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# FOREST POOL



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△ POEMS BY △  
ESTHER POPEL

# A Forest Pool

By

ESTHER POPEL <sup>Shaw</sup>



Privately Printed—Gift Edition

Washington, D. C.

MCMXXXIV

To the Memory of

My Mother

14 January 35 Dear Meredith gift

P0398

“Grown still, and calm, and cool,  
A forest pool is but a woman’s heart.”

—*A Forest Pool.*

*With you,  
My friends,  
This little book I share  
Because  
(My ego whispers soft' to me)  
You care!*

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*A FOREST POOL*



## TO A CERTAIN BIDDER

You offer a penny for *my* thoughts—  
What would you give if you knew  
How utterly foolish they are? Thoughts  
That *never* could mean much to you!

But maybe I'd sell, for a nickle or dime,  
Or even a centime or sou,  
The thoughts that I'm thinking (three-fourths of the  
time)  
When I *ought* to be thinking of you!

## SINNER

They taught  
My baby lips  
To pray neat prayers; correct  
And pious prayers for righteous things,  
And promised that I'd find  
Reward, some day,  
In Heaven!

But oh,  
The pious ways  
Of over-pious folk,  
All heaven bound, are stifling ways!  
And so I'll pray no more  
Just now, for heaven,  
Until

I've seen  
And tasted—Hell!

## A FOREST POOL

A woman's heart,  
A forest pool  
Are one!

A forest pool  
Unruffled by the winds,  
A silent, still, cool mirror  
Gray as steel  
In dawn's first mystic light;  
Or flecked with gold  
Of peeping sun  
Restrained by guardian trees;  
Deep crimson-dyed with blood  
Of slaughtered Day;  
Or jewel-decked by Night's profligate hand;  
Unmoved by needle pricks  
Of summer rain  
Or by the drowning flakes  
Of silent snow;  
Through all the seasons calm and undismayed—  
Reveals no trace  
Of all the hidden things  
Imprisoned in its dark and secret depths,  
Save when a careless hand  
Lets fall a stone  
That cleaves its way unto the unplumbed deep  
And stirs a thousand ripples  
For the space  
Of one long sigh,  
A single cry of pain,  
And then grows still  
And cool  
And calm  
Again!  
Grown still  
And calm  
And cool  
A forest pool  
Is but a woman's heart!

## SYMPHONIES

The red-gold sun  
Sinking to rest  
At day's end,  
Tucking under its chin  
The fleecy, down comforter  
That men call clouds;

The glimmer of moonlight  
Rippling over the ocean of heaven,  
Or starshine  
That sparkles  
And makes of the lonely dark  
A magic thing;

The first green of Springtime  
Draping the shoulders  
Of shivering trees  
That whisper their words  
Of gratitude to Him  
Who covers their nudeness;

The carol of robins  
Bursting their throats  
With riotous welcome  
To a world reborn,  
Risen from the tomb  
Of dead, forgotten things;

And Love . . .  
Filling young hearts  
With strange yearnings,  
Linking two souls with the glories  
Of sunsets and starshine and bird songs  
And whispering trees in the Springtime!

## APRIL

April is a wanton  
With her cool, slim, searching fingers—  
And Day, a giddy gossip,  
Sitting, waiting on the stair,  
Listens to the murmurings—  
While wayward Romance lingers  
To revel in the fragrance  
Of her hair!

## BAGATELLE

A cloud, to God, is such a little thing:  
A puff of dust by careless angels stirred  
And left curled up beneath the celestial chair  
On which He sits to watch this puppet show,  
This toy of His creation—call it World  
Or what you will—go on 'till He is tired  
Of all its futile dawdlings, then beneath  
His chair where dust enshrouds it, lets it lie  
Forgotten, while the greater pageantry  
Of Sky and Time and Space delights His eye!

To God, a cloud is such a little thing!

## SUPPLICATION

Give me the strength  
Of verdant hills  
Washed clean by summer rain;  
Of purple hills  
At peace when weary Day  
Sinks quietly to rest  
In Night's cool arms;  
Of rugged, wind-whipped hills  
That lift their heads  
Above the petty, lowland, valley things,  
And shake their shoulders free  
Of bonds that hold  
Them close to earth;  
Of snow-capped hills  
Sun-kissed by day, by night  
Companioned by the stars;  
Of grim volcanoes  
Pregnant with the fires  
Of molten fury!

