

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Duncan Campbell Scott**

**- poems -**

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## **Afterwards**

Her life was touched with early frost,  
About the April of her day,  
Her hold on earth was lightly lost,  
And like a leaf she went away.

Her soul was chartered for great deeds,  
For gentle war unwonted here:  
Her spirit sought her clearer needs,  
An Empyrean atmosphere.

At hush of eve we hear her still  
Say with her clear, her perfect smile,  
And with her silver-throated thrill:  
"A little while - a little while."

Duncan Campbell Scott

## Angelus

A deep bell that links the downs  
To the drowsy air;  
Every loop of sound that swoons,  
Finds a circle fair,  
Whereon it doth rest and fade;  
Every stroke that dins is laid  
Like a node,  
Spinning out the quivering, fine,  
Vibrant tendrils of a vine:  
(Bim - bim - bim.)  
How they wreathe and run,  
Silvern as a filmy light,  
Filtered from the sun:  
The god of sound is out of sight,  
And the bell is like a cloud,  
Humming to the outer rim,  
Low and loud:  
(Bim - bim - bim.)  
Throwing down the tempered lull,  
Fragile, beautiful:  
Married drones and overtones,  
How we fancy them to swim,  
Spreading into shapes that shine,  
With the aura of the metals,  
Prisoned in the bell,  
Fulvous tinted as a shell,  
Dreamy, dim,  
Deep in amber hyaline:  
(Bim - bim - bim.)

Duncan Campbell Scott

## At the Cedars

You had two girls -- Baptiste --  
One is Virginie --  
Hold hard -- Baptiste!  
Listen to me.

The whole drive was jammed  
In that bend at the Cedars,  
The rapids were dammed  
With the logs tight rammed  
And crammed; you might know  
The Devil had clinched them below.

We worked three days -- not a budge,  
'She's as tight as a wedge, on the ledge,'  
Says our foreman;  
'Mon Dieu! boys, look here,  
We must get this thing clear.'  
He cursed at the men  
And we went for it then;  
With our cant-dogs arow,  
We just gave he-yo-ho;  
When she gave a big shove  
From above.

The gang yelled and tore  
For the shore,  
The logs gave a grind  
Like a wolf's jaws behind,  
And as quick as a flash,  
With a shove and a crash,  
They were down in a mash,  
But I and ten more,  
All but Isaàc Dufour,  
Were ashore.

He leaped on a log in the front of the rush,  
And shot out from the bind  
While the jam roared behind;  
As he floated along  
He balanced his pole  
And tossed us a song.  
But just as we cheered,  
Up darted a log from the bottom,  
Leaped thirty feet square and fair,  
And came down on his own.

He went up like a block  
With the shock,  
And when he was there  
In the air,  
Kissed his hand  
To the land;

When he dropped  
My heart stopped,  
For the first logs had caught him  
And crushed him;  
When he rose in his place  
There was blood on his face.

There were some girls, Baptiste,  
Picking berries on the hillside,  
Where the river curls, Baptiste,  
You know -- on the still side  
One was down by the water,  
She saw Isaàc  
Fall back.

She did not scream, Baptiste,  
She launched her canoe;  
It did seem, Baptiste,  
That she wanted to die too,  
For before you could think  
The birch cracked like a shell  
In that rush of hell,  
And I saw them both sink --

Baptiste ! --  
He had two girls,  
One is Virginie,  
What God calls the other  
Is not known to me.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **Avis**

With a golden rolling sound  
Booming came a bell,  
From the aery in the tower  
Eagles fell;  
So with regal wings  
Hurled, and gleaming sound and power,  
Sprang the fatal spell.

Ten a storm of burnished doves  
Gleaming from the cote  
Flurried by the almonry  
O'er the moat,--  
Fell and soared and fell  
With the arc and iris eye  
Burning breast and throat.

Avis heard the beaten bell  
Break the quiet space,  
Gathering softly in the room  
Round her face;  
And the sound of wings  
From the deeps of rosy gloom  
Rustled in the place.

Nothing moved along the wall,  
Weltered on the floor;  
Only in the purple deep,  
Streaming o'er,  
Came the dream of sound  
Silent as the dale of sleep,  
Where the dreams are four.

(One of love without a word,  
Wan to look upon,  
One of fear without a cry,  
Cowering stone,  
And the dower of life,  
Grief without a single sigh,  
Pain without a moan.)

"Avis-Avis!" Cried a voice;  
Then the voice was mute.  
"Avis!" Soft the echo lay  
As the lute.  
Where she was she fell,  
Drowsy as mandragora,  
Tranced to the root.

Then she heard her mother's voice,  
Tender as a dove;  
Then her lover plain and sigh,  
"Avis--Love!"

Like the mavis bird  
Calling, calling lonelily  
From the eerie grove.

Then she heard within the vast  
Closure of the spell,  
Rolled and moulded into one  
Rounded swell,  
All the sounds that ever were  
Uttered underneath the sun,  
Heard in heaven or hell.

In the arras moved the wind,  
And the window cloth  
Rippled like a serpent barred,  
Gray with wrath;  
In the brazier gold  
The wan ghost of a rose charred  
Fluttered like a moth.

