

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **James Whitcomb Riley**

**- poems -**

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## A Barefoot Boy

1 A barefoot boy! I mark him at his play --  
2 For May is here once more, and so is he, --  
3 His dusty trousers, rolled half to the knee,  
4 And his bare ankles grimy, too, as they:  
5 Cross-hatchings of the nettle, in array  
6 Of feverish stripes, hint vividly to me  
7 Of woody pathways winding endlessly  
8 Along the creek, where even yesterday  
9 He plunged his shrinking body -- gasped and shook --  
10 Yet called the water "warm," with never lack  
11 Of joy. And so, half enviously I look  
12 Upon this graceless barefoot and his track, --  
13 His toe stubbed -- ay, his big toe-nail knocked back  
14 Like unto the clasp of an old pocketbook.

James Whitcomb Riley

## **A Life-Lesson**

There! little girl; don't cry!  
They have broken your doll, I know;  
And your tea-set blue,  
And your play-house, too,  
Are things of the long ago;  
But childish troubles will soon pass by. --  
There! little girl; don't cry!

There! little girl; don't cry!  
They have broken your slate, I know;  
And the glad, wild ways  
Of your schoolgirl days  
Are things of the long ago;  
But life and love will soon come by. --  
There! little girl; don't cry!

There! little girl; don't cry!  
They have broken your heart I know;  
And the rainbow gleams  
Of your youthful dreams  
Are things of the long ago;  
But Heaven holds all for which you sigh. --  
There! little girl; don't cry!

James Whitcomb Riley

## **A Noon Interval**

A deep, delicious hush in earth and sky --  
A gracious lull--since, from its wakening,  
The morn has been a feverish, restless thing  
In which the pulse of Summer ran too high  
And riotous, as though its heart went nigh  
To bursting with delights past uttering:  
Now--as an o'erjoyed child may cease to sing  
All falteringly at play, with drowsy eye  
Draining the pictures of a fairy-tale  
To brim his dreams with--there comes o'er the day  
A loathful silence wherein all sounds fail  
Like loitering sounds of some roundelay . . .  
No wakeful effort longer may avail --  
The wand waves, and the dozer sinks away.

James Whitcomb Riley

## **A Parting Guest**

What delightful hosts are they --  
Life and Love!  
Lingeringly I turn away,  
This late hour, yet glad enough  
They have not withheld from me  
Their high hospitality.  
So, with face lit with delight  
And all gratitude, I stay  
Yet to press their hands and say,  
"Thanks. -- So fine a time! Good night."

James Whitcomb Riley

## **A Passing Hail**

Let us rest ourselves a bit!  
Worry?-- wave your hand to it --  
Kiss your finger-tips and smile  
It farewell a little while.

Weary of the weary way  
We have come from Yesterday,  
Let us fret not, instead,  
Of the wary way ahead.

Let us pause and catch our breath  
On the hither side of death,  
While we see the tender shoots  
Of the grasses -- not the roots,--

While we yet look down -- not up --  
To seek out the buttercup  
And the daisy where they wave  
O'er the green home of the grave.

Let us launch us smoothly on  
The soft billows of the lawn,  
And drift out across the main  
Of our childish dreams again:

Voyage off, beneath the trees,  
O'er the field's enchanted seas,  
Where the lilies are our sails,  
And our sea-gulls, nightingales:

Where no wilder storm shall beat  
Than the wind that waves the wheat,  
And no tempest-burst above  
The old laughs we used to love:

Lose all troubles -- gain release,  
Languor, and exceeding peace,  
Cruising idly o'er the vast,  
Calm mid-ocean of the Past.

Let us rest ourselves a bit!  
Worry? -- Wave your hand to it --  
Kiss your finger-tips and smile  
It fare well a little while.

James Whitcomb Riley

## A Poet's Wooing

*I woo'd a woman once,  
But she was sharper than an eastern wind.*  
Tennyson

"What may I do to make you glad,  
To make you glad and free,  
Till your light smiles glance  
And your bright eyes dance  
Like sunbeams on the sea?  
Read some rhyme that is blithe and gay  
Of a bright May morn and a marriage day?"  
And she sighed in a listless way she had,--  
"Do not read--it will make me sad!"

"What shall I do to make you glad--  
To make you glad and gay,  
Till your eyes gleam bright  
As the stars at night  
When as light as the light of day  
Sing some song as I twang the strings  
Of my sweet guitar through its wanderings?"  
And she sighed in the weary way she had,--  
"Do not sing--it will make me sad!"

"What can I do to make you glad--  
As glad as glad can be,  
Till your clear eyes seem  
Like the rays that gleam  
And glint through a dew-decked tree?--  
Will it please you, dear, that I now begin  
A grand old air on my violin?"  
And she spoke again in the following way,--  
"Yes, oh yes, it would please me, sir;  
I would be so glad you'd play  
Some grand old march--in character,--  
And then as you march away  
I will no longer thus be sad,  
But oh, so glad--so glad--so glad!"

James Whitcomb Riley

## A Song of the Road

O I will walk with you, my lad, whichever way you fare,  
You'll have me, too, the side o' you, with heart as light as air;  
No care for where the road you take's a-leadin' anywhere,--  
It can but be a joyful ja'nt whilst you journey there.  
The road you take's the path o' love, an' that's the bridth o' two--  
An' I will walk with you, my lad -- O I will walk with you.

Ho! I will walk with you, my lad,  
Be weather black or blue  
Or roadsides frost or dew, my lad --  
O I will walk with you.

Aye, glad, my lad, I'll walk with you, whatever winds may blow,  
Or summer blossoms stay our steps, or blinding drifts of snow;  
The way thay you set face an' foot 's the way that I will go,  
An' brave I'll be, abreast o' ye, the Saints and Angels know!  
With loyal hand in loyal hand, an' one heart made o' two,  
Through summer's gold, or winter's cold, It's I will walk with you.

Sure, I will walk with you, my lad,  
A love ordains me to,--  
To Heaven's door, an' through, my lad.  
O I will walk with you.

James Whitcomb Riley

## **A Summer Afternoon**

A languid atmosphere, a lazy breeze,  
With labored respiration, moves the wheat  
From distant reaches, till the golden seas  
Break in crisp whispers at my feet.

My book, neglected of an idle mind,  
Hides for a moment from the eyes of men;  
Or lightly opened by a critic wind,  
Affrightedly reviews itself again.

Off through the haze that dances in the shine  
The warm sun showers in the open glade,  
The forest lies, a silhouette design  
Dimmed through and through with shade.

A dreamy day; and tranquilly I lie  
At anchor from all storms of mental strain;  
With absent vision, gazing at the sky,  
"Like one that hears it rain."

The Katydid, so boisterous last night,  
Clinging, inverted, in uneasy poise,  
Beneath a wheat-blade, has forgotten quite  
If "Katy DID or DIDN'T" make a noise.

The twitter, sometimes, of a wayward bird  
That checks the song abruptly at the sound,  
And mildly, chiding echoes that have stirred,  
Sink into silence, all the more profound.

And drowsily I hear the plaintive strain  
Of some poor dove . . . Why, I can scarcely keep  
My heavy eyelids--there it is again--  
"Coo-coo!"--I mustn't--"Coo-coo!"--fall asleep!

