

Classic Poetry Series

Helen Hunt Jackson

- poems -

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A Calendar of Sonnets: April

No days such honored days as these! While yet
Fair Aphrodite reigned, men seeking wide
For some fair thing which should forever bide
On earth, her beauteous memory to set
In fitting frame that no age could forget,
Her name in lovely April's name did hide,
And leave it there, eternally allied
To all the fairest flowers Spring did beget.
And when fair Aphrodite passed from earth,
Her shrines forgotten and her feasts of mirth,
A holier symbol still in seal and sign,
Sweet April took, of kingdom most divine,
When Christ ascended, in the time of birth
Of spring anemones, in Palestine.

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: August

Silence again. The glorious symphony
Hath need of pause and interval of peace.
Some subtle signal bids all sweet sounds cease,
Save hum of insects' aimless industry.
Pathetic summer seeks by blazonry
Of color to conceal her swift decrease.
Weak subterfuge! Each mocking day doth fleece
A blossom, and lay bare her poverty.
Poor middle-aged summer! Vain this show!
Whole fields of Golden-Rod cannot offset
One meadow with a single violet;
And well the singing thrush and lily know,
Spite of all artifice which her regret
Can deck in splendid guise, their time to go!

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: December

The lakes of ice gleam bluer than the lakes
Of water 'neath the summer sunshine gleamed:
Far fairer than when placidly it streamed,
The brook its frozen architecture makes,
And under bridges white its swift way takes.
Snow comes and goes as messenger who dreamed
Might linger on the road; or one who deemed
His message hostile gently for their sakes
Who listened might reveal it by degrees.
We gird against the cold of winter wind
Our loins now with mighty bands of sleep,
In longest, darkest nights take rest and ease,
And every shortening day, as shadows creep
O'er the brief noontide, fresh surprises find.

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: February

Still lie the sheltering snows, undimmed and white;
And reigns the winter's pregnant silence still;
No sign of spring, save that the catkins fill,
And willow stems grow daily red and bright.
These are days when ancients held a rite
Of expiation for the old year's ill,
And prayer to purify the new year's will:
Fit days, ere yet the spring rains blur the sight,
Ere yet the bounding blood grows hot with haste,
And dreaming thoughts grow heavy with a greed
The ardent summer's joy to have and taste;
Fit days, to give to last year's losses heed,
To recon clear the new life's sterner need;
Fit days, for Feast of Expiation placed!

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: January

O Winter! frozen pulse and heart of fire,
What loss is theirs who from thy kingdom turn
Dismayed, and think thy snow a sculptured urn
Of death! Far sooner in midsummer tire
The streams than under ice. June could not hire
Her roses to forego the strength they learn
In sleeping on thy breast. No fires can burn
The bridges thou dost lay where men desire
In vain to build.

O Heart, when Love's sun goes
To northward, and the sounds of singing cease,
Keep warm by inner fires, and rest in peace.
Sleep on content, as sleeps the patient rose.
Walk boldly on the white untrodden snows,
The winter is the winter's own release.

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: July

Some flowers are withered and some joys have died;
The garden reeks with an East Indian scent
From beds where gillyflowers stand weak and spent;
The white heat pales the skies from side to side;
But in still lakes and rivers, cool, content,
Like starry blooms on a new firmament,
White lilies float and regally abide.
In vain the cruel skies their hot rays shed;
The lily does not feel their brazen glare.
In vain the pallid clouds refuse to share
Their dews, the lily feels no thirst, no dread.
Unharmed she lifts her queenly face and head;
She drinks of living waters and keeps fair.

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: June

O month whose promise and fulfilment blend,
And burst in one! it seems the earth can store
In all her roomy house no treasure more;
Of all her wealth no farthing have to spend
On fruit, when once this stintless flowering end.
And yet no tiniest flower shall fall before
It hath made ready at its hidden core
Its tithe of seed, which we may count and tend
Till harvest. Joy of blossomed love, for thee
Seems it no fairer thing can yet have birth?
No room is left for deeper ecstasy?
Watch well if seeds grow strong, to scatter free
Germs for thy future summers on the earth.
A joy which is but joy soon comes to dearth.

