

Classic Poetry Series

Arlo Bates
- poems -

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Arlo Bates()

A Lament

Let gleeful muses sing their roundelays!
So might my muse have sung;
But in the jocund days
When she was young,
She chanced upon a grave
New-made, and since, there strays
A mournful cadence through her lightest stave.

Her mask, however gay,
Still covers cheeks tear-wet;
She cannot, in her singing, smile
Until she can forget.

Arlo Bates

A Lover's Messengers

The earliest flowers of spring
To thee, beloved, I bring:
Anemone and graceful adder's-tongue,
With golden cowslips, yellow as the sun
And fresh as brooks by which they sprung;
Sweet violets that we love; and, one by one,
The blossoms that come after, -cherry blossom
And snow of shad-bush, willful columbine
In pale red raiment, and the milky stars
Of chickweed-wintergreen; slim walnut buds
In satin sheen, and furry curling ferns,
Like owlets half awake; with floods
Of alder tassels that dropp dust of gold
On the dark pools where, 'twixt the bars
Of piercing sunbeams, speckled troutlings dart.
And thus until the jocund year is old
And frosts spin cerements, white and chill,
O'er all the woodlands, fold on fold,
I tell the days with flowers, to mind thee still
Who, kind to blossoms, to me cruel art,
How swift is time, how constant is my heart.

Arlo Bates

A Night Ride

His swart cheek tingled with the rain,
So swift he rode that night;
But all his speed no boon might gain
Save to kiss, in a rapture of love and pain,
Dead lips at morning light.

Had he but known, what touched his cheek,
Riding that midnight wild,
Was her soul's kiss that might not speak,
And the wail in his ear, so woeful and weak,
The cry of his unborn child!

Arlo Bates

A Shadow Boat

Under my keel another boat
Sails as I sail, floats as I float;
Silent and dim and mystic still,
It steals through that weird nether-world,
Mocking my power, though at my will
The foam before its prow is curled,
Or calm it lies, with canvas furled.

Vainly I peer and fain would see
What phantom in that boat may be;
Yet half I dread, lest I with ruth
Some ghost of my dead, past divine,
Some gracious shape of my lost youth,
Whose deathless eyes once fixed on mine
Would draw me downward through the brine!

Arlo Bates

A Winter Twilight

Pale beryl sky, with clouds□
Hued like dove's wing,□
O'ershadowing□
The dying day,□
And whose edge half enshrouds□
The first fair evening star,□
Most crystalline by far□
Of all the stars that night enring,□
Half human in its ray□
What blessed, soothing sense of calm□
Comes with this twilight,—sovereign balm□
That takes at last the bitter sting□
Of day's keen pain away.□

Arlo Bates

America

For , O America, our country!—land□
Hid in the west through centuries, till men□
Through countless tyrannies could understand□
The priceless worth of freedom,—once again□
The world was new-created when thy shore□
First knew the Pilgrim keels, that one last test□
The race might make of manhood, nor give o'er□
The strife with evil till it proved its best.□
Thy true sons stand as torch-bearers, to hold□
A guiding light. Here the last stand is made.□
If we fail here, what new Columbus bold,□
Steering brave prow through black seas unafraid,□
Finds out a fresh land where man may abide□
And freedom yet be saved? The whole round earth□
Has seen the battle fought. Where shall men hide□
From tyranny and wrong, where life have worth,□
If here the cause succumb? If greed of gold□
Or lust of power or falsehood triumph here,□
The race is lost! A globe dispeopled, cold,□
Rolled down the void a voiceless, lifeless sphere,□
Were not so stamped by all which hope debars□
As were this earth, plunging along through space□
Conquered by evil, shamed among the stars,□
Bearing a base, enslaved, dishonored race!□
Here has the battle its last vantage ground;□
Here all is won, or here must all be lost,□
Here freedom's trumpets one last rally sound;□
Here to the breeze its blood-stained flag is tossed.□
America, last hope of man and truth,□
Thy name must through all coming ages be□
The badge unspeakable of shame and ruth,□
Or glorious pledge that man through truth is free.□
This is thy destiny; the choice is thine□
To lead all nations and outshine them all:□
But if thou failest, deeper shame is thine,□
And none shall spare to mock thee in thy fall.

Arlo Bates

Before The Dawn

In the hush of the morn before the sun
I waken to think of thee
And all the sweet day thus begun
As hallowed sees to be.

In the holly repose the morning star
With trembling awaits the sun,
And thus my heart if near or far
Awaits thee, sweetest one.

In a golden ecstasy of bliss
The fair morning star will die
But I immortal by thy kiss
Live but when thou art nigh.