James Whitcomb Riley

## At Broad Ripple

Oh luxury! Beyond the heat  
And dust of town, with dangling feet  
Astride the rock below the dam,  
In the cool shadows where the calm  
Rests on the stream again, and all  
Is silent save the waterfall,--  
I bait my hook and cast my line,  
And feel the best of life is mine.

No high ambition can I claim --  
I angle not for lordly game  
Of trout, or bass, or wary bream --  
A black perch reaches the extreme  
Of my desires; and "goggle-eyes"  
Are not a thing that I despise;  
A sunfish, or a "chub," or a "cat"--  
A "silver-side"-- yea, even that!

In eloquent tranquility  
The waters lisp and talk to me.  
Sometimes, far out, the surface breaks,  
As some proud bass an instant shakes  
His glittering armor in the sun,  
And romping ripples, one by one,  
Come dallying across the space  
Where undulates my smiling face.

The river's story flowing by,  
Forever sweet to ear and eye,  
Forever tenderly begun --  
Forever new and never done.  
Thus lulled and sheltered in a shade  
Where never feverish cares invade,  
I bait my hook and cast my line,  
And feel the best of life is mine.

James Whitcomb Riley

## Granny

1 Granny's come to our house,  
2 And ho! my lawzy-daisy!  
3 All the childern round the place  
4 Is ist a-runnin' crazy!  
5 Fetched a cake fer little Jake,  
6 And fetched a pie fer Nanny,  
7 And fetched a pear fer all the pack  
8 That runs to kiss their Granny!

9 Lucy Ellen's in her lap,  
10 And Wade and Silas Walker  
11 Both's a-ridin' on her foot,  
12 And 'Pollos on the rocker;  
13 And Marthy's twins, from Aunt Marinn's,  
14 And little Orphant Annie,  
15 All's a-eatin' gingerbread  
16 And giggle-un at Granny!

17 Tells us all the fairy tales  
18 Ever thought er wundered --  
19 And 'bundance o' other stories --  
20 Bet she knows a hunderd! --  
21 Bob's the one fer "Whittington,"  
22 And "Golden Locks" fer Fanny!  
23 Hear 'em laugh and clap their hands,  
24 Listenin' at Granny!

25 "Jack the Giant-Killer" 's good;  
26 And "Bean-Stalk" 's another! --  
27 So's the one of "Cinderell"  
28 And her old godmother; --  
29 That-un's best of all the rest --  
30 Bestest one of any, --  
31 Where the mices scampers home  
32 Like we runs to Granny!

33 Granny's come to our house,  
34 Ho! my lawzy-daisy!  
35 All the childern round the place  
36 Is ist a-runnin' crazy!  
37 Fetched a cake fer little Jake,  
38 And fetched a pie fer Nanny,  
39 And fetched a pear fer all the pack  
40 That runs to kiss their Granny!

James Whitcomb Riley

## Ike Walton's Prayer

I crave, dear Lord,  
No boundless hoard  
Of gold and gear,  
Nor jewels fine,  
Nor lands, nor kine,  
Nor treasure-heaps of anything.-  
Let but a little hut be mine  
Where at the hearthstore I may hear  
The cricket sing,  
And have the shine  
Of one glad woman's eyes to make,  
For my poor sake,  
Our simple home a place divine;-  
Just the wee cot-the cricket's chirr-  
Love, and the smiling face of her.

I pray not for  
Great riches, nor  
For vast estates, and castle-halls,-  
Give me to hear the bare footfalls  
Of children o'er  
An oaken floor,  
New-risen with sunshine, or bespread  
With but the tiny coverlet  
And pillow for the baby's head;  
And pray Thou, may  
The door stand open and the day  
Send ever in a gentle breeze,  
With fragrance from the locust-trees,  
And drowsy moan of doves, and blur  
Of robin-chirps, and drove of bees,  
With afterhushes of the stir  
Of intermingling sounds, and then  
The good-wife and the smile of her  
Filling the silences again-  
The cricket's call,  
And the wee cot,  
Dear Lord of all,  
Deny me not!

I pray not that  
Men tremble at  
My power of place  
And lordly sway, -  
I only pray for simple grace  
To look my neighbor in the face  
Full honestly from day to day-  
Yield me this horny palm to hold,  
And I'll not pray  
For gold;-  
The tanned face, garlanded with mirth,  
It hath the kingliest smile on earth-

The swart brow, diamonded with sweat,  
Hath never need of coronet.  
And so I reach,  
Dear Lord, to Thee,  
And do beseech  
Thou givest me  
The wee cot, and the cricket's chirr,  
Love, and the glad sweet face of her.

James Whitcomb Riley

## Knee-Deep in June

Tell you what I like the best --  
'Long about knee-deep in June,  
'Bout the time strawberries melts  
On the vine, -- some afternoon  
Like to jes' git out and rest,  
And not work at nothin' else!

Orchard's where I'd ruther be --  
Needn't fence it in fer me! --  
Jes' the whole sky overhead,  
And the whole airth underneath --  
Sort o' so's a man kin breathe  
Like he ort, and kind o' has  
Elbow-room to keerlessly  
Sprawl out len'thways on the grass  
Where the shadders thick and soft  
As the kivvers on the bed  
Mother fixes in the loft  
Allus, when they's company!

Jes' a-sort o' lazin there -  
S'lazy, 'at you peek and peer  
Through the wavin' leaves above,  
Like a feller 'ats in love  
And don't know it, ner don't keer!  
Ever'thing you hear and see  
Got some sort o' interest -  
Maybe find a bluebird's nest  
Tucked up there conveyenently  
Fer the boy 'at's ap' to be  
Up some other apple tree!  
Watch the swallers skootin' past  
Bout as peert as you could ast;  
Er the Bob-white raise and whiz  
Where some other's whistle is.

Ketch a shadder down below,  
And look up to find the crow --  
Er a hawk, - away up there,  
'Pearantly froze in the air! --  
Hear the old hen squawk, and squat  
Over ever' chick she's got,  
Suddent-like! - and she knows where  
That-air hawk is, well as you! --  
You jes' bet yer life she do! --  
Eyes a-glitterin' like glass,  
Waitin' till he makes a pass!

Pee-wees wingin', to express  
My opinion, 's second-class,  
Yit you'll hear 'em more er less;  
Sapsucks gittin' down to biz,

Weedin' out the lonesomeness;  
Mr. Bluejay, full o' sass,  
In them baseball clothes o' his,  
Sportin' round the orchad jes'  
Like he owned the premises!  
Sun out in the fields kin sizz,  
But flat on yer back, I guess,  
In the shade's where glory is!  
That's jes' what I'd like to do  
Stiddy fer a year er two!

Plague! Ef they ain't somepin' in  
Work 'at kind o' goes ag'in'  
My convictions! - 'long about  
Here in June especially! --  
Under some ole apple tree,  
Jes' a-restin through and through,  
I could git along without  
Nothin' else at all to do  
Only jes' a-wishin' you  
Wuz a-gittin' there like me,  
And June wuz eternity!

Lay out there and try to see  
Jes' how lazy you kin be! --  
Tumble round and souse yer head  
In the clover-bloom, er pull  
Yer straw hat acrost yer eyes  
And peek through it at the skies,  
Thinkin' of old chums 'ats dead,  
Maybe, smilin' back at you  
In betwixt the beautiful  
Clouds o'gold and white and blue! --  
Month a man kin raily love --  
June, you know, I'm talkin' of!

