Classic Poetry Series

Louisa May Alcott

- poems -

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A Song From The Suds

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Louisa May Alcott

Fairy Song

The moonlight fades from flower and rose
And the stars dim one by one;
The tale is told, the song is sung,
And the Fairy feast is done.
The night-wind rocks the sleeping flowers,
And sings to them, soft and low.
The early birds erelong will wake:
'T is time for the Elves to go.

O'er the sleeping earth we silently pass,
Unseen by mortal eye,
And send sweet dreams, as we lightly float
Through the quiet moonlit sky;--
For the stars' soft eyes alone may see,
And the flowers alone may know,
The feasts we hold, the tales we tell;
So't is time for the Elves to go.

From bird, and blossom, and bee,
We learn the lessons they teach;
And seek, by kindly deeds, to win
A loving friend in each.
And though unseen on earth we dwell,
Sweet voices whisper low,
And gentle hearts most joyously greet
The Elves where'er they go.

When next we meet in the Fairy dell,
May the silver moon's soft light
Shine then on faces gay as now,
And Elfin hearts as light.
Now spread each wing, for the eastern sky
With sunlight soon shall glow.
The morning star shall light us home:
Farewell! for the Elves must go.

Louisa May Alcott

From The Short Story A Christmas Dream, And How It Came True

From our happy home
Through the world we roam
One week in all the year,
Making winter spring
With the joy we bring
For Christmas-tide is here.

Now the eastern star
Shines from afar
To light the poorest home;
Hearts warmer grow,
Gifts freely flow,
For Christmas-tide has come.

Now gay trees rise
Before young eyes,
Abloom with tempting cheer;
Blithe voices sing,
And blithe bells ring,
For Christmas-tide is here.

Oh, happy chime,
Oh, blessed time,
That draws us all so near!
"Welcome, dear day,"
All creatures say,
For Christmas-tide is here.

Louisa May Alcott

From The Short Story Shadow-Children

Little shadows, little shadows
Dancing on the chamber wall,
While I sit beside the hearthstone
Where the red flames rise and fall.
Caps and nightgowns, caps and nightgowns,
My three antic shadows wear;
And no sound they make in playing,
For the six small feet are bare.

Dancing gayly, dancing gayly,
To and fro all together,
Like a family of daisies
Blown about in windy weather;
Nimble fairies, nimble fairies,
Playing pranks in the warm glow,
While I sing the nursery ditties
Childish phantoms love and know.

Now what happens, now what happens?
One small shadow's tumbled down:
I can see it on the carpet
Softly rubbing its hurt crown.
No one whimpers, no one whimpers;
A brave-hearted sprite is this:
See! the others offer comfort
In a silent, shadowy kiss.

Hush! they're creeping; hush! they're creeping,
Up about my rocking-chair:
I can feel their loving fingers
Clasp my neck and touch my hair.
Little shadows, little shadows,
Take me captive, hold me tight,
As they climb and cling and whisper,
"Mother dear, good night! good night!"

Louisa May Alcott

From The Short Story What The Swallows Did

Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,
Starting on your autumn flight,
Pause a moment at my window,
Twitter softly your good-night;
For the summer days are over,
All your duties are well done,
And the happy homes you builded
Have grown empty, one by one.
Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,
Are you ready for your flight?
Are all the feather cloaks completed?
Are the little caps all right?
Are the young wings strong and steady
For the journey through the sky?
Come again in early spring-time;
And till then, good-by, good-by!

Louisa May Alcott

Lily-Bell and Thistledown Song I

Awake! Awake! for the earliest gleam
Of golden sunlight shines
On the rippling waves, that brightly flow
Beneath the flowering vines.
Awake! Awake! for the low, sweet chant
Of the wild-birds' morning hymn
Comes floating by on the fragrant air,
Through the forest cool and dim;
Then spread each wing,
And work, and sing,
Through the long, bright sunny hours;
O'er the pleasant earth
We journey forth,
For a day among the flowers.

Awake! Awake! for the summer wind
Hath bidden the blossoms unclose,
Hath opened the violet's soft blue eye,
And awakened the sleeping rose.
And lightly they wave on their slender stems
Fragrant, and fresh, and fair,
Waiting for us, as we singing come
To gather our honey-dew there.
Then spread each wing,
And work, and sing,
Through the long, bright sunny hours;
O'er the pleasant earth
We journey forth,
For a day among the flowers.