Arlo Bates

Conceits

Thy laugh's a song an oriole trilled,□
Romping in glee the sky,□
Sunshine in lucent drops distilled,□
And showered from on high.□

So perfect in his song thou art,□
That when thy laughter rings□
I long to clasp thee to my heart,□
Lest, too, thou have his wings!□

Kit, the recording angel wrote□
That cruel "no" you said,□
And smiled to think how in your throat□
You choked a "yes" instead;□

Then sighed in envy of the look□
That promised me your grace;□
And on the margin of his book□
Limned in excuse your face.

Arlo Bates

In Paradise

"O Pitying angel, pause, and say
To me, new come to Paradise,
How I may drive one pain away
By penitence or sacrifice.
From deeps below of nether Hell
I hear a lost soul's bitter cry:
Alas! It was through me she fell,
What price forgetfulness may buy?"

The passing angel paused in flight,
Poised like fair stars which first arise,
And looked on that pale suppliant white,
With piercing pity in his eyes.
"Ah, woe!" he said. "Thy joy and peace
Cannot be bought with prayer or price.
For thee that wail will never cease,
Though thou hast won to Paradise!"

Arlo Bates

Like To A Coin

Like to a coin, passing from hand to hand,□
Are common memories, and day by day□
The sharpness of their impress wears away.□
But love's remembrances unspoiled with-stand□
The touch of time, as in an antique land□
Where some proud town old centuries did slay,□
Intaglios buried lie, still in decay□
Perfect and precious spite of grinding sand.□
What fame or joy or sorrow has been ours,□
What we have hoped or feared, we may forget.□
The clearness of all memory time deflours,□
Save that of love alone, persistent yet□
Though sure oblivion all things else devours,□
Its tracings firm as when they first were set.

Arlo Bates

Metempsychosis

'Mid the seal-silt and the sea-sand,
 Sinuous and sinister, fold on fold,
Sliding and winding tortuously,
 Slips the sea-snake, weird and old;
Longing, with gleams of slumberous fire
In her dull eyes, and fierce desire
In her slow brain, for that far time
When, rising lotus-like from ooze and slime,
 Her sinuate liveness changed to supple grace,
Her sibilance melted to witching speech,
She shall the heights of glorious being reach.
 And lure her prey with woman's form and face.

Arlo Bates

On The Road To Chorrera

Three horsemen galloped the dusty way□
While sun and moon were both in the sky;□
An old crone crouched in the cactus' shade,□
And craved an alms as they rode by.□
A friendless hag she seemed to be,□
But the queen of a bandit crew was she.□

One horseman tossed her a scanty dole,□
A scoffing couplet the second trolled;□
But the third, from his blue eyes frank and free,□
No glance vouchsafed the beldam old;□
As toward the sunset and the sea,□
No evil fearing, rode the three.□

A curse she gave for the pittance small,□
A gibe for the couplet 's ribald word;□
But that which once had been her heart□
At sight of the silent horseman stirred:□
And safe through the ambushed band they speed□
For the sake of the rider who would not heed!

Arlo Bates

The Cyclamen

Over the plains where Persian hosts□
Laid down their lives for glory□
Flutter the cyclamens, like ghosts□
That witness to their story.□
Oh, fair! Oh, white! Oh, pure as snow!□
On countless graves how sweet they grow!□

Or crimson, like the cruel wounds□
From which the life-blood, flowing,□
Poured out where now on grassy mounds□
The low, soft winds are blowing:□
Oh, fair! Oh, red! Like blood of slain;□
Not even time can cleanse that stain.□

But when my dear these blossoms holds,□
All loveliness her dower,□
All woe and joy the past enfolds□
In her find fullest flower.□
Oh, fair! Oh, pure! Oh, white and red!□
If she but live, what are the dead!

Arlo Bates

The Watchers

We must be nobler for our dead, be sure,□
Than for the quick. We might their living eyes□
Deceive with gloss of seeming; but all lies□
Were vain to cheat a prescience spirit-pure.□
Our soul's true worth and aim, however poor,□
They see who watch us from some deathless skies□
With glance death-quicken'd. That no sad surprise□
Sting them in seeing, be ours to secure.□
Living, our loved ones make us what they dream;□
Dead, if they see, they know us as we are.□
Henceforward we must be, not merely seem.□
Bitterer woe than death it were by far□
To fail their hopes who love us to redeem;□
Loss were thrice loss that thus their faith should mar.

Arlo Bates

When Allah Spoke

Was I not thine when Allah spoke the word
Which formed from smoke the sky?
Were not our two hearts one
When heaven heard the stars,
The first faint stars reply?
Were not our twin hearts one,
When heaven heard the stars,
The first faint stars reply?
Canst thou then doubt that while the ages roll
Our being one shall be?
As flame and light are one, so is my soul
One, o my love, with thee,
As flame and light are one, so is my soul with thee,
One with thee, One with thee.
The ebbing star floods of the Judgment day
Shall leave my heart still thine
And Paradise itself shall fade away
Ere I thy love resign.

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