Tranquil lay her darkened eyes  
As the pools that keep  
Auras dim of fern and frond  
Dappled, deep,  
Dreamy as the map of Nod;  
Moveless was she as a wand  
In the wind of sleep.

Then the birds began to cry  
From the crannied wall,  
Piping as the morning rose  
Mystical,  
Gray with whistling rain,  
Silver with the light that flows  
In the interval.

Pallid poplars cast a shade,  
Twinkling gray and dun,  
Where the wind and water wove  
Into one  
All the linnet leaves,  
Greening from the mere and grove  
In the undern sun.

Night fell with the ferny dusk,  
Planets paled and grew,  
Up, with lily and clarid turns  
Throbbing through,  
Rose the robin's song,  
Heart of home and love that burns beating in the dew.

But she neither moved nor heard,

Trancèd was her breath;  
Lip on charmèd lip was laid  
(One who saith  
"Love-Undone" and falls).  
Silent was she as a shade  
In the dells of death.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## Enigma

Some men are born to gather women's tears,  
To give a harbour to their timorous fears,  
To take them as the dry earth takes the rain,  
As the dark wood the warm wind from the plain;  
Yet their own tears remain unshed,  
Their own tumultuous fears unsaid,  
And, seeming steadfast as the forest and the earth  
Shaken are they with pain.  
They cry for voice as earth might cry for the sea  
Or the wood for consuming fire;  
Unanswered they remain  
Subject to the sorrows of women utterly -  
Heart and mind,  
Subject as the dry earth to the rain  
Or the dark wood to the wind.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## From Shadow

Now the November skies,  
And the clouds that are thin and gray,  
That drop with the wind away;  
A flood of sunlight rolls,  
In a tide of shallow light,  
Gold on the land and white  
On the water, dim and warm in the wood;  
Then it is gone, and the wan  
Clear of the shade  
Covers fields and barren and glade.  
The peace of labor done,  
Is wide in the gracious earth;  
The harvest is won;  
Past are the tears and the mirth;  
And we feel in the tenuous air  
How far beyond thought or prayer  
Is the grace of silent things,  
That work for the world alway,  
Neither for fear nor for pay,  
And when labor is over, rest.

The moil of our fretted life  
Is borne anew to the soul,  
Borne with its cark and strife,  
Its burden of care and dread,  
Its glories elusive and strange;  
And the weight of the weary whole  
Presses it down, till we cry:  
Where is the fruit of our deeds?  
Why should we struggle to build  
Towers against death on the plain?  
All things possess their lives  
Save man, whose task and desire  
Transcend his power and his will.

The question is over and still;  
Nothing replies: but the earth  
Takes on a lovelier hue  
From a cloud that neighbored the sun,  
That the sun burned down and through,  
Till it glowed like a seraph's wing;  
The fields that were gray and dun  
Are warm in the flowing light;  
Fair in the west the night  
Strikes in with vibrant star.

Something has stirred afar  
In the shadow that winter flings;  
A message comes up to the soul  
From the soul of inanimate things:  
A message that widens and grows  
Till it touches the deeds of man,

Till we see in the torturous throes  
Some dawning glimmer of plan;  
Till we feel in the deepening night  
The hand of the angel Content,  
That stranger of calmness and light,  
With his brow over us bent,  
Who moves with his eyes on the earth,  
Whose robe of lambent green,  
A tissue of herb and its sheen,  
Tells the mother who gave him birth.  
The message plays through his power,  
Till it flames exultant in thought,  
As the quince-tree triumphs in flower.  
The fruit that is checked and marred  
Goes under the sod:  
The good lives here in the world;  
It persists,-- it is God.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon

Here in the midnight, where the dark mainland and island  
Shadows mingle in shadow deeper, profounder,  
Sing we the hymns of the churches, while the dead water  
Whispers before us.

Thunder is travelling slow on the path of the lightning;  
One after one the stars and the beaming planets  
Look serene in the lake from the edge of the storm-cloud,  
Then have they vanished.

While our canoe, that floats dumb in the bursting thunder,  
Gathers her voice in the quiet and thrills and whispers,  
Presses her prow in the star-gleam, and all her ripple  
Lapses in blackness.

Sing we the sacred ancient hymns of the churches,  
Chanted first in old-world nooks of the desert,  
While in the wild, pellucid Nipigon reaches  
Hunted the savage.

Now have the ages met in the Northern midnight,  
And on the lonely, loon-haunted Nipigon reaches  
Rises the hymn of triumph and courage and comfort,  
Adeste Fideles.

Tones that were fashioned when the faith brooded in darkness,  
Joined with sonorous vowels in the noble Latin,  
Now are married with the long-drawn Ojibwa,  
Uncouth and mournful.

Soft with the silver drip of the regular paddles  
Falling in rhythm, timed with the liquid, plangent  
Sounds from the blades where the whirlpools break and are carried  
Down into darkness;

Each long cadence, flying like a dove from her shelter  
Deep in the shadow, wheels for a throbbing moment,  
Poises in utterance, returning in circles of silver  
To nest in the silence.

All wild nature stirs with the infinite, tender  
Plaint of a bygone age whose soul is eternal,  
Bound in the lonely phrases that thrill and falter  
Back into quiet.

