Classic Poetry Series

William Brighty Rands

- poems -

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Cuckoo in the Pear-Tree

The Cuckoo sat in the old pear-tree,
Cuckoo!
Raining or snowing, nought cared he.
Cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo, nought cared he.

The Cuckoo flew over a housetop high.
Cuckoo!
"Dear, are you at home, for here am I?
Cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo, here am I."

"I dare not open the door to you.
Cuckoo!
Perhaps you are not the right cuckoo?
Cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cukoo, the right Cuckoo!"

"I am the right Cuckoo, the proper one.
Cuckoo!
For I am my father's only son,
Cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo, his only son."

"If you are your father's only son -
Cuckoo!
The bobbin pull tightly,
Come through the door lightly -
Cuckoo!

"If you are your father's only son -
Cuckoo!
It must be you, the only one -
Cuckoo, cuckoo, my own Cuckoo!
Cuckoo!"

William Brighty Rands

Dressing the Doll

THIS is the way we dress the Doll:—
You may make her a shepherdess, the Doll,
If you give her a crook with a pastoral hook,
But this is the way we dress the Doll.

Chorus

Bless the Doll, you may press the Doll,
But do not crumple and mess the Doll!
This is the way we dress the Doll.

First, you observe, her little chemise,
As white as milk, with ruches of silk;
And the little drawers that cover her knees,
As she sits or stands, with golden bands,
And lace in beautiful filagrees.

Chorus

Now these are the bodies: she has two,
One of pink, with rouches of blue,
And sweet white lace; be careful, do!
And one of green, with buttons of sheen,
Buttons and bands of gold, I mean,
With lace on the border in lovely order,
The most expensive we can afford her!

Chorus

Then, with black at the border, jacket
And this—and this—she will not lack it;
Skirts? Why, there are skirts, of course,
And shoes and stockings we shall enforce,
With a proper bodice, in the proper place,
(Stays that lace have had their days
And made their martyrs); likewise garters,
All entire. But our desire
Is to show you her night attire,
At least a part of it. Pray admire
This sweet white thing that she goes to bed in!
It ’s not the one that ’s made for her wedding:
That is special, a new design,
Made with a charm and a countersign,
Three times three and nine times nine:
These are only her usual clothes.
Look, there ’s a wardrobe! gracious knows
It ’s pretty enough, as far as it goes!

So you see the way we dress the Doll:
You might make her a shepherdess, the Doll,
If you gave her a crook with pastoral hook,
With sheep, and a shed, and a shallow brook,

And all that, out of the poetry-book.

Chorus

Bless the Doll, you may press the Doll,
But do not crumple and mess the Doll!
This is the way we dress the Doll;
If you had not seen, could you guess the Doll?

William Brighty Rands

Great, Wide, Beautiful, Wonderful World

Great, wide, beautiful, wonderful World,
With the wonderful water round you curled,
And the wonderful grass upon your breast--
World, you are beautifully drest.

The wonderful air is over me,
And the wonderful wind is shaking the tree,
It walks on the water, and whirls the mills,
And talks to itself on the tops of the hills.

You friendly Earth! how far do you go,
With the wheat-fields that nod and the rivers that flow,
With cities and gardens, and cliffs, and isles,
And people upon you for thousands of miles?

Ah, you are so great, and I am so small,
I tremble to think of you, World, at all;
And yet, when I said my prayers to-day,
A whisper inside me seemed to say,
"You are more than the Earth, though you are such a dot:
You can love and think, and the Earth cannot!"

William Brighty Rands

I Saw A New World

I SAW a new world in my dream,
Where all the folks alike did seem:
There was no Child, there was no Mother,
There was no Change, there was no Other.

For everything was Same, the Same;
There was no praise, there was no blame;
There was neither Need nor Help for it;
There was nothing fitting or unfit.

Nobody laugh'd, nobody wept;
None grew weary, so none slept;
There was nobody born, and nobody wed;
This world was a world of the living-dead.

I long'd to hear the Time-Clock strike
In the world where people were all alike;
I hated Same, I hated Forever;
I long'd to say Neither, or even Never.