March ain't never nothin' new! --  
April's altogether too  
Brash fer me! and May -- I jes'  
'Bominate its promises, --  
Little hints o' sunshine and  
Green around the timber-land --  
A few blossoms, and a few  
Chip-birds, and a sprout er two, --  
Drap asleep, and it turns in  
Fore daylight and snows ag'in! --  
But when June comes - Clear my th'coat  
With wild honey! -- Rench my hair  
In the dew! And hold my coat!  
Whoop out loud! And th'ow my hat! --  
June wants me, and I'm to spare!  
Spread them shadders anywhere,

I'll get down and waller there,  
And obleeged to you at that!

James Whitcomb Riley

## Liberty

*New Castle, July 4, 1878*

or a hundred years the pulse of time  
Has throbb'd for Liberty;  
For a hundred years the grand old clime  
Columbia has been free;  
For a hundred years our country's love,  
The Stars and Stripes, has waved above.

Away far out on the gulf of years--  
Misty and faint and white  
Through the fogs of wrong--a sail appears,  
And the Mayflower heaves in sight,  
And drifts again, with its little flock  
Of a hundred souls, on Plymouth Rock.

Do you see them there--as long, long since--  
Through the lens of History;  
Do you see them there as their chieftain prints  
In the snow his bended knee,  
And lifts his voice through the wintry blast  
In thanks for a peaceful home at last?

Though the skies are dark and the coast is bleak,  
And the storm is wild and fierce,  
Its frozen flake on the upturned cheek  
Of the Pilgrim melts in tears,  
And the dawn that springs from the darkness there  
Is the morning light of an answered prayer.

The morning light of the day of Peace  
That gladdens the aching eyes,  
And gives to the soul that sweet release  
That the present verifies,--  
Nor a snow so deep, nor a wind so chill  
To quench the flame of a freeman's will!

## II

Days of toil when the bleeding hand  
Of the pioneer grew numb,  
When the untilled tracts of the barren land  
Where the weary ones had come  
Could offer nought from a fruitful soil  
To stay the strength of the stranger's toil.

Days of pain, when the heart beat low,  
And the empty hours went by  
Pitiless, with the wail of woe  
And the moan of Hunger's cry--  
When the trembling hands upraised in prayer  
Had only the strength to hold them there.

Days when the voice of hope had fled--  
Days when the eyes grown weak  
Were folded to, and the tears they shed  
Were frost on a frozen cheek--  
When the storm bent down from the skies and gave  
A shroud of snow for the Pilgrim's grave.

Days at last when the smiling sun  
Glanced down from a summer sky,  
And a music rang where the rivers run,  
And the waves went laughing by;  
And the rose peeped over the mossy bank  
While the wild deer stood in the stream and drank.

And the birds sang out so loud and good,  
In a symphony so clear  
And pure and sweet that the woodman stood  
With his ax upraised to hear,  
And to shape the words of the tongue unknown  
Into a language all his own--

1

'Sing! every bird, to-day!  
Sing for the sky so clear,  
And the gracious breath of the atmosphere  
Shall waft our cares away.  
Sing! sing! for the sunshine free;  
Sing through the land from sea to sea;  
Lift each voice in the highest key  
And sing for Liberty!'

2

'Sing for the arms that fling  
Their fetters in the dust  
And lift their hands in higher trust  
Unto the one Great King;  
Sing for the patriot heart and hand;  
Sing for the country they have planned;  
Sing that the world may understand  
This is Freedom's land!'

3

'Sing in the tones of prayer,  
Sing till the soaring soul  
Shall float above the world's control

In freedom everywhere!  
Sing for the good that is to be,  
Sing for the eyes that are to see  
The land where man at last is free,  
O sing for liberty!

### III

A holy quiet reigned, save where the hand  
Of labor sent a murmur through the land,  
And happy voices in a harmony  
Taught every lispig breeze a melody.  
A nest of cabins, where the smoke upcurled  
A breathing incense to the other world.  
A land of languor from the sun of noon,  
That fainted slowly to the pallid moon,  
Till stars, thick-scattered in the garden-land  
Of Heaven by the great Jehovah's hand,  
Had blossomed into light to look upon  
The dusky warrior with his arrow drawn,  
As skulking from the covert of the night  
With serpent cunning and a fiend's delight,  
With murderous spirit, and a yell of hate  
The voice of Hell might tremble to translate:  
When the fond mother's tender lullaby  
Went quavering in shrieks all suddenly,  
And baby-lips were dabbled with the stain  
Of crimson at the bosom of the slain,  
And peaceful homes and fortunes ruined--lost  
In smoldering embers of the holocaust.  
Yet on and on, through years of gloom and strife,  
Our country struggled into stronger life;  
Till colonies, like footprints in the sand,  
Marked Freedom's pathway winding through the land--  
And not the footprints to be swept away  
Before the storm we hatched in Boston Bay,--  
But footprints where the path of war begun  
That led to Bunker Hill and Lexington,--  
For he who "dared to lead where others dared  
To follow" found the promise there declared  
Of Liberty, in blood of Freedom's host  
Baptized to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

Oh, there were times when every patriot breast  
Was riotous with sentiments expressed  
In tones that swelled in volume till the sound  
Of lusty war itself was well-nigh drowned.  
Oh, those were times when happy eyes with tears  
Brimmed o'er as all the misty doubts and fears  
Were washed away, and Hope with gracious mien,  
Reigned from her throne again a sovereign queen.  
Until at last, upon a day like this

When flowers were blushing at the summer's kiss,  
And when the sky was cloudless as the face  
Of some sweet infant in its angel grace,--  
There came a sound of music, thrown afloat  
Upon the balmy air--a clanging note  
Reiterated from the brazen throat  
Of Independence Bell: A sound so sweet,  
The clamoring throngs of people in the streets  
Were stilled as at the solemn voice of prayer,  
And heads were bowed, and lips were moving there  
That made no sound--until the spell had passed,  
And then, as when all sudden comes the blast  
Of some tornado, came the cheer on cheer  
Of every eager voice, while far and near  
The echoing bells upon the atmosphere  
Set glorious rumors floating, till the ear  
Of every listening patriot tingled clear,  
And thrilled with joy and jubilee to hear.

I

'Stir all your echoes up,  
O Independence Bell,  
And pour from your inverted cup  
The song we love so well.

'Lift high your happy voice,  
And swing your iron tongue  
Till syllables of praise rejoice  
That never yet were sung.

'Ring in the gleaming dawn  
Of Freedom--Toll the knell  
Of Tyranny, and then ring on,  
O Independence Bell.--

'Ring on, and drown the moan,  
Above the patriot slain,  
Till sorrow's voice shall catch the tone  
And join the glad refrain.

'Ring out the wounds of wrong  
And rankle in the breast;  
Your music like a slumber-song  
Will lull revenge to rest.

'Ring out from Occident  
To Orient, and peal  
From continent to continent  
The mighty joy you feel.

'Ring! Independence Bell!

Ring on till worlds to be  
Shall listen to the tale you tell  
Of love and Liberty!