Louisa May Alcott

Lily-Bell and Thistledown Song II

Thistledown in prison sings:

Bright shines the summer sun,
Soft is the summer air;
Gayly the wood-birds sing,
Flowers are blooming fair.
But, deep in the dark, cold rock,
Sadly I dwell,
Longing for thee, dear friend,
Lily-Bell! Lily-Bell!

Lily-Bell replies:

Through sunlight and summer air
I have sought for thee long,
Guided by birds and flowers,
And now by thy song.

Thistledown! Thistledown!
O'er hill and dell
Hither to comfort thee
Comes Lily-Bell.

Louisa May Alcott

Lullaby

Now the day is done,
Now the shepherd sun
Drives his white flocks from the sky;
Now the flowers rest
On their mother's breast,
Hushed by her low lullaby.

Now the glowworms glance,
Now the fireflies dance,
Under fern-boughs green and high;
And the western breeze
To the forest trees
Chants a tuneful lullaby.

Now 'mid shadows deep
Falls blessed sleep,
Like dew from the summer sky;
And the whole earth dreams,
In the moon's soft beams,
While night breathes a lullaby.

Now, birdlings, rest,
In your wind-rocked nest,
Unscared by the owl's shrill cry;
For with folded wings
Little Brier swings,
And singeth your lullaby.

Louisa May Alcott

My Kingdom

A little kingdom I possess
where thoughts and feelings dwell,
And very hard I find the task
of governing it well;
For passion tempts and troubles me,
A wayward will misleads,
And selfishness its shadow casts
On all my words and deeds.

How can I learn to rule myself,
to be the child I should,
Honest and brave, nor ever tire
Of trying to be good?
How can I keep a sunny soul
To shine along life's way?
How can I tune my little heart
To sweetly sing all day?

Dear Father, help me with the love
that casteth out my fear;
Teach me to lean on thee, and feel
That thou art very near,
That no temptation is unseen
No childish grief too small,
Since thou, with patience infinite,
Doth soothe and comfort all.

I do not ask for any crown
But that which all may win
Nor seek to conquer any world
Except the one within.
Be thou my guide until I find,
Led by a tender hand,
Thy happy kingdom in myself
And dare to take command.

Louisa May Alcott

'The Frost-King' Song 1

We are sending you, dear flowers
Forth alone to die,
Where your gentle sisters may not weep
O'er the cold graves where you lie;
But you go to bring them fadeless life
In the bright homes where they dwell,
And you softly smile that't is so,
As we sadly sing farewell.
O plead with gentle words for us,
And whisper tenderly
Of generous love to that cold heart,
And it will answer ye;
And though you fade in a dreary home,
Yet loving hearts will tell
Of the joy and peace that you have given:
Flowers, dear flowers, farewell!

Louisa May Alcott

'The Frost-King' Song II

Brighter shone the golden shadows;
On the cool wind softly came
The low, sweet tones of happy flowers,
Singing little Violet's name.
'Mong the green trees was it whispered,
And the bright waves bore it on
To the lonely forest flowers,
Where the glad news had not gone.

Thus the Frost-King lost his kingdom,
And his power to harm and blight.
Violet conquered, and his cold heart
Warmed with music, love, and light;
And his fair home, once so dreary,
Gay with lovely Elves and flowers,
Brought a joy that never faded
Through the long bright summer hours.

Thus, by Violet's magic power,
All dark shadows passed away,
And on the home of happy flowers
The golden light for ever lay.
Thus the Fairy mission ended,
And all Flower-Land was taught
The "Power of Love," by gentle deeds
That little Violet wrought.

Louisa May Alcott

The Lay of a Golden Goose

Long ago in a poultry yard
One dull November morn,
Beneath a motherly soft wing
A little goose was born.

Who straightway peeped out of the shell
To view the world beyond,
Longing at once to sally forth
And paddle in the pond.

"Oh! be not rash," her father said,
A mild Socratic bird;
Her mother begged her not to stray
With many a warning word.

But little goosey was perverse,
And eagerly did cry,
"I've got a lovely pair of wings,
Of course I ought to fly."

In vain parental cacklings,
In vain the cold sky's frown,
Ambitious goosey tried to soar,
But always tumbled down.

The farmyard jeered at her attempts,
The peacocks screamed, "Oh fie!
You're only a domestic goose,
So don't pretend to fly."

Great cock-a-doodle from his perch
Crowed daily loud and clear,
"Stay in the puddle, foolish bird,
That is your proper sphere,"

The ducks and hens said, one and all,
In gossip by the pool,
"Our children never play such pranks;
My dear, that fowl's a fool."

The owls came out and flew about,
Hooting above the rest,
"No useful egg was ever hatched
From transcendental nest."

