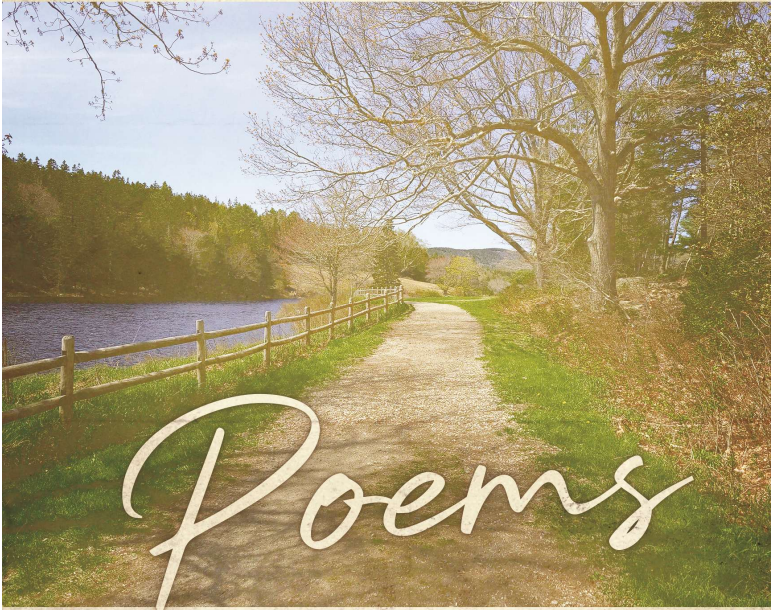


JAY TROTT



OF THE
COMMONER

POEMS OF THE COMMONER

JAY TROTT

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EARLY MORNING BOOKS

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WHEATON, MY PRINCE

Wheaton, my prince, my pride & joy,
Carry me back home
Through the meadows and the valley;
Carry me home again while there is still light,
For we should not forget the way.
Do you want to stop at the brook for a drink?
We will stop.
Then carry me home to the familiar scenes,
To the places and the faces we both know,
My dear one, my chestnut prince,
So strong yet so light upon your feet.
I will put you in the stable,
I will gently rub you down
And give you fresh hay and a carrot,
For you have done great things for me today.
Wheaton, my chestnut prince, my joy.
I will not forget you when you are old.

GRIND THE WHEEL DOWN SLOWLY

Grind the wheel down slowly,
Grind it down, grind it down.
The last evidence we will see
Is day slipping into night,
Night slipping into shadow,
Shadow slipping into stars:
For we are all mere shadows,
And things that seem real, not so.
Avert your stare from the stones,
Stay out of their wily embrace,
For there is nothing written
That time will not efface.
Nor think of things that may come,
But only the things that are;
For they alone can be known,
And they alone can be love.
Grind the wheel down slowly,
Grind it down, grind it down,
Unto dust so pearly fine
That the world is no longer alone.

HANGING UP THE WASH

I love to hang the wash up on the line,
Most of all when spring breezes are still fresh.
I love the smell of clothes dried in the sun,
Burying my face in the clean sheets.
Indoors is the winter time of life.
It's caring for my kids, my poor husband.
It's managing the house in heating season,
Making sure we have enough to get by;
Indoors is yesterday's mistake or loss,
Yesterday's regret for something said,
Yesterday's spider that the woodstove brought,
Yesterday's mouse dropping in the kitchen drawer.
Then April comes in with her daffodils,
With heather bloom and bright forsythia,
With the joyful peeper chorus at night
And the first bird songs of the morning.
Then what joy it is, on a mild day,
To stand by the clothesline in my back yard
And feel the pale spring sun on my face,
Struggling to rise from the horizon,
Just as I struggle, this time every year,
For the rekindling of my inner light.

ON HIS LAST LEG

I don't even know what happened. It was July,
The last thing I remember I was on the tractor,
And then somehow I was on the ground.
The big wheel, it ran over my left leg and crushed it.
I guess I was in shock, because I just lay there
While the tractor rumbled on till it hit a tree.
When my leg got better, I fixed that tractor up,
I climbed back on it and I went to work again.
For twenty years we plowed the fields through sun
and rain.
We planted them with corn and soy, my tractor and I,
For twenty years dragging my bad leg behind me.
Now, when rain is coming, the bum leg just aches
and aches.
I figure it's just trying to remind me
That I could never hope to earn your love.

AUTUMN SKY

Delicate are the thoughts of autumn,
Poised as they are between green summer
And the icy grip of winter gloom
Wherein all of life's colors are fled.
This hardy season of transformations,
Sweet in itself, leads to a sour end;
At one time we loved it with all our heart,
But now that which we love we also fear.
Autumn is a strange celebration,
Maple, ash and birch all conspiring
To put a face of joy on their demise,
While we, who naturally love summer,
Are swept along by the glorious haste,
Wanting the bright colors to come faster
As if this speed did not bring sullen gray
In its wake and long days of restlessness.
Above our folly reigns the autumn sky,
Pristine as a token of the Virgin.
The hardwoods paint her with their sad beauty,
And we at the end of summer sigh.

THE HOUSE DOTH NOT MAKE THE MAN

Oh, sweet-proportioned house
Ensconced in a green meadow
Near a copse of birch and beech
With a sparkling brook curling by!
How oft have I beheld thee
Here and in sundry places
And imagined there was peace
Within your walls, peace for those
Who make you their dwelling-place!
Still, I know your comeliness
To have been made by men of dreams,
While within you there may be quarrels
Churning for a year or a lifetime;
There may be beatings, schisms,
Flesh-tearing words that are spoken.
For dear house, no matter how pretty
You may seem to weathered eyes,
No matter if the soul be drawn
That thirsts to find safe haven,
I know that dreaming men made you,
And the house doth not make the man.

THE IMPASSIVE FACE

The impassive face was wrinkled and worn,
Dry like dust in the pale January light.
Hello, it said through cracked lips,
Murmuring in a low monotone
Like a heart that had never once been stirred.
I wondered when you would notice me.
What are you doing here? I said.
Are you come to torment me,
I who am already tormented?
There was just the trace of a smile,
A slow roll of the eyes in desiccation.
Torment? Not at all. Don't you know
I am come at your own calling
To settle myself within your sullen breast
When you have no place to lay your head
Nor any means with which to find your rest.
This is the death mask, then, I said;
This is a show of things that are to come.
Again it seemed he forced himself to smile.
This is the mask you choose to wear in life
When you have forgotten the fresh roses
And the moon is as cold as your own heart.
But now that you've come, will you go away?
I said, not at all liking this retort.
How can I go when you are the one
Who does the calling? he replied.
But what if I don't want you here?
What if I said you disgust me
And I never want to see you again?
Then that is a conversation for yourself.

THE YOUNG MOTHER

When I hold my baby in my arms,
I feel as if life were born with me.
I do not gaze upon her; no, I drink
With a thirst that gladdens its own self.
In spring, the mother sparrow leaves her nest,
Scouting for the sustenance of life,
Eager, it seems, to return again
As if to wear the truth in devotion.
All mothers are the sparrow, I suppose;
A mystery has come into their lives.
What used to seem mundane, it is not so;
No one can deceive them with that lie.
Privileged I am to have this treasure,
Not because all little girls are perfect,
Not because of any foolish pride,
But for the incredible gift of love.
I have loved before—my home, my church,
I have loved my husband, and others too,
I have loved my family with a fierce love,
And my country, as one who keeps the faith;
But never have I been in love like this,
Made pure by the flame of sacrifice.