Back they falter as the deep storm overtakes them,  
Whelms them in splendid hollows of booming thunder,  
Wraps them in rain, that, sweeping, breaks and onrushes  
Ringing like cymbals.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## Ode for the Keats Centenary

The Muse is stern unto her favoured sons,  
Giving to some the keys of all the joy  
Of the green earth, but holding even that joy  
Back from their life;  
Bidding them feed on hope,  
A plant of bitter growth,  
Deep-rooted in the past;  
Truth, 'tis a doubtful art  
To make Hope sweeten  
Time as it flows;  
For no man knows  
Until the very last,  
Whether it be a sovereign herb that he has eaten,  
Or his own heart.

O stern, implacable Muse,  
Giving to Keats so richly dowered,  
Only the thought that he should be  
Among the English poets after death;  
Letting him fade with that expectancy,  
All powerless to unfold the future!  
What boots it that our age has snatched him free  
From thy too harsh embrace,  
Has given his fame the certainty  
Of comradeship with Shakespeare's?  
He lies alone  
Beneath the frown of the old Roman stone  
And the cold Roman violets;  
And not our wildest incantation  
Of his most sacred lines,  
Nor all the praise that sets  
Towards his pale grave,  
Like oceans towards the moon,  
Will move the Shadow with the pensive brow  
To break his dream,  
And give unto him now  
One word! --

When the young master reasoned  
That our puissant England  
Reared her great poets by neglect,  
Trampling them down in the by-paths of Life  
And fostering them with glory after death,  
Did any flame of triumph from his own fame  
Fall swift upon his mind; the glow  
Cast back upon the bleak and aching air  
Blown around his days -- ?  
Happily so!  
But he, whose soul was mighty as the soul  
Of Milton, who held the vision of the world  
As an irradiant orb self-filled with light,  
Who schooled his heart with passionate control

To compass knowledge, to unravel the dense  
Web of this tangled life, he would weigh slight  
As thistledown blown from his most fairy fancy  
That pale self-glory, against the mystery,  
The wonder of the various world, the power  
Of "seeing great things in loneliness."  
Where bloodroot in the clearing dwells  
Along the edge of snow;  
Where, trembling all their trailing bells,  
The sensitive twinflowers blow;

Where, searching through the ferny breaks,  
The moose-fawns find the springs;  
Where the loon laughs and diving takes  
Her young beneath her wings;

Where flash the fields of arctic moss  
With myriad golden light;  
Where no dream-shadows ever cross  
The lidless eyes of night;

Where, cleaving a mountain storm, the proud  
Eagles, the clear sky won,  
Mount the thin air between the loud  
Slow thunder and the sun;

Where, to the high tarn tranced and still  
No eye has ever seen,  
Comes the first star its flame to chill  
In the cool deeps of green; --  
Spirit of Keats, unfurl thy wings,  
Far from the toil and press,  
Teach us by these pure-hearted things,  
Beauty in loneliness.

Where, in the realm of thought, dwell those  
Who oft in pain and penury  
Work in the void,  
Searching the infinite dark between the stars,  
The infinite little of the atom,  
Gathering the tears and terrors of this life,  
Distilling them to a medicine for the soul;  
(And hated for their thought  
Die for it calmly;  
For not their fears,  
Nor the cold scorn of men,  
Fright them who hold to truth:)  
They brood alone in the intense serene  
Air of their passion,  
Until on some chill dawn  
Breaks the immortal form foreshadowed in their dream,  
And the distracted world and men

Are no more what they were.  
Spirit of Keats, unfurl thy deathless wings,  
Far from the wayward toil, the vain excess,  
Teach us by such soul-haunting things  
Beauty in loneliness.

The minds of men grow numb, their vision narrows,  
The clogs of Empire and the dust of ages,  
The lust of power that fogs the fairest pages,  
Of the romance that eager life would write,  
These war on Beauty with their spears and arrows.  
But still is Beauty and of constant power;  
Even in the whirl of Time's most sordid hour,  
Banished from the great highways,  
Afflighted by the tramp of insolent feet,  
She hangs her garlands in the by-ways;  
Lissome and sweet  
Bending her head to hearken and learn  
Melody shadowed with melody,  
Softer than shadow of sea-fern,  
In the green-shadowed sea:  
Then, nourished by quietude,  
And if the world's mood  
Change, she may return  
Even lovelier than before. --

The white reflection in the mountain lake  
Falls from the white stream  
Silent in the high distance;  
The mirrored mountains guard  
The profile of the goddess of the height,  
Floating in water with a curve of crystal light;  
When the air, envious of the loveliness,  
Rushes downward to surprise,  
Confusion plays in the contact,  
The picture is overdrawn  
With ardent ripples,  
But when the breeze, warned of intrusion,  
Draws breathless upward in flight,  
The vision reassembles in tranquillity,  
Reforming with a gesture of delight,  
Reborn with the rebirth of calm.

