

Classic Poetry Series

Julia Caroline (Ripley) Dorr
- poems -

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Julia Caroline (Ripley) Dorr(1825-1913)

Julia Caroline (Ripley) Dorr (1825–1913) was an American author who published both prose and poetry. She was born at Charleston, South Carolina, but moved early in her life to New York City, then to Rutland, Vermont. There she married Hon. Seneca R. Dorr. Her earliest published writings appeared in 1848.

Hush!

Oh, hush thee, Earth! Fold thou thy weary palms!
The sunset glory fadeth in the west;
The purple splendor leaves the mountain's crest;
Gray twilight comes as one who beareth alms,
Darkness and silence and delicious calms.
Take thou the gift, O Earth! On Night's soft breast
Lay thy tired head and sink to dreamless rest,
Lulled by the music of her evening psalms.
Cool darkness, silence, and the holy stars,
Long shadows when the pale moon soars on high,
One far lone night-bird singing from the hill,
And utter rest from Day's discordant jars;
O soul of mine! when the long night draws nigh
Will such deep peace thine inmost being fill?

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Mercedes

O fair young queen, who liest dead to-day
In thy proud palace o'er the moaning sea,
With still, white hands that never more may be
Lifted to pluck life's roses bright with May
Little is it to you that, far away,
Where skies you knew not bend above the free,
Hearts touched with tender pity turn to thee,
And for thy sake a shadow dims the day!
But youth and love and womanhood are one,
Though across sundering seas their signals fly;
Young Love's pure kiss, the joy but just begun,
The hope of motherhood, thy people's cry
O thou fair child! was it not hard to die
And leave so much beneath the summer sun?

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Nocturne

Bird beneath the midnight sky
As on my lonely couch I lie,
I hear thee singing in the dark,
Why sing not I?

No star-gleams meet thy wakeful eye;
No fond mate answers to thy cry;
No other voice, through all the dark,
Makes sweet reply.

Yet never sky-lark soaring high
Where sun-lit clouds rejoicing lie,
Sang as thou singest in the dark,
Not mute as I!

O lone, sweet spirit! tell me why
So far thy ringing love-notes fly,
While other birds, hushed by the dark,
Are mute as I?

No prophecy of morn is nigh;
Yet as the somber hours glide by,
Bravely thou singest in the dark
Why sing not I?

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O Wind That Blows Out Of The West

O wind that blows out of the West,
Thou hast swept over mountain and sea,
Dost thou bear on thy swift, glad wings
The breath of my love to me?
Hast thou kissed her warm, sweet lips?
Or tangled her soft, brown hair?
Or fluttered the fragrant heart
Of the rose she loves to wear?

O sun that goes down in the West,
Hast thou seen my love to-day,
As she sits in her beautiful prime
Under skies so far away?
Hast thou gilded a path for her feet,
Or deepened the glow on her cheeks,
Or bent from the skies to hear
The low, sweet words she speaks?

O stars that are bright in the West
When the hush of the night is deep,
Do ye see my love as she lies
Like a chaste, white flower asleep?
Does she smile as she walks with me
In the light of a happy dream,
While the night winds rustle the leaves,
And the light waves ripple and gleam?

O birds that fly out of the West,
Do ye bring me a message from her,
As sweet as your love-notes are,
When the warm spring breezes stir?
Did she whisper a word of me
As your tremulous wings swept by,
Or utter my name, mayhap,
In a single passionate cry?

O voices out of the West,
Ye are silent every one,
And never an answer comes

From wind, or stars, or sun!
And the blithe birds come and go
Through the boundless fields of space,
As reckless of human prayers
As if earth were a desert place!

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Outgrown

Nay, you wrong her my friend, she's not fickle; her love she has simply outgrown:

One can read the whole matter, translating her heart by the light of one's own.

Can you bear me to talk with you frankly? There is much that my heart would say;

And you know we were children together, have quarrelled and 'made up' in play.

And so, for the sake of old friendship, I venture to tell you the truth,-
As plainly, perhaps, and as bluntly, as I might in our earlier youth.

Five summers ago, when you wooed her, you stood on the self-same plane,
Face to face, heart to heart, never dreaming your souls could be parted again.

She loved you at that time entirely, in the bloom of her life's early May;
And it is not her fault, I repeat it, that she does not love you to-day.

Nature never stands still, nor souls either; they ever go up or go down;
And hers has been steadily soaring - but how has it been with your own?

