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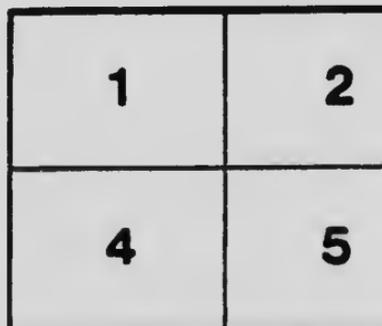
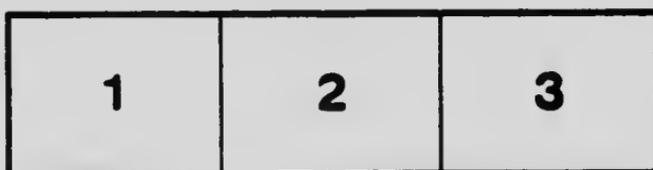
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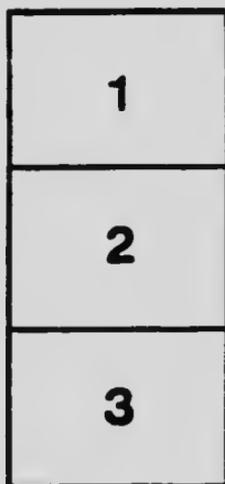
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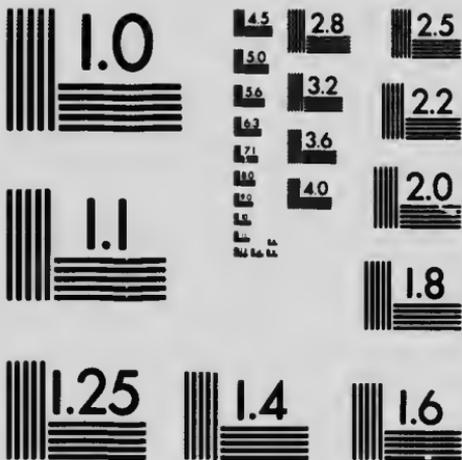
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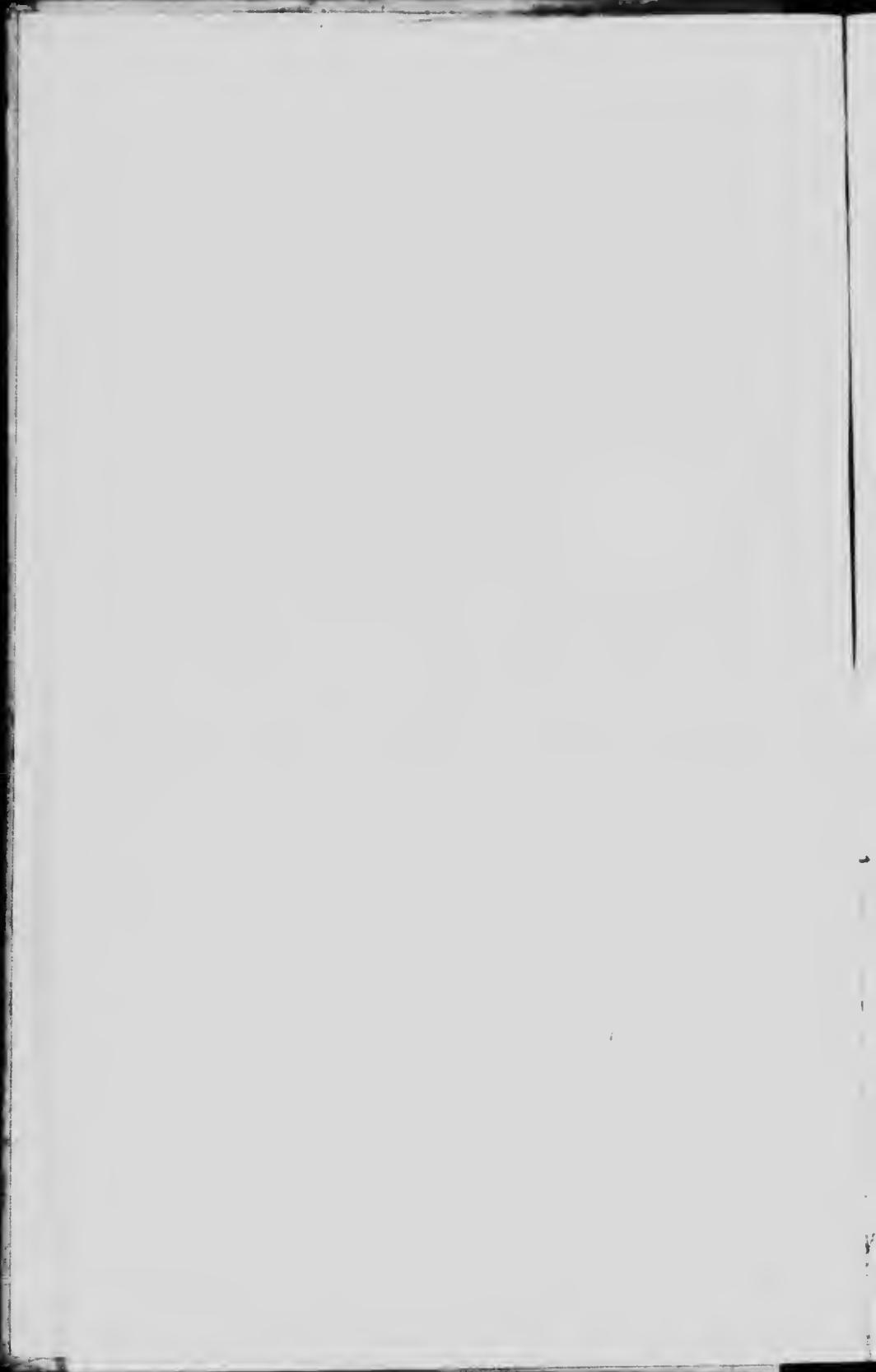