Spirit of Keats, lend us thy voice,  
Breaking like surge in some enchanted cave  
On a dream-sea-coast,  
To summon Beauty to her desolate world.  
For Beauty has taken refuge from our life  
That grew too loud and wounding;  
Beauty withdraws beyond the bitter strife,  
Beauty is gone, (Oh where?)  
To dwell within a precinct of pure air

Where moments turn to months of solitude;  
To live on roots of fern and tips of fern,  
On tender berries flushed with the earth's blood.  
Beauty shall stain her feet with moss  
And dye her cheek with deep nut-juices,  
Laving her hands in the pure sluices  
Where rainbows are dissolved.  
Beauty shall view herself in pools of amber sheen  
Dappled with peacock-tints from the green screen  
That mingles liquid light with liquid shadow.  
Beauty shall breathe the fairy hush  
With the chill orchids in their cells of shade,  
And hear the invocation of the thrush  
That calls the stars into their heaven,  
And after even  
Beauty shall take the night into her soul.  
When the thrill voice goes crying through the wood,  
(Oh, Beauty, Beauty!)  
Troubling the solitude  
With echoes from the lonely world,  
Beauty will tremble like a cloistered thing  
That hears temptation in the outlands singing,  
Will steel her dedicated heart and breathe  
Into her inner ear to firm her vow: --  
"Let me restore the soul that ye have marred.  
O mortals, cry no more on Beauty,  
Leave me alone, lone mortals,  
Until my shaken soul comes to its own,  
Lone mortals, leave me alone!"  
(Oh Beauty, Beauty, Beauty!)  
All the dim wood is silent as a dream  
That dreams of silence.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **Permanence**

Set within a desert lone,  
Circled by an arid sea,  
Stands a figure carved in stone,  
Where a fountain used to be.

Two abraded, pleading hands  
Held below a shapeless mouth,  
Human-like the fragment stands,  
Tortured by perpetual drouth.

Once the form was drenched with spray,  
Deluged with the rainbow flushes;  
Surplus water dashed away  
To the lotus and the rushes.

Time was clothed in rippling fashion,  
Opulence of light and air,  
Beauty changing into passion  
Every hour and everywhere.

And the yearning of that race  
Was for something deep and tender,  
Life replete with power, with grace,  
Touched with vision and with splendour.

Now no rain dissolves and cools,  
Dew is even as a dream,  
The enticing far-off pools  
In a mirage only seem.

All the traces that remain,  
Of the longings of that land,  
Are two hands that plead in vain  
Filled with burning sand.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **Rain and the Robin**

A ROBIN in the morning,  
In the morning early,  
Sang a song of warning,  
"There'll be rain, there'll be rain."  
Very, very clearly  
From the orchard  
Came the gentle horning,  
"There'll be rain."  
But the hasty farmer  
Cut his hay down,  
Did not heed the charmer  
From the orchard,  
And the mower's clatter  
Ceased at noontide,  
For with drip and spatter  
Down came the rain.  
Then the prophet robin  
Hidden in the crab-tree  
Railed upon the farmer,  
"I told you so, I told you so."  
As the rain grew stronger,  
And his heart grew prouder,  
Notes so full and slow  
Coming blither, louder,  
"I told you so, I told you so,"  
"I told you so."

Duncan Campbell Scott

## Rapids at Night

Here at the roots of the mountains,  
Between the sombre legions of cedars and tamaracks,  
The rapids charge the ravine:  
A little light, cast by foam under starlight,  
Wavers about the shimmering stems of the birches:  
Here rise up the clangorous sounds of battle,  
Immense and mournful.  
Far above curves the great dome of darkness  
Drawn with the limitless lines of the stars and the planets.  
Deep at the core of the tumult,  
Deeper than all the voices that cry at the surface,  
Dwells one fathomless sound,  
Under the hiss and cry, the stroke and the plangent clamour.

O human heart that sleeps,  
Wild with rushing dreams and deep with sadness!

The abysmal roar drops into almost silence,  
While over its sleep play in various cadence  
Innumerable voices crashing in laughter;  
Then rising calm, overwhelming,  
Slow in power,  
Rising supreme in utterance,  
It sways, and reconquers and floods all the spaces of silence,  
One voice, deep with the sadness,  
That dwells at the core of all things.  
There by a nest in the glimmering birches,  
Speaks a thrush as if startled from slumber,  
Dreaming of Southern ricefields,  
The moted glow of the amber sunlight,  
Where the long ripple roves among the reeds.

Above curves the great dome of darkness,  
Scored with the limitless lines of the stars and the planets;  
Like the strong palm of God,  
Veined with the ancient laws,  
Holding a human heart that sleeps,  
Wild with rushing dreams and deep with the sadness,  
That dwells at the core of all things.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## Stone Breaking

March wind rough  
Clashed the trees,  
Flung the snow;  
Breaking stones,  
In the cold,  
Germans slow  
Toiled and toiled;  
Arrowy sun  
Glanced and sprang,  
One right blithe  
German sang:  
Songs of home,  
Fatherland:  
Syenite hard,  
Weary lot,  
Callous hand,  
All forgot:  
Hammers pound,  
Ringing round;  
Rise the heaps,  
To his voice,  
Bounds and leaps  
Toise on toise:  
Toil is long,  
But dear God  
Gives us song,  
At the end  
Gives us test,  
Toil is best.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## The Forsaken