WINTER BROOK

Where are you taking me, winter brook?
I love to see your ice-rimmed margins
Cutting deep through silent snows,
The winter sun darkly shining
On your burbling furrows.
Through the woods you wind
Warming my heart with frigid song—
But where are you taking me, winter brook,
In your ice-rimmed meanderings to the sea?

THE CONQUEROR IS CONQUERED

He walked out on his parapet one evening,
And there she was, bathing, and she was beautiful,
Offering herself openly to his astonished eyes
While her husband did the noble work of war.
He descended from his throne to taste her sweets,
Not knowing until then who she really was—
Triumphing over him in his triumph.
The conqueror was overthrown by love,
He who had abstained from false Ambition
When fate put the old king in his hands;
Who had triumphed over lustful nations,
Snatching the tender lambs from their clutches—
Now at last the conqueror was conquered,
Not by steel but the soft foe of desire.
The thorn takes, he becomes like other men,
No longer king of his own realm.

WHERE HAVE YOU GONE?

I went for a walk the other day
Down a country road where I have walked
Many times before. The rambling farm
Down by the river has a new owner
And a new menagerie, among them
A pair of mules, their monotone honks
As loud and unsettling as a tug.
They are freaks of nature, and so is she—
Nature herself, I mean—with her strange mix
Of invasives, brought to these shores by men
Who thought they were improvers, or just careless.
A bittersweet vine choking a hapless oak,
Once mighty, but now brought low by guile;
The undergrowth a mass of burning bush;
The bamboo that chokes the river bed;
Loosestrife and all the other conquerors;—
Where are the old woods now? Gone forever.
Either we must find a way to make peace
With the invaders and their unruliness,
Or they will choke us out in the end.

THE COLOR IN THE TREES

Fall color in the trees makes me dreamy
Like a pressing of a lever in the mind,
Which in the change assuages all harsh thought,
Turning hurts and pains into sweet butter.
A maple near the road is turning red,
Emerging from a bank of sturdy oaks,
Themselves still green, and likewise pines;
But this maple, this maple turning red
Has made a transformation in my head,
Spinning a world that seemed as hard as stone
Like buzzards circling the waste of time
Into a pleasant bower of repose.
What made the maple red, and what made me
Susceptible to such sweet serenity?

STORM WAVES

In the aftermath of the storm,
The streets were strewn with seaweed,
Tangled in polished rocks and broken tar.
The menace, having faded from the skies,
Was still present in vertical swells
Pounding hard upon the shore,
Mingling wrath with a constant roar.
Deep was the wash of those waves
As they turned in the pale silver light,
And deep was the delight of those
Who came to be awed and amazed.
Some stood by watching with unknown yearnings,
Others held camera phones exultingly high,
Each one reveling in the fierce winter storm,
As if by salt washing they too were made clean.

THE BACK PEW

I am an old woman now, with white hair,
But it wasn't always that way.
At one time I was a dark-haired beauty,
Full of fun and frolic, friend to friends.
I married young to a wonderful man,
We raised our three children together,
And now they have families of their own.
(He's gone; I still miss him terribly.
Sometimes I wake up calling out his name.)
Through it all, I've sat in my back pew.
I guess I'm a back-pew kind of person.
Not that I don't want to be involved—
Oh, I've been involved. I've done my share
Of flower arranging and dish washing,
Decorating the church at Christmas,
Visiting the shut-ins with the deacons.
I've seen pastors come and go like birds.
I've seen times of life and times of death.
I remember when the old church was full
As well as summer days with no one there.
No, sitting in the back was not for distance;
It was for keeping my place in my heart.
The world swept before me in my back pew,
Teaching me to say a simple prayer.

NO ONE CAN TAKE A PICTURE OF A BROOK

One of the great pleasures of walking
In the woods is the musical brook,
Fresh in the sunlight, meandering over
Smooth stones, sparkling along its way
To the river or the distant sea.
In summer the brook soothes the dusty soul
With much more than physical beauty;
The gurgle of its song is sweet to hear,
And in running it makes all things new.
The winter brook brings winter pleasures,
Frosted with snow and rainbows of ice,
Lying like a gem in the thick forest
When the sun is pale and the air is thin.
No one can take a picture of a brook;
That's the artist.

COCKPIT: ROUTE 80

It was tough, pulling the rig
Along Route 80.
Through the mountain pass, the amateurs,
It was tough.
The houses I saw in the August sun
Made me want to hope.
Dilapidated or dapper,
They made me want to hope.
In the highlands and the lowlands
Of Route 80.

LEMONADE

Sitting on the porch
On a lovely summer day,
Savoring my glass of lemonade.
Gave up the gin
When they said it was a sin,
So now there's just the lemonade and me.
Sitting on the porch
On a lovely summer day,
Gazing at God's green earth.
Why can the heart not be content?

SING A HUMBLE SONG

Who will sing the humble song of the nurse?
She does not sally forth into the boardroom
Or seek to impress with Powerpoint;
Her wardrobe is made up of scrubs and clogs
In which she seeks to be comfortable
And yet clean and fresh as health itself.
It is not with silver words that she toils;
She does not ply the craft of influence.
She has no need to fly to Budapest;
To her the power lunch is unknown,
As is the country club and luxury.
But a nurse's duty brings her great joy.
She works with her head and with her heart.
Some new learning comes with each new day,
And she can see her value in patients' eyes.
The work of the humble nurse is life,
Which is the most precious thing of all.

THE OPPOSING CHAIR

Who is it down there sitting in that chair?
Sure, it appears to be empty, but you can't fool me.
You have come in a Spirit of Opposition
On this late summer night – very late, almost fall.
You are there facing me in the face
Even though – am I imagining it? – the chair is empty.
My friend, you are my oldest enemy.
You think you can fool me with your emptiness.
I see you nonetheless, and am not unaware
That the empty chair is for me.

AS THE TREES BEGIN TO TURN

This year, as the trees begin to turn,
Filling our woodland realm with brilliant hues,
And the ripe pumpkin gloats on wilted meadow,
And flocks of geese turn toward their summer home,
And the tea rose gives one last single bloom,
All I can think of is the days consumed,
The lazy summers turned to winter frost,
The spinning of the years without remorse:
For passing like a shade from fleeting life,
For regret and scenes of brokenness,
For blotting out of good we may have done,
For change from sturdy youth to shaky age,
And losses that can never be restored.
Now more than ever does the promise ring
That trees will leaf again for those who trust,
That all is not a waltzing toward the void
But rather a revealing of a realm
Where all fears and toils are forgotten
And the color of the season is pure love.