I long'd to mend, I long'd to make;
I long'd to give, I long'd to take;
I long'd for a change, whatever came after,
I long'd for crying, I long'd for laughter.

At last I heard the Time-Clock boom,
And woke from my dream in my little room;
With a smile on her lips my Mother was nigh,
And I heard the Baby crow and cry.

And I thought to myself, How nice it is
For me to live in a world like this,
Where things can happen, and clocks can strike,
And none of the people are made alike;

Where Love wants this, and Pain wants that,
Where all our hearts want Tit for Tat
In the jumbles we make with our heads and our hands,
In a world that nobody understands,
But with work, and hope, and the right to call
Upon Him who sees it and knows us all!

William Brighty Rands

Little Ditties I

Winifred Waters sat and sighed
Under a weeping willow;
When she went to bed she cried,
Wetting all the pillow;

Kept on crying night and day,
Till her friends lost patience;
"What shall we do to stop her, pray?"
So said her relations.

Send her to the sandy plains,
In the zone called torrid:
Send her where it never rains,
Where the heat is horrid.

Mind that she has only flour
For her daily feeding;
Let her have a page an hour
Of the driest reading,--

Navigation, logarithm,
All that kind of knowledge,--
Ancient pedigrees go with 'em,
From the Heralds' College.

When the poor girl has endured
Six months of this drying,
Winifred will come back cured,
Let us hope, of crying.

Then she will not day by day
Make those mournful faces,
And we shall not have to say,
"Wring her pillow-cases."

William Brighty Rands

Polly

Brown eyes,
Straight nose;
Dirt pies,
Rumpled clothes;

Torn books,
Spoilt toys;
Arch looks,
Unlike a boy's;

Little rages,
Obvious arts;
(Three her age is,)
Cakes, tarts;

Falling down
Off chairs;
Breaking crown
Down stairs;

Catching flies
On the pane;
Deep sighs,--
Cause not plain.

Bribing you
With kisses
For a few
Farthing blisses;

Wide awake,
As you hear,
"Mercy's sake,
Quiet, dear!"

New shoes,
New frock;
Vague views
Of what's o'clock

When it's time
To go to bed,
And scorn sublime
Of what is said;

Folded hands,
Saying prayers,
Understands
Not, nor cares;

Thinks it odd,
Smiles away;

Yet may God
Hear her pray!

Bedgown white,
Kiss Dolly;
Good-night!--
That's Polly,

Fast asleep,
As you see;
Heaven keep
My girl for me!

William Brighty Rands

The Cat of Cats

I am the cat of cats. I am
The everlasting cat!
Cunning, and old, and sleek as jam,
The everlasting cat!
I hunt vermin in the night-
The everlasting cat!
For I see best without the light-
The everlasting cat!

William Brighty Rands

The Dream of a Boy Who Lived at Nine-Elms

Nine grenadiers, with bayonets in their guns;
Nine bakers' baskets, with hot cross buns;
Nine brown elephants standing in a row;
Nine new velocipedes, good ones to go;
Nine knickerbocker suits, with buttons all complete;
Nine pairs of skates with straps for the feet;
Nine clever conjurors eating hot coals;
Nine sturdy mountaineers leaping on their poles;
Nine little drummer-boys beating on their drums;
Nine fat aldermen sitting on their thumbs;
Nine new knockers to our front door;
Nine new neighbours that I never saw before;
Nine times running I dreamt it all plain;
With bread and cheese for supper I could dream it all again!

William Brighty Rands

The Dream of a Girl Who Lived at Seven-Oaks

Seven sweet singing birds up in a tree;
Seven swift sailing ships white upon the sea;
Seven bright weather-cocks shining in the sun;
Seven slim race-horses ready for a run;
Seven gold butterflies, flitting overhead;
Seven red roses blowing in a garden bed;
Seven white lilies, with honey bees inside them;
Seven round rainbows with clouds to divide them;
Seven pretty little girls with sugar on their lips;
Seven witty little boys, whom everybody tips;
Seven nice fathers, to call little maids joys;
Seven nice mothers, to kiss the little boys;
Seven nights running I dreamt it all plain;
With bread and jam for supper I could dream it all again!