I  
Once in the winter  
Out on a lake  
In the heart of the north-land,  
Far from the Fort  
And far from the hunters,  
A Chippewa woman  
With her sick baby,  
Crouched in the last hours  
Of a great storm.  
Frozen and hungry,  
She fished through the ice  
With a line of the twisted  
Bark of the cedar,  
And a rabbit-bone hook  
Polished and barbed;  
Fished with the bare hook  
All through the wild day,  
Fished and caught nothing;  
While the young chieftain  
Tugged at her breasts,  
Or slept in the lacings  
Of the warm tikanagan.  
All the lake-surface  
Streamed with the hissing  
Of millions of iceflakes  
Hurled by the wind;  
Behind her the round  
Of a lonely island  
Roared like a fire  
With the voice of the storm  
In the deeps of the cedars.  
Valiant, unshaken,  
She took of her own flesh,  
Baited the fish-hook,  
Drew in a gray-trout,  
Drew in his fellows,  
Heaped them beside her,  
Dead in the snow.  
Valiant, unshaken,  
She faced the long distance,  
Wolf-haunted and lonely,  
Sure of her goal  
And the life of her dear one:  
Tramped for two days,  
On the third in the morning,  
Saw the strong bulk  
Of the Fort by the river,  
Saw the wood-smoke  
Hand soft in the spruces,  
Heard the keen yelp  
Of the ravenous huskies

Fighting for whitefish:  
Then she had rest.

## II

Years and years after,  
When she was old and withered,  
When her son was an old man  
And his children filled with vigour,  
They came in their northern tour on the verge of winter,  
To an island in a lonely lake.  
There one night they camped, and on the morrow  
Gathered their kettles and birch-bark  
Their rabbit-skin robes and their mink-traps,  
Launched their canoes and slunk away through the islands,  
Left her alone forever,  
Without a word of farewell,  
Because she was old and useless,  
Like a paddle broken and warped,  
Or a pole that was splintered.  
Then, without a sigh,  
Valiant, unshaken,  
She smoothed her dark locks under her kerchief,  
Composed her shawl in state,  
Then folded her hands ridged with sinews and corded with veins,  
Folded them across her breasts spent with the nourishment of children,  
Gazed at the sky past the tops of the cedars,  
Saw two spangled nights arise out of the twilight,  
Saw two days go by filled with the tranquil sunshine,  
Saw, without pain, or dread, or even a moment of longing:  
Then on the third great night there came thronging and thronging  
Millions of snowflakes out of a windless cloud;  
They covered her close with a beautiful crystal shroud,  
Covered her deep and silent.  
But in the frost of the dawn,  
Up from the life below,  
Rose a column of breath  
Through a tiny cleft in the snow,  
Fragile, delicately drawn,  
Wavering with its own weakness,  
In the wilderness a sign of the spirit,  
Persisting still in the sight of the sun  
Till day was done.  
Then all light was gathered up by the hand of God and hid in His breast,  
Then there was born a silence deeper than silence,  
Then she had rest.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **The Half-breed Girl**

She is free of the trap and the paddle,  
The portage and the trail,  
But something behind her savage life  
Shines like a fragile veil.

Her dreams are undiscovered,  
Shadows trouble her breast,  
When the time for resting cometh  
Then least is she at rest.

Oft in the morns of winter,  
When she visits the rabbit snares,  
An appearance floats in the crystal air  
Beyond the balsam firs.

Oft in the summer mornings  
When she strips the nets of fish,  
The smell of the dripping net-twine  
Gives to her heart a wish.

But she cannot learn the meaning  
Of the shadows in her soul,  
The lights that break and gather,  
The clouds that part and roll,

The reek of rock-built cities,  
Where her fathers dwelt of yore,  
The gleam of loch and shealing,  
The mist on the moor,

Frail traces of kindred kindness,  
Of feud by hill and strand,  
The heritage of an age-long life  
In a legendary land.

She wakes in the stifling wigwam,  
Where the air is heavy and wild,  
She fears for something or nothing  
With the heart of a frightened child.

She sees the stars turn slowly  
Past the tangle of the poles,  
Through the smoke of the dying embers,  
Like the eyes of dead souls.

Her heart is shaken with longing  
For the strange, still years,  
For what she knows and knows not,  
For the wells of ancient tears.

A voice calls from the rapids,  
Deep, careless and free,

A voice that is larger than her life  
Or than her death shall be.

She covers her face with her blanket,  
Her fierce soul hates her breath,  
As it cries with a sudden passion  
For life or death.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## The Harvest

Sun on the mountain,  
Shade in the valley,  
Ripple and lightness  
Leaping along the world,  
Sun, like a gold sword  
Plucked from the scabbard,  
Striking the wheat-fields,  
Splendid and lusty,  
Close-standing, full-headed,  
Toppling with plenty;  
Shade, like a buckler  
Kindly and ample,  
Sweeping the wheat-fields  
Darkening and tossing;  
There on the world-rim  
Winds break and gather  
Heaping the mist  
For the pyre of the sunset;  
And still as a shadow,  
In the dim westward,  
A cloud sloop of amethyst  
Moored to the world  
With cables of rain.