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: March

Month which the warring ancients strangely styled
The month of war,--as if in their fierce ways
Were any month of peace!--in thy rough days
I find no war in Nature, though the wild
Winds clash and clang, and broken boughs are piled
As feet of writhing trees. The violets raise
Their heads without affright, without amaze,
And sleep through all the din, as sleeps a child.
And he who watches well may well discern
Sweet expectation in each living thing.
Like pregnant mother the sweet earth doth yearn;
In secret joy makes ready for the spring;
And hidden, sacred, in her breast doth bear
Annunciation lilies for the year.

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: May

O Month when they who love must love and wed!
Were one to go to worlds where May is naught,
And seek to tell the memories he had brought
From earth of thee, what were most fitly said?
I know not if the rosy showers shed
From apple-boughs, or if the soft green wrought
In fields, or if the robin's call be fraught
The most with thy delight. Perhaps they read
Thee best who in the ancient time did say
Thou wert the sacred month unto the old:
No blossom blooms upon thy brightest day
So subtly sweet as memories which unfold
In aged hearts which in thy sunshine lie,
To sun themselves once more before they die.

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: November

This is the treacherous month when autumn days
With summer's voice come bearing summer's gifts.
Beguiled, the pale down-trodden aster lifts
Her head and blooms again. The soft, warm haze
Makes moist once more the sere and dusty ways,
And, creeping through where dead leaves lie in drifts,
The violet returns. Snow noiseless sifts
Ere night, an icy shroud, which morning's rays
Willidly shine upon and slowly melt,
Too late to bid the violet live again.
The treachery, at last, too late, is plain;
Bare are the places where the sweet flowers dwelt.
What joy sufficient hath November felt?
What profit from the violet's day of pain?

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: October

The month of carnival of all the year,
When Nature lets the wild earth go its way,
And spend whole seasons on a single day.
The spring-time holds her white and purple dear;
October, lavish, flaunts them far and near;
The summer charily her reds doth lay
Like jewels on her costliest array;
October, scornful, burns them on a bier.
The winter hoards his pearls of frost in sign
Of kingdom: whiter pearls than winter knew,
Oar empress wore, in Egypt's ancient line,
October, feasting 'neath her dome of blue,
Drinks at a single draught, slow filtered through
Sunshiny air, as in a tingling wine!

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Calendar of Sonnets: September

O golden month! How high thy gold is heaped!
The yellow birch-leaves shine like bright coins strung
On wands; the chestnut's yellow pennons tongue
To every wind its harvest challenge. Steeped
In yellow, still lie fields where wheat was reaped;
And yellow still the corn sheaves, stacked among
The yellow gourds, which from the earth have wrung
Her utmost gold. To highest boughs have leaped
The purple grape,--last thing to ripen, late
By very reason of its precious cost.
O Heart, remember, vintages are lost
If grapes do not for freezing night-dews wait.
Think, while thou sunnest thyself in Joy's estate,
Mayhap thou canst not ripen without frost!

Helen Hunt Jackson

A Dream

I dreamed that I was dead and crossed the heavens,--
Heavens after heavens with burning feet and swift,--
And cried: "O God, where art Thou?" I left one
On earth, whose burden I would pray Thee lift."

I was so dead I wondered at no thing,--
Not even that the angels slowly turned
Their faces, speechless, as I hurried by
(Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned);

Nor, at the first, that I could not find God,
Because the heavens stretched endlessly like space.
At last a terror seized my very soul;
I seemed alone in all the crowded place.

Then, sudden, one compassionate cried out,
Though like the rest his face from me he turned,
As I were one no angel might regard
(Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned):

"No more in heaven than earth will he find God
Who does not know his loving mercy swift
But waits the moment consummate and ripe,
Each burden, from each human soul to lift."

Though I was dead, I died again for shame;
Lonely, to flee from heaven again I turned;
The ranks of angels looked away from me
(Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned).