She has struggled and yearned and aspired, grown purer and wiser each year:
The stars are not farther above you in yon luminous atmosphere!

For she whom you crowned with fresh roses, down yonder, five summer ago,
Has learned that the first of our duties to God and ourselves is to grow.

Her eyes they are sweeter and calmer; but their vision is clearer as well:
Her voice has a tenderer cadence, but is pure as a silver bell.

Her face has the look worn by those who with God and his angels have talked:
The white robes she wears are less white than the spirits with whom she has walked.

And you? Have you aimed at the highest? Have you, too, aspired and prayed?
Have you looked upon evil unsullied? Have you conquered it undismayed?

Have you, too, grown purer and wiser, as the months and the years have rolled on?

Did you meet her this morning rejoicing in the triumph of victory won?

Nay, hear me! The truth cannot harm you. When to-day in her presence you
stood,
Was the hand that you gave her as white and clean as that of her womanhood?

Go measure yourself by her standard; look back on the years that have fled:
Then ask, if you need, why she tells you that the love of her girlhood is dead.

She cannot look down to her lover; her love like her soul, aspires;
He must stand by her side, or above her, who would kindle its holy fires.

Now farewell! For the sake of old friendship I have ventured to tell you the truth,
As plainly, perhaps, and as bluntly, as I might in our earlier youth.

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The Kiss

When you lay before me dead,
In such pallid rest,
On those passive lips of thine
Not one kiss I pressed!

Did you wonder-looking down
From some higher sphere-
Knowing how we two had loved
Many and many a year?

Did you think me strange and cold
When I did not touch,
Even with reverent finger-tips,
What I had loved so much?

Ah! when last you kissed me, dear,
Know you what you said?
'Take this last kiss, my beloved,
Soon shall I be dead!

'Keep it for a solemn sign
Through our love's long night,
Till you give it back again
On some morning bright.'

So I gave you no caress;
But, remembering this,
Warm upon my lips I keep
Your last living kiss!

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The Legend Of The Organ Builder

Day by day the Organ-BUILDER in his lonely chamber wrought;
Day by day the soft air trembled to the music of his thought,

Till at last the work was ended; and no organ-voice so grand
Ever yet had soared responsive to the master's magic hand.

Ay, so rarely was it builded that whenever groom and bride,
Who in God's sight were well pleasing, in the church stood side by side

Without touch or breath the organ of itself began to play,
And the very airs of heaven through the soft gloom seemed to stray.

He was young, the Organ-builder, and o'er all the land his fame
Ran with fleet and eager footsteps, like a swiftly rushing flame.

All the maidens heard the story; all the maidens blushed and smiled,
By his youth and wondrous beauty and his great renown beguiled.

So he sought and won the fairest, and the wedding day was set:
Happy day-the brightest jewel in the glad year's coronet!

But when they the portal entered he forgot his lovely bride-
Forgot his love, forgot his God, and his heart swelled high with pride.

'Ah!' thought he; 'how great a master am I! When the organ plays,
How the vast cathedral arches will re-echo with my praise!'

Up the aisle the gay procession moved. The altar shone afar,
With every candle gleaming through soft shadows like a star.

But he listened, listened, listened, with no thought of love or prayer,
For the swelling notes of triumph from his organ standing there.

All was silent. Nothing heard he save the priest's low monotone,
And the bride's robe trailing softly o'er the floor of fretted stone.

Then his lips grew white with anger. Surely God was pleased with him
Who built the wondrous organ for His temple vast and dim!

Whose the fault, then? Hers-the maiden standing meekly at his side!
Flamed his jealous rage, maintaining she was false to him-his bride.

Vain were all her protestations, vain her innocence and truth;
On that very night he left her to her anguish and her ruth.

Far he wandered to a country wherein no man knew his name;
For ten weary years he dwelt there, nursing still his wrath and shame.

Then his haughty heart grew softer, and he thought by night and day
Of the bride he had deserted, till he hardly dared to pray;

Thought of her, a spotless maiden, fair and beautiful and good;
Thought of his relentless anger, that had cursed her womanhood;

Till his yearning grief and penitence at last were all complete,
And he longed, with bitter longing, just to fall down at her feet.

Ah! how throbbed his heart when, after many a weary day and night,
Rose his native towers before him, with the sunset glow alight!