Acres of gold wheat  
Stir in the sunshine,  
Rounding the hill-top,  
Crested with plenty,  
Filling the valley,  
Brimmed with abundance,  
Wind in the wheat-field  
Eddying and settling,  
Swaying it, sweeping it,  
Lifting the rich heads,  
Tossing them soothingly  
Twinkle and shimmer  
The lights and the shadowings,  
Nimble as moonlight  
Astir in the mere.  
Laden with odors  
Of peace and of plenty,  
Soft comes the wind  
From the ranks of the wheat-field,  
Bearing a promise  
Of harvest and sickle-time,  
Opulent threshing-floors  
Dusty and dim  
With the whirl of the flail,  
And wagons of bread,  
Sown-laden and lumbering  
Through the gateways of cities.

When will the reapers  
Strike in their sickles,  
Bending and grasping,  
Shearing and spreading;  
When will the gleaners  
Searching the stubble  
Take the last wheat-heads  
Home in their arms ?

Ask not the question! -  
Something tremendous  
Moves to the answer.

Hunger and poverty  
Heaped like the ocean  
Welters and mutters,  
<i>Hold back the sickles!</i>

Millions of children  
Born to their mothers' womb,  
Starved at the nipple, cry,--  
<i>Ours is the harvest!</i>  
Millions of women  
Learned in the tragical  
Secrets of poverty,  
Sweated and beaten, cry,--  
<i>Hold back the sickles!</i>

Millions of men  
With a vestige of manhood,  
Wild-eyed and gaunt-throated,  
Shout with a leonine  
Accent of anger,  
<i>Leaves us the wheat-fields!</i>

When will the reapers  
Strike in their sickles?  
Ask not the question;  
Something tremendous  
Moves to the answer.

Long have they sharpened  
Their fiery, impetuous  
Sickles of carnage,  
Welded them aeons  
Ago in the mountains  
Of suffering and anguish;  
Hearts were their hammers  
Blood was their fire,  
Sorrow their anvil,  
(Trusty the sickle  
Tempered with tears;)

Time they had plenty-  
Harvests and harvests  
Passed them in agony,  
Only a half-filled  
Ear for their lot;  
Man that has taken  
God for a master  
Made him a law,  
Mocked him and cursed him,  
Set up this hunger,  
Called it necessity,  
Put in the blameless mouth  
Juda's language:  
The poor ye have with you  
Always, unending.  
But up from the impotent  
Anguish of children,  
Up from the labor  
Fruitless, unmeaning,  
Of millions of mothers,  
Hugely necessitous,  
Grew by a just law  
Stern and implacable,  
Art born of poverty,  
The making of sickles  
Meet for the harvest.

And now to the wheat-fields  
Come the weird reapers  
Armed with their sickles,  
Whipping them keenly  
In the fresh-air fields,  
Wild with the joy of them,  
Finding them trusty,  
Hilted with teen.  
Swarming like ants,  
The Idea for captain,  
No banners, no bugles,  
Only a terrible  
Ground-bass of gathering  
Tempest and fury,  
Only a tossing  
Of arms and of garments;  
Sexless and featureless,  
(Only the children  
Different among them,  
Crawling between their feet,  
Borne on their shoulders;)  
Rolling their shaggy heads  
Wild with the unheard-of  
Drug of the sunshine;  
Tears that had eaten

The half of their eyelids  
Dry on their cheeks;  
Blood in their stiffened hair  
Clouted and darkened;  
Down in their cavern hearts  
Hunger the tiger,  
Leaping, exulting;  
Sighs that had choked them  
Burst into triumphing;  
On they come, Victory!  
Up to the wheat-fields,  
Dreamed of in visions  
Bred by the hunger,  
Seen for the first time  
Splendid and golden;  
On they come fluctuant,  
Seething and breaking,  
Weltering like fire  
In the pit of the earthquake,  
Bursting in heaps  
With the sudden intractable  
Lust of the hunger:  
Then when they see them-  
The miles of the harvest  
White in the sunshine,  
Rushing and stumbling,  
With the mighty and clamorous  
Cry of a people  
Starved from creation,  
Hurl themselves onward,  
Deep in the wheat-fields,  
Weeping like children,  
After ages and ages,  
Back at the mother the earth.  
Night in the valley,  
Gloom on the mountain,  
Wind in the wheat,  
Far to the southward  
The flutter of lightning,  
The shudder of thunder;  
But high at the zenith,  
A cluster of stars  
Glimmers and throbs  
In the gasp of the midnight,  
Steady and absolute,  
Ancient and sure

Duncan Campbell Scott

## The Height of Land

Here is the height of land:  
The watershed on either hand  
Goes down to Hudson Bay  
Or Lake Superior;  
The stars are up, and far away  
The wind sounds in the wood, wearier  
Than the long Ojibwa cadence  
In which Potàn the Wise  
Declares the ills of life  
And Chees-que-ne-ne makes a mournful sound  
Of acquiescence. The fires burn low  
With just sufficient glow  
To light the flakes of ash that play  
At being moths, and flutter away  
To fall in the dark and die as ashes:  
Here there is peace in the lofty air,  
And Something comes by flashes  
Deeper than peace: --  
The spruces have retired a little space  
And left a field of sky in violet shadow  
With stars like marigolds in a water-meadow.