#### IV

O Liberty--the dearest word  
A bleeding country ever heard,--  
We lay our hopes upon thy shrine  
And offer up our lives for thine.  
You gave us many happy years  
Of peace and plenty ere the tears  
A mourning country wept were dried  
Above the graves of those who died  
Upon thy threshold. And again  
When newer wars were bred, and men  
Went marching in the cannon's breath  
And died for thee and loved the death,  
While, high above them, gleaming bright,  
The dear old flag remained in sight,  
And lighted up their dying eyes  
With smiles that brightened paradise.  
O Liberty, it is thy power  
To gladden us in every hour  
Of gloom, and lead us by thy hand  
As little children through a land  
Of bud and blossom; while the days  
Are filled with sunshine, and thy praise  
Is warbled in the roundelays  
Of joyous birds, and in the song  
Of waters, murmuring along  
The paths of peace, whose flowery fringe  
Has roses finding deeper tinge  
Of crimson, looking on themselves  
Reflected--leaning from the shelves  
Of cliff and crag and mossy mound  
Of emerald splendor shadow-drowned.--  
We hail thy presence, as you come  
With bugle blast and rolling drum,  
And booming guns and shouts of glee  
Commingled in a symphony  
That thrills the worlds that throng to see  
The glory of thy pageantry.  
O And with thy praise, we breathe a prayer  
That God who leaves you in our care  
May favor us from this day on  
With thy dear presence--till the dawn  
Of Heaven, breaking on thy face,  
Lights up thy first abiding place.

James Whitcomb Riley

## Little Orphant Annie

1 Little Orphant Annie's come to our house to stay,  
2 An' wash the cups an' saucers up, an' brush the crumbs away,  
3 An' shoo the chickens off the porch, an' dust the hearth, an' sweep,  
4 An' make the fire, an' bake the bread, an' earn her board-an'-keep;  
5 An' all us other childern, when the supper-things is done,  
6 We set around the kitchen fire an' has the mostest fun  
7 A-list'nin' to the witch-tales 'at Annie tells about,  
8 An' the Gobble-uns 'at gits you  
9 Ef you  
10 Don't  
11 Watch  
12 Out!

13 Wunst they wuz a little boy wouldn't say his prayers, --  
14 An' when he went to bed at night, away up-stairs,  
15 His Mammy heerd him holler, an' his Daddy heerd him bawl,  
16 An' when they turn't the kivvers down, he wuzn't there at all!  
17 An' they seeked him in the rafter-room, an' cubby-hole, an' press,  
18 An' seeked him up the chimby-flue, an' ever'-wheres, I guess;  
19 But all they ever found wuz thist his pants an' roundabout: --  
20 An' the Gobble-uns 'll git you  
21 Ef you  
22 Don't  
23 Watch  
24 Out!

25 An' one time a little girl 'ud allus laugh an' grin,  
26 An' make fun of ever' one, an' all her blood-an'-kin;  
27 An' wunst, when they was "company," an' ole folks wuz there,  
28 She mocked 'em an' shocked 'em, an' said she didn't care!  
29 An' thist as she kicked her heels, an' turn't to run an' hide,  
30 They wuz two great big Black Things a-standin' by her side,  
31 An' they snatched her through the ceilin' 'fore she knowed what she's about!  
32 An' the Gobble-uns 'll git you  
33 Ef you  
34 Don't  
35 Watch  
36 Out!

37 An' little Orphant Annie says, when the blaze is blue,  
38 An' the lamp-wick sputters, an' the wind goes woo-oo!  
39 An' you hear the crickets quit, an' the moon is gray,  
40 An' the lightnin'-bugs in dew is all squenched away, --  
41 You better mind yer parunts, an' yer teachurs fond an' dear,  
42 An' churish them 'at loves you, an' dry the orphant's tear,  
43 An' he'p the pore an' needy ones 'at clusters all about,  
44 Er the Gobble-uns 'll git you  
45 Ef you  
46 Don't

47      Watch  
48      Out!

James Whitcomb Riley

## Orlie Wilde

A goddess, with a siren's grace,--  
A sun-haired girl on a craggy place  
Above a bay where fish-boats lay  
Drifting about like birds of prey.

Wrought was she of a painter's dream,--  
Wise only as are artists wise,  
My artist-friend, Rolf Herschkelhiem,  
With deep sad eyes of oversize,  
And face of melancholy guise.

I pressed him that he tell to me  
This masterpiece's history.  
He turned--REturned--and thus beguiled  
Me with the tale of Orlie Wilde:--

"We artists live ideally:  
We breed our firmest facts of air;  
We make our own reality--  
We dream a thing and it is so.  
The fairest scenes we ever see  
Are mirages of memory;  
The sweetest thoughts we ever know  
We plagiarize from Long Ago:  
And as the girl on canvas there  
Is marvelously rare and fair,  
'Tis only inasmuch as she  
Is dumb and may not speak to me!"  
He tapped me with his mahlstick--then  
The picture,--and went on again:

"Orlie Wilde, the fisher's child--  
I see her yet, as fair and mild  
As ever nursling summer day  
Dreamed on the bosom of the bay:  
For I was twenty then, and went  
Alone and long-haired--all content  
With promises of sounding name  
And fantasies of future fame,  
And thoughts that now my mind discards  
As editor a fledgling bard's.

"At evening once I chanced to go,  
With pencil and portfolio,  
A down the street of silver sand  
That winds beneath this craggy land,  
To make a sketch of some old scurf  
Of driftage, nosing through the surf  
A splintered mast, with knarl and strand  
Of rigging-rope and tattered threads  
Of flag and streamer and of sail  
That fluttered idly in the gale

Or whipped themselves to sadder shreds.  
The while I wrought, half listlessly,  
On my dismantled subject, came  
A sea-bird, settling on the same  
With plaintive moan, as though that he  
Had lost his mate upon the sea;  
And--with my melancholy trend--  
It brought dim dreams half understood--  
It wrought upon my morbid mood,--  
I thought of my own voyagings  
That had no end--that have no end.--  
And, like the sea-bird, I made moan  
That I was loveless and alone.  
And when at last with weary wings  
It went upon its wanderings,  
With upturned face I watched its flight  
Until this picture met my sight:  
A goddess, with a siren's grace,--  
A sun-haired girl on a craggy place  
Above a bay where fish-boats lay  
Drifting about like birds of prey.

"In airy poise she, gazing, stood  
A machless form of womanhood,  
That brought a thought that if for me  
Such eyes had sought across the sea,  
I could have swum the widest tide  
That ever mariner defied,  
And, at the shore, could on have gone  
To that high crag she stood upon,  
To there entreat and say, 'My Sweet,  
Behold thy servant at thy feet.'  
And to my soul I said: 'Above,  
There stands the idol of thy love!'

"In this rapt, awed, ecstatic state  
I gazed--till lo! I was aware  
A fisherman had joined her there--  
A weary man, with halting gait,  
Who toiled beneath a basket's weight:  
Her father, as I guessed, for she  
Had run to meet him gleefully  
And ta'en his burden to herself,  
That perched upon her shoulder's shelf  
So lightly that she, tripping, neared  
A jutting crag and disappeared;  
But she left the echo of a song  
That thrills me yet, and will as long  
As I have being! . . .