Helen Hunt Jackson

An Arctic Quest

O proudly name their names who bravely sail
To seek brave lost in Arctic snows and seas!
Bring money and bring ships, and on strong knees
Pray prayers so strong that not one word can fail
To pierce God's listening heart!
Rigid and pale,
The lost men's bodies, waiting, drift and freeze;
Yet shall their solemn dead lips tell to these
Who find them secrets mighty to prevail
On farther, darker, icier seas.
I go
Alone, unhelped, unprayed-for. Perishing
For years in realms of more than Arctic snow,
My heart has lingered.
Will the poor dead thing
Be sign to guide past bitter flood and floe,
To open sea, some strong heart triumphing?

Helen Hunt Jackson

Chance

These things wondering I saw beneath the sun:
That never yet the race was to the swift,
The fight unto the mightiest to lift,
Nor favors unto men whose skill had done
Great works, nor riches ever unto one
Wise man of understanding. All is drift
Of time and chance, and none may stay or sift
Or know the end of that which is begun.
Who waits until the wind shall silent keep,
Will never find the ready hour to sow.
Who watcheth clouds will have no time to reap.
At daydawn plant thy seed, and be not slow
At night. God doth not slumber take nor sleep:
Which seed shall prosper thou shalt never know.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Crossed Threads

The silken threads by viewless spinners spun,
Which float so idly on the summer air,
And help to make each summer morning fair,
Shining like silver in the summer sun,
Are caught by wayward breezes, one by one,
Are blown to east and west and fastened there,
Weaving on all the roads their sudden snare.
No sign which road doth safest, freest run,
The wingèd insects know, that soar so gay
To meet their death upon each summer day.
How dare we any human deed arraign;
Attempt to recon any moment's cost;
Or any pathway trust as safe and plain
Because we see not where the threads have crossed?

Helen Hunt Jackson

Danger

With what a childish and short-sighted sense
Fear seeks for safety; recons up the days
Of danger and escape, the hours and ways
Of death; it breathless flies the pestilence;
It walls itself in towers of defence;
By land, by sea, against the storm it lays
Down barriers; then, comforted, it says:
"This spot, this hour is safe." Oh, vain pretence!
Man born of man knows nothing when he goes;
The winds blow where they list, and will disclose
To no man which brings safety, which brings risk.
The mighty are brought low by many a thing
Too small to name. Beneath the daisy's disk
Lies hid the pebble for the fatal sling.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Death

My body, eh? Friend Death, how now?
Why all this tedious pomp of writ?
Thou hast reclaimed it sure and slow
For half a century bit by bit.

In faith thou knowest more to-day
Than I do, where it can be found!
This shrivelled lump of suffering clay,
To which I am now chained and bound,

Has not of kith or kin a trace
To the good body once I bore;
Look at this shrunken, ghastly face:
Didst ever see that face before?

Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;
Thy only fault thy lagging gait,
Mistaken pity in thy heart
For timorous ones that bid thee wait.

Do quickly all thou hast to do,
Nor I nor mine will hindrance make;
I shall be free when thou art through;
I grudge thee nought that thou must take!

Stay! I have lied; I grudge thee one,
Yes, two I grudge thee at this last,--
Two members which have faithful done
My will and bidding in the past.

I grudge thee this right hand of mine;
I grudge thee this quick-beating heart;
They never gave me coward sign,
Nor played me once the traitor's part.

I see now why in olden days
Men in barbaric love or hate
Nailed enemies' hands at wild crossways,
Shrined leaders' hearts in costly state:

The symbol, sign and instrument
Of each soul's purpose, passion, strife,
Of fires in which are poured and spent
Their all of love, their all of life.

O feeble, mighty human hand!
O fragile, dauntless human heart!
The universe holds nothing planned
With such sublime, transcendent art!

Yes, Death, I own I grudge thee mine
Poor little hand, so feeble now;

Its wrinkled palm, its altered line,
Its veins so pallid and so slow --

Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;
I shall be free when thou art through.
Take all there is -- take hand and heart;
There must be somewhere work to do.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Doubt

1 They bade me cast the thing away,
2 They pointed to my hands all bleeding,
3 They listened not to all my pleading;
4 The thing I meant I could not say;
5 I knew that I should rue the day
6 If once I cast that thing away.

7 I grasped it firm, and bore the pain;
8 The thorny husks I stripped and scattered;
9 If I could reach its heart, what mattered
10 If other men saw not my gain,
11 Or even if I should be slain?
12 I knew the risks; I chose the pain.