William Brighty Rands

The First Tooth

There once was a wood, and a very thick wood,
So thick that to walk was as much as you could;
But a sunbeam got in, and the trees understood.

I went to this wood, at the end of the snows,
And as I was walking I saw a primrose;
Only one! Shall I show you the place where it grows?

There once was a house, and a very dark house,
As dark, I believe, as the hole of a mouse,
Or a tree in my wood, at the thick of the boughs.

I went to this house, and I searched it aright,
I opened the chambers, and I found a light;
Only one! Shall I show you this little lamp bright?

There once was a cave, and this very dark cave
One day took a gift from an incoming wave;
And I made up my mind to know what the sea gave.

I took a lit torch, I walked round the ness
When the water was lowest; and in a recess
In my cave was a jewel. Will nobody guess?

O there was a baby, he sat on my knee,
With a pearl in his mouth that was precious to me,
His little dark mouth like my cave of the sea!

I said to my heart, "And my jewel is bright!
He blooms like a primrose! He shines like a light!"
Put your hand in his mouth! Do you feel? He can bite!

William Brighty Rands

The Flowers

When Love arose in heart and deed
To wake the world to greater joy,
'What can she give me now?' said Greed,
Who thought to win some costly toy.

He rose, he ran, he stoop'd, he clutch'd;
And soon the Flowers, that Love let fall,
In Greed's hot grasp were fray'd and smutch'd,
And Greed said, 'Flowers! Can this be all?'

He flung them down and went his way,
He cared no jot for thyme or rose;
But boys and girls came out to play,
And some took these and some took those—

Red, blue, and white, and green and gold;
And at their touch the dew return'd,
And all the bloom a thousandfold—
So red, so ripe, the roses burn'd!

William Brighty Rands

The Thought

Into the skies, one summer's day,
I sent a little Thought away;
Up to where, in the blue round,
The sun sat shining without sound.

Then my Thought came back to me.—
Little Thought, what did you see
In the regions whence you come?
And when I spoke, my Thought was dumb.

But she breathed of what was there,
In the pure bright upper air;
And, because my Thought so shone,
I knew she had been shone upon.

Next, by night a Thought I sent
Up into the firmament;
When the eager stars were out,
And the still moon shone about.

And my Thought went past the moon
In between the stars, but soon
Held her breath and durst not stir,
For the fear that covered her;
Then she thought, in this demur:

'Dare I look beneath the shade,
Into where the worlds are made;
Where the suns and stars are wrought?
Shall I meet another Thought?

'Will that other Thought have wings?
Shall I meet strange, heavenly things?
Thought of Thoughts, and Light of Lights,
Breath of Breaths, and Night of Nights?'

Then my Thought began to hark
In the illuminated dark,
Till the silence, over, under,
Made her heart beat more than thunder.

And my Thought, came trembling back,
But with something on her track,
And with something at her side;
Nor till she has lived and died,
Lived and died, and lived again,
Will that awful thing seem plain.

William Brighty Rands

Topsy-Turvy World

IF the butterfly courted the bee,
 And the owl the porcupine;
If churches were built in the sea,
 And three times one was nine;
If the pony rode his master,
 If the buttercups ate the cows,
If the cats had the dire disaster
 To be worried, sir, by the mouse;
If mamma, sir, sold the baby
 To a gypsy for half a crown;
If a gentleman, sir, was a lady,—
 The world would be Upside-down!
If any or all of these wonders
 Should ever come about,
I should not consider them blunders,
 For I should be Inside-out!

Chorus

Ba-ba, black wool,
 Have you any sheep?
Yes, sir, a packfull,
 Creep, mouse, creep!
Four-and-twenty little maids
 Hanging out the pie,
Out jump'd the honey-pot,
 Guy Fawkes, Guy!
Cross latch, cross latch,
 Sit and spin the fire;
When the pie was open'd,
 The bird was on the brier!

William Brighty Rands