Through the gates into the city, on he pressed with eager tread;
There he met a long procession-mourners following the dead.

'Now, why weep ye so, good people? and whom bury ye today?
Why do yonder sorrowing maidens scatter flowers along the way?

'Has some saint gone up to heaven?' 'Yes,' they answered, weeping sore;
'For the Organ-Builder's saintly wife our eyes shall see no more;

'And because her days were given to the service of God's poor,
From his church we mean to bury her. See! yonder is the door.'

No one knew him; no one wondered when he cried out, white with pain;
No one questioned when, with pallid lips, he poured his tears like rain.

'Tis someone whom she has comforted, who mourns with us,' they said,
As he made his way unchallenged, and bore the coffin's head;

Bore it through the open portal, bore it up the echoing aisle,
Let it down before the altar, where the lights burned clear the while:

When, oh, hark! the wondrous organ of itself began to play
Strains of rare, unearthly sweetness never heard until that day!

All the vaulted arches rang with the music sweet and clear;
All the air was filled with glory, as of angels hovering near;

And ere yet the strain was ended, he who bore the coffin's head,
With the smile of one forgiven, gently sank beside it-dead.

They who raised the body knew him, and they laid him by his bride;
Down the aisle and o'er the threshold they were carried, side by side,

While the organ played a dirge that no man ever heard before,
And then softly sank to silence-silence kept for evermore.

Julia Caroline (Ripley) Dorr

To A Late Comer

Why didst thou come into my life so late?
If it were morning I could welcome thee
With glad all-hails, and bid each hour to be
The willing servitor of thine estate,
Lading thy brave ships with Time's richest freight;
If it were noonday I might hope to see
On some fair height thy banners floating free,
And hear the acclaiming voices call thee great!
But it is nightfall and the stars are out;
Far in the west the crescent moon hangs low,
And near at hand the lurking shadows wait;
Darkness and silence gather round about,
Lethe's black stream is near its overflow,-
Ah, friend, dear, friend, why didst thou come so late?

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To-Morrow

I

Mysterious One, inscrutable, unknown,
A silent Presence, with averted face,
Whose lineaments no mortal eye can trace,
And robes of trailing darkness round thee thrown,
Over the midnight hills thou comest alone!
What thou dost bring to me from farthest space,
What blessing or what ban, what dole, what grace,
I may not know. Thy secrets are thine own!
Yet, asking not for lightest word or sign
To tell me what the hidden fate may be,
Without a murmur, or a quickened breath,
Unshrinkingly I place my hand in thine,
And through the shadowy depths go forth with thee
To meet, as thou shalt lead, or life, or death!

II

Then, if I fear not thee, thou veiled One,
Whose face I know not, why fear I to meet
Beyond the everlasting hills her feet
Who cometh when all Yesterdays are done?
Shall I, who have proved thee good, thy sister shun?
O thou To-morrow, who dost feel the beat
Of life's long, rhythmic pulses, strong and sweet,
In the far realm that hath no need of sun-
Thou who art fairer than the fair To-day
That I have held so dear, and loved so much-
When, slow descending from the hills divine,
Thou summonest me to join thee on thy way,
Let me not shrink nor tremble at thy touch,
Nor fear to break thy bread and drink thy wine!

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Two Paths

A path across a meadow fair and sweet,
Where clover-blooms the lithesome grasses greet,
A path worn wsmooth by his impetuous feet.
A straight, swift path-and at its end, a star
Gleaming behind the lilac's fragrant bar,
And her soft eyes, more luminous by far!

A path across the meadow fair and sweet,
Still sweet and fair where blooms and grasses meet-
A path worn smooth by his reluctant feet.
A long, straight path-and, at its end, a gate
Behind whose bars she doth in silence wait
To keep the tryst, if he come soon or late!

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With A Rose From Conway Castle

On hoary Conway's battlemented height,
O poet-heart, I pluck for thee a rose!
Through arch and court the sweet wind wandering goes;
Round each high tower the rooks in airy flight
Circle and wheel, all bathed in amber light;
Low at my feet the winding river flows;
Valley and town, entranced in deep repose,
War doth no more appall, nor foes affright.
Thou knowest how softly on the castle walls,
Where mosses creep, and ivies far and free
Fling forth their pennants to the freshening breeze,
Like God's own benison this sunshine falls.
Therefore, O friend, across the sundering seas,
Fair Conway sends this sweet wild rose to thee!

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