Now the Indian guides are dead asleep;  
There is no sound unless the soul can hear  
The gathering of the waters in their sources.  
We have come up through the spreading lakes  
From level to level, --  
Pitching our tents sometimes over a revel  
Of roses that nodded all night,  
Dreaming within our dreams,  
To wake at dawn and find that they were captured  
With no dew on their leaves;  
Sometimes mid sheaves  
Of bracken and dwarf-cornel, and again  
On a wide blueberry plain  
Brushed with the shimmer of a bluebird's wing;  
A rocky islet followed  
With one lone poplar and a single nest  
Of white-throat-sparrows that took no rest  
But sang in dreams or woke to sing, --  
To the last portage and the height of land --:  
Upon one hand  
The lonely north enlaced with lakes and streams,  
And the enormous targe of Hudson Bay,  
Glimmering all night  
In the cold arctic light;  
On the other hand  
The crowded southern land  
With all the welter of the lives of men.  
But here is peace, and again  
That Something comes by flashes  
Deeper than peace, -- a spell

Golden and inappellable  
That gives the inarticulate part  
Of our strange being one moment of release  
That seems more native than the touch of time,  
And we must answer in chime;  
Though yet no man may tell  
The secret of that spell  
Golden and inappellable.

Now are there sounds walking in the wood,  
And all the spruces shiver and tremble,  
And the stars move a little in their courses.  
The ancient disturber of solitude  
Breathes a pervasive sigh,  
And the soul seems to hear  
The gathering of the waters at their sources;  
Then quiet ensues and pure starlight and dark;  
The region-spirit murmurs in meditation,  
The heart replies in exaltation  
And echoes faintly like an inland shell  
Ghost tremors of the spell;  
Thought reawakens and is linked again  
With all the welter of the lives of men.  
Here on the uplands where the air is clear  
We think of life as of a stormy scene, --  
Of tempest, of revolt and desperate shock;  
And here, where we can think, on the brights uplands  
Where the air is clear, we deeply brood on life  
Until the tempest parts, and it appears  
As simple as to the shepherd seems his flock:  
A Something to be guided by ideals --  
That in themselves are simple and serene --  
Of noble deed to foster noble thought,  
And noble thought to image noble deed,  
Till deed and thought shall interpenetrate,  
Making life lovelier, till we come to doubt  
Whether the perfect beauty that escapes  
Is beauty of deed or thought or some high thing  
Mingled of both, a greater boon than either:  
Thus we have seen in the retreating tempest  
The victor-sunlight merge with the ruined rain,  
And from the rain and sunlight spring the rainbow.

The ancient disturber of solitude  
Stirs his ancestral potion in the gloom,  
And the dark wood  
Is stifled with the pungent fume  
Of charred earth burnt to the bone  
That takes the place of air.  
Then sudden I remember when and where, --  
The last weird lakelet foul with weedy growths  
And slimy viscid things the spirit loathes,

Skin of vile water over viler mud  
Where the paddle stirred unutterable stench,  
And the canoes seemed heavy with fear,  
Not to be urged toward the fatal shore  
Where a bush fire, smouldering, with sudden roar  
Leaped on a cedar and smothered it with light  
And terror. It had left the portage-height  
A tangle of slanted spruces burned to the roots,  
Covered still with patches of bright fire  
Smoking with incense of the fragment resin  
That even then began to thin and lessen  
Into the gloom and glimmer of ruin.  
'Tis overpast. How strange the stars have grown;  
The presage of extinction glows on their crests  
And they are beautied with impermanence;  
They shall be after the race of men  
And mourn for them who snared their fiery pinions,  
Entangled in the meshes of bright words.

A lemming stirs the fern and in the mosses  
Eft-minded things feel the air change, and dawn  
Tolls out from the dark belfries of the spruces.  
How often in the autumn of the world  
Shall the crystal shrine of dawning be rebuilt  
With deeper meaning! Shall the poet then,  
Wrapped in his mantle on the height of land,  
Brood on the welter of the lives of men  
And dream of his ideal hope and promise  
In the blush sunrise? Shall he base his flight  
Upon a more compelling law than Love  
As Life's atonement; shall the vision  
Of noble deed and noble thought immingled  
Seem as uncouth to him as the pictograph  
Scratched on the cave side by the cave-dweller  
To us of the Christ-time? Shall he stand  
With deeper joy, with more complex emotion,  
In closer commune with divinity,  
With the deep fathomed, with the firmament charted,  
With life as simple as a sheep-boy's song,  
What lies beyond a romaunt that was read  
Once on a morn of storm and laid aside  
Memorious with strange immortal memories?  
Or shall he see the sunrise as I see it  
In shoals of misty fire the deluge-light  
Dashes upon and whelms with purer radiance,  
And feel the lulled earth, older in pulse and motion,  
Turn the rich lands and inundant oceans  
To the flushed color, and hear as now I hear  
The thrill of life beat up the planet's margin  
And break in the clear susurrus of deep joy  
That echoes and reëchoes in my being?  
O Life is intuition the measure of knowledge

And do I stand with heart entranced and burning  
At the zenith of our wisdom when I feel  
The long light flow, the long wind pause, the deep  
Influx of spirit, of which no man may tell  
The Secret, golden and inappellable?