Grant me strength,  
Great God,  
Like that of hills!

## APRIL PASSED MY WAY

April passed my way, and Romance  
Followed after to my door;  
Lingered shyly, gently watchful  
For my welcome; more and more  
In her manner fascinating  
As she held my eye—  
Standing at my doorway, waiting,  
Anxious not to pass me by!

Romance came, along with April,  
And I let her in;  
Shared with her my heart's deep secrets  
And, to my chagrin,  
Off she slipped and, when she left me,  
Stole my treasures all away!  
Romance came—and went—with April!  
There is nothing more to say.



## CONFESSION

I am so tired,  
So restless,  
So in need  
Of Peace—  
And therefore not immune  
To wayward thoughts  
That tempt me, by their very waywardness,  
To find release!

## AWAKENING

We've mixed our Love with cabbages  
And other humble things,  
And so he mopes behind the door  
And seldom ever sings.

Of rain and drought and ugly worms  
We talk the whole day through,  
While Love is crowded off the place!  
Is this how dreams come true?

## STORAGE

We've linens stored away in chests,  
Our shell-like china stays  
Correctly placed on closet shelves  
Awaiting gala days!

And tightly locked away from sight  
Our choicest silver hides!  
("We're saving it for company—  
It's much too good, besides!")

And so the linens rot with age,  
And china coldly stares  
At pewter knives and forks and spoons  
And ten-cent earthenwares

That serve the less important folk—  
Ourselves—who toil all day  
To build a home (for company)  
While Beauty slips away

And all our little dreams are spent!  
(And lovely china *stays*  
Correctly placed on closet shelves,  
—Awaiting gala days!)

“LA JOCONDE”

I live a sham . . .  
And they who dwell with me  
Think I am cold, complacent,  
All the while  
A seething furnace burns within my heart  
And turns to ashes all Life's little dreams!  
They think me quiet, serene,  
While canker worms  
Gnaw at the roots of my soul's stalwart tree  
And drain it of its strength!  
They think me calm—  
Could they but *see*  
Beneath this shell!

I live a sham!

## THE PILFERER

Love had his strong box  
Hidden in my heart.  
Foolish little treasures,  
Relics of his art,

Rested in the strong box  
Wrapped away in dreams . . .  
Queer but *lovely* treasures,  
(Passing strange it seems.)

Love had them locked there,  
(They were mine to hold.)  
But Time had a pass-key  
And a manner bold.

He opened wide the strong box  
Hidden in my heart.  
Gone now are my treasures,  
Relics of Love's art!

## OCTOBER PRAYER

Change me, oh God,  
Into a tree in autumn,  
And let my dying  
Be a blaze of glory!

Drape me in a  
Crimson, leafy gown,  
And deck my soul  
In dancing flakes of gold!

And then when Death  
Comes by, and with his hands  
Strips off my rustling garment  
Let me stand

Before him, proud and naked,  
Unashamed, uncaring,  
All the strength in me revealed  
Against the sky!

Oh God,  
Make me an autumn tree  
If I must die!

## LITTLE GRAY LEAVES

Little gray leaves  
Hanging so listlessly,  
Wrinkled,  
Like chattering old women  
Huddling together, a-tremble,  
In the chill loneness of the Night—  
Tell me—  
Are *you* afraid  
To let go of Life?

## NOVEMBER HAZE

(For B. C. McN.)

Earth, growing old,  
Slips on her orchid gown  
And draws her footstool close  
Beside the fire.  
Her thin brown fingers,  
Listless on her knees  
Lie cold and still.  
At peace, in twilight ease  
She sits, alone—  
Around her stooping shoulders  
Soft and grey  
Her shawl  
Drawn close  
To keep the chill, sharp blasts  
Of Death  
Away!



“I LOVE A SNOWY WORLD!”

(For A. H. W.)

I love a snowy world—  
A world made clean  
And pure and white  
By mighty hands  
Unseen,  
Majestic, in their careless scattering  
Of Beauty  
Over every earthly thing!

I love a world of snow  
Where all is hid'  
Save loveliness;  
Where ugly, sordid things  
Lie buried deep  
Beneath the argent pall  
By dancing snowflakes laid!  
I love  
The aching, silent stillness  
Of it all!

