

Classic Poetry Series

**Beatrice Redpath
- poems -**

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Beatrice Redpath(-1937)

Beatrice Redpath (died 1937) was a Canadian poet.

Life

She was born Beatrice Peterson in Montreal, Quebec. Her father, Alexander Peterson, was Chief Engineer of the Canadian Pacific Railway. She was educated in private schools in Montreal. At 17 she moved to Goderich, Ontario, where she lived for five years. She married William Redpath of Montreal in 1910; the couple had one son.

Writing

T.P.'s Weekly: "Beatrice Redpath in Drawn Shutters can be commonplace in the noble contemplation of essential life: a virtue in poetry. She comes down at times to the minor level of 'The Dancer'. But 'To One Lying Dead' is a poem of true loveliness, elegiac without dullness, eloquent without gush.... Beatrice Redpath feels the passions of rebellion and indignation. But to her they imply more than mere dissatisfaction and chafing. Indeed, one might make the quality of those passions the supreme test of character, certainly of poetic power.... There is evidence in the volume of life lived at first hand, of the discipline of actuality that forces people either to a calm, strong normality, or to hectic agony, and disquietness of spirit. And it is because the poet soul rises to the reality of experience that her poems will not depress. Of her brief songs it may be said that they come like sunshine amid clouds, themselves noble and impressive."

Earth Love

God, in Thy Heaven hast Thou ever known
Toil, when the heart and hand were fused in one,
The sweet bruised scent of grasses newly mown,
The sharp delight to see each dawn the sun
Rising above the margent of the seas?
And hast Thou ever felt within Thy breast
That strange delight in dim uncertainties
With every day's apparellings unguessed?
Ah, hast Thou lain with wide entrancèd eyes
Wrapped in the purple veilings of the night
Beneath the fretted splendour of the skies
And seen them tressed with coronal of light,
Yearning to push their silvern fringe apart
And so adventure to Eternity?
God I have strangely felt it in my heart
Walking upon the earth to pity Thee.

Beatrice Redpath

My Thoughts

My thoughts are as a flock of sheep
Upon a windy wold,
At eventide they homeward creep
To shelter from the cold;
And when I lay me down to sleep
They rest within the fold.

Beatrice Redpath

Rebellion

The earth lay wrapped in pale low hanging mist,
As some white tomb all ready for its dead
I thought, and shudderingly forward pressed
Into that shadowed house where night still hung
Darkly, as though it yet were loath to leave
While he lay there so still within the room.

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There was a garden once where the rose trees
Were heavy with white globes of scented bloom,
There the bright-shafted arrows of the moon
Fell down the amethystine ways of night,
And silence hung so heavy on the air
We scarcely dared to fret the night with speech.

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Ah, how the scent of that rose garden now
Drifts back, and for a moment lulls my pain,
But then more poignant seems my heart's sharp ache,
For he lies dead, silent and all alone.

How strange it is to be the first time here,
And pass by every room where he has been
Which now are empty as a disused frame.
Along these halls his feet have often trod
Unto the sound of Her voice calling him,
So careful of Her pleasure as his wont. . .
Ah, how the shadows of these empty halls
Seem pressing on my throat to stifle me,
Until I feel I may not reach that room. . .
I thought my heart acquainted well with grief,
But oh, I had not known there was such woe
In all the world as this, O God as this,
To stand and look on my belovèd dead.
O Death, I did not know thou wert so still

And so remote from all this troubled world;
Thou takest from me what was never mine,
And yet all mine the loss, all mine to bear
The hungry emptiness of aching days.

For oh, Belovèd, though so far from thee
Yet thy love warmed me as the distant sun
Lightens a planet in a further space,
And so I was not wholly comfortless.
Now is the light gone out across the world,
Yet earth reels always purposelessly round.
Ah, I would scream aloud unto the stars
That thou art dead, what need have they to shine,
What need have moons to drift across the skies,
Or suns to flare above a barren earth ?

Belovèd, now thou art beyond the world
And art no longer bound to cherish Her,
But now shalt love me as thy spirit wouldst.
Ah, shall repression be our single creed?
All Thou hast made, God, Thou hast fashioned free,
But man would place a bridle on it all,
Chain the glad golden lightnings to his need,
Stem the bright rivers eager from the hills,
And burden earth with palaces of steel;
So would he place his rule above our hearts
And stifle love with a remorseless law.

But now, Belovèd, dost thou not have grief
And know regret because of wasted years
That knew no profiting but only loss ?
Surely thou seest now how vain are laws,
How greatly God in Heaven esteemeth love.
There was a garden once where the rose-trees
Were heavy with white globes of scented bloom. . .
Ah, dear, canst thou not hold thine arms again
More wide for me, I am so tired with tears,
And resting even now within thine arms
I might forget a little while to weep.

Beatrice Redpath

The Daughter Of Jairus

I have fashioned soft raiment for her to wear
And have laid her embroidered sandals in her room,
I have said I would braid and bind her heavy hair,
But she has gone out to the orchard to gather bloom.

Last night she lay in the dusk with her eyes adream,
And I questioned of what were her dreams as I touched her hand,
But she looked at me with a smile in her eyes' dark gleam,
What word might she use to make me understand?

So she spoke instead of the earth all bathed in light,
Of the moon as a lily when the leaves unfold,
Of the trees like silver plumes to deck the night,
Of the starry skies as a blazoned script unrolled.

She has no praise for all she had cherished before,
And has given away her beads of yellow gold,
Strange she seems, yet more kind than heretofore,
And I marvel much at the dreams she must withhold.

She has spoken no word about her curious sleep,
And the light in her eyes we have vainly essayed to read,
The secret of her dream she must hidden keep,
For her lips are framed but to an earthly need.

She has left her sandals lying upon the floor
And all untasted her goblet of amber wine,
She has gone out to the sun beyond the door
To sit in the cool green gloom of the hanging vine.

Beatrice Redpath

To One Lying Dead

Strange that thou liest so, void of all will
For loving; so content with thy long sleep
That neither word nor sound may stir the still
Calm quiet of the dream that thou dost keep.

Pale now the cherished contour of thy face,
Thy lids lie heavy 'gainst the ache of light,
And hold in their wan stillness ne'er a trace
Of waking from the shadow of thy night.

Languid thy tender feet unsandalled rest,
Wearied of passage o'er the furrowed earth;
They say thou art gone forth upon thy quest
Seeking a greater fullness of rebirth.

Yet all that I have ever known of thee
Lies here. What has gone out from thee this hour
That leaveth thee, unstirred by word from me,
Low lying, like a fallen scentless flower?

Hadst thou a soul which through the drifting years
My earth-bound vision was too dull to see?
And didst thou know the weight of unshed tears?
Hadst thou a spirit straining to be free?

A heart that knew regret and all desire,
And envy and that malice men call hate,
And saw with fear the slow consuming fire
Of life, and learned to be compassionate?

Then all of this was what I knew not of,
Thou wert but loveliness made manifest,
And wore the garment fashioned of my love
So fittingly that I ignored the rest.

Shall all of thee that I have ever known
Become as dust the sun shines not upon?
I did not know thy soul so strangely flown,
So may not find thee where thou now art gone.

Then let me kneel thus worshipping and see—
Thee whom I love, still lying as thou art,
That I may ever keep long dreams of thee
And hold thine image close within my heart.

So shall I look upon thy face so fair,
And thy sealed lids which sleep doth seem to please,
Thy mouth's pale blossom and thy fallen hair,
Where heavy shadows lie at pleasant ease.

Beatrice Redpath