THE DREAM

It started like a feast of tropic heat,
A meal of loving love too desperately,
A taste of tender lips so soft and sweet
They seemed like cherries ripe with ecstasy.
Once he was so sick with summer hunger
That there he swooned to think of one she'd loved,
Who like some sleek Apollo had pursued her,
A shining player moved by stars above.
But deep into the whirl of soft desire
When sinews burn and ebb to energy,
Dissolving all in all-consuming fire
Against the graven image now set free—
Just then she turned to him; he saw her face,
A glint of steel, cold bolts, and rotting flesh.

THE MONSTER

He dreamed he saw a monster or a beast
That came disguised as love one stony day
When fears and weary hopes had ambushed peace
Like briars tangled on the forest way.
At first she seemed the soul of summer bliss,
Her cherry lips a banquet of delight,
Where men would love to linger with a kiss
And taste with tenderness the fruit of night.
As red geraniums that cling to glass
Upon the fleeting warmth of winter sun,
So did he thirst for love lest love should pass
Before the work of fever was begun —
Until with rude awakening he found
A mocking face that was a running wound.

TERROR OF THE NIGHT

With terror one night crept a mocking beast
Into the honeyed lull of summer dreams,
Feigning first to be some careless feast
Until dissolved in shards of icy streams.
Like ghostly creaks upon a wooden tread
That make the beating heart grow cold with fear,
So by the beast was love turned into dread,
As if the chill of doom were drawing near.
The wanton nerve was etched with terror's blight
While florid dreams of bliss turned to decay:
Deep menace creeping up in fetid night
To make him long for balm of blessed day.
From sleep to dreams, and dreams to empty bliss,
A rancid beast was prowling the abyss.

THE SAVAGE BEAST

A savage beast incriminating comes
To take possession of a skittered vault,
With terror filling folds of gray-faced gloom
That had been shifting sands and wash of salt.
Just as the lovely day slides into night,
A beast came in to darken mortal flesh;
The waking soul that strives to walk upright
Forsakes resolve when night seems cool and fresh.
The beast has come to stalk; he sees it near,
Menacing the verge of conscious thought
With ribboned edge of steel and molten leer:
For he in loss of wakefulness is caught.
He cannot stall the torpor in his eyes
As silently he waits a cold surprise.

THE LOATHSOME LEECH

He like some loathsome leech cannot let go;
Is that why she still infects him so?
With jealous eyes he sees what once he loved,
And though it be mere madness, he is moved.
Oh, destiny is like the rolling sea
That rallies on the shore impassively.
Who can resist it or his own way make
When tossed upon the surging of her wake?
There was a time when he was like a boy
Drawn like some weak planet to his toy;
Then her soft-lipped kisses seemed so bright
That they became a pillar in the night.
And now the boy has changed into a man,
Still clinging to the leech where he began.

OUT OF WINTER'S BLAST

Out of winter's blast grow tender flowers,
Seeming half-ashamed of fledgling bloom;
Their coming charms the cold and blustry hours
And helps the world shake off its winter gloom.
Oh, that those bashful flowers could suffice
To lift him up like some sweet sacrifice
Above the slashing wind and churning sea
Of coming storms that he waits anxiously!
But no; too soon they fade, wilting with heat,
For they cannot withstand the summer sun.
The change from frost to blaze must be complete
When every half-met measure is undone.
For a beast now lurks in his desire
That only can be purged with purer fire.

HIS EYES GREW DIM

Winter fled, but then his eyes grew dim,
As if they did not care to see the day,
Or waken from the frosty landscape grim
To merry blooms and meadows green and gay.
The same eyes that were sick of dirty snow
Have now withdrawn in pain from gracious spring,
As if they feared such happiness to know
While in the night a beast is lingering.
Birds of April come with mild breezes
To temper winter-kill with cheerful song;
Even so, the misery increases,
For now his eyes rebel against the wrong.
The robin and the lark have come to sing;
Where is the joy that cheerful birds should bring?

THE BRITTLE PIERCING

What was the brittle piercing of the eyes
That drove him, dull Orestes, from his bed
Like some cold pulse or tragic enterprise
Of nerves exploding bright within his head?
Oh why does he rage against his fate
As if to change a failing in the flesh,
Since the showers that flood the winter gate
Have with their flowers made the meadows fresh?
What is there to fear in loss of sight
Except the reign of terror of a beast?
Sight being gone, there is an end to light,
And so the joys of spring must bring decrease.
Ah, but vainly does he long for sightless night,
For that is when the beast will rage in might.

EYES WITHOUT SIGHT

Eyes without sight grow weary but bold,
Like the hungry doe whom the woods betray,
Her slender legs ice-numb with winter cold
While fire in her soul burns in dismay.
Once she was the pride of summer days,
Queen of meadows! Oh, then your cares were few.
From dawn you came in luxury to graze
On rye or clover wet with morning dew.
But now she smells the creatures of the blood
With armored paws soft padding in the snow:
She longs to bound into the deeper woods
But winter legs are ponderous and slow.
Like starving deer are eyes deprived of sight,
Dull rebels to the beast that haunts the night.

WHEN SUMMER STARS ARE SHINING

When summer stars are shining in the night,
And wild lilies tender buds conceal,
And orchard shadows mix with ghostly light
In margins where the wounded soul can heal;
When conscious of delight the graceful deer
Glides over pearly meadows soft with dew,
Or shimmering like glass now wanders near
To hear the thrush her liquid song renew;
When children play their carefree nighttime games,
Their bare feet cropping fields of downy grass,
Crowning themselves with fancy's fairy names
As if to drink enchantment to the last:
Then even darkest night would he embrace,
And cast upon the moon her beams so chaste.

TO DRIVE AWAY CRUEL FROST

To drive away cruel frost, drop everything,
And make yourself a votary of May;
Plumb the youthfulness of blessed spring
As if there were no shadow of decay.
Walk boldly on the path of flowers gay,
Their kindly cheer all generous and free,
For now the winter snows seem far away,
Their mournful moan a fading memory.
Green woods and meadows be thy only thought!
For they will capture those who them pursue;
And when in tender influence is caught
Will nurture them as ever young and new.
Too soon the sun-filled time is perishing!
Be jealous of the gentle days of spring.

A VOICE AT NIGHT

Could it have been a voice he heard that night?
A hallowed echo whispered in his mind
That seemed to him a signal left or right
As if he there some radiance should find.
Could it have been a voice that spoke to him?
Or what could seem to promise such increase?
With hope his soul was furnished to the brim
As summer moonlight shimmered in the trees.
For then enchantment seized his very being,
A chorus of the ancients dressed in white,
Or other wonders yet unknown, unseen—
Perhaps a host of angels in the night.
But if it was a stranger's voice that called,
Then why, oh why, did he see none at all?

HE STRIVES WITH ALL HIS MIGHT

He strives and strives with all his might to see
A vessel emptied to eternity;
Perhaps a vase all washed in purest gold
Or precious filament in ether's mold;
More out of reach just as it seems most near,
Receding at the same time it brings cheer!
There is a fever that lays the body low;
There is the fight against a stronger foe:
But who can know the stranger in the blood?
And who can swim against a mighty flood?
Oh, what is it like to fall to weariness?
Is mortal flesh drawn down to the abyss?
What would he be if only he could see
A vessel empty of eternity?