. . . "Evenings came

And went,--but each the same--the same:  
She watched above, and even so  
I stood there watching from below;  
Till, grown so bold at last, I sung,--  
(What matter now the theme thereof!)--  
It brought an answer from her tongue--  
Faint as the murmur of a dove,  
Yet all the more the song of love. . . .

"I turned and looked upon the bay,  
With palm to forehead--eyes a-blur  
In the sea's smile--meant but for her!--  
I saw the fish-boats far away  
In misty distance, lightly drawn  
In chalk-dots on the horizon--  
Looked back at her, long, wistfully;--  
And, pushing off an empty skiff,  
I beckoned her to quit the cliff  
And yield me her rare company  
Upon a little pleasure-cruise.--  
She stood, as loathful to refuse,  
To muse for full a moment's time,--  
Then answered back in pantomime  
'She feared some danger from the sea  
Were she discovered thus with me.'  
I motioned then to ask her if  
I might not join her on the cliff  
And back again, with graceful wave  
Of lifted arm, she answer gave  
'She feared some danger from the sea.'

"Impatient, piqued, impetuous, I  
Sprang in the boat, and flung 'Good-by'  
From pouted mouth with angry hand,  
And madly pulled away from land  
With lusty stroke, despite that she  
Held out her hands entreatingly:  
And when far out, with covert eye  
I shoreward glanced, I saw her fly  
In reckless haste adown the crag,  
Her hair a-flutter like a flag  
Of gold that danced across the strand  
In little mists of silver sand.  
All curious I, pausing, tried  
To fancy what it all implied,--  
When suddenly I found my feet  
Were wet; and, underneath the seat  
On which I sat, I heard the sound  
Of gurgling waters, and I found  
The boat aleak alarmingly. . . .  
I turned and looked upon the sea,  
Whose every wave seemed mocking me;

I saw the fishers' sails once more--  
In dimmer distance than before;  
I saw the sea-bird wheeling by,  
With foolish wish that I could fly:  
I thought of firm earth, home and friends--  
I thought of everything that tends  
To drive a man to frenzy and  
To wholly lose his own command;  
I thought of all my waywardness--  
Thought of a mother's deep distress;  
Of youthful follies yet unpurged--  
Sins, as the seas, about me surged--  
Thought of the printer's ready pen  
To-morrow drowning me again;--  
A million things without a name--  
I thought of everything but--Fame. . . .

"A memory yet is in my mind,  
So keenly clear and sharp-defined,  
I picture every phase and line  
Of life and death, and neither mine,--  
While some fair seraph, golden-haired,  
Bends over me,--with white arms bared,  
That strongly plait themselves about  
My drowning weight and lift me out--  
With joy too great for words to state  
Or tongue to dare articulate!

"And this seraphic ocean-child  
And heroine was Orlie Wilde:  
And thus it was I came to hear  
Her voice's music in my ear--  
Ay, thus it was Fate paved the way  
That I walk desolate to-day!" . . .

The artist paused and bowed his face  
Within his palms a little space,  
While reverently on his form  
I bent my gaze and marked a storm  
That shook his frame as wrathfully  
As some typhoon of agony,  
And fraught with sobs--the more profound  
For that peculiar laughing sound  
We hear when strong men weep. . . . I leant  
With warmest sympathy--I bent  
To stroke with soothing hand his brow,  
He murmuring--"Tis over now!--

And shall I tie the silken thread  
Of my frail romance?" "Yes," I said.--  
He faintly smiled; and then, with brow  
In kneading palm, as one in dread--

His tasseled cap pushed from his head  
" 'Her voice's music,' I repeat,"  
He said,--" 'twas sweet--O passing sweet!--  
Though she herself, in uttering  
Its melody, proved not the thing  
Of loveliness my dreams made meet  
For me--there, yearning, at her feet--  
Prone at her feet--a worshiper,--  
For lo! she spake a tongue," moaned he,  
"Unknown to me;--unknown to me  
As mine to her--as mine to her."

James Whitcomb Riley

## Our Hired Girl

1 Our hired girl, she's 'Lizabuth Ann;  
2 An' she can cook best things to eat!  
3 She ist puts dough in our pie-pan,  
4 An' pours in somepin' 'at's good an' sweet;  
5 An' nen she salts it all on top  
6 With cinnamon; an' nen she'll stop  
7 An' stoop an' slide it, ist as slow,  
8 In th' old cook-stove, so's 'twon't slop  
9 An' git all spilled; nen bakes it, so  
10 It's custard-pie, first thing you know!  
11 An' nen she'll say,  
12 "Clear out o' my way!  
13 They's time fer work, an' time fer play!  
14 Take yer dough, an' run, child, run!  
15 Er I cain't git no cookin' done!"

16 When our hired girl 'tends like she's mad,  
17 An' says folks got to walk the chalk  
18 When she's around, er wisht they had!  
19 I play out on our porch an' talk  
20 To Th' Raggedy Man 'at mows our lawn;  
21 An' he says, "Whew!" an' nen leans on  
22 His old crook-scythe, and blinks his eyes,  
23 An' sniffs all 'round an' says, "I swawn!  
24 Ef my old nose don't tell me lies,  
25 It 'pears like I smell custard-pies!"  
26 An' nen he'll say,  
27 "Clear out o' my way!  
28 They's time fer work, an' time fer play!  
29 Take yer dough, an' run, child, run!  
30 Er she cain't git no cookin' done!"

31 Wunst our hired girl, when she  
32 Got the supper, an' we all et,  
33 An' it wuz night, an' Ma an' me  
34 An' Pa went wher' the "Social" met, --  
35 An' nen when we come home, an' see  
36 A light in the kitchen door, an' we  
37 Heerd a maccordeun, Pa says, "Lan'-  
38 O'-Gracious! who can her beau be?"  
39 An' I marched in, an' 'Lizabuth Ann  
40 Wuz parchin' corn fer The Raggedy Man!  
41 Better say,  
42 "Clear out o' the way!  
43 They's time fer work, an' time fer play!  
44 Take the hint, an' run, child, run!  
45 Er we cain't git no courtin' done!"

James Whitcomb Riley

## The Bumblebee

1 You better not fool with a Bumblebee! --  
2 Ef you don't think they can sting -- you'll see!  
3 They're lazy to look at, an' kind o' go  
4 Buzzin' an' bummin' aroun' so slow,  
5 An' ac' so slouchy an' all fagged out,  
6 Danglin' their legs as they drone about  
7 The hollyhawks 'at they can't climb in  
8 'Ithout ist a-tumble-un out ag'in!  
9 Wunst I watched one climb clean 'way  
10 In a jimson-blossom, I did, one day, --  
11 An' I ist grabbed it -- an' nen let go --  
12 An' "Ooh-ooh! Honey! I told ye so!"  
13 Says The Raggedy Man; an' he ist run  
14 An' pullt out the stinger, an' don't laugh none,  
15 An' says: "They has be'n folks, I guess,  
16 'At thought I wuz predjudust, more er less, --  
17 Yit I still muntain 'at a Bumblebee  
18 Wears out his welcome too quick fer me!"

James Whitcomb Riley

## **The Harper**

Like a drift of faded blossoms  
Caught in a slanting rain,  
His fingers glimpsed down the strings of his harp  
In a tremulous refrain:

Patter and tinkle, and drip and drip!  
Ah! but the chords were rainy sweet!  
And I closed my eyes and I bit my lip,  
As he played there in the street.