13 O, had I cast that thing away,
14 I had not found what most I cherish,
15 A faith without which I should perish,--
16 The faith which, like a kernel, lay
17 Hid in the husks which on that day
18 My instinct would not throw away!

Helen Hunt Jackson

Freedom

What freeman knoweth freedom? Never he
Whose father's father through long lives have reigned
O'er kingdoms which mere heritage attained.
Though from his youth to age he roam as free
As winds, he dreams not freedom's ecstasy.
But he whose birth was in a nation chained
For centuries; where every breath was drained
From breasts of slaves which knew not there could be
Such thing as freedom,--he beholds the light
Burst, dazzling; though the glory blind his sight
He knows the joy. Fools laugh because he reels
And weilds confusedly his infant will;
The wise man watching with a heart that feels
Says: "Cure for freedom's harms is freedom still."

Helen Hunt Jackson

God's Light-Houses

1 When night falls on the earth, the sea
2 From east to west lies twinkling bright
3 With shining beams from beacons high
4 Which flash afar a friendly light.

5 The sailor's eyes, like eyes in prayer,
6 Turn unto them for guiding ray:
7 If storms obscure their radiance,
8 The great ships helpless grope their way.

9 When night falls on the earth, the sky
10 Looks like a wide, a boundless main.
11 Who knows what voyagers sail there?
12 Who names the ports they seek and gain?

13 Are not the stars like beacons set
14 To guide the argosies that go
15 From universe to universe,
16 Our little world above, below?--

17 On their great errands solemn bent,
18 In their vast journeys unaware
19 Of our small planet's name or place
20 Revolving in the lower air.

21 O thought too vast! O thought too glad!
22 An awe most rapturous it stirs.
23 From world to world God's beacons shine:
24 God means to save his mariners!

Helen Hunt Jackson

Habeas Corpus

1 My body, eh? Friend Death, how now?
2 Why all this tedious pomp of writ?
3 Thou hast reclaimed it sure and slow
4 For half a century bit by bit.

5 In faith thou knowest more to-day
6 Than I do, where it can be found!
7 This shrivelled lump of suffering clay,
8 To which I am now chained and bound,

9 Has not of kith or kin a trace
10 To the good body once I bore;
11 Look at this shrunken, ghastly face:
12 Didst ever see that face before?

13 Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;
14 Thy only fault thy lagging gait,
15 Mistaken pity in thy heart
16 For timorous ones that bid thee wait.

17 Do quickly all thou hast to do,
18 Nor I nor mine will hindrance make;
19 I shall be free when thou art through;
20 I grudge thee nought that thou must take!

21 Stay! I have lied; I grudge thee one,
22 Yes, two I grudge thee at this last,--
23 Two members which have faithful done
24 My will and bidding in the past.

25 I grudge thee this right hand of mine;
26 I grudge thee this quick-beating heart;
27 They never gave me coward sign,
28 Nor played me once the traitor's part.

29 I see now why in olden days
30 Men in barbaric love or hate
31 Nailed enemies' hands at wild crossways,
32 Shrined leaders' hearts in costly state:

33 The symbol, sign and instrument
34 Of each soul's purpose, passion, strife,
35 Of fires in which are poured and spent
36 Their all of love, their all of life.

37 O feeble, mighty human hand!
38 O fragile, dauntless human heart!
39 The universe holds nothing planned
40 With such sublime, transcendent art!

41 Yes, Death, I own I grudge thee mine
42 Poor little hand, so feeble now;

43 Its wrinkled palm, its altered line,
44 Its veins so pallid and so slow --

* * * (Unfinished here.)

45 Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;
46 I shall be free when thou art through.
47 Take all there is -- take hand and heart;
48 There must be somewhere work to do.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Morn

In what a strange bewilderment do we
Awake each morn from out the brief night's sleep.
Our struggling consciousness doth grope and creep
Its slow way back, as if it could not free
Itself from bonds unseen. Then Memory,
Like sudden light, outflashes from its deep
The joy or grief which it had last to keep
For us; and by the joy or grief we see
The new day dawneth like the yesterday;
We are unchanged; our life the same we knew
Before. I wonder if this is the way
We wake from death's short sleep, to struggle through
A brief bewilderment, and in dismay
Behold our life unto our old life true.