NOVEMBER SNOWS

This longing for the first November snows;
This pining for the covering they bring,
When they dance in leaden skies and then cling
To bleeding hearts and faded rose;
This longing for the first fresh snows of fall,
The northern wind now steadfast as a friend,
Strong gusts that make the frosty forests bend,
And drive the summer birds to migrant call;
This longing for the deep and silent nights
When clamor of the fetid swamps is done,
And iron skies are merging dusk and sun
On woodland meadows bound in lacy white;
This longing for the first November snows
That cover bleeding hearts and faded rose.

HE IS NOT WORTHY

He is not worthy of your coming here this year,
Though he look tenderly and swell with tears
At every sound of gentleness he hears,
He is not worthy of your coming here this year.
This old house will mark the blessed day
With custard pies and sweets of spicy wine,
Welcoming each guest that comes its way
In homage to the sacred festive time.
Why then is he so restless, so cast down?
Is he too proud for honored revelry?
Or is he only seeking solid ground
To stand between the calm and stormy sea?
For though the blessed day is drawing near,
He is not worthy of your coming here this year.

A COTTAGE IN THE WOODS

He stumbled on a cottage in the woods;
Through winter snows he saw it with delight,
Its beams of sturdy oak, rough-hewn and rude,
Standing on the edge of forest night.
He sought it long through January snows,
Tossed about by stinging drifts and wind;
And as his weary heart grew dull and cold,
Just then he felt its cheerful warmth again.
He spied it from the gorge that lies behind,
The fragrant fire warming massive stone,
The rustic wooden hearth, fresh bread and wine,
The table with sweet authors he has known.
He longs to find the cottage in the wood
That warms him with the embers of its food.

THE FOG AFTER THE SNOW

Who will forestall the fog after the snow?
For it is neither hot nor cold, but grey;
Clinging to the fetid night, it grows
Till memory is blotted from the day.
Who will forestall the fog after the snow?
Who will restore the cold and brittle skies?
Against the winter is a manly fight
For bitter winds bring clarity to sight.
Oh, bludgeon him with heartless winter storms,
Make shutters snap from wailing winter gusts;
Besiege him in his house with dread alarms,
For when the fight is dear he learns to trust.
The fiercest winter storm brings him good cheer,
But he is shaken by the fog, and it is near.

OH THAT HE LIKE A SHEPHERD

Oh, that he like a shepherd could confess
Some deadly sin, the engine of unrest;
Could feel the stabbing dagger of hot shame
And senseless swoon, now writhing in his pain!
For after days of sorrow rose the king
And washed himself, refreshed in everything,
And incense burned to mask the stench of shame
That his own sins had brought upon his name.
Oh that he like one ruined could confess,
For out of deepest shame the king was blessed;
Just as the dawn in blackest hours waits
For the despoiled soul to rise up chaste.
By grace was he set free from grosser sin,
But what can save us when the light grows dim?

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN?

What would happen if he did not stop the fall?
There has been a desire when he sleeps
To let the plunge of dreaming take him deep
Into the fearsome void beyond recall —
But what would happen if he did not stop the fall?
What is it like to lose all self-control,
To plummet like an earthward fiery ball
Into the unknown limits of the soul?
Is there terror or regret if he lets go?
Or weightlessness from loss of memory?
Or the rising of some newfound starry goal?
If he lets go, what of him would there be?
What would happen if he did not stop the fall?
Would he find blessed peace — or none at all?

THE LENGTHENING OF DAYS

The lengthening of days in gentle spring
Is like the promised breath of newborn foal,
Waking him with kindly hastening
From the winter stupor of the soul.
At the gate of darkness came the birth,
The strange enchantment of a helpless child,
But after that sweet moment died out mirth
Against the bitter snows and winter wild.
Too soon the dead of winter came to test
The quiet light that quickens every part;
Long bitter nights that seemed to welcome rest
Broke down into a battle of the heart:
Until the lengthened days reached out to me,
And him with bleeding thorns I learned to see.

THE SNOWS OF MARCH

Against the snows of March and gusty cold
Stand woolly sheep with winter coats arrayed,
Harbored safely in their carefree fold
While the ice-sheathed branches creak and sway.
The sheep from roaming dogs are made secure
By fieldstone fence and moats of brittle streams,
Sometimes their heads are raised at predators,
But they remain in calm serenity.
They rub themselves on rugged walnut trees
Or strip the bark to sip from sugared birch,
Then clumsily they run in sheepish glee
When they hear their master's feet approach.
With gentleness the sheep live day to day
While the breath of spring seems far away.

LIKE A SHEEP

The one he loves is therefore like a sheep,
Its winter wool mixed in with dirty white,
By trusting nature led into the keep
Of every heart that opens with delight.
The one he loves from fear lives fenced away,
Fettered by the will that chains his flesh.
For he does not doubt that he must stay,
And neither does he scorn his lowliness.
The sheep that seeks to shirk the easy yoke
Will wander from the meadows free from care,
And lose the birthright of those humble folk
Who know the master's voice and tarry there.
The sheep that wants to live must learn to stay
Within his master's voice, or lose the way.

HE MUST BE CONTENT

He like the gentle sheep must be content
With simple pastures, loving hands hemmed in,
To wander day by day the same old bent
And forfeit wild pleasures of the wind.
Sometimes the sheep grows weary of his story
And wonders if the world is not more sweet;
He sees the graceful deer in all her glory
That feeds at will so light upon her feet.
The wild doe runs to grass-lined valleys,
And finds the tender meals he'll never taste,
Or into deeper woods she nimbly sallies
To make him envious of her fleet grace.
Sheep cannot run where wild creatures go,
For by a gentler will are they made so.

THE MEEKNESS OF HIS HOME

On beyond the meekness of his home
Lie ferny valleys lush with unknown pleasure,
Green forests spun under the hemlock dome
And streams of freedom bubbling without measure.
Deep in the forest lives the slender doe
Who comes at dawn the dew-wet fields to graze;
Skittish in her spirit, she glides the knoll,
Or stops to quench her thirst in crystal lakes.
But late at night the doe becomes the prey;
She smells the wolves that shun a gentle manger.
Now is she trapped and cannot find her way.
Or linger for a moment without danger.
Then would the doughty doe be pleased to sleep
In guarded pastures, like a lowly sheep.

A FALLING STAR

Sometimes on warm spring nights a falling star
Is etched upon the eyes of lowly sheep,
Unconscious of amazement from afar,
Its trail of brilliance blazing in the deep.
If sheep had souls, the star might then ignite
A restlessness still shimmering within;
A memory of something burning bright
Might trouble them and make them dream again.
Falling stars in brilliance seem to be
More fetching than a universe of light,
Their reckless blaze suggesting victory
As well as sweet defiance of a fight.
Gentle souls are etched by falling stars,
The burning glory that is seen so far.

THE ONE HE LOVES

The one he loves is like the fragrant spring
That plays a mottled tune upon his heart;
For though the winter dead is no such thing,
He finds that he must play a mournful part.
Sweet spring comes on with lovely radiance,
Casting forth the fragrance of the hour,
The breath of fresh-mown grass and hyacinth
And gardens pouring forth their youthful dower.
But spring comes in a rush and then is gone;
No one in love with it can make it stay.
The pleasures that it brings soon hurry on,
For lovely days of spring have their own way.
Like the one I love, spring days are free;
I cannot conjure them — they capture me.

