic rose,
In poverty or pride love comes and goes,
We do not question what the deeps may seem
Launched on the steady current of the stream.
Gaily and hardily we hear the prose;
In youth, red sun, in age the charnel snows.
Nor see the banks where subtle flowers gleam,
In green sweet beds of moly and of thyme
Wild as an errant fancy. All the while
We know you, mystic rose; we know your smile,
Your deep, still eyes, your fragrant floating hair,
The peacock purple of the gown you wear,
O lyric alchemist of rune and rhyme!

SAPPHICS

Leave the Vine, Ah Love, and the wreath of myrtle,
Leave the Song, to die, on the lips of laughter,
Come, for love is faint with the choric measure,
Weary of waiting.

Down the sky in lines of pellucid amber
Blows the hair of her whom the gods have treasured,
Fair, more fair is mine in the ring of maidens,
Mine for the taking.

SATAN, PRINCE OF DARKNESS

I sinned, but gloriously. I bore the fall
From Heaven's high places as becomes a king.
I did not shrink before the utmost sting
Of torture or of banishment. The pall
Of Dis, I cried, should be the hall
Where sad proud men of men should meet and sing
The woes of that defeat ambitions bring
Hurled from the last vain fight against the wall.

I thought I had been punished. To forego
All lovely sights, the whisper of fresh rain,
To brood forever endlessly on pain
Yet still a Prince, Ah God, I dreamed,—and then
I learned my Fate, this wandering to and fro
In Devil's work among the sons of men.

IN PRISON

Above her task the long year through
She works with steady hands,
The while her heart is tired with dreams
Which no man understands.

For long and long ago she knew
Green trees and open sky,
Before the law condemned her days
To doom until she die.

And so she dreams in mystic peace,
Indifferent to the scene,
Because her heart retains and knows
The little stain of green.

GHOSTS

The long lost lights of love I know,
They thrill from ultimate space, they blow
Like small bewildered stars, tossed high
On some unknown and passionate sky.

I know them for the loved lost lights
That made the glamour of my nights
Long, long ago, and now I fear
Their coming, and the garb they wear.

For they are very white and cold,
They are not coloured as of old,
In trailing radiance, rose and red,
For these are ghosts, and they are dead.

LILIS

We have forgiven you because you are so fair,
Eloquent by virtue of your dark enchanting eyes,
Evil to your heart of hearts, shall we blame or care,
You are very beautiful, and love has made you wise.

With a splendid insolence you exist to sin,
Scorn us for the weaknesses that bring us to our pain.
Weak you are and false you are and never may we win,
Yet we have forgiven you, and shall forgive again.

THE OLD WOMEN

We are very, very old,
We have had our day,
So we bend above our work
While the others play.

Do they call us women, we
Gaunt and grey and grim,
Hideous and sexless things
Weak of brain and limb?

Beauty ended, love long past,
Yet, when all else flees,
We are women, for we still
Have our memories.

TO HIPPOLYTUS

It is too late to part. I dreamed a dream
That love had loosed me, that no more your name
Should vex my soul, for very pride and shame
I hid you out of mind; I said, The stream
Has grown too wide between us, it would seem
To sunder even memory. Your fame
Rang hollow on my ear, and then you came
And love laughed for the lie he would redeem.

It is too late. Love will not let me go.
The bare suns burn me, and the strong winds blow;
I take them fearlessly, for I am wise
At last; for being yours I must be brave,
Tho' you give nothing, still am I your slave,
The light within my heart your eyes, your eyes.

THE GARDEN HEDGE

I live in a beautiful garden,
All joyous with fountains and flowers;
I reckon not of penance or pardon,
At ease thro' the exquisite hours.

My blossoms of lilies and pansies,
Pale heliotrope, rosemary, rue,
All lull me with delicate fancies
As shy as the dawn and the dew.

But the ghost—Gods—the ghost in the gloaming,
How it lures me with whispers and cries,
How it speaks of the wind and the roaming,
Free, free, 'neath the Romany skies.

'Tis the hedge that is crimson with roses,
All wonderfully crimson and gold,
And caged in my beautiful closes
I know what it is to be old.

THE SLAVE WOMAN

Her eyes are dark with unknown deeps,
Old woes and new despair,
Her shackled spirit feels the thong
That breaks her body bare.

The savage master of her days
Who mocks her passive pain,
How should he know her scorn of him.
Indifferent to the stain?

For in her heart she sees the glow
Of sacrificial fires,
A priestess of a mystic rite
Performed on nameless pyres.

The incident of shame and toil
She takes with idle breath,
For she remembers Africa,
And what to her is death?

SONG

The sky is more blue than the eyes of a boy,
A riot of roses entangles the year;
Ah, come to me, run to me, fill me with joy,
Dear, dear, dear.

The air is a passion of perfume and song,
The little moon swings up above, look above,
I cannot wait longer, I've waited so long,
Love, love, love.

SANS-JOY

Hide your eyes, Angels, beneath your gold phylacteries,
Israfel will charm you with the magic of his song;
Yet you will not smile for him, by reason of your memories,
For Lucifer is absent, and the cry goes up, How long!

For his expiation you would give your dreams and destinies,
Paradise is clouded by the measure of your pain;
Hide your eyes, Angels, beneath your gold phylacteries,
Till the jasper gates swing wide to bring him home again.

OUT OF THE JUNGLE

Out of the jungle he came, he came,
Man of the lion's breed,
His heart was fire and his eyes were flame,
And he piped on a singing reed.

Spring was sweet and keen in his blood,
Singing, he sought his mate,
The wife for the life and time of his mood,
Formed for his needs by fate.

Over his reed he piped and sang,
His eyes were the eyes of a man,
But the jungle knew how his changes rang,
For his heart was the heart of Pan.

IN PORT

Wave buffeted and sick with storm,
The ships came reeling in,
The harbour lights were kind and warm,
And yet, so hard to win.

Like wings, the tired sails fluttered down,
While night began to fall,
Then came, sea-scarred, toward the town,
The smallest ship of all.

At last in harbour, safe and still,
No more she need be brave,
No more she'd meet the winds' rough will,
The wanton of each wave.

The harbour lights! but where the moon
Should murmur blessings bright,
Clouded instead the dread typhoon,
That thundered down the night.

What curse the luring harbour bore
Of false security;
The port held desolation more
Than boasted all the sea.

When morning came with leering lip,
What death lay on her breast,
And oh! the little weary ship
Was wrecked with all the rest.

SONNY BOY

(A bust by H. F.)

Grave as a little god, erect and wise,
He dares the years that open to his gaze.
Brave in his charming beauty, he portrays
A bright eternal youth, and in his eyes
Sweet moons that are no more. No sad surprise

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