

Selected Poetry

But Song Shall Rise

The city's hands are lean and grey,
The city's hands are strong;
They wind about your throat by day,
They strangle all night long;
With eager tort and twist they slay
Morning and evening song.

The city's hands are grey with dust
And strong with slaying men;
They fold before the gods of rust
Within their iron den,
But song shall rise above their lust
And men be free again.

The man-god with the man-made wings,
Denying space and time,
Unto the clutching city brings
The scent of rose and thyme;
Like freedom's self the motor sings
Above the city's grime.

—JOHN RUSSELL MCCARTHY, in *The Lyric*.

Spanish Johnny

The old West, the old time,
The old wind singing through
The red, red grass a thousand miles,
And, Spanish Johnny, you,
He'd sit beside the water-ditch
When all his herd was in,
And never mind a child, but sing
To his mandolin.

The big stars, the blue night,
The moon-enchanted plain;
The olive man who never spoke,
But sang the songs of Spain.
His speech with men was wicked talk—
To hear it was a sin;
But those were golden things he sang
To his mandolin.

The gold songs, the gold stars,
The world so golden then:
And the hand so tender to a child
Had killed so many men.
He died a hard death long ago
Before the Road came in;
The night before he swung, he sang
To his mandolin.

—WILLA CATHER, in *April Twilights and Other Poems*.

Grandser

My Grandser was a fearsome man!
He died before I came;
But I have watched my Granny's face
That withered at his name.

And I have spied the scared gaze
And lips as white as chalk
Of slender aunts whose dreams he haunts
With his terrible sailor-talk.

Only my Mother always said
With wistful looks at me—
"His eyes were blue like the eyes of you—
And he ran away to sea!"

Oh, the wild sea-thirst in the blood,
Her rhythm in the heart!
The mighty urge of the tide's surge,
The salty sting and smart!

Of course he fled the dull town
When the magic grew too strong.
A lad will go; (but a lassie, no!
She has to bide and long).

He sailed thrice over the round world,
To ports as strange as hell;
A thousand curious things he saw,
A thousand haps befell.

Till he docked at last in the home port,
And married a gentle maid
With a land grace and a flower face,
Whom the sea-wind blew afraid.

Oh, squalls are rough, the combers rough,
And sailors rough as the sea.
But Grandser was as soft as silk
To the daughter on his knee;

Growling her talks of serpents, whales,
And mermaids green as waves;
Of tropical girls festooned with pearls;
Of palms and coralline caves;

She did not fear the strange oaths,
Nor the blue fire of his glance,
Nor his callous hand. She could understand,
And so can I, by chance!

My Grandser was a fearsome man,
But a hero to her and me.
If I had a son I know he'd run
Like a brook away to sea!

—ABBIE FARWELL BROWN, in *Contemporary Verse*.

Our House

It should be yours, if I could build
The quaint old dwelling I desire,
With books and pictures bravely filled
And chairs beside an open fire,
White-panelled rooms with candles lit—
I lie awake to think of it!

A dial for the sunny hours,
A garden of old-fashioned flowers—
Say marigolds and lavender
And mignonette and fever-few,
And Judas-tree and maidenhair
And candytuft and thyme and rue—
All these for you to wander in.

A Chinese carp (called Mandarin)
Waving a sluggish silver fin
Deep in the moat; so tame he comes
To lip your fingers offering crumbs.
Tall chimneys, like long listening ears,
White shutters, ivy green and thick,
And walls of ruddy Tudor brick

And windows with small leaded panes,
Broad window-seats for when it rains;
A big blue bowl of pot pourri
And—yes, a Spanish chestnut tree
To coin the autumn's minted gold.
A summer-house for drinking tea—
All these (just think) for you and me.

A staircase of the old black wood
Cut in the days of Robin Hood,
And banisters worn smooth as glass
Down which your hand will lightly pass;
A piano with pale yellow keys
For wistful twilight melodies,
And dusty bottles in a bin—
All these for you to revel in!

But when? Ah well, until that time
We'll habit in this house of rhyme.

—CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, in the *American Poetry Magazine*.

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