

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Ethel Turner**

**- poems -**

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**'Oh, if that Rainbow up there!'**

Oh, if that rainbow up there,  
Spanning the sky past the hill,  
Slenderly, tenderly fair  
Shining with colours that thrill,  
Oh, if that rainbow up there,  
Just for a moment could reach  
Through the wet slope of the air  
Here where I stand on the beach!

Here where the waves wash the strand,  
Swing itself lovingly low,  
Let me catch fast with one hand,  
Climb its frail rigging and go.  
Climb its frail rigging and go?  
Where is its haven of rest?  
Out in the gleam and the glow  
Of the blood-red waves of the West?

Or where the isles of the dawn  
Lie on an amethyst sea,  
Does it drift, pale and forlorn,  
Ghost of the glory I see?  
Is there, ah, is there a land  
Such as the Icelanders say,  
Or past the West's ruddy strand  
Or on the edge of the day,

Some undiscovered clime  
Seen through a cloud's sudden rift,  
Where all the rainbows of Time  
Slowly and silently drift?  
Some happy port of a sea  
Never a world's sail has made,  
Where till the earth shadows flee  
Never a rainbow may fade.

Oh, if that rainbow up there,  
Just for a moment would reach,  
Through the wet slope of the air  
Here where I stand on the beach.  
Here where the waves wash the strand  
Swing itself lovingly low,  
Let me catch fast with one hand,  
Climb its frail rigging and go!

Ethel Turner

## **A Boat on the Sea**

A BOAT on the sea, my boat,  
Eager and frail!  
Sweet skies, smile as you look  
On that fairy sail.

Waves, great waves, many years  
You have worked your will.  
Just while she passes through,  
Kind waves, be still.

Winds—and I may not ask  
That you never blow,  
But spare her the moaning note  
That the old boats know.

Ethel Turner

## A Christ-child Day in Australia

A COPPER concave of a sky  
Hangs high above my head.  
Vague thunder sullenly goes by  
With dragging, muffled tread.

The hot air faints upon the grass,  
And at its bitter breath,  
Ten thousand trembling flower-souls pass,  
With fragrant sighs, to death.

There comes no breeze. No breeze has sprung  
And sweetly blown for days.  
Dead air in silent sheets has hung,  
Smooth wavering sheets of haze.

The very birds that erstwhile soared  
Hide hushed in haunts of trees.  
Nature no longer walks abroad,  
But crouches on her knees.

Crouches and hides her withered face,  
Above her barren breast,  
And I forget her yester grace  
And the clustering mouths she blessed.

'Tis in no alien land I sit,  
Almost it is mine own.  
Its fibres to my fibres knit,  
Its bone into my bone.

These are no alien skies I know,  
Yet something in my blood  
Calls sharp for breath of ice and snow  
Across the wide, salt flood.

Calls loud and will not be denied,  
Cries, with imperious tears,  
And mem'ries that have never died  
Leap wildly o'er the years:

The thrill of England's winter days,  
Of England's frost-sharp air,  
The ice along her waterways,  
Her snowfields stretching fair,

Her snowfields gleaming through the dark,  
Her bird with breast aglow,  
On the white land a crimson mark,  
—Ah England, England's snow!

Fair as a queen, this far south land,  
A wayward bride, half won,

Her dowry careless flung like sand,  
Her royal flax unspun.

And if beneath her ardent glance  
Her subjects faint and reel,  
Does she but melt, stoop to entrance,  
They kiss her hem and kneel.

And I—I kneel. For oft her hand  
Has gently touched my hair.  
Then with a throb I rise and stand,  
—A Queen!—why should she spare!

Yet when the Christ-Child mem'ries steal,  
Some ebb-tide swells to flood.  
Ah, England—just once more to feel  
Thy winter in my blood

Ethel Turner

## A Trembling Star

"There is my little trembling star," she said.  
I looked; once more  
The tender sea had put the sun to bed,  
And heaven's floor  
Was grey.

And nowhere yet in all that young night sky  
Was any star,  
But one that hung above the sea. Not high,  
Nor very far  
Away.

"I watch it every night," she said, and crept  
Within my arm.  
"Soft little star, I wish the angels kept  
It safe from harm  
Always.

"I know it is afraid," she said; her eyes  
Held a sweet tear.  
"They send it all alone into the skies,  
No big stars near,  
To stay.

"They push it out before the sweet, kind moon  
Lights up the sea.  
They laugh because it fears the dark. `Soon, soon,  
You'll braver be,'  
They say.

"One night I climbed far up that high white tree  
Beside the beach,  
And tried to stretch my hand across the sea  
And tried to reach  
The grey.

"For something made me feel my heart would break  
Unless that night  
I in my hand my trembling star could take  
And kiss its fright  
Away.

"There only blew a strange wind chillily,  
And clouds were swept.  
The angels would not let my own star see  
That someone wept.  
I pray

"To Christ, who hears my little prayers each night,  
That He will seek  
Through all His skies for that sweet, frightened light,  
And stoop His cheek

And say

"` My angels must not send so frail a thing  
To light the West.  
Lift up the little trembling star to cling  
About my breast  
Always."

Ethel Turner

## Where does the Winter go?

There goes the Winter, sulkily slinking  
Somewhere behind the trees on the hill.  
He caught a vision of sweet Spring prinking  
In green before her mirror---the rill.  
And he turned away  
With his face quite grey,  
And he went without ever a glance behind him  
But I want to know  
Which way does he go,  
And does anyone ever try to find him?  
Is he caught to the sky in a burst of thunder  
And tucked away in the clouds to sleep?  
Or does he go down to the sea, I wonder,  
And fling himself out where the waves roll deep?  
Is he washed ashore  
After tossings sore,  
And found by some fisherman, pale and dying?  
On some lonely beach  
Beyond human reach  
Still and stark is poor Winter lying?  
Or climbs he up, with his grey head drooping,  
Yon purple mountain that hides the sun,  
And stooping and rising, rising and stooping,  
Digs a grave where never was one?  
And then lies down  
In his grey, pale gown  
A prayer on his lips, and his hands together?  
"What tears will they shed  
Because I am dead?  
They will dance on my grave all the bright Spring weather."  
Oh! Winter, Winter, my tears are falling,  
Are you glad of the tears of a little child?  
Though Spring is abroad and calling, calling,  
I cling to the edge of your cloak so wild.  
And I kiss your hand  
And I understand,  
And I smooth your poor grey head, low-lying,  
Ah! I cannot sing  
Just yet with the Spring  
While Winter, Winter, is pale and dying.

Ethel Turner