Good little goslings at their play
And well-conducted chicks
Were taught to think poor goosey's flights
Were naughty, ill-bred tricks.

They were content to swim and scratch,
And not at all inclined

For any wild goose chase in search
Of something undefined.

Hard times she had as one may guess,
That young aspiring bird,
Who still from every fall arose
Saddened but undeterred.

She knew she was no nightingale
Yet spite of much abuse,
She longed to help and cheer the world,
Although a plain gray goose

She could not sing, she could not fly,
Nor even walk, with grace,
And all the farmyard had declared
A puddle was her place.

But something stronger than herself
Would cry, "Go on, go on!
Remember, though an humble fowl,
You're cousin to a swan."

So up and down poor goosey went,
A busy, hopeful bird.
Searched many wide unfruitful fields,
And many waters stirred.

At length she came unto a stream
Most fertile of all Niles,
Where tuneful birds might soar and sing
Among the leafy isles.

Here did she build a little nest
Beside the waters still,
Where the parental goose could rest
Unvexed by any bill.

And here she paused to smooth her plumes,
Ruffled by many plagues;
When suddenly arose the cry,
"This goose lays golden eggs."

At once the farmyard was agog;
The ducks began to quack;
Prim Guinea fowls relenting called,
"Come back, come back, come back."

Great chanticleer was pleased to give
A patronizing crow,
And the contemptuous biddies clucked,
"I wish my chicks did so."

The peacocks spread their shining tails,
And cried in accents soft,
"We want to know you, gifted one,
Come up and sit aloft."

Wise owls awoke and gravely said,
With proudly swelling breasts,
"Rare birds have always been evoked
From transcendental nests!"

News-hunting turkeys from afar
Now ran with all thin legs
To gobble facts and fictions of
The goose with golden eggs.

But best of all the little fowls
Still playing on the shore,
Soft downy chicks and goslings gay,
Chirped out, "Dear Goose, lay more."

But goosey all these weary years
Had toiled like any ant,
And wearied out she now replied
"My little dears, I can't.

"When I was starving, half this corn
Had been of vital use,
Now I am surfeited with food
Like any Strasbourg goose."

So to escape too many friends,
Without uncivil strife,
She ran to the Atlantic pond
And paddled for her life.

Soon up among the grand old Alps
She found two blessed things,
The health she had so nearly lost,
And rest for weary limbs.

But still across the briny deep
Couched in most friendly words,
Came prayers for letters, tales, or verse
From literary birds.

Whereat the renovated fowl
With grateful thanks profuse,
Took from her wing a quill and wrote
This lay of a Golden Goose.

Louisa May Alcott

The Rock and The Bubble

Oh! a bare, brown rock
Stood up in the sea,
The waves at its feet
Dancing merrily.

A little bubble
Once came sailing by,
And thus to the rock
Did it gayly cry,--

"Ho! clumsy brown stone,
Quick, make way for me:
I'm the fairest thing
That floats on the sea.

"See my rainbow-robe,
See my crown of light,
My glittering form,
So airy and bright.

"O'er the waters blue,
I'm floating away,
To dance by the shore
With the foam and spray.

"Now, make way, make way;
For the waves are strong,
And their rippling feet
Bear me fast along."

But the great rock stood
Straight up in the sea:
It looked gravely down,
And said pleasantly--

"Little friend, you must
Go some other way;
For I have not stirred
this many a long day.

"Great billows have dashed,
And angry winds blown;
But my sturdy form
Is not overthrown.

"Nothing can stir me
In the air or sea;
Then, how can I move,
Little friend, for thee?"

Then the waves all laughed
In their voices sweet;

And the sea-birds looked,
From their rocky seat,

At the bubble gay,
Who angrily cried,
While its round cheek glowed
With a foolish pride,--

"You SHALL move for me;
And you shall not mock
At the words I say,
You ugly, rough rock.

"Be silent, wild birds!
While stare you so?
Stop laughing, rude waves,
And help me to go!

"For I am the queen
Of the ocean here,
And this cruel stone
Cannot make me fear."

Dashing fiercely up,
With a scornful word,
Foolish Bubble broke;
But Rock never stirred.

Then said the sea-birds,
Sitting in their nests
To the little ones
Leaning on their breasts,--

"Be not like Bubble,
Headstrong, rude, and vain,
Seeking by violence
Your object to gain;

"But be like the rock,
Steadfast, true, and strong,
Yet cheerful and kind,
And firm against wrong.

