

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Grace Fallow Norton**

## **- poems -**

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## Grace Fallow Norton(29 October 1876 - 1926)

# Little Gray Songs From St. Joseph's

# I

With cassock black, baret and book,  
                 Father Saran goes by;  
 I think he goes to say a prayer  
                 For one who has to die.

Even so, some day, Father Saran  
                   May say a prayer for me;  
 Myself meanwhile, the Sister tells,  
                   Should pray unceasingly.

They kneel who pray: how may I kneel  
                 Who face to ceiling lie,  
 Shut out by all that man has made  
                 From God who made the sky?

They lift who pray -- the low earth-born --  
                                   A humble heart to God:  
 But O, my heart of clay is proud --  
                                   True sister to the sod.

I look into the face of God,  
                                   They say bends over me;  
 I search the dark, dark face of God --  
                                   O what is it I see?

I see -- who lie fast bound, who may  
                                   Not kneel, who can but seek --  
 I see mine own face over me,  
                                   With tears upon its cheek.

## II

If my dark grandam had but known,  
                                   Or yet my wild grandsir,  
 Or the lord that lured the maid away  
                                   That was my sad mother,

O had they known, O had they dreamed  
         What gift it was they gave,  
 Would they have stayed their wild, wild love,  
         Nor made my years their slave?

Must they have stopped their hungry lips  
                 From love at thought of me?  
 O life, O life, how may we learn  
                 Thy strangest mystery?

Nay, they knew not, as we scarce know;  
               Their souls, O let them rest;  
 My life is pupil unto pain --  
               With him I make my quest.

### III

My little soul I never saw,  
                                   Nor can I count its days;  
 I do not know its wondrous law  
                                   And yet I know its ways.

O it is young as morning-hours,  
               And old as is the night;  
 O it has growth of budding flowers,  
               Yet tastes my body's blight.

And it is silent and apart,  
        And far and fair and still,  
Yet ever beats within my heart,  
        And cries within my will.

And it is light and bright and strange,  
                                   And sees life far away,  
 Yet far with near can interchange  
                                   And dwell within the day.

My soul has died a thousand deaths,  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&And yet it does not die;  
My soul has broke a thousand faiths,  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&And yet it cannot lie;

My soul -- not any dark can bind,  
                   Nor hinder any hand,  
 Yet here it weeps -- long blind, long blind --  
                   And cannot understand.

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# Love Is A Terrible Thing

I went out to the farthest meadow,  
I lay down in the deepest shadow;

And I said unto the earth, "Hold me,"  
And unto the night, "O enfold me,"

And unto the wind petulantly  
I cried, "You know not for you are free!"

And I begged the little leaves to lean  
Low and together for a safe screen;

Then to the stars I told my tale:  
"That is my home-light, there in the vale,

"And O, I know that I shall return,  
But let me lie first mid the unfeeling fern.

"For there is a flame that has blown too near,  
And there is a name that has grown too dear,  
And there is a fear . . ."

And to the still hills and cool earth and far sky I made moan,  
"The heart in my bosom is not my own!

"O would I were free as the wind on wing;  
Love is a terrible thing!"

Grace Fallow Norton

# My Little Soul I Never Saw

My little soul I never saw,  
Nor can I count its days;  
I do not know its wondrous law  
And yet I know its ways.

Oh, it is young as morning-hours,  
And old as is the night;  
Oh, it has growth of budding flowers,  
Yet tastes my body's blight.

And it is silent and apart,  
And far and fair and still,  
Yet ever beats within my heart,  
And cries within my will.

And it is light and bright and strange,  
And sees life far away,  
Yet far with near can interchange  
And dwell within the day.

My soul has died a thousand deaths,  
And yet it does not die;  
My soul has broke a thousand faiths,  
And yet it cannot lie;

My soul--there's naught can make it less;  
My soul--there's naught can mar;  
Yet here it weeps with loneliness  
Within its lonely star.

My soul--not any dark can bind,  
Nor hinder any hand,  
Yet here it weeps--long blind, long blind--  
And cannot understand.

Grace Fallow Norton

# The Journey

I went upon a journey  
To countries far away,  
From province unto province  
To pass my holiday.

And when I came to Serbia,  
In a quiet little town  
At an inn with a flower-filled garden  
With a soldier I sat down.

Now he lies dead at Belgrade.  
You heard the cannon roar!  
It boomed from Rome to Stockholm,  
It pealed to the far west shore.