THE BRILLIANT LIGHT

The one he loves is like the brilliant light
That gilds the climbing roses in mid-June
And gives the faithful gardener delight
To see pink flowers in fair morning bloom –
For she endured the rains and frosts of spring,
Guarding tenderly her dormant garden,
Rejoicing at the sight of each new thing
And never growing weary of the burden.
Then brilliant sun of June began to shine
And filled her hopeful heart with summer joy,
Spoonng out red rose and columbine
That bitter winter winds could not destroy.
For after fitful spring, the light of June
Brings in the burden of a joyful tune.

THE GENTLE LIGHT

The one he loves is like the gentle light
That charms the soothing evenings of late summer,
When hummingbirds feed into weightless night
Hovering on pools of silent water.
The evening light adds depth to passing flowers
With beauty that is gaiety subdued,
For in the shadows of the sleepy bowers
The light of August has a sober hue.
Yet in the soothing summer light so mild,
There is a hint of harsher days begun,
Foretaste of frosts and winds of winter wild
Made tender by the force of summer sun.
The one he loves is like the timeless light
Calling him to die with gentle might.

THE AUTUMN LIGHT

The one he loves is like the autumn light
That pales into the skies of December,
For though it is a season of delight,
The frosts of fall cannot prevent the winter.
The autumn months bring welcome cool refreshment,
A pensive end to summer's ruddy heat;
The colored woods brimming with excitement,
A sudden burst of glory all too fleet.
In the fall, the heart turns toward the home,
From summer festival to inward thought;
Poetic souls are joyful when it comes
Until in sullen winter they are caught.
For like the one he loves, the autumn light
Cannot protect him from the winter night.

THE PIERCING LIGHT

The one he loves is like the piercing light
That pours through leafless trees on winter days,
When all around the sere world is bedight
With humble lifeless browns and dingy grays.
In winter sun all foolishness is seen:
No scented flowers shield him from his shame,
Nor refuge can he seek in meadows green
From brooding on the dust from which he came.
The piercing light lays all our dreaming bare
By stripping off the clothing we adore;
And then the winter sun becomes a snare
By showing greyborne woods and nothing more.
For when with piercing light he shines on me,
What is there that can hide my vanity?

TO CALL UPON A NAME

How often must he call upon a name
Like one cast off and left in grief alone,
Waiting for a word that never came
While every thought is clinging like a stone?
Like one who swoons, he thought some snow-white dove
Would come to make a nest within his heart;
And then true bliss, descending from above,
Taking the whole, would subsume his part.
But no such joyful sound can he devise,
No tempering between divided strife;
Twixt day and night is deadly compromise
When the mournful tune is meshed in life.
And now he finds him calling on a name,
While still the same self-quandary remains.

SNOW ON APRIL FLOWERS

Like as the snow that falls on April flowers,
So is he coldly dressed in mortal flesh;
The fledgling soul that longs for temperate hours
Is chilled by clinging lust and finds no rest.
The kindling of blood disturbs the soul,
A giddy pain, like breathing short of breath;
The soul desires to be sorrowful,
But lust would put the face of joy on death.
Lust is the skittish sister of desire,
Fleeing from the fate of gravity;
To lovely rest the fair soul does aspire,
But man from timid flesh cannot be free.
For lust and soul make up the life of man,
And restlessness, until he loves again.

WHY DID THEY TELL HIM?

Why did they tell him you were gone?
How he wished he'd never heard the news!
You will trick him now when he's alone
And haunt him when the night is winding loose.
How dread those lying dreams that are to come!
The bright-washed colors steeped in memory,
When one might see a face or catch a name
And plunge into the absence suddenly.
No one can say what future days may bring,
For we, it seems, are tethered to the stars;
Time there was when he longed to hear them sing
But now the dullard dares not go so far.
For stars and endless nights are cruel to see
When broken hearts are bent in misery.

HOW DOES HE MISS YOU

How does he miss you, now that you are gone!
What would he give again to hear your voice
When you were in a giddy teasing mood
Or found the strength in sorrow to rejoice!
How does he miss you, now that you have fled!
For he is like a ship without a keel
That on the shallow torrents looks with dread
And does not dare to stop or dare to feel.
How do they miss you, those you left behind,
For they cannot come where you are now;
How they would love to see you one last time
To wipe your troubled brow before you go.
They would want you to know that you are dear,
Who in spite of their wishing are not here.

HE CANNOT PAUSE

He fears he cannot pause to say goodbye.
Many are the times he heard a voice
Floating on the mists of summer nights
When he became again a boundless boy
Walking endlessly on fieldstone walls
Or laboring against the stubborn hills
Until at last he reached the very top:
Only then did he allow himself to stop.
But like a mountain stream, he cannot stay,
Like swollen waters rushing clear and cool,
For when the snow-swelled springs have had their day
They lose themselves in August's shrinking pools.
Oh, like a falling star in summer sky,
He cannot stop or pause to say goodbye.

WAS THAT YOU?

The picture of that man — was that you?
We saw a handsome fellow, very shy,
Standing by a house that we once knew
Holding in his arms a squirming boy.
You look so much alike — was that you?
Around him were the walls he laid with brick,
And feeders for the birds he loved to woo,
The red trellis with Concord twining thick —
But the fellow looking shy, was that you?
The strong-armed man who made a cottage nest
Bound up with something old and something new
And pleasant places for his friends to rest:
Tell me, was that you? — was that you?
Standing by the house that we once knew?

A BOON TO ME

Your going now has been a boon to me;
Don't ever think that I'll regret the day,
Or hate the fact that I can never see
You one last time, or know what we might say.
There is no time to stop and wait for you;
Why should I wait? You left without goodbye,
And there are many things that I must do
Before I have the time to weep or sigh.
Oh no, I will not fear December's chill,
Or run and hide when winter skies turn grey,
Or lose my place when all of time stands still
Against the deadly weight of shortened day.
Why should I fear? You went too suddenly,
And all I have of you is memory.

NOW ALL THE WORLD

Now all the world in weary darkness lies,
And night with dreams obscure infects the soul;
Then slumber-sated sun begins to rise
And men at work are making all things whole.
The weaver weaves a tablecloth of gold,
The carver raises heaven's vault in wood,
The poet's lips are loosed and stories told
That had been bound by doubting of the good.
Man seeking freedom chose the gradeless way
That leads to endless darkness and despair;
But if in joyful work he finds the day,
Then soon in him revives the brave, the fair.
For in the dark his face he cannot see,
Nor bring to mind his own humanity.

WHAT IS THIS RESTLESS WORLD?

What is this restless world made up of thought
Where seeking for himself he was waylaid,
Churning like the fox in steel jaws caught,
By foxish ingenuity betrayed?
When did August's charms begin to fade
And buzzing of thick flies become so strong
That he felt like a thing of jangles made
By hazy summer nights drawn out too long?
Who is it turns the tides of love to hate
And works upon the destiny of men,
Or makes the rose of hope to lose its date
When there are none to help it bloom again?
Dear rosebud mine, spring darling of delight,
How did such untuned times turn out so right?