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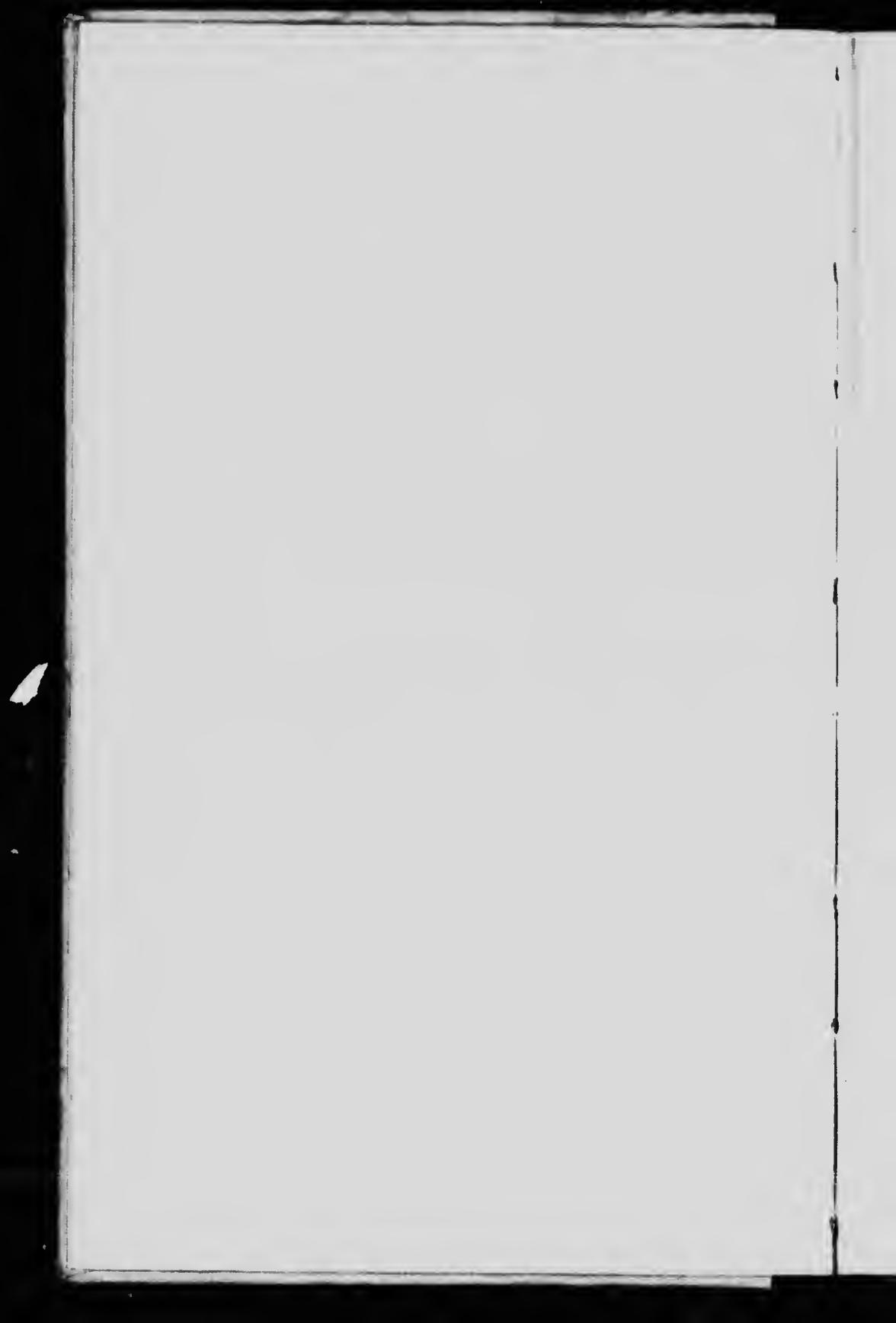
Romance and the West
and
Falling Petals

By JOHN PRESTON



Romance *and the* West

Falling Petals



Romance *and the West*

Falling Petals

By

JOHN PRESTON



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FALLING PETALS
(A MEMOIR OF ACADIA)

FALLING PETALS

(A MEMOIR OF ACADIA)

Let scent of lilac bushes
 Surcharge the air around,
While morn, like maiden, blushes
 That in her face is found
Such glory; and my dreaming
 Persuade me that I lie
Where sun of June is beaming
 From an Acadian sky.
Let morning mists arise,
 As if from Fundy driven,
Then fail before my eyes,
 Like dreams at dawning riven;
The odors of the sea,
 Commingling with the pine,
Come heavily to me,
 O'er flower, grass and vine:
Perfumes of the breath
 Of Nature where she's fairest —

And where long wandereth
Dreams of mine the rarest.