Patter, and drip, and tinkle!  
And there was the little bed  
In the corner of the garret,  
And the rafters overhead!

And there was the little window --  
Tinkle, and drip, and drip!--  
The rain above, and a mother's love,  
And God's companionship!

James Whitcomb Riley

## The Merman

I

Who would be  
A merman gay,  
Singing alone,  
Sitting alone,  
With a mermaid's knee,  
For instance--hey--  
For a throne?

II

I would be a merman gay;  
I would sit and sing the whole day long;  
I would fill my lungs with the strongest brine,  
And squirt it up in a spray of song,  
And soak my head in my liquid voice;  
I'd curl my tail in curves divine,  
And let each curve in a kink rejoice.  
I'd tackle the mermaids under the sea,  
And yank 'em around till they yanked me,  
Sportively, sportively;  
And then we would wiggle away, away,  
To the pea-green groves on the coast of day,  
Chasing each other sportively.

III

There would be neither moon nor star;  
But the waves would twang like a wet guitar  
Low thunder and thrum in the darkness grum--  
Neither moon nor star;  
We would shriek aloud in the dismal dales--  
Shriek at each other and squawk and squeal,  
"All night!" rakishly, rakishly;  
They would pelt me with oysters and wiggletails,  
Laughing and clapping their hands at me,  
"All night!" prankishly, prankishly;  
But I would toss them back in mine,  
Lobsters and turtles of quaint design;  
Then leaping out in an abrupt way,  
I'd snatch them bald in my devilish glee,  
And skip away when they snatched at me,  
Fiendishly, fiendishly.  
O, what a jolly life I'd lead,  
Ah, what a "bang-up" life indeed!  
Soft are the mermaids under the sea--  
We would live merrily, merrily.

James Whitcomb Riley

## The Old Guitar

Neglected now is the old guitar  
And moldering into decay;  
Fretted with many a rift and scar  
That the dull dust hides away,  
While the spider spins a silver star  
In its silent lips to-day.

The keys hold only nerveless strings--  
The sinews of brave old airs  
Are pulseless now; and the scarf that clings  
So closely here declares  
A sad regret in its ravelings  
And the faded hue it wears.

But the old guitar, with a lenient grace,  
Has cherished a smile for me;  
And its features hint of a fairer face  
That comes with a memory  
Of a flower-and-perfume-haunted place  
And a moonlit balcony.

Music sweeter than words confess,  
Or the minstrel's powers invent,  
Thrilled here once at the light caress  
Of the fairy hands that lent  
This excuse for the kiss I press  
On the dear old instrument.

The rose of pearl with the jeweled stem  
Still blooms; and the tiny sets  
In the circle all are here; the gem  
In the keys, and the silver frets;  
But the dainty fingers that danced o'er them--  
Alas for the heart's regrets!--

Alas for the loosened strings to-day,  
And the wounds of rift and scar  
On a worn old heart, with its roundelay  
Enthralled with a stronger bar  
That Fate weaves on, through a dull decay  
Like that of the old guitar!

James Whitcomb Riley

## The Old Swimmin' Hole

1 Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! whare the crick so still and deep  
2 Looked like a baby-river that was laying half asleep,  
3 And the gurgle of the worter round the drift jest below  
4 Sounded like the laugh of something we onc't ust to know  
5 Before we could remember anything but the eyes  
6 Of the angels lookin' out as we left Paradise;  
7 But the merry days of youth is beyond our controle,  
8 And it's hard to part ferever with the old swimmin'-hole.

9 Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! In the happy days of yore,  
10 When I ust to lean above it on the old sickamore,  
11 Oh! it showed me a face in its warm sunny tide  
12 That gazed back at me so gay and glorified,  
13 It made me love myself, as I leaped to caress  
14 My shadder smilin' up at me with sich tenderness.  
15 But them days is past and gone, and old Time's tuck his toll  
16 From the old man come back to the old swimmin'-hole.

17 Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! In the long, lazy days  
18 When the humdrum of school made so many run-a-ways,  
19 How plesant was the jurney down the old dusty lane,  
20 Whare the tracks of our bare feet was all printed so plane  
21 You could tell by the dent of the heel and the sole  
22 They was lots o' fun on hands at the old swimmin'-hole.  
23 But the lost joys is past! Let your tears in sorrow roll  
24 Like the rain that ust to dapple up the old swimmin'-hole.

25 Thare the bullrushes growed, and the cattails so tall,  
26 And the sunshine and shadder fell over it all;  
27 And it mottled the worter with amber and gold  
28 Tel the glad lilies rocked in the ripples that rolled;  
29 And the snake-feeder's four gauzy wings fluttered by  
30 Like the ghost of a daisy dropped out of the sky,  
31 Or a wownded apple-blossom in the breeze's controle  
32 As it cut acrost some orchard to'rds the old swimmin'-hole.

33 Oh! the old swimmin'-hole! When I last saw the place,  
34 The scenes was all changed, like the change in my face;  
35 The bridge of the railroad now crosses the spot  
36 Whare the old divin'-log lays sunk and fergot.  
37 And I stray down the banks whare the trees ust to be --  
38 But never again will they shade shelter me!  
39 And I wish in my sorrow I could strip to the soul,  
40 And dive off in my grave like the old swimmin'-hole.

James Whitcomb Riley

## **The Old Times Were the Best**

Friends, my heart is half weary  
Of its happiness to-night:  
Though your songs are gay and cheery,  
And your spirits feather-light,  
There's a ghostly music haunting  
Still the heart of every guest  
And a voiceless chorus chanting  
That the Old Times were the best.

### CHORUS

All about is bright and pleasant  
With the sound of song and jest,  
Yet a feeling's ever present  
That the Old Times were the best.

James Whitcomb Riley

## The Raggedy Man

1 O the Raggedy Man! He works fer Pa;  
2 An' he's the goodest man ever you saw!  
3 He comes to our house every day,  
4 An' waters the horses, an' feeds 'em hay;  
5 An' he opens the shed -- an' we all ist laugh  
6 When he drives out our little old wobble-ly calf;  
7 An' nen -- ef our hired girl says he can --  
8 He milks the cow fer 'Lizabuth Ann. --  
9 Ain't he a' awful good Raggedy Man?  
10 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

11 W'y, The Raggedy Man -- he's ist so good,  
12 He splits the kindlin' an' chops the wood;  
13 An' nen he spades in our garden, too,  
14 An' does most things 'at boys can't do. --  
15 He clumbed clean up in our big tree  
16 An' shooked a' apple down fer me --  
17 An' 'nother 'n', too, fer 'Lizabuth Ann --  
18 An' 'nother 'n', too, fer The Raggedy Man. --  
19 Ain't he a' awful kind Raggedy Man?  
20 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

21 An' The Raggedy Man one time say he  
22 Pick' roast' rambos from a' orchurd-tree,  
23 An' et 'em -- all ist roast' an' hot! --  
24 An' it's so, too! -- 'cause a corn-crib got  
25 Afire one time an' all burn' down  
26 On "The Smoot Farm," 'bout four mile from town --  
27 On "The Smoot Farm"! Yes -- an' the hired han'  
28 'At worked there nen 'uz The Raggedy Man! --  
29 Ain't he the beatin'est Raggedy Man?  
30 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

