

Classic Poetry Series

Alma Frances McCollum
- poems -

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Alma Frances McCollum(7 December 1879 - 21 March 1906)

Alma Frances McCollum was a Canadian poet.

Life

She was born in a village outside Chatham, Ontario, the youngest of six children of Irish immigrants. Her father, Edward Lee McCollum, died when she was a child, and the family moved to Peterborough, Ontario. Alma McCollum began to write poetry, like her father, early in life, and most of the poems collected in her one book, *Flower Legends and Other Poems*, were written when she was in her teens.

She was a frail child, and in 1900 spent time in a sanitarium (where she experienced the visitation written about in her sonnet, "The Angel of the Sombre Cowl").

In 1905 she moved, with her mother and two sisters, to Toronto, where she enrolled at University College, University of Toronto. However, she had to discontinue her studies due to ill health after a few weeks. In 1906 she was diagnosed with incipient appendicitis, and died during the operation.

Writing

Peterborough Examiner: "Her poetical compositions, conspicuous for their tender delicacy of sentiment and graceful literary form, constitute a permanent and valued addition to native Canadian literature."

William Henry Drummond: "On the whole my judgment tells me the volume is a valuable addition to our Canadian literature. The only faults are minor ones, and consistent with the writer's youth; and who would have it otherwise?"

A Song Of The Forest

When you wander alone through the forest
And list to the murmuring song,
If your heart be attuned to the music,
The words will come floating along.
I have listened so oft to the singing
That when it is plaintive and low
I can hear through the melody's sobbing
A love tale of long, long ago.
'Nenemoosha! Omemee! Omemee!'
The waterfalls purl as they flow;
And the echo sighs softly, 'Omemee!
The sweetheart, the maiden of woe.'
Like a willow wand supple and slender
Her movements were motions of grace,
And her eyes as the stars of the morning;
And dusky as twilight her face,
Overshadowed by long silken tresses,
Which shone with a luminous light,
Like darkness, when daylight appeareth
Dispersing the shadows of night.

Now the West Wind is dreamily humming
The love-lays the dusky Braves cooed,
And the brooklet is mocking the laughter
That silenced each lover who wooed;
But the melody varies and deepens,
A tenderer message is sighed,
And the brooklet grows fainter and fainter
To whisper the words which replied,
Oh! this lover was fair as the morning,
His eyes as the blue of the lake,
And the hair, like its brink sun-illumined,
And true was the promise he spake:

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'Nenemoosha! Omemee! Beloved!
The moon is a thin, silver thread;
After, strand over strand, winds it roundly,

Omeme her lover will wed.'
But the Waterfalls sullenly gurgle
How, speedily, far from her sight,
With no farewell, her lover was banished,
Ere moonbeams illumined the night;
How the Braves and the Squaws in derision
Then pointed the finger of scorn
Harshly laughing, 'Omeme, forsaken,
The loveless, the maiden forlorn!'

Now the waters roar loudly their anger,
Till echoing echoes reply;
And the wind wails its anguish of spirit,
Keyed high to a shrill minor cry;
Then it hushes and sobs how Omeme
Was dazed with their gibes and her grief,
And afar through the forest went roaming
To find for her sorrow relief;
How the trees drooped their boughs to caress her,
The brambles and thorns bent aside,
And the blossoms clung fast to her tresses
To garland her fair like a bride;
How the Moon rolled its last silver girdle
And over the maiden shone clear,
Till she startled and shivered enraptured
And knew that her lover was near.
From the lakelet she heard his voice calling,
And following as in a dream,
Where the margin hung high o'er the water,
She gazed on the moon's sparkling gleam.
For a moment she lingered and hovered,
Then gliding through quivering light,
Where the Wavelets called softly, 'Omeme,'
She floated and vanished from sight.

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Now the forest is throbbing with music,
A harmony wondrously blent,
An ecstatic and thrilling emotion,
Commingled with blissful content;
From the Brooklet a ripple of laughter,

The Waterfall's note like the dove,
And the Wind in a clear tone of triumph,
With echoes uniting, sing love.
And though years have rolled decade on decade
The Forest remembers the song,
And the wraith of Omemee appeareth,
And flits o'er the water along:
An elusive ethereal vision,
An eerie and mystical sprite:
Like the vaporous spray of a fountain
It glides through the silvery light.
And because of this visitant ghostly,
Which follows the moon's brilliant wake,
And the Waterfall's echoing sighing,
This region is called 'Love-sick Lake.'