Helen Hunt Jackson

My Bees: An Allegory

"O bees, sweet bees!" I said, "that nearest field
Is shining white with fragrant immortelles.
Fly swiftly there and drain those honey wells."
Then, spicy pines the sunny hive to shield,
I set, and patient for the autumn's yield
Of sweet I waited.
When the village bells
Rang frosty clear, and from their satin cells
The chestnuts leaped, rejoicing, I unsealed
My hive.
Alas! no snowy honey there
Was stored. My wicked bees had borne away
Their queen and left no trace.
That very day,
An idle drone who sauntered through the air
I tracked and followed, and he led me where
My truant bees and stolen honey lay.
Twice faithless bees! They had sought out to eat
Rank, bitter herbs. The honey was not sweet.

Helen Hunt Jackson

My Strawberry

O marvel, fruit of fruits, I pause
To reckon thee. I ask what cause
Set free so much of red from heats
At core of earth, and mixed such sweets
With sour and spice: what was that strength
Which out of darkness, length by length,
Spun all thy shining thread of vine,
Netting the fields in bond as thine.
I see thy tendrils drink by sips
From grass and clover's smiling lips;
I hear thy roots dig down for wells,
Tapping the meadow's hidden cells.
Whole generations of green things,
Descended from long lines of springs,
I see make room for thee to bide
A quiet comrade by their side;
I see the creeping peoples go
Mysterious journeys to and fro,
Treading to right and left of thee,
Doing thee homage wonderingly.
I see the wild bees as they fare,
Thy cups of honey drink, but spare.
I mark thee bathe and bathe again
In sweet unclaendared spring rain.
I watch how all May has of sun
Makes haste to have thy ripeness done,
While all her nights let dews escape
To set and cool thy perfect shape.
Ah, fruit of fruits, no more I pause
To dream and seek thy hidden laws!
I stretch my hand and dare to taste,
In instant of delicious waste
On single feast, all things that went
To make the empire thou hast spent.

Helen Hunt Jackson

My Tenants

I never had a title-deed
To my estate. But little heed
Eyes give to me, when I walk by
My fields, to see who occupy.
Some clumsy men who lease and hire
And cut my trees to feed their fire,
Own all the land that I possess,
And tax my tenants to distress.
And if I say I had been first,
And, reaping, left for them the worst,
That they were beggars at the hands
Of dwellers on my royal lands,
With idle laugh of passing scorn
As unto words of madness born,
They would reply
I do not care;
They cannot crowd the charmed air;
They cannot touch the bonds I hold
On all that they have bought and sold.
They can waylay my faithful bees,
Who, lulled to sleep, with fatal ease,
Are robbed. Is one day's honey sweet
Thus snatched? All summer round my feet
In golden drifts from plummy wings,
In shining drops on fragrant things
Free gift, it came to me. My corn,
With burnished banners, morn by morn,
Comes out to meet and honor me;
The glittering ranks spread royally
Far as I walk. When hasty greed
Tramples it down for food and seed,
I, with a certain veiled delight,
Hear half the crop is lost by blight.

Letter of the law these may fulfil,
Plant where they like, slay what they will,
Count up their gains and make them great;
Nevertheless, the whole estate
Always belongs to me and mine.
We are the only royal line.
And though I have no title-deed
My tenants pay me royal heed
When our sweet fields I wander by
To see what strangers occupy.

Helen Hunt Jackson

New Year's Morning

Only a night from old to new!
Only a night, and so much wrought!
The Old Year's heart all weary grew,
But said: The New Year rest has brought."
The Old Year's hopes its heart laid down,
As in a grave; but trusting, said:
"The blossoms of the New Year's crown
Bloom from the ashes of the dead."
The Old Year's heart was full of greed;
With selfishness it longed and ached,
And cried: "I have not half I need.
My thirst is bitter and unslaked.
But to the New Year's generous hand
All gifts in plenty shall return;
True love it shall understand;
By all y failures it shall learn.
I have been reckless; it shall be
Quiet and calm and pure of life.
I was a slave; it shall go free,
And find sweet pace where I leave strife."