31 The Raggedy Man's so good an' kind  
32 He'll be our "horsey," an' "haw" an' mind  
33 Ever'thing 'at you make him do --  
34 An' won't run off -- 'less you want him to!  
35 I drived him wunst way down our lane  
36 An' he got skeered, when it 'menced to rain,  
37 An' ist rared up an' squealed and run  
38 Purt' nigh away! -- an' it's all in fun!  
39 Nen he skeered ag'in at a' old tin can ...  
40 Whoa! y' old runaway Raggedy Man!  
41 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

42 An' The Raggedy Man, he knows most rhymes,  
43 An' tells 'em, ef I be good, sometimes:  
44 Knows 'bout Giunts, an' Griffuns, an' Elves,  
45 An' the Squidgicum-Squees 'at swallers the'rselves:  
46 An', wite by the pump in our pasture-lot,  
47 He showed me the hole 'at the Wunks is got,  
48 'At lives 'way deep in the ground, an' can

49 Turn into me, er 'Lizabuth Ann!  
 50 Er Ma, er Pa, er The Raggedy Man!  
 51 Ain't he a funny old Raggedy Man?  
 52 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

53 An' wunst, when The Raggedy Man come late,  
 54 An' pigs ist root' thue the garden-gate,  
 55 He 'tend like the pigs 'uz bears an' said,  
 56 "Old Bear-shooter'll shoot 'em dead!"  
 57 An' race' an' chase' 'em, an' they'd ist run  
 58 When he pint his hoe at 'em like it's a gun  
 59 An' go "Bang! -- Bang!" nen 'tend he stan'  
 60 An' load up his gun ag'in! Raggedy Man!  
 61 He's an old Bear-shooter Raggedy Man!  
 62 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

63 An' sometimes The Raggedy Man lets on  
 64 We're little prince-children, an' old King's gone  
 65 To git more money, an' lef' us there --  
 66 And Robbers is ist thick ever'where;  
 67 An' nen -- ef we all won't cry, fer shore --  
 68 The Raggedy Man he'll come and "'splore  
 69 The Castul-halls," an' steal the "gold" --  
 70 An' steal us, too, an' grab an' hold  
 71 An' pack us off to his old "Cave"! -- An'  
 72 Haymow's the "cave" o' The Raggedy Man! --  
 73 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

74 The Raggedy Man -- one time, when he  
 75 Wuz makin' a little bow-'n'-orry fer me,  
 76 Says "When you're big like your Pa is,  
 77 Air you go' to keep a fine store like his --  
 78 An' be a rich merchunt -- an' wear fine clothes? --  
 79 Er what air you go' to be, goodness knows?"  
 80 An' nen he laughed at 'Lizabuth Ann,  
 81 An' I says "'M go' to be a Raggedy Man! --  
 82 I'm ist go' to be a nice Raggedy Man!"  
 83 Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

James Whitcomb Riley

## The Rapture of the Year

While skies glint bright with bluest light  
Through clouds that race o'er fields and town,  
And leaves go dancing left and right,  
And orchard apples tumble down;  
While school-girls sweet, in lane or street,  
Lean 'gainst the wind and feel and hear  
Its glad heart like a lover's beat,--  
So reigns the rapture of the year.

*The ho! and hey! and whop-hooray!  
Though winter clouds be looming,  
Remember a November day  
Is merrier than mildest May  
With all her blossoms blooming.*

While birds in scattered flight are blown  
Aloft and lost in dusky mist,  
And truant boys scud home alone  
'Neath skies of gold and amethyst;  
While twilight falls, and Echo calls  
Across the haunted atmosphere,  
With low, sweet laughs at intervals,--  
So reigns the rapture of the year.

*The ho! and hey! and whop-hooray!  
Though winter clouds be looming,  
Remember a November day  
Is merrier than mildest May  
With all her blossoms blooming.*

James Whitcomb Riley

## **The Ripest Peach**

The ripest peach is highest on the tree --  
And so her love, beyond the reach of me,  
Is dearest in my sight. Sweet breezes, bow  
Her heart down to me where I worship now!

She looms aloft where every eye may see  
The ripest peach is highest on the tree.  
Such fruitage as her love I know, alas!  
I may not reach here from the orchard grass.

I drink the sunshine showered past her lips  
As roses drain the dewdrop as it drips.  
The ripest peach is highest on the tree,  
And so mine eyes gaze upward eagerly.

Why -- why do I not turn away in wrath  
And pluck some heart here hanging in my path? --  
Love's lower boughs bend with them -- but, ah me!  
The ripest peach is highest on the tree!

James Whitcomb Riley

## **The Rival**

I so loved once, when Death came by I hid  
    Away my face,  
And all my sweetheart's tresses she undid  
    To make my hiding-place.

The dread shade passed me thus unheeding; and  
    I turned me then  
To calm my love -- kiss down her shielding hand  
    And comfort her again.

And lo! she answered not: and she did sit  
    All fixedly,  
With her fair face and the sweet smile of it,  
    In love with Death, not me.

James Whitcomb Riley

## The Song of Yesterday

I  
But yesterday  
I looked away  
O'er happy lands, where sunshine lay  
In golden blots,  
Inlaid with spots  
Of shade and wild forget-me-nots.

My head was fair  
With flaxen hair,  
And fragrant breezes, faint and rare,  
And, warm with drouth  
From out the south,  
Blew all my curls across my mouth.

And, cool and sweet,  
My naked feet  
Found dewy pathways through the wheat;  
And out again  
Where, down the lane,  
The dust was dimpled with the rain.

II  
But yesterday! --  
Adream, astray,  
From morning's red to evening's dray,  
O'er dales and hills  
Of daffodils  
And lorn sweet-fluting whippoorwills.

I knew nor cares  
Nor tears nor prayers --  
A mortal god, crowned unawares  
With sunset -- and  
A scepter-wand  
Of apple-blossoms in my hand!

The dewy blue  
Of twilight grew  
To purple, with a star or two  
Whose lisping rays  
Failed in the blaze  
Of sudden fireflies through the haze.

III  
But yesterday  
I heard the lay  
Of summer birds, when I, as they  
With breast and wing,  
All quivering  
With life and love, could only sing.

My head was leant  
Where, with it, blent  
A maiden's, o'er her instrument;  
While all the night,  
From vale to height,  
Was filled with echoes of delight.

And all our dreams  
Were lit with gleams  
Of that lost land of reedy streams,  
Along whose brim  
Forever swim  
Pan's lilies, laughing up at him.

IV  
But yesterday! . . .  
O blooms of May,  
And summer roses -- where away?  
O stars above;  
And lips of love,  
And all the honeyed sweets thereof! --

O lad and lass,  
And orchard pass,  
And briered lane, and daisied grass!  
O gleam and gloom,  
And woodland bloom,  
And breezy breaths of all perfume! --

No more for me  
Or mine shall be  
Thy raptures -- save in memory, --  
No more -- no more --  
Till through the Door  
Of Glory gleam the days of yore.

James Whitcomb Riley

## **The Willow**

Who shall sing a simple ditty about the Willow,  
Dainty-fine and delicate as any bending spray  
That dandles high the dainty bird that flutters there to trill a  
Tremulously tender song of greeting to the May.