When you wander alone through the forest
And list to the murmuring song,
If your heart be attuned to the music,
The words will come floating along.
I have listened so oft to the singing
That when it is plaintive and low
I can hear through the melodies sobbing
This love tale of long, long ago.

Alma Frances McCollum

Forest Sounds

Who, in the pines, may hear low voices raised
To chant in suppliant tone?
They who, in Sorrow's tranquil eyes, have gazed,
O'ercome, endured alone.

The joyous whispering of lesser trees,
Who can interpret this?
Awakened souls whose inmost sanctities
Know Love's revealing kiss.

And lowly vines, the tender clinging things
That dwell amid the sod?
For pillowed ear, a carillon ne'er rings,
Unless at peace with God.

Alma Frances McCollum

Little Nellie's Pa

Oh! me and Nellie Barker live way down on William Street,—
I'll bet you couldn't find another youngster half so sweet;
Why, when she wears that gown of hers, the colour of the skies,
You'd think 'twas made of bits of stuff, exactly like her eyes.
She's like a reg'lar picture girl, so pretty, I tell you,
She's like the cards they have for advertisin' washin' blue.
Her hair's just like a shinin' light, soft fluffy curls,—but pshaw!
Tweren't her that I'm to tell about,—it's little Nellie's Pa.

Oh! he's of no account,—'a ne'er do weel,' her grandma says;
It's this, he takes a glass too much and isn't right for days;
But me and Nell is awful thick; I live across the way,
And she sees me, I guess, 'bout forty 'leven times a day.
We always play at teachin' school, and Nell's the boss; you see,
She's in the part-a-second book and knows lots more than me;
She stays with us a lot, for if I'd make a noise, he'd jaw,
And I am kind of half afraid of little Nellie's Pa.

Once me and Nell was down the town, 'twas on a Saturday,
And there was such an awful crowd we thought we wouldn't stay;
We started off for home and hadn't gone so very far,
When right before us rushed a horse, skeered by a trolley car.
I thought that we was gonners sure, but someone grabbed it quick,
And held on tight; it dragged him down, but my! he was a brick;
He held on till he dropped, the awf'lest sight you ever saw,
As white as death—you'd never think, 'twas little Nellie's Pa.

I hustled off with Nell so fast she hadn't time to know,—
I wanted for to get home first and knowed that they'd come slow.
Well, he was awful sick, was hurt inside, his leg was broke,
And Nellie said 'twas days and days before he even spoke;
And by and by he comed around and walked out with a crutch,
And then I wasn't skeered of him, and didn't run,—not much!
He used to sit and sun hissself a talkin' to her Ma.
And, by and by, I got to likin' little Nellie's Pa.

One Sunday, Nell was teachin' us and we was singin' there, '
Bout 'Jesus loves me, this I know,'—I guess you've heard the air;
And Nell, she held her finger up and said that it was true,

He loved us all, the good or bad, no matter what we'd do;
Of course He's sorry if we're bad; and then poor little Ned
Looked up with his big eyes and—'Does he love your Pa?' he said.
Her Pa was sittin' near an' when he peeked around I saw,
And answered up,—'Of course He does love little Nellie's Pa.'

Well, I was sorry, don't you know, for lately he'd been kind,
And after that the doctor said he'd somethin' on his mind.
When he got worse again I knowed that he was goin' sure,
For after once a bird's flew in you know there ain't no cure;
And Nell, she heard a tick-a-tick just solemn like a clock,
And Butler's dog, it howled one night, you'd heard it for a block;
So just at noon, when someone came a runnin' in for Ma,
I knowed right off, at last there weren't no little Nellie's Pa.

But man! the funeral was fine; the Workmen all turned out;
The band was there and beat the drum so soft, and marched about;
They played that awful thing, it keeps a runnin' in my head, '
Tum, tum, tum, tum, tum, tum, tum;' I could hear it in my bed.
You'd think he'd been a minister, as good as good could be;
They took their shiny hats right off, and so I guess, you see,
The angels too will act the same, forget the sin they saw,
And be just awful glad to meet my little Nellie's Pa.