THE SUMMER DEWDROP

Upon a summer dewdrop she was born,
Of liquid pearls and August shining bright,
Long misty evenings soaring into dawn
Upon the leathern wings of starry night.
For she is like the musk rose blooming sweet,
The pink purveyance of the summer rose,
Dropping her tender petals at her feet
To bring the cares of nature to a close;
And she is like the scented evening breeze
That nudges nodding lily and bright coral,
Or creeps like silver through the forest trees
To soften the rough margins of the soul.
For she is nature's face in harmony,
And in her eyes all blessedness I see.

WHAT SHALL HE SAY?

What shall he say about you, little girl?
What credit will you take for idleness?
Shall stars upon your August birthright whirl
All dizzy with a trance of loveliness?
Shall he sing of wisdom in your eyes
Or clever smiles figured on your lips?
Or claim the sun bursts forth when you arise
That had been hiding in a sad eclipse?
Shall he compare you to the woodland breeze
Still shimmering the leaves on starry nights
As if you were a swirl of honeyed dreams
That mingle with the birds at morning light?
Should he say such things and use such art?
What is it you have done to charm his heart?

OH HE SHALL SING TO YOU

Oh, he shall sing to you of summer days
When time seems charmed and all the world stands still
Except for bumblebees in flowers gay
That hover in the scent to eat their fill.
Oh, shall he sing to you of thunderstorms
That prophesy a cleansing of dank skies,
Rumbling in valleys with dread alarms
To make the children shout with shining eyes.
Oh, he shall sing to you of pleasant bourns,
Lush valleys lined with rows of fresh-mown hay,
Sloping meadows thick with bearded corn,
Or lazy cows that flick the flies away.
For you have charmed away his August dread
And brought to life the joys that were quite dead.

AFTER SUMMER

After summer comes the gentle fall,
Still the sweetest season of the year,
When ruddy apples deck the festival
And hardwoods gild the woods with brilliant cheer.
There will be no more melancholy,
Or shades of loss to shadow her young heart;
For though his summer's past, he will be jolly
As if in her fresh joy he bore a part.
There are no gloomy tears in the first frost
For one so young, or pain at flowers' blight;
Green pleasures that are for a moment lost
Do not forestall a future that is bright.
The gloried autumn day is all she sees
Who nothing knows of cold mortality.

SAFE IN CHILDREN'S HEARTS

Safe in children's hearts is children's king,
Born, they say, deep on a winter night;
The children love to hear the angels sing
Proclaiming to the world the dawn of light.
In the sweet season children have no care
For sorrows of the world they do not see;
No cold nor poverty can enter there
Where fervent love is good security.
They in a mother's bosom comfort find
And cheer within a stable rude and cold,
Nothing more they need to fill the mind
Than lowly beasts and shepherds from the fold.
He thought to take her unformed mind to school
But found in her sweet joy himself the fool.

A CHILD'S EYES

Do you love him, O you with child's eyes,
Made for love, all pure and innocent,
You who are neither old enough nor wise
To see him any way but heaven-sent?
Life has not yet calcified your heart,
For your world is made of dreams and light;
It nothing knows of the deceiver's art
Or how he wept on his most bitter night.
With faith-filled eyes you see him safe and sound
In mother's arms and father's loving care;
Wise men from heathen nations gather round
To ring him in a harmony of prayer.
But time will come when child's eyes will fade
And you will see him by the world betrayed.

HER CHILD'S WORLD

In her child's world there is pure light
While men are darkened in their vain conceit;
For life breathes into youth immortal might,
But gloom infects the soul with cold defeat.
Thus he to her is like a winter rose
That blooms when old men fall into despair,
For the time grows cold with icy snows,
But blood-red petals to her soul are fair.
The mind of man grows dull in the abyss
Where the shades of nothingness are seen,
But in the sign of life she finds her bliss,
For there the youthful rose is ever green.
The mind of man is conscious of the good,
But it is life that is the soul's true food.

THE STARRY NIGHTS

And he shall tell her of the starry nights
When fairy legions dance into the woods,
Their elfin armies robed in satin white,
That live on nuts and roots and forest foods.
All quietly they glide on dewy grass
To gather limpid moonbeams from the air
Which storing up against the winter blast
They feed on them in caverns free from care.
The fairies sing a song so charmed and light
That woodland creatures wander from their dens,
And even skittish does will pause in flight
To hear the strange enchanting tune again.
Such fairies are the friends of little girls
Who feed on blessed Love, which turns the world.

THE WILD BIRDS

And he shall tell her of the wild birds
That greet the dawn in mossy forest glen,
And joy to swap the silly tales they've heard
Regarding petty jealousies of men.
When silver light is creeping in the forest,
And the lagging moon hangs on the trees,
And peepers hush their jangling nighttime chorus,
Then do these birds start chirping as they please.
They come from mountain tops and rivers swift,
The lark, the robin, and the goldfinch gay,
And fill the woods till hardly twig be left
For tardy tanager or raucous jay.
And when they make their summer gathering
The wittiest of each begins to sing.

A MAIDEN MILD

"I saw a maiden mild," said the wren,
"Who fled by her fair self into the wood;
I sang my sweet-trilled song and sang again,
But she would not look up or change her mood.
In her fair hands she held a leather book
From which she murmured poetry so sweet,
That had I been a man and seen her look,
I would have cast myself down at her feet.
Her hair was pulled straight back in chestnut braids
To make a dappled nest of twined delight,
But in her eyes there was a somber shade,
As if she'd lain awake for many a night.
She paused; her quiv'ring lips could no more speak;
And so I sang a song for hearts that break."

A HANDSOME POET

"I saw a handsome poet," said the finch,
"Who struck a careless-seeming summer pose,
With conscious hand he stroked the budding quince,
And stooped to drink the fragrance of the rose.
As one transported by the lovely day,
He sat and scribbled lightly in a book,
Searching pensively for what to say
As joy and sorrow mingled in his look.
But then he happened to cast his eye on me
And smiled sadly with a tender sigh.
'Ah! Little bird,' he said, 'what do you see?
My words will give you wings enough to fly.'
I laughed and said, 'I'll fly when you are gone;
I'll fly all night and soar into the dawn!'"

THE HAUGHTY JAY

"I flew," said haughty jay, "into the town,
And there I saw a man with dour face.
He seemed too proud for one who wore a frown,
So, curious, I found a hiding place.
I saw him scowling at the deep red rose
That snagged upon his coat as he marched by,
And though the sun shone bright, he did not choose
To lift his leaden eyes up to the sky.
The men he met were chattering and shrill —
Men like him, all dressed in dullest grey;
They seemed to press each other for the kill,
But what they had to gain I cannot say.
When he was gone I sang a harsh refrain
And cackled to the woods my song again."

THE MOCKINGBIRD

"I saw an actor," said the mockingbird.
"I gibbered, but he would not look at me.
He seemed too busy trying to be heard
And miming every mirror he could see.
I sang the song of all the birds I love:
The solemn tune of owl late at night,
The heartsick moaning of the turtle dove,
The boasting of the wren, so sweet and bright.
I sang and sang until my throat was dry,
But he seemed anxious to find other men;
And even when they jeered, he did not fly
But threw himself upon them once again!
He sang, he danced, he laughed, and then went home
Only to find himself there all-alone."