Bravest, too, of all the trees! -- none to match your daring,--  
First of greens to greet the Spring and lead in leafy sheen;--  
Aye, and you're the last -- almost into winter wearing  
Still the leaf of loyalty -- still the badge of green.

Ah, my lovely willow! --let the waters lilt your graces,--  
They alone with limped kisses lave your leaves above,  
Flashing back your silvan beauty, and in shady places  
Peering up with glimmering pebbles, like the eyes of love.

James Whitcomb Riley

## **There Was a Cherry-Tree**

There was a cherry-tree. Its bloomy snows  
Cool even now the fevered sight that knows  
No more its airy visions of pure joy --  
As when you were a boy.

There was a cherry-tree. The Bluejay sat  
His blue against its white -- O blue as jet  
He seemed there then!-- But now -- Whoever knew  
He was so pale a blue!

There was a cherry-tree -- our child-eyes saw  
The miracle:-- Its pure white snows did thaw  
Into a crimson fruitage, far too sweet  
But for a boy to eat.

There was a cherry-tree, give thanks and joy!--  
There was a bloom of snow -- There was a boy --  
There was a bluejay of the realest blue --  
And fruit for both of you.

James Whitcomb Riley

## **To a Boy Whistling**

The smiling face of a happy boy  
With its enchanted key  
Is now unlocking in memory  
My store of heartiest joy.

And my lost life again to-day,  
In pleasant colors all aglow,  
From rainbow tints, to pure white snow,  
Is a panorama sliding away.

The whistled air of a simple tune  
Eddies and whirls my thoughts around,  
As fairy balloons of thistle-down  
Sail through the air of June.

O happy boy with untaught grace!  
What is there in the world to give  
That can buy one hour of the life you live  
Or the trivial cause of your smiling face!

James Whitcomb Riley

## Unless

Who has not wanted, does not guess  
What plenty is.--Who has not groped  
In depths of doubt and hopelessness,  
Has never truly hoped.--  
Unless, sometimes, a shadow falls  
Upon his mirth, and veils his sight,  
And from the darkness drifts the light  
Of love at intervals.

And that most dear of everything,  
I hold, is love; and who can sit  
With lightest heart and laugh and sing,  
Knows not the worth of it.--  
Unless, in some strange throng, perchance,  
He feels how thrilling sweet it is,  
One yearning look that answers his --  
The truth of glance and glance.

Who knows not pain, knows not, alas!  
What pleasure is.--Who knows not of  
The bitter cup that will not pass,  
Knows not the taste of love.  
O souls that thirst, and hearts that fast,  
And natures faint with famishing,  
God lift and lead and safely bring  
You to your own at last!

James Whitcomb Riley

## **We to Sigh Instead of Sing**

"Rain and Rain! and rain and rain!"  
Yesterday we muttered  
Grimly as the grim refrain  
That the thunders uttered:  
All the heavens under cloud --  
All the sunshine sleeping;  
All the grasses limply bowed  
With their weight of weeping.

Sigh and sigh! and sigh and sigh!  
Never end of sighing;  
Rain and rain for our reply --  
Hopes half-drowned and dying;  
Peering through the window-pane,  
Naught but endless raining --  
Endless sighing, and, as vain,  
Endlessly conmplaining.

Shine and shine! and shine and shine!  
Ah! to-day the splendor!--  
All this glory yours and mine --  
God! but God is tender!  
We to sigh instead of sing,  
Yesterday in sorrow,  
While the lord was fashioning  
This for our To-morrow!

James Whitcomb Riley

## When the Frost is on the Punkin

1 When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock,  
2 And you hear the kyouck and gobble of the struttin' turkey-cock,  
3 And the clackin' of the guineys, and the cluckin' of the hens,  
4 And the rooster's hallylooyer as he tiptoes on the fence;  
5 O, it's then's the times a feller is a-feelin' at his best,  
6 With the risin' sun to greet him from a night of peaceful rest,  
7 As he leaves the house, bareheaded, and goes out to feed the stock,  
8 When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock.

9 They's something kindo' harty-like about the atmusfere  
10 When the heat of summer's over and the coolin' fall is here --  
11 Of course we miss the flowers, and the blossums on the trees,  
12 And the mumble of the hummin'-birds and buzzin' of the bees;  
13 But the air's so appetizin'; and the landscape through the haze  
14 Of a crisp and sunny morning of the airy autumn days  
15 Is a pictur' that no painter has the colorin' to mock --  
16 When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock.

17 The husky, rusty russel of the tossels of the corn,  
18 And the raspin' of the tangled leaves, as golden as the morn;  
19 The stubble in the furries -- kindo' lonesome-like, but still  
20 A-preachin' sermons to us of the barns they growed to fill;  
21 The strawstack in the medder, and the reaper in the shed;  
22 The hosses in theyr stalls below -- the clover over-head! --  
23 O, it sets my hart a-clickin' like the tickin' of a clock,  
24 When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock!

25 Then your apples all is gethered, and the ones a feller keeps  
26 Is poured around the celler-floor in red and yeller heaps;  
27 And your cider-makin' 's over, and your wimmern-folks is through  
28 With their mince and apple-butter, and theyr souse and sausage, too! ...  
29 I don't know how to tell it -- but ef sich a thing could be  
30 As the Angels wantin' boardin', and they'd call around on me --  
31 I'd want to 'commodate 'em -- all the whole-indurin' flock --  
32 When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's in the shock!

James Whitcomb Riley

## Who Bides His Time

Who bides his time, and day by day  
Faces defeat full patiently,  
And lifts a mirthful roundelay,  
However poor his fortunes be,--  
He will not fail in any qualm  
Of poverty -- the paltry dime  
It will grow golden in his palm,  
Who bides his time.

Who bides his time -- he tastes the sweet  
Of honey in the saltiest tear;  
And though he fares with slowest feet,  
Joy runs to meet him, drawing near;  
The birds are hearalds of his cause;  
And, like a never-ending rhyme,  
The roadsides bloom in his applause,  
Who bides his time.

Who bides his time, and fevers not  
In the hot race that none achieves,  
Shall wear cool-wreathen laurel, wrought  
With crimson berries in the leaves;  
And he shall reign a goodly king,  
And sway his hand o'er every clime  
With peace writ on his signet-ring,  
Who bides his time.

James Whitcomb Riley

## Ylladmar

Her hair was, oh, so dense a blur  
Of darkness, midnight envied her;  
And stars grew dimmer in the skies  
To see the glory of her eyes;  
And all the summer rain of light  
That showered from the moon at night  
Fell o'er her features as the gloom  
Of twilight o'er a lily-bloom.

The crimson fruitage of her lips  
Was ripe and lush with sweeter wine  
Than burgundy or muscadine  
Or vintage that the burgher sips  
In some old garden on the Rhine:  
And I to taste of it could well  
Believe my heart a crucible  
Of molten love--and I could feel  
The drunken soul within me reel  
And rock and stagger till it fell.

And do you wonder that I bowed  
Before her splendor as a cloud  
Of storm the golden-sandaled sun  
Had set his conquering foot upon?  
And did she will it, I could lie  
In writhing rapture down and die  
A death so full of precious pain  
I'd waken up to die again.

James Whitcomb Riley