

Classic Poetry Series

**Mabel Forrest**  
**- poems -**

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## Mabel Forrest(1872-1935)

Mabel Forrest (6 March 1872 – 18 March 1935) was an Australian writer and journalist.

Helena Mabel Forrest was born near Yandilla, Queensland, daughter of James Checkley Mills and his wife Margaret Nelson, née Haxell. Mabel began writing at an early age but did not publish her first book, *The Rose of Forgiveness and other Stories*, until 1904. She became well-known as a writer of verse following the publication of her first volume of poems, *Alpha Centauri*, which appeared in Melbourne in 1909. Her first novel *A Bachelor's Wife*, was included in the Bookstall series in 1914. *The Green Harper* (prose and verse) followed in 1915, and *Streets and Gardens*, a small collection of verse, in 1922. In 1924 *The Wild Moth*, a novel, was published in London, and was followed by four other novels, *Gaming Gods* (1926), *Hibiscus Heart* (1927), *Reaping Roses* (1928), and *White Witches* (1929). *Poems by M. Forrest*, a collection of her verse contributions to Australian English and American magazines, was published at Sydney in 1927.

Forrest died in Brisbane of pneumonia after a long illness on 18 March 1935. Mrs Forrest was twice married and was survived by a daughter. *Gaming Gods* was dedicated to the memory of her second husband, John Forrest. In addition to her work in book form, for the last 30 years of her life Mrs Forrest poured out a constant stream of verse and short stories for newspapers and magazines. Probably no other woman in Australia ever maintained herself so long by freelance journalism. Her verse is represented in several anthologies. Her novels were perhaps little more than stories written to fulfil the demands of the circulating libraries, but Mrs Forrest was an admirable journalist who lived a life that had many misfortunes with great industry, ability and courage.

# Boy-Dreams

I was a Pirate once,  
A blustering fellow with scarlet sash,  
A ready cutlass and language rash;  
From a ship with a rum-filled water-tank  
I made the enemy walk the plank;  
I marooned a man on an island bare,  
And seized his wife by her long, dark hair;  
Took treasure, such heaps of it!—wealth untold—  
Bright bars of silver and chunks of gold!  
Till my ship was choked to the decks with pelf,  
And no one dare touch it except myself  
And my black flag waved to the tearing breeze,  
And I was the terror of all the seas!

I was a Fairy once.

I swung in the bows of the silky oak,  
And the harebells rang to the words I spoke,  
And my wings were fashioned of silver gauze,  
And I knew no grief and no human laws.  
And I lived where the laces of green leaves sway.  
And my life was one long, long holiday.  
No tasks to learn, and no bothering rules,  
No hectoring grown-ups, and no—more—schools;  
But a dance each eve, 'neath the moon's cold light,  
To sit up as late as I liked at night. . . .  
For a lance I carried a grass-blade green,  
And my shield was cut from an olivine;  
I sipped cool dews from the cups of flowers,  
My days were threaded of happy hours!

I was a Merman once.

In the gloom of the amber-tinted seas,  
With the brown tang clinging about my knees,  
With a coral house, and a crab to ride,  
Who pranced, and who ambled from side to side;  
I wooed a Mermaid with emerald hair,  
Dragged the fierce sea-serpent from out his lair,  
With his flaming tongue and his awful might,  
And I slew him—easy—in open fight!  
I had strings of pearls, white as frozen milk,

That were strung for me on sea-spider's silk;  
And I never pined for the upper skies,  
Whose blue came down in the dead men's eyes,  
Drowned men with the salt on their blackened lips,  
Who slid, drifting in, from the wrecks of ships;  
But I took the gold from the belts of all,  
To pave the road to my coral hall.

I was a Hunter once,  
And I trapped and stalked in a pathless wood,  
And the talk of the wild things understood.  
With my leather leggings and hat of brown.  
I tracked the elk and the redskin down;  
Slew a grizzly bear in a mountain cave,  
And tweaked the nose of an Indian brave.  
Ere I shot the rapids in birch canoe—  
For there was nothing I could not do.  
There was naught I did not dare or enjoy,  
In the magic world of a dreaming boy!

Mabel Forrest

# The Lonely Woman

WHERE the ironbarks are hanging leaves disconsolate and pale,  
Where the wild vines o'er the ranges their spilt cream of blossom trail,  
By the door of the bark humpey, by the rotting blood-wood gates,  
On the river-bound selection, there a lonely woman waits,  
Waits and watches gilded sunrise glow behind the mountain peak,  
Hears the water hens' shrill piping, in the rushes by the creek,  
And by the sullen stormy sunsets, when the anxious cattle call,  
Sees the everlasting gum-trees closing round her like a wall.  
With the hunger of her bosom notes the wild birds seek their mates,  
All alone and heavy-hearted, there the lonely woman waits.

Where the tall brown city buildings loom against a cloud-flecked sky,  
Where along the curving tramlines brightly varnished cars rush by,  
Where the call of petty traders echoes down the dusty street,  
And forever comes the beating of the many passing feet,  
Where the bamboo reeds are whispering by the green park's iron gates,  
By the muslin-curtained window, there a lonely woman waits.

Where the white caps lash the sea-wall, and the great waves thunder by,  
Where the grey rains sweep the beaches underneath a sodden sky,  
Where the swift-winged gull flies landward, and the fisher bides at home,  
When the long Pacific reaches are a seething stretch of foam,  
Where the empty boat drifts seawards, by the ocean's sand-flanked gates,  
In the weather-boarded cottage, there a lonely woman waits.

Where the river boats are calling, where the railway engine shrieks,  
Or where only wild bird liltings echo from the reedy creeks,  
Where the grey waves grieve to landward, and a wet wind beats the seas,  
Or where pearl-white moths flit slowly through the dropping wattle-trees,  
By the high verandah pillars, by the rotting bloodwood gates,  
Crowded town or dreary seaboard, everywhere some woman waits!

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