THE POLITICIAN AND THE CROW

"I saw a politician," said the crow,
"Who trimmed his sail to all prevailing winds
But hardly knew the next way he should go
For fear of tacking slowly home again,
Still shrinking from the privilege of rule
Until the path ahead seemed safely charted,
One moment he was hot or he was cool
Or angry or then sweet and tenderhearted.
For noble causes he'd rise up to fight,
And fence his foe with vivid imagery;
But when he steered himself to left or right,
His compass seemed to bend to victory.
His voice rang out above the roiling crowd
Just like a bell – more hollow and more loud."

THE NOBLE THINKER

"I saw a noble thinker," said the gull,
"Who armed himself with Logic's iron shield.
His tongue, like blood-red sword, was never dull,
Nor could soft emotion make him yield.
He turned his cutting words on strong or weak,
A mighty Ajax playing fatal part,
Maiming all poor fools who disagreed
With any slicing engine of his art.
Heroically he straddled human reason,
Like giant Rhodes with two feet planted deep,
And taking on the steel of Caesar's legions,
He dug a barbed defense before he'd sleep.
But then at night his dreams were strange and warm,
And no machine could keep him safe from harm."

THE GRACKLE AND THE CRITIC

"I saw a critic," said the motley grackle,
"Who preyed upon the work of other men.
With barb-like wit he liked to shriek and cackle
And foist the uninformed upon his pen.
At first he rode on fashion like a whip,
Holding nothing cheap as reputation.
From great Parnassus fluff and sham he'd strip
To save the god of Art from degradation.
But then at last he sacrificed his pride
And threw his jewel-like words into the roar,
Till like a man who lets his virtue slide
He could not tell a virgin from a whore.
And then the sands of time attacked his door;
His words were swallowed up and heard no more."

A RED-CHEEKED GIRL

Then robin said, "I saw a red-cheeked girl
Who plays in quiet meadows all the day,
Her henchmen being rabbit and red squirrel
Who cock their heads to hear what she might say.
She runs in carefree steps on the cool grass
Between the clouds where sunlight patches roll,
Skipping near the rim of darkness passed
Lest any shade of gloom should touch her soul.
In the knoll she finds an icy brook
And parts the mountain water with a stick,
Leaping with weightless grace from rock to rock
To hear the liquid melody so quick.
I sing my song; she smiles up at me,
And that is all the happiness I need."

MY LITTLE BLESSED ONE

What is the world, my little blessed one?
What is the world to such as you and me?
The world is summer nights and crystal dawns
And moonlight shimmering in green-leaf trees.

And what is life, my little blessed one?
What is life to such as you and me?
Life is gentle sheep and woodland farms
And meadows rolling down to meet the sea,

But what is death, my little blessed one,
What is death to such as you and me?
Death is like a dream that bends the sun
Of captive birds now longing to be free.

What is the world, my little blessed one?
What is the world to such as you and me?
The world is summer nights and frosty dawns,
And meadows rolling down to meet the sea.

AUTUMN FROSTS

In autumn frosts there is a bitter bite
That strikes the showy flower in full bloom;
A sudden shard of rust invades the white
And seizes on the colors of its doom.
But that same frost brings with it sugared thoughts
As if in dying there were some strange joy;
The fair white rose to lowliness is brought
While in the mind it suffers no alloy.
The fearsome lengthening of autumn nights
Draws upon the waste of sullied years,
But frosted village windows glowing bright
Are harbingers of happiness drawn near.
A child's world is made of dark and light
To which the frosts of fall bring second sight.

THE OLD MAN AND HIS DOG

The old man by the roadside weeping stood
On a glorious May morning in Maine,
Beside him a grieved young man cradling
A limp and lifeless dog in passive arms.
The old man had lost his grip on the leash;
The loose dog scrambled out into the road,
Tumbling hard beneath the young man's wheels,
No fault of his — there was no time to swerve.
In pity he scooped up the mangled body,
Sensing it was beyond the master's means,
And stood there shame-faced holding the dead dog
While the old man with fingers bony white
Tried to divert the hot tears from his cheek.
Sometimes there are things we cannot control;
Sometimes things happen of their own accord.

THE TURNING OF THE SPHERES

To some there is a turning of the spheres
That otherwise in nothingness are found,
As violin in artist's hand brings cheer
Which by itself lies silent without sound.
The change between a song and none is life,
As harmony is particle to wave;
For though all mortal folk are born to strife,
The singing of the spheres can charm the grave.
All nature is made up of melodies
Like song of brook that thirst unwitting slakes
Or winter gusts deep-sighing in bare trees
Or rounding boom of ice on mountain lakes.
And hovering on all there is a voice
That makes this winsome song into a choice.

ODE TO TENDERNESS

Thee I lift up, the jewel of tenderness,
Choice dainty morsel of kings and poets,
In which all humanity is subsumed,
The joys, the sorrows, the exaltations
And the suffering, the sometime triumphs
As well as the sharp humiliations,
The kindness, the peace, the rank transgression,
The morning when we wake full of purpose
And the evening when we lay down our heads;
All of this and everything else that is
Finds its way into each tender moment,
Wraps itself into a nerve-ended ball
Of divine sublimity in lowly weeds,
Of the ages cast away near and far,
Of fathers, mothers, children and our friends,
Of hungry stranger standing at the door,
Of the widow, the orphan, the needy,
Of those deprived of justice in the courts,
Of workers who deserve their fair wages,
Of musicians who ply the soothing trade,
Of the nurse with her tender morning touch,
Of the mother waiting for the school bus,
In such we see tenderness shining forth
To fill the heart with that which satisfies,
Great tenderness, sitting on her throne,
Queen of the sensations known to men.

TODAY I WALKED

Today I walked the autumn beach with you
As glist'ning waves rolled up upon the shore
For there is nothing surf cannot renew
And nothing that the tide cannot restore.
Stretched out before us lay the golden sand
Made fine like silk by wash of salty sea,
Strewn with pebbles as if by cursive hand
That far above writes out our destiny.
Long decades have we walked upon the beach,
Always glad for moments in the sun;
But now our destination is in reach
As we return to where we once begun.
The washing of the tides is years gone by,
And sorrows we have known is ocean's sigh.

THE REMAINS OF SUMMER

Here we sit, looking out
On the remains of summer,
With just a touch of melancholy.
Once we greeted the fall with a shout,
The cooling of the breezes,
The dawn of cobalt skies,
The jointure of deep colors
In the meadows and by the sea.
Once we rejoiced to see them here,
And still do, as far as rejoicing
Remains our portion. But now the fall
Brings in the end of balmy summer,
Which we cannot help regretting,
As we note the passing of our time.