Only a night from old to new!
Never a night such changes brought.
The Old Year had its work to do;
No New Year miracles are wrought.

Always a night from old to new!
Night and the healing balm of sleep!
Each morn is New Year's morn come true,
Morn of a festival to keep.
All nights are sacred nights to make
Confession and resolve and prayer;
All days are sacred days to wake
New gladness in the sunny air.
Only a night from old to new;
Only a sleep from night to morn.
The new is but the old coem true;
Each sunrise sees a new year born.

Helen Hunt Jackson

October's Bright Blue Weather

O suns and skies and clouds of June,
And flowers of June together,
Ye cannot rival for one hour
October's bright blue weather;

When loud the bumblebee makes haste,
Belated, thriftless vagrant,
And goldenrod is dying fast,
And lanes with grapes are fragrant;

When gentians roll their fingers tight
To save them for the morning,
And chestnuts fall from satin burrs
Without a sound of warning;

When on the ground red apples lie
In piles like jewels shining,
And redder still on old stone walls
Are leaves of woodbine twining;

When all the lovely wayside things
Their white-winged seeds are sowing,
And in the fields still green and fair,
Late aftermaths are growing;

When springs run low, and on the brooks,
In idle golden freighting,
Bright leaves sink noiseless in the hush
Of woods, for winter waiting;

When comrades seek sweet country haunts,
By twos and twos together,
And count like misers, hour by hour,
October's bright blue weather.

O sun and skies and flowers of June,
Count all your boasts together,
Love loveth best of all the year
October's bright blue weather.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Poppies on the Wheat

Along Ancona's hills the shimmering heat,
A tropic tide of air with ebb and flow
Bathes all the fields of wheat until they glow
Like flashing seas of green, which toss and beat
Around the vines. The poppies lithe and fleet
Seem running, fiery torchmen, to and fro
To mark the shore.
The farmer does not know
That they are there. He walks with heavy feet,
Counting the bread and wine by autumn's gain,
But I,--I smile to think that days remain
Perhaps to me in which, through bread be sweet
No more, and red wine warm my blood in vain,
I shall be glad remembering how the fleet,
Lithe poppies ran like torchmen with the wheat.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Refrain

Of all the songs which poets sing
The ones which are most sweet
Are those which at close intervals
A low refrain repeat;
Some tender word, some syllable,
Over and over, ever and ever,
While the song lasts,
Altering never,
Music if sung, music if said,
Subtle like some golden thread
A shuttle casts,
In and out on a fabric red,
Till it glows all through
With the golden hue.
Oh! of all the songs sung,
No songs are so sweet
As the songs with refrains,
Which repeat and repeat.

Of all the lives lived,
No life is so sweet,
As the life where one thought,
In refrain doth repeat,
Over and over, ever and ever,
Till the life ends,
Altering never,
Joy which is felt, but is not said,
Subtler than any golden thread
Which the shuttle sends
In and out in a fabric red,
Till it glows all through
With a golden hue.
Oh! of all the lives lived,
Can be no life so sweet,
As the life where one thought
In refrain doth repeat,

"Now name for me a thought
To make life so sweet,
A thought of such joy
Its refrain to repeat."
Oh! foolish to ask me. Ever, ever
Who loveth believes,
But telleth never.
It might be a name, just a name not said,
But in every thought; like a golden thread
Which the shuttle weaves
In and out on a fabric red,
Till it glows all through
With a golden hue.
Oh! of all sweet lives,
Who can tell how sweet

Is the life which one name
In refrain doth repeat?

Helen Hunt Jackson

September

1 The golden-rod is yellow;
2 The corn is turning brown;
3 The trees in apple orchards
4 With fruit are bending down.

5 The gentian's bluest fringes
6 Are curling in the sun;
7 In dusty pods the milkweed
8 Its hidden silk has spun.

9 The sedges flaunt their harvest,
10 In every meadow nook;
11 And asters by the brook-side
12 Make asters in the brook,

13 From dewy lanes at morning
14 The grapes' sweet odors rise;
15 At noon the roads all flutter
16 With yellow butterflies.

17 By all these lovely tokens
18 September days are here,
19 With summer's best of weather,
20 And autumn's best of cheer.

