

Classic Poetry Series

Elsie Cole

- poems -

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Elsie Cole (1884-1968)

Elsie Clarice Cole was born in Melbourne from English parents. Her grandfather, mother and brother all composed poetry and both her brother and her grandfather achieved publication. Cole was educated at the South Melbourne College and her principal, the poet John Bernard O'Hara influenced her nature poetry. Cole's first publication was in The Bulletin when she was still at school, which The Bulletin published despite her not having put any address on her contribution.

Song of the Foot Track

COME away, come away from the straightness of the road;
I will lead you into delicate recesses
Where peals of ripples ring through the maidenhair's abode
In the heart of little water wildernesses.

I will show you pleasant places; tawny hills the sun has kissed,
Where the giant trees the wind is always swinging
Rise from clouds of pearly saplings tipped with rose and amethyst,—
Fairy boughs where fairy butterflies are clinging.

Come away from the road; I will lead through shade and sheen,
Changing brightly as the year of colour passes
Through each tint the opal knows, from the flaming winter green
To the summer gold and silver of the grasses.

Here is riot of leaf and blossom, ferny mosses in the glade
Pressing round the wattle's stem of dappled splendour;
Even the pathway that you tread smiles with daisies unafraid,—
Laden branches lean to breathe a welcome tender.

Come away from the road; let wild petals cool your eyes
Dim and hardened with the arid light of duty;
Lose awhile your weary purpose, leave the highway of the wise
For the little reckless of joy and beauty.

I am fairer still to follow where the Bush is lonelier grown
And the purple vines fling tendrils out to bind me;
For the secret of my lure is the call of the Unknown,
Hidden Loveliness that laughs: 'Come and find me!'

Follow on, ah, come with me! Though the way is fainter shown
Where the restless waves of green have splashed and crossed me;
In the temple of the trees you have met delight alone;
Winning happiness, what matter though you lost me?

In this dreamy fane of sunshine, where wood-violets are rife,
Though I leave you,—path and bracken surges blended,—
Would you say I led you vainly? I have sung the joy of life,
I have set you in the way; my song is ended.

Elsie Cole

The Herb Of Grace

Find some freckled fern seed to sprinkle in your shoes
And you may step invisible down the peopled street,
Or curve about the apple boughs like swallows if you choose,
Lifted by the elfin wings that tingle in your feet.
Oh, you may cull a-many sweets with fern seed iin your shoe!
But leave alone the rue--
Little boy, little girl,
Leave alone the rue!

Keep the downy dittany and storms will bring you calm,
Fill a vervain pillow for a thought-grieved head;
Cherish balm whene'er you can, there's none too much of balm,
And never stop for rosemary, 'twill follow where you tread.
Taste the scarlet love-apple, if youth will drive you to,
But leave alone the rue--
Fair lass, fine lad,
Leave alone the rue!

Mix tansy in your Easter cake and earn a placid year,
For though you cross the Little Folk they cannot then offend;
Give a spray and take a spray of ivy from your dear,
But pay with coin for parsley, or its price will be a friend.
Wear a four-leafed clover and the charm will win you through;
But leave alone the rue--
Grave man, wise woman,
Leave alone the rue!

Lovelier than wealth is laughing potentilla's gold,
Eyebright is beautiful and kind to eyes that weep;
Rich herbs of healing the wild glens hold
With hemlock and foxglove for those sick for sleep.
Surely there are flowers enough and strong leaves too!
Must you gather rue?
Poor things, poor things,
Leave alone the rue!

Come the aged creeping, each with wreaths for his own grave,
Dried roses, laurel leaves, wisps of dead grass,
Young-eyed forget-me-nots that old tears lave,
Heartsease, and love-lies-bleeding, bare thorns, alas!
Choice of life's harvesting that tells the tale true!
And all carry rue,
Evergreen, bitter green,
All carry rue!

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