

APRIL THOUGHTS IN WAR TIME

HELEN HUGHES

Winner of 1942 League of American Pen Women Prize

Sonnet

Blue skies are cruelest now; immense, they bend
Over the lonely land, uncompromising,
Unconcerned, aloof. Unnatural friend!
Whose time is April when the sweet surprising
Daffodils spring up to rival such
A brave and tender blue! We who are used
To turning calm eyes skyward now see much
Of heaven that is alien and confused.
Where once we laughed into the sun's embrace,
Once welcomed friendly rain, once searched the broad
And democratic sky for Saturn's face,
And, searching, strained to touch the hand of God;
We now stand under skies that vomit fire.
Be angry at the blue sky for a liar!

Ballad

My soldier is saying goodbye to me,
With his lips pressed to my hand;
And a whispered word and a kiss to be
Strength in the foreign land.
("Who are you loving, my dear, so dear?"
Lovers in War-time understand.)

My soldier is fighting across the sea,
With a steady heart and a hand;
But my days are full of a fear that he
May die in that bloody land.
("What are you thinking, my dear, so dear?"
Lovers in War-time understand.)

My soldier has written a page to me
With a broad and manly hand;
His ship is coming across the sea,
Homing back to the land.
("Will you be waiting, my dear, so dear?"
Lovers in War-time understand.)

My soldier's ship has come over the sea.
My love doesn't hear the band;
Low in a shallow grave lies he
In a cold and barren land.
("Why have you left me, my dear, so dear?"
Lovers in War-time understand.)

The Search

Now once again in beauty the strange and fragile season walks the land.
And once again we search for the tremendous, the uncommon.
Where shall we find, among these petty days, the secret heart turned toward us in
the dusk?
Whose face has looked at me from dusty pages of a book among my father's shelves?
Whose voice has called to me from the syringa trees when April finds them quivering
with bloom?
Did we meet on a stormy night in angry wind and mounting fear,
Or on a morning, sunny and common with dandelions and fresh clothes hung on a
line to dry?
Oh, ghostly voice, and dim-remembered smile,
Are you shadow or substance, kindled memory or marrow of my bones?
Look here, where I, standing at the window, am waiting, waiting

Songs of Somewhere Else

(A Collection for Children

"The Legend of How Come Islands."

In Maine I heard a farmer say,
(I'm sure he meant it seriously)
That odd things happen every day
In a country that has both the mountains and the sea.

Now men have always loved the hills,
But they have loved the sea no less;
So, clasping hands, the pine-green hills
Walked right down into the ocean just from loneliness.

And that's the reason (as he told me),
That islands flower down the stern Maine coast,
Sprinkled and clustered on the breast of the sea;
And why all the sun-brown fishermen love the islands most.

Plans for Independence

Someday
When I'm a man
I'm going to sail a ship
To Cyprus and Afganistan.
Perhaps I'll stop in Timbuctoo to play.
Don't try to stop me, 'cause you'll fail —
I'll only laugh and dip
One oar, and sail
Away.

Our Gardener

Our gardener tells me when it's going to rain.
He finds out from the violets,
The pansies and the jonquills,
And then he lets
It rain!
And when the sun
Plays with the daffodils
The gardener and I have fun
By splashing through the puddles in the lane.

Our gardener is much wiser than most men.
He understands what flowers think.
He gives the hollyhocks
Water to drink.
And when
He starts to sing
To all the four-o-clocks,
I dance about and make a ring
That none may cross 'till we come back again.

Triolet

A child is nothing much to see,
Except for immortality.
She wakes and kicks and blinks at me.
A child is nothing much to see.
I wonder how a thing can be
Alive and human—and so wee!
A child is nothing much to see,
Except for Immortality.