Duncan Campbell Scott

## The Message

Wind of the gentle summer night,  
Dwell in the lilac tree,  
Sway the blossoms clustered light,  
Then blow over to me.

Wind, you are sometimes strong and great,  
You frighten the ships at sea,  
Now come floating your delicate freight  
Out of the lilac tree,

Wind you must waver a gossamer sail  
To ferry a scent so light,  
Will you carry my love a message as frail  
Through the hawk-haunted night?

For my heart is sometimes strange and wild,  
Bitter and bold and free,  
I scare the beautiful timid child,  
As you frighten the ships at sea;

But now when the hawks are piercing the air,  
With the golden stars above,  
The only thing that my heart can bear  
Is a lilac message of love.

Gentle wind, will you carry this  
Up to her window white  
Give her a gentle tender kiss;  
Bid her good-night, good-night.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **The Onondaga Madonna**

She stands full-throated and with careless pose,  
This woman of a weird and waning race,  
The tragic savage lurking in her face,  
Where all her pagan passion burns and glows;  
Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes,  
And thrills with war and wildness in her veins;  
Her rebel lips are dabbled with the stains  
Of feuds and forays and her father's woes.

And closer in the shawl about her breast,  
The latest promise of her nation's doom,  
Paler than she her baby clings and lies,  
The primal warrior gleaming from his eyes;  
He sulks, and burdened with his infant gloom,  
He draws his heavy brows and will not rest.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **The Violet Pressed in a Copy of Shakespeare**

Here in the inmost of the master's heart  
This violet crisp with early dew  
Has come to leave her beauty and to part  
With all her vivid hue.

And while in hollow glades and dells of musk,  
Her fellows will reflower in bands,  
Clasping the deeps of shade and emerald dusk,  
With sweet inviolate hands,

She will lie here, a ghost of their delight,  
Their lucent stems all ashen gray,  
Their purples fallen into pulvil white,  
Dull as the bluebird's alula.

But her where human passions pulse in power,  
She will transcend our Shakespeare's art,  
From Desdemona to a smothered flower,  
Will leap the tragic heart.

And memory will recall in keener mood  
The precinct fair where passion grew,  
The stars within the water in the wood,  
The moonlit grove, the odorous dew.

The voice that throbbed along the summer dark  
Will float and pause and thrill,  
In lonely cadence silvern as the lark,  
To fail below the hill.

The reader will grow weary of the play,  
Finding his hearts half understood,  
And with the young moon in the early dusk will stray  
Beside the starry water in the wood.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **To a Canadian Aviator Who Died for his Country in France**

Tossed like a falcon from the hunter's wrist,  
A sweeping plunge, a sudden shattering noise,  
And thou hast dared, with a long spiral twist,  
The elastic stairway to the rising sun.  
Peril below thee and above, peril  
Within thy car; but peril cannot daunt  
Thy peerless heart: gathering wing and poise,  
Thy plane transfigured, and thy motor-chant  
Subdued to a whisper -- then a silence, --  
And thou art but a disembodied venture  
In the void.

But Death, who has learned to fly,  
Still matchless when his work is to be done,  
Met thee between the armies and the sun;  
Thy speck of shadow faltered in the sky;  
Then thy dead engine and thy broken wings  
Drooped through the arc and passed in fire,  
A wreath of smoke -- a breathless exhalation.  
But ere that came a vision sealed thine eyes,  
Lulling thy senses with oblivion;  
And from its sliding station in the skies  
Thy dauntless soul upward in circles soared  
To the sublime and purest radiance whence it sprang.

In all their eyries, eagles shall mourn thy fate,  
And leaving on the lonely crags and scaurs  
Their unprotected young, shall congregate  
High in the tenuous heaven and anger the sun  
With screams, and with a wild audacity  
Dare all the battle danger of thy flight;  
Till weary with combat one shall desert the light,  
Fall like a bolt of thunder and check his fall  
On the high ledge, smoky with mist and cloud,  
Where his neglected eaglets shriek aloud,  
And drawing the film across his sovereign sight  
Shall dream of thy swift soul immortal  
Mounting in circles, faithful beyond death.

Duncan Campbell Scott

## **When Spring Goes By**

The winds that on the uplands softly lie,  
Grow keener where the ice is lingering still  
Where the first robin on the sheltered hill  
Pipes blithely to the tune, "When Spring goes by!"  
Hear him again, "Spring! Spring!" He seems to cry,  
Haunting the fall of the flute-throated rill,  
That keeps a gentle, constant, silver thrill,  
While he is restless in his ecstasy.

Ah! the soft budding of the virginal woods,  
Of the frail fruit trees by the vanishing lakes:  
There's the new moon where the clear sunset floods,  
A trace of dew upon the rose leaf sky;  
And hark! what rapture the glad robin wakes-  
"When Spring goes by; Spring! Spring! When  
Spring goes by."

Duncan Campbell Scott