Alma Frances McCollum

Love

The atmosphere of Heaven is love, and when
The portal outward swings for souls redeemed,
The precious ether, so released, is streamed
Upon a weary world. God's gift to men
It is, for spirits turned to Him. Oh, then,
They, over whom this wondrous waft is beamed,
Inbreathing it, see visions brain ne'er dreamed,
Or through another source may dream again.

The world is glorified; they sing and sound
A quivering key-note of such ecstasy,
The keen vibrations throb till there is found
A soul companion of rare harmony.
If lightly breathed it ends in one brief round;
If deeply drawn it chords eternally.

Alma Frances McCollum

The Angel Of The Sombre Cowl

When sight and sound, by Pain's oppressive hand,
Were dimmed, and low the shaded night-light burned,
A Presence came beside my bed, and yearned
To clasp and bear me to another land.
But whispered gently, 'It is not so planned.'
In sweet compassion was the soft glance turned
On mine, till senses quickened and I learned
The tenderness within the eyes that scanned.

O Angel of the Sombre Cowl! close fold
My hand and lead me into peace,' I prayed;
But with a glowing glance of love untold,
Alone to the Unknown he passed. Now stayed
Is former dread; whatever life may hold,
I follow to the end, all unafraid.

Alma Frances McCollum

The Angel's Kiss

When darkness slowly fades from earth away,
And dawning shades are turning rosy gray,
An angel comes, and softly stooping low
Leaves on our lips a kiss, a blessed kiss,
Filled with protecting peace and heavenly bliss,
Which means, 'I guard you and I love you so.'

If we could drive away all woe and strife,
And thoughts of wicked things that crowd this life,
We should awake and that pure presence bless.
But, ah! our eyes are sealed in slumber deep;
The angel rouses not our soul from sleep,
And we dream on and lose that sweet caress.

I cannot feel the tender touch divine,—
Good wars with ill within this heart of mine—
But all through life my hope, my prayer, is this:
That when my night on earth has passed away,
I may behold soft lights of dawning day,
And wake at last to feel the angel's kiss.

Alma Frances McCollum

The Silent Singer

The lights are all low, for the sun's in the west,
But where is the singer that lulled us to rest?
The singer was tired—though day was not long—
And when he had finished his slumber-time song
An angel re-echoed the lullaby lay
And hushed him to sleep at the close of that day.
Oh, rest, silent singer, till morning breaks through,
And wake to be welcomed by 'Little Boy Blue'!

Alma Frances McCollum

Where Sings The Whippoorwill

Golden-Gray the twilight lingers
In the glory of the west,
Where the whippoorwill is singing
And the lake is lulled to rest.
Every leaf has stilled its motion,
Listening for silent Night,
And across the placid water
Floats a path of golden light.
Gliding o'er its glowing lustre
Gentle Night meets tired Day,
Veiling his resplendent glory
As he slowly steals away.
Now the gray has lost its golden,
Dusky shadows gather deep,
Where the whippoorwill is singing
And the lake is lulled to sleep.

Alma Frances McCollum

Why Blossoms Fall

Dear Mother Earth her children trees
Clad well in robes of white,
That they may rest in perfect peace
Through all the winter night.

When Spring, the morning, softly dawns,
She calls each sleeping one,
Who wakens, slowly sighs, and yawns,
Till day is well begun.

Soon April brings a shower bath,
And May fresh garments clean;
Bright trimmings gay each maiden hath,
The lads wear sober green.

The sister-winds their playmates are,
The gentle South and West,
And quickly come they from afar
To help them all get drest.

Each garment new is soon unrolled,
And smoothed well in its place,
Till not a crease or crumpled fold
Can anybody trace.

And then they hum a tuneful song
And play it in-and-out,
Until their brothers come along,
And join them with a shout.

The brothers North and East are rough,
And play with such wild glee,
They tear the pretty trimming stuff
Off every maiden tree.

So this is why the blossoms fall
And leaves oft times looked creased;
The boisterous brothers do it all,
The merry North and East.

Alma Frances McCollum