IMMORTAL YELLOW JEEP

In our small green town there lived a goddess,
Which is not why the town was called Bethel.
Her name was Barbara Britton, screen icon,
With fame disproportionate to our means.
She lived on an old farm that she spruced up
With landscaping that seemed otherworldly
To country folk who never saw such things,
With a sparkling trout stream running through it
Which local boys were far too scared to try.
But her fame was cemented in our minds
By driving a bright yellow Jeep, top off,
Through our sleepy burgh on summer mornings;
In those days, twenty years after the War,
Most Jeeps, if we saw them, wore battle green.
A bright yellow Jeep was indelible,
An emblem of her fame on silver screen.
Barbara and her Jeep live on immortal
Until the thoughts that keep them turn to dust.

NOT EVERY DAY

Not every day can be a sunny day,
Not every trail can be a perfect trail.
Sometimes summer clouds get in the way,
Sometimes things once sweet now seem quite stale.
The brilliance of the summer days has passed,
The Queen Anne's lace and daises lose their charm,
But it was true — such joys can never last;
Therefore losing them should do no harm.
Fall sweeps in like some delicious spell,
Oaks and maples bursting orange red,
Chaste blue skies that cause the heart to swell,
Forgetting that those leaves will soon be dead.
Not every day can be a summer day;
Sometimes winter thoughts get in the way.

REFRESH US, LORD

Refresh us, Lord, with streams of lovingkindness;
Let Mercy pour into our thirsty souls.
Touch our dull eyes and take away our blindness;
Help us to rise and press on towards the goal.

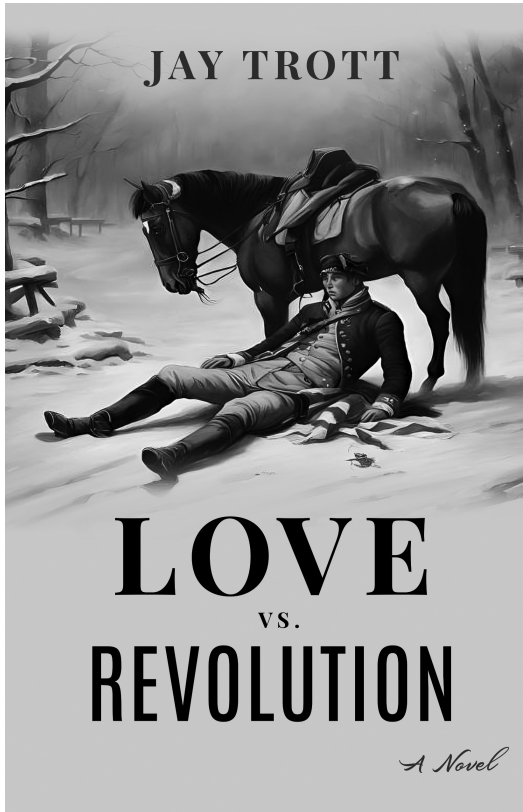
Life is a trail that wanders in strange pathways.
You never fail to lead us as we go.
We lean on you, the only Hope of our days;
In all we do, help us your love to show.

Lord, stay with us when life's own way grows weary.
You are our trust, now rest us in your grace.
Through your own Son, you showed you love us dearly;
When this life's done, we'll see you face to face.

THE END

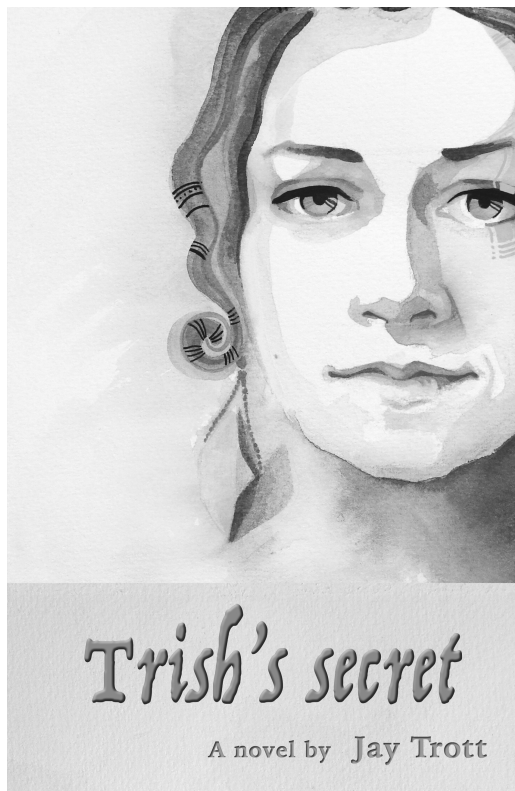
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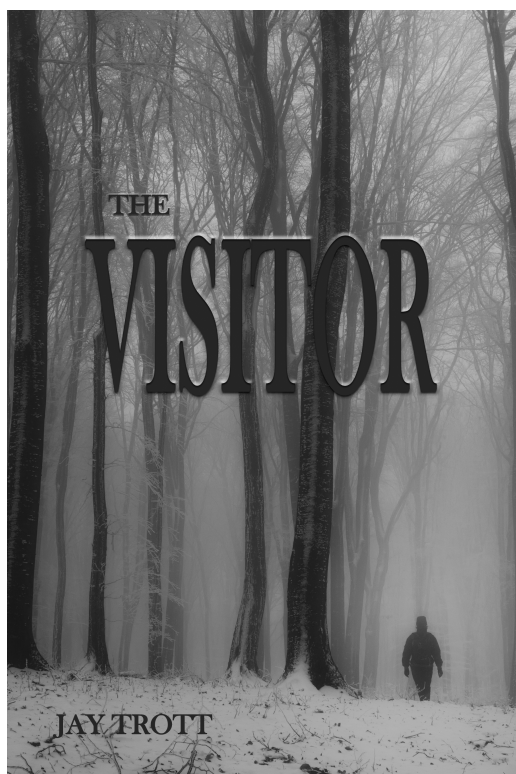
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terrible truth that could tear it all apart.



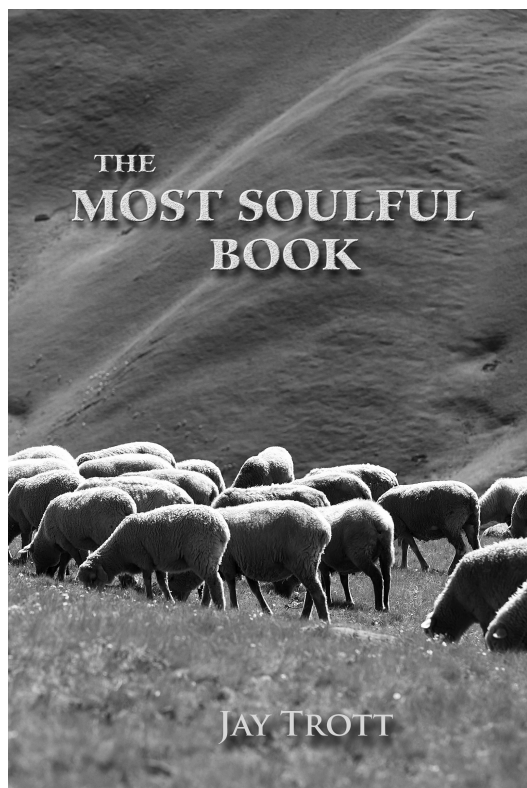
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Jill is a painter who has lost the will to paint. Josh is a dark stranger with a thirst for blood. A novel of passion, mystery, and the shadows that stir the soul.



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