"Heed, little birdlings,
And wiser you'll be
For the lesson learned
To-day by the sea."

Louisa May Alcott

'The Rose Family' Song 1

O flower at my window
Why blossom you so fair,
With your green and purple cup
Upturned to sun and air?
'I bloom, blithesome Bessie,
To cheer your childish heart;
The world is full of labor,
And this shall be my part.'
Whirl, busy wheel, faster,
Spin, little thread, spin;
The sun shines fair without,
And we are gay within.

O robin in the tree-top,
With sunshine on your breast,
Why brood you so patiently
Above your hidden nest?
'I brood, blithesome Bessie,
And sing my humble song,
That the world may have more music
From my little ones erelong.'
Whirl, busy wheel, faster,
Spin, little thread, spin;
The sun shines fair without,
And we are gay within.

O balmy wind of summer,
O silver-singing brook,
Why rustle through the branches?
Why shimmer in your nook?
'I flutter, blithesome Bessie,
Like a blessing far and wide;
I scatter bloom and verdue
Where'er my footsteps glide.'
Whirl, busy wheel, faster,
Spin, little thread, spin;
The sun shines fair without,
And we are gay within.

O brook and breeze and blossom,
And robin on the tree,
You make a joy of duty,
A pride of industry;
Teach me to work as blithely,
With a willing hand and heart:
The world is full of labor,
And I must do my part.
Whirl, busy wheel, faster,
Spin, little thread, spin;
The sun shines fair without,
And we are gay within.

Louisa May Alcott

'The Rose Family' Song II

O lesson well and wisely taught
Stay with me to the last,
That all my life may better be
For the trial that is past.
O vanity, mislead no more!
Sleep, like passions, long!
Wake, happy heart, and dance again
To the music of my song!

O summer days, flit fast away,
And bring the blithesome hour
When we three wanderers shall meet
Safe in our household flower!
O dear mamma, lament no more!
Smile on us as we come,
Your grief has been our punishment,
Your love has led us home.

Louisa May Alcott

Thoreau's Flute

We sighing said, "Our Pan is dead;
His pipe hangs mute beside the river
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,
But Music's airy voice is fled.
Spring mourns as for untimely frost;
The bluebird chants a requiem;
The willow-blossom waits for him;
The Genius of the wood is lost."

Then from the flute, untouched by hands,
There came a low, harmonious breath:
"For such as he there is no death;
His life the eternal life commands;
Above man's aims his nature rose.
The wisdom of a just content
Made one small spot a continent
And turned to poetry life's prose.

"Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,
Swallow and aster, lake and pine,
To him grew human or divine,
Fit mates for this large-hearted child.
Such homage Nature ne'er forgets,
And yearly on the coverlid
'Neath which her darling lieth hid
Will write his name in violets.

"To him no vain regrets belong
Whose soul, that finer instrument,
Gave to the world no poor lament,
But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.
O lonely friend! he still will be
A potent presence, though unseen,
Steadfast, sagacious, and serene;
Seek not for him -- he is with thee."

Louisa May Alcott

Transfiguration

Mysterious death! who in a single hour
Life's gold can so refine
And by thy art divine
Change mortal weakness to immortal power!

Bending beneath the weight of eighty years
Spent with the noble strife
of a victorious life
We watched her fading heavenward, through our tears.

But ere the sense of loss our hearts had wrung
A miracle was wrought;
And swift as happy thought
She lived again -- brave, beautiful, and young.

Age, pain, and sorrow dropped the veils they wore
And showed the tender eyes
Of angels in disguise,
Whose discipline so patiently she bore.

The past years brought their harvest rich and fair;
While memory and love,
Together, fondly wove
A golden garland for the silver hair.

How could we mourn like those who are bereft,
When every pang of grief
found balm for its relief
In counting up the treasures she had left?--

Faith that withstood the shocks of toil and time;
Hope that defied despair;
Patience that conquered care;
And loyalty, whose courage was sublime;

The great deep heart that was a home for all--
Just, eloquent, and strong
In protest against wrong;
Wide charity, that knew no sin, no fall;

The spartan spirit that made life so grand,
Mating poor daily needs
With high, heroic deeds,
That wrested happiness from Fate's hard hand.

We thought to weep, but sing for joy instead,
Full of the grateful peace
That follows her release;
For nothing but the weary dust lies dead.

Oh, noble woman! never more a queen
Than in the laying down

Of sceptre and of crown
To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen;

Teaching us how to seek the highest goal,
To earn the true success --
To live, to love, to bless --
And make death proud to take a royal soul.

Louisa May Alcott