21 But none of all this beauty
22 Which floods the earth and air
23 Is unto me the secret
24 Which makes September fair.

25 'T is a thing which I remember;
26 To name it thrills me yet:
27 One day of one September
28 I never can forget.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Songs of Battle

Old as the world--no other things so old;
Nay, older than the world, else, how had sprung
Such lusty strength in them when earth was young?--
Stand valor and its passion hot and bold,
Insatiate of battle. How, else, told
Blind men, born blind, that red was fitting tongue
Mute, eloquent, to show how trumpets rung
When armies charged adn battle-flags unfurled?
Who sings of valor speaks for life, for death,
Beyond all death, and long as life is life,
in rippled waves the eternal air hs breath
Eternal bears to stir all noble strife.
Dead Homer from his lost and vanished grave
Keeps battle glorious still and soldiers brave.

Helen Hunt Jackson

The Fir-Tree and the Brook

The Fir-Tree looked on stars, but loved the Brook!
"O silver-voiced! if thou wouldst wait,
My love can bravely woo." All smiles forsook
The brook's white face. "Too late!
Too late! I go to wed the sea.
I know not if my love would curse or bless thee.
I may not, dare not, tarry to caress thee,
Oh, do not follow me!

The Fir-Tree moaned and moaned till spring;
Then laughed in manic joy to feel
Early one day, the woodsmen of the King
Sign him with a sign of burning steel,
The first to fall. "Now flee
Thy swiftest, Brook! Thy love may curse or bless me,
I care not, if but once thou dost caress me,
O Brook, I follow thee!

All torn and bruised with mark of adze and chain,
Hurl'd down the dizzy slide of sand,
Tossed by great waves in ecstacy of pain,
And rudely thrown at last to land,
The Fir-Tree heard: "Oh, see
With what fierce love it is I must caress thee!
I warn'd thee I might curse, and never bless thee,
Why didst thou follow me?

All stately set with spar and brace and rope,
The Fir-Tree stood and sailed and sailed.
In wildest storm when all the ship lost hope,
The Fir-Tree never shook nor quailed,
Nor ceased from saying, "Free
Art thou, O Brook! But once thou hast caressed me;
For life, for death, thy love has cursed or blessed me;
Behold, I follow thee!"

Lost in a night, and no man left to tell,
Crushed in the giant iceberg's play,
The ship went down without a song, a knell.
Still drifts the Fir-Tree night and day,
Still moans along the sea
A voice: "O Fir-Tree! thus must I possess thee;
Eternally, brave love, will I caress thee,
Dead for the love of me!"

Helen Hunt Jackson

The Poet's Forge

He lies on his back, the idling smith,
A lazy, dreaming fellow is he;
The sky is blue, or the sky is gray,
He lies on his back the livelong day,
Not a tool in sight, say what they may,
A curious sort of smith is he.

The powers of the air are in league with him;
The country around believes it well;
The wondering folk draw spying near;
Never sight nor sound do they see or hear;
No wonder they feel a little fear;
When is it his work is done so well?

Never sight nor sound to see or hear;
The powers of the air are in league with him;
High over his head his metals swing,
Fine gold and silver to shame the king;
We might distinguish their glittering,
If once we could get in league with him.

High over his head his metals swing;
He hammers them idly year by year,
Hammers and chuckles a low refrain:
"A bench and a book are a ball and a chain,
The adze is a better tool than the plane;
What's the odds between now and next year?"

Hammers and chuckles his low refrain,
A lazy, dreaming fellow is he:
When sudden, some day, his bells peal out,
And men, at the sound, for gladness shout;
He laughs and asks what it's all about;
Oh, a curious sort of smith is he.