I love the haughty trees—  
Their wet, black arms  
Piled high with fluffiness;  
The rugged hills  
Made smoothe and soft and gentle  
By the hand  
Of Winter—  
And the tangled wilderness  
Turned fairyland  
By swirling puffs of down  
Dropped from a heedless sky!

I love a world  
With snow  
Piled high!

## TRAGEDY

*Love* died last night  
And none was there to see  
Or hear him in his final agony  
Save me alone!  
The horror of it crowds my memory yet!  
I shall not soon forget  
The sight  
Of Love in Death.  
Ah me . . . !  
Love *died* last night!

## SOLACE

What matters the forgetting if the dreams  
That made the Dream House where the treasure lay  
Were only vain imaginings; the gold  
Called Love, not gold at all, but gilded clay  
Now crumbled into dust? What need for tears  
Or sighings for the things that never were?  
We cannot lose a phantom. Dust is dust  
And dreams are but the creatures of illusion!

## FUTILITY

Knock, if you will,  
On the sealéd door  
Of the tomb where our Love lies buried,  
The knocking is vain,  
There is nothing more,  
Not even a ghost has tarried.

And we who were careless  
And let it go,  
What need have we now for sighing?  
Blind fools! Oh how *blind*  
Not to see, not to know,  
All the while that our Love was dying!

## SUICIDE

Life held me close to her,  
Too close, and I  
Must die to find release  
From her cruel arms!  
My soul, made weary by her loathsome charms,  
Must seek escape;  
And so to Death I fly  
For peace!

## ALL LOVELY THINGS

All things,  
All lovely things  
Can last, they say,  
But just a little while;  
And so, today,  
This day that filled our hearts  
With bitterness,  
When fickle Love  
Slipped from our careless hands  
And went his way,  
Remember only this—  
Our Love was rare,  
A tender, lovely thing  
That could not stay!

FOR ONE WHO DIED—OLD

It is not Death to die  
When Age has come  
And from the shriveled cup  
Drained all the wine,  
The bright red wine  
That gave its quickening glow  
To Life when years were few  
And hopes were high!  
When Age has come  
It is not Death to die!

It is but rest,  
And peace,  
And calm repose  
Hard won and welcomed  
At the long day's end;  
A meeting  
With a gentle, trusted friend  
Who understands.

When Age has come  
It is not Death to die!

## BIRTH NIGHT

(For E. R. W.)

There isn't much that we can do  
Save sit—and pray our foolish prayers—  
The long night through—

While Death stands by  
Alert and watchful, eagerly alert,  
And all we do

Is sit—and watch—and wait—  
And pray for you,  
The long night through!



## REACH DOWN, SWEET GRASS

(For H. K. P.)

Reach down,  
Oh long grass fingers,  
Touch her hair  
And stroke—but softly—her tired eyes!  
Make soft  
The pillow there  
Beneath her weary head,  
And maybe, then,  
She will not care  
That she is dead!

And when  
The wild things cry  
Their mating songs,  
And pregnant Time makes ready to bring forth  
Her issue,  
Gentle grass  
Caress her still,  
And loose the earth a bit  
So she may hear  
The birthing sounds  
Of lovely Spring  
This year.

Then Beauty  
Such as you have never known  
Before, dear grass,  
Will come to you, I swear,  
For being kind to her  
Where, quietly,  
Alone, yet not alone,  
She rests—  
In silence—there!

Sweet grass  
Reach down  
And let her know—  
When it is time, this year—  
That Spring  
Is here—  
Because  
She loved it so!

## TO A FRIEND ESTRANGED

And if I choose  
To think of you as dead,  
Whose love for me  
Has vanished like a star  
That, plunging through the emptiness of Space,  
Leaves naught behind it  
But a puny trail  
Of flame that glows a little while  
Then fades and dies  
Beneath the never ending tides  
Of blackness, surging  
From the midnight deeps  
Of sky, impenetrable,  
Strange  
As all Eternity—  
Is it not better so?  
For then I'd know  
That, being dead,  
You would not come again,  
And only could your hand  
In Memory, touch mine,  
Your voice fall kindly on my ear—  
And I should find, at last,  
The blessed peace  
That follows pain!

## DUSK

A hush  
Floods all the world,  
And lovely Day has gone  
To keep her tryst  
With eager Night,  
While all Life's little cares  
Bend low their heads  
In sleep!