And when I came to Russia,  
A man with flowing hair  
Called me his friend and showed me  
A flowing river there.

Now he lies dead at Lemberg,  
Beside another stream,  
In his dark eyes extinguished  
The friendship of his dream.

And then I crossed two countries  
Whose names on my lips are sealed....  
Not yet had they flung their challenge  
Nor led upon the field

Sons who lie dead at Liège,  
Dead by the Russian lance,  
Dead in southern mountains,  
Dead through the farms of France.

I stopped in the land of Louvain,  
So tranquil, happy, then.  
I lived with a good old woman,  
With her sons and her grandchildren.



Now they lie dead at Louvain,  
Those simple kindly folk.  
Some heard, some fled. It must be  
Some slept, for they never woke.

I came to France. I was thirsty.  
I sat me down to dine.  
The host and his young wife served me  
With bread and fruit and wine.

Now he lies dead at Cambrai-  
He was sent among the first.  
In dreams she sees him dying  
Of wounds, of heat, of thirst.

At last I passed to Dover  
And saw upon the shore  
A tall young English captain  
And soldiers, many more.

Now they lie dead at Dixmude,  
The brave, the strong, the young!  
I turn unto my homeland,  
All my journey sung!

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# The Mobilization In Brittany

It was silent in the street.  
I did not know until a woman told me,  
Sobbing over the muslin she sold me.  
Then I went out and walked to the square  
And saw a few dazed people standing there.

And then the drums beat, the drums beat!  
O then the drums beat!  
And hurrying, stumbling through the street  
Came the hurrying stumbling feet.  
O I have heard the drums beat  
For war!

I have heard the townsfolk come,  
I have heard the roll and thunder of the nearest drum  
As the drummer stopped and cried, 'Hear!  
Be strong! The summons comes! Prepare!'  
Closing he prayed us to be calm....

And there was calm in my heart of the desert, of the dead sea,  
Of vast plains of the West before the coming storm,  
And there was calm in their eyes like the last calm that shall be.

And then the drum beat,  
The fatal drum, beat,  
And the drummer marched through the street  
And down to another square,  
And the drummer above took up the beat  
And sent it onward where  
Huddled, we stood and heard the drums roll,  
And then a bell began to toll.

O I have heard the thunder of drums  
Crashing into simple poor homes.  
I have heard the drums roll 'Farewell!'  
I have heard the tolling cathedral bell.  
Will it ever peal again?  
Shall I ever smile or feel again?  
What was joy? What was pain?

For I have heard the drums beat,  
I have seen the drummer striding from street to street,  
Crying, 'Be strong! Hear what I must tell!'  
While the drums roared and rolled and beat  
For war!

## II

Last night the men of this region were leaving. Now they are far.  
Rough and strong they are, proud and gay they are.  
So this is the way of war....

The train was full and we all shouted as it pulled away.  
They sang an old war-song, they were true to themselves, they were gay!  
We might have thought they were going for a holiday-

Except for something in the air,  
Except for the weeping of the ruddy old women of Finistère.  
The younger women do not weep. They dream and stare.

They seem to be walking in dreams. They seem not to know  
It is their homes, their happiness, vanishing so.  
(Every strong man between twenty and forty must go.)

They sang an old war-song. I have heard it often in other days,  
But never before when War was walking the world's highways.  
They sang, they shouted, the  
Marseillaise!

The train went and another has gone, but none, coming, has brought word.  
Though you may know, you, out in the world, we have not heard,  
We are not sure that the great battalions have stirred-

Except for something, something in the air,  
Except for the weeping of the wild old women of Finistère.  
How long will the others dream and stare?

The train went. The strong men of this region are all away, afar.  
Rough and strong they are, proud and gay they are.

So this is the way of war....

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# This Is My Love For You

I have brought the wine  
And the folded raiment fine,  
Pilgrim staff and shoe -  
This is my love for you.

I will smooth your bed,  
Lay away your coverlid,  
Sing the whole day through.  
This is my love for you.

Mayhap in the night,  
When the dark beats back the light,  
I shall struggle too . . .  
This is my love for you.

In your dream, once more,  
Will a star lead to my door?  
To stars and dreams be true  
This is my love for you . . .

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# You Say There Is No Love

YOU say there is no love, my love,□  
Unless it lasts for aye!□  
Oh, folly, there are interludes□  
Better than the play.□

You say lest it endure, sweet love,□  
It is not love for aye?□  
Oh, blind! Eternity can be□  
All in one little day.□

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