

Classic Poetry Series

**E. Pauline Johnson
(Tekahionwake)
- poems -**

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Brier: Good Friday

1 Because, dear Christ, your tender, wounded arm
2 Bends back the brier that edges life's long way,
3 That no hurt comes to heart, to soul no harm,
4 I do not feel the thorns so much to-day.

5 Because I never knew your care to tire,
6 Your hand to weary guiding me aright,
7 Because you walk before and crush the brier,
8 It does not pierce my feet so much to-night.

9 Because so often you have hearkened to
10 My selfish prayers, I ask but one thing now,
11 That these harsh hands of mine add not unto
12 The crown of thorns upon your bleeding brow.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)

Shadow River: Muskoka

1 A stream of tender gladness,
2 Of filmy sun, and opal tinted skies ;
3 Of warm midsummer air that lightly lies
4 In mystic rings,
5 Where softly swings
6 The music of a thousand wings
7 That almost tones to sadness.

8 Midway 'twixt earth and heaven,
9 A bubble in the pearly air I seem
10 To float upon the sapphire floor, a dream
11 Of clouds of snow,
12 Above, below,
13 Drift with my drifting, dim and slow,
14 As twilight drifts to even.

15 The little fern-leaf, bending
16 Upon the brink, its green reflection greets,
17 And kisses soft the shadow that it meets
18 With touch so fine,
19 The border line
20 The keenest vision can't define ;
21 So perfect is the blending.

22 The far, fir trees that cover
23 The brownish hills with needles green and gold,
24 The arching elms o'erhead, vinegrown and old,
25 Repictured are
26 Beneath me far,
27 Where not a ripple moves to mar
28 Shades underneath, or over.

29 Mine is the undertone ;
30 The beauty, strength, and power of the land
31 Will never stir or bend at my command ;
32 But all the shade
33 Is marred or made,
34 If I but dip my paddle blade ;
35 And it is mine alone.

36 O! pathless world of seeming!
37 O! pathless life of mine whose deep ideal
38 Is more my own than ever was the real.
39 For others Fame
40 And Love's red flame,
41 And yellow gold : I only claim
42 The shadows and the dreaming.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)

The Pilot of the Plains

1 ` ` False," they said, ` ` thy Pale-face lover, from the land of waking morn ;
2 Rise and wed thy Redskin wooer, nobler warrior ne'er was born ;
3 Cease thy watching, cease thy dreaming,
4 Show the white thine Indian scorn."

5 Thus they taunted her, declaring, ` ` He remembers naught of thee :
6 Likely some white maid he wooeth, far beyond the inland sea."
7 But she answered ever kindly,
8 ` ` He will come again to me,"

9 Till the dusk of Indian summer crept athwart the western skies ;
10 But a deeper dusk was burning in her dark and dreaming eyes,
11 As she scanned the rolling prairie,
12 Where the foothills fall, and rise.

13 Till the autumn came and vanished, till the season of the rains,
14 Till the western world lay fettered in midwinter's crystal chains,
15 Still she listened for his coming,
16 Still she watched the distant plains.

17 Then a night with nor'land tempest, nor'land snows a-swirling fast,
18 Out upon the pathless prairie came the Pale-face through the blast,
19 Calling, calling, ` ` Yakonwita,
20 I am coming, love, at last."

21 Hovered night above, about him, dark its wings and cold and dread ;
22 Never unto trail or tepee were his straying footsteps led ;
23 Till benumbed, he sank, and pillowed
24 On the drifting snows his head,

25 Saying, ` ` O! my Yakonwita call me, call me, be my guide
26 To the lodge beyond the prairie--for I vowed ere winter died
27 I would come again, beloved ;
28 I would claim my Indian bride."

29 ` ` Yakonwita, Yakonwita! " Oh, the dreariness that strains
30 Through the voice that calling, quivers, till a whisper but remains,
31 ` ` Yakonwita, Yakonwita,
32 I am lost upon the plains."

33 But the Silent Spirit hushed him, lulled him as he cried anew,
34 ` ` Save me, save me! O! beloved, I am Pale but I am true.
35 Yakonwita, Yakonwita
36 I am dying, love, for you."

37 Leagues afar, across the prairie, she had risen from her bed,
38 Roused her kinsmen from their slumber : ` ` He has come to-night," she said.
39 ` ` I can hear him calling, calling ;
40 But his voice is as the dead.

41 ` ` Listen! " and they sate all silent, while the tempest louder grew,
42 And a spirit-voice called faintly, ` ` I am dying, love, for you."

43 Then they wailed, ``O! Yakonwita.

44 He was Pale, but he was true."

45 Wrapped she then her ermine round her, stepped without the tepee door,

46 Saying, ``I must follow, follow, though he call for evermore,

47 Yakonwita, Yakonwita ;"

48 And they never saw her more.

49 Late at night, say Indian hunters, when the starlight clouds or wanes,

50 Far away they see a maiden, misty as the autumn rains,

51 Guiding with her lamp of moonlight

52 Hunters lost upon the plains.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)

The Song my Paddle Sings

1 West wind, blow from your prairie nest,
2 Blow from the mountains, blow from the west
3 The sail is idle, the sailor too ;
4 O! wind of the west, we wait for you.
5 Blow, blow!
6 I have wooed you so,
7 But never a favour you bestow.
8 You rock your cradle the hills between,
9 But scorn to notice my white lateen.

10 I stow the sail, unship the mast :
11 I wooed you long but my wooing's past ;
12 My paddle will lull you into rest.
13 O! drowsy wind of the drowsy west,
14 Sleep, sleep,
15 By your mountain steep,
16 Or down where the prairie grasses sweep!
17 Now fold in slumber your laggard wings,
18 For soft is the song my paddle sings.

19 August is laughing across the sky,
20 Laughing while paddle, canoe and I,
21 Drift, drift,
22 Where the hills uplift
23 On either side of the current swift.

24 The river rolls in its rocky bed ;
25 My paddle is plying its way ahead ;
26 Dip, dip,
27 While the water flip
28 In foam as over their breast we slip.

29 And oh, the river runs swifter now ;
30 The eddies circle about my bow.
31 Swirl, swirl!
32 How the ripples curl
33 In many a dangerous pool awhirl!

34 And forward far the rapids roar,
35 Fretting their margin for evermore.
36 Dash, dash,
37 With a mighty crash,
38 They seethe, and boil, and bound, and splash.

39 Be strong, O paddle! be brave, canoe!
40 The reckless waves you must plunge into.
41 Reel, reel.
42 On your trembling keel,
43 But never a fear my craft will feel.

44 We've raced the rapid, we're far ahead!
45 The river slips through its silent bed.

46 Sway, sway,
47 As the bubbles spray
48 And fall in tinkling tunes away.

49 And up on the hills against the sky,
50 A fir tree rocking its lullaby,
51 Swings, swings,
52 Its emerald wings,
53 Swelling the song that my paddle sings.

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