Helen Hunt Jackson

The Victory of Patience

Armed of the gods! Divinest conqueror!
What soundless hosts are thine! Nor pomp, nor state,
Nor token, to betray where thou dost wait.
All Nature stands, for thee, ambassador;
Her forces all thy serfs, for peace or war.
greatest and least alike, thou rul'st their fate,--
The avalanch chained until its century's date,
The mulberry leaf made robe for emperor!
Shall man alone thy law deny? --refuse
Thy healing for his blunders and his sins?
Oh, make us thine! Teach us who waits best sues;
Who longest waits of all most surely wins.
When Time is spent, Eternity begins.
To doubt, to chafe, to haste, doth God accuse.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Tides

O patient shore, thou canst not go to meet
Thy love, the restless sea, how comfortest
Thou all thy loneliness? Art thou at rest,
When, loosing his strong arms from round thy feet,
He turns away? Know'st thou, however sweet
That other shore may be, that to thy breast
He must return? And when in sterner test
He folds thee to a heart which does not beat,
Wraps thee in ice, and gives no smile, no kiss,
To break long wintry days, still dost thou miss
Naught from thy trust? Still wait, unfaltering,
The higher, warmer waves which leap in spring?
O sweet, wise shore, to be so satisfied!
O heart, learn from the shore! Love has a tide!

Helen Hunt Jackson

To an Absent Lover

That so much change should come when thou dost go,
Is mystery that I cannot ravel quite.
The very house seems dark as when the light
Of lamps goes out. Each wanted thing doth grow
So altered, that I wander to and fro
Bewildered by the most familiar sight,
And feel like one who rouses in the night
From dream of ecstasy, and cannot know
At first if he be sleeping or awake.
My foolish heart so foolish for thy sake
Hath grown, dear one!
Teach me to be more wise.
I blush for all my foolishness doth lack;
I fear to seem a coward in thine eyes.
Teach me, dear one,--but first thou must come back!

Helen Hunt Jackson

Tryst

Somewhere thou awaitest,
And I, with lips unkissed,
Weep that thus to latest
Thou puttest off our tryst!

The golden bowls are broken,
The silver cords untwine;
Almond flowers in token
Have bloomed,---that I am thine!

Others who would fly thee
In cowardly alarms,
Who hate thee and deny thee,
Thou foldest in thine arms!

How shall I entreat thee
No longer to withhold?
I dare not go to meet thee,
O lover, far and cold!

O lover, whose lips chilling
So many lips have kissed,
Come, even if unwilling,
And keep thy solemn tryst!

Helen Hunt Jackson

Two Truths

Darling,' he said, 'I never meant
To hurt you;' and his eyes were wet.
'I would not hurt you for the world:
Am I to blame if I forget?'

'Forgive my selfish tears!' she cried,
'Forgive! I knew that it was not
Because you meant to hurt me, sweet-
I knew it was that you forgot!'

But all the same, deep in her heart
Rankled this thought, and rankles yet,-
'When love is at its best, one loves
So much that he cannot forget.'

Helen Hunt Jackson

Unto one who lies at rest

Unto one who lies at rest
'Neath the sunset, in the West,
Clover-blossoms on her breast.

Lover of each gracious thing
Which makes glad the summer-tide,
From the daisies clustering
And the violets purple-eyed,
To those shy and hidden blooms
Which in forest coverts stay,
Sending wandering perfumes
Out as guide to show the way,
All she knew, to all was kind;
None so humble or so small
That she did not seek and find
Silent friendship from them all.
Moss-cups, tiarella leaves,
Dapp'd like the adder's skin,
Fungus huts with ivory eaves
Which the fairies harbor in,
Regiments of fronded ferns,
Golden-rod and asters frail,
Every flaming leaf that burns
Red against the autumn pale,
Every pink-cupped wayside rose,--
All to her were dear and known;
But above them all she chose
Clover-blossoms for her own.

So they laid her to her rest
In the sun-warmed, bounteous West,
Clover-blossoms on her breast.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Where?

My snowy eupatorium has dropped
Its silver threads of petals in the night;
No signal told its blossoming had stopped;
Its seed-films flutter silent, ghostly white:
No answer stirs the shining air,
As I ask, "Where?"

Beneath the glossy leaves of winter-green
Dead lilly-bells lie low, and in their place
A rounded disk of pearly pink is seen,
Which tells not of the lily's fragrant grace:
No answer stirs the shining air,
As I ask, "Where?"

This morning's sunrise does not show to me
Seed-film or fruit of my sweet yesterday;
Like falling flowers, to realms I cannot see
Its moments floated silently away:
No answer stirs the shining air,
As I ask, "Where?"

Helen Hunt Jackson