From unrestrained bosoms
Of robins o'er my head,
Half hidden in the blossoms
Which, fall'n, have carpeted
The grass, comes blithest singing,
A gladness round me flinging,
And yet a sadness bringing,
Which will not be gainsaid.

My hammock slowly swaying
Two apple-trees between,
My vision now is playing
Upon a patch of green
This side the wooded valley,
And now upon the scene
Immediately around me:
A spot the Fairies found me,
A weary mood to rally.

Yet, what a Fairy bringeth
He hath the power to take ;
The sweetest fancy wingeth,
And wishes will forsake :
The robin in his bower
Sends down a wilted shower
Of petals, while he singeth
And striveth joy to make.

But not alone for pleasure
Of this enchantment here
Have I attained such leisure ;
But that when she appear,
Whom I have been expecting,
She find me thus neglecting
Whatever task may be,
Since she is honoring me.

I wait in mood uncertain,
For well I know her pride ;
But presently the curtain
Of foliage beside

The gate is gently parted,
And none too steady-hearted
I rise and call her name,
And then regret the same.

She halts not at the gateway,
But coldly smiles, and straightway
Goes round the kitchen walk;
And then I hear the talk
And laughter of the hostess,
Until the side-door closes.

The thought that I am slighted
Has put me on my mettle;
I watch a falling petal
Until the same has lighted;
I say: " 'Tis sweeter duty
To study here the beauty
Of Nature, in reflection,
Than watch a maiden's action."
But still, at every sound
I turn and look around.

Thus, trying to forget her,
Because she passed me by,
I think of when I met her,
And how she was so shy;
I think of what she told me,
Bashfully yet boldly,
And not that she might mold
me —

And how I wished to die!
For it was she who cured me
Of an illusion deep,
The first that ever lured me,
Or caused me, shamed, to weep;
A blind and youthful passion,
Of which I would not tell;
One not of love's persuasion,
As I should learn from Belle.

I watch the petals falling
In merry circles round,
The while I am recalling
The meaning and the sound

Of " Belle" — it stands for beauty,
And I surmise, as well,
Implies a love of duty,
In love with which is Belle.

At last has she been driven
Beneath the apple-trees,
And, blushing, is forgiven.
My melancholy flees.
Her eyes, a trifle slanting,
As though of some lost race,
With naught of brilliance want-
ing,
Illumine all her face;
Yet with a subtle glory,
Not often sung in story,
A warm though timid grace.
I cannot scan each feature
Of this uncommon creature,
Describe its separate art,
As though it stood apart;

I only see the sweetness
Of all, and the completeness
Of harmony achieved —
For so was Belle received.

We speak about the weather,
And view the scene together,
Until she finds me smiling
At pastime so beguiling.

She deigns to lay aside
Her pretty sailor hat,
And I would pleasure hide,
Because so pleased, at that.

I take it as a sign
That none of affectation —
So little, Belle, was thine! —
Shall mar the day's relation.

And then in graceful stride,
For none was half so graceful
As she, do we divide
The world, at arms or peaceful;

We march upon it bravely —
Myself, perhaps, o'ergravely —
Denouncing all its ill,
 Prescribing for its woes;
 And far young vision goes,
And deep young spirits thrill.
O Life, give back those hours!
Belle, bring me back those
 powers!

I follow her, delighted,
My faculties excited:
But Twenty never knows
How far such pleasure goes
Beyond the limitation,
 The sobering years will set,
Of more mature elation
 Of spirit. . . . Oh, but let
My vision keep forgetting
 The petals in the air,
So softly, gently settling
 Upon her golden hair!

I think, as Twenty thinketh,
That my companion now,
To whom my being drinketh
The draught the gods allow,
This girl of wond'ring eyes,
With whom I sail the skies,
Will be with me forever,
That Time will steal her never.
Or, if our ways shall part,
(I treat the matter lightly)
Some other kindred heart,
Some other form as sightly—
Nay, many such, mayhap,
Will come to fill the gap!
Not that I fail to see
Unusual things aplenty
In her, but vanity
Pertains to foolish Twenty.
The world, the world is wide,
And life is at the tide!

In looking back to thee,
At thought of womankind,

Instruction, a degree
Of mystery, I find
In this: That we enjoyed
Friendship so unalloyed;
That I so solemn born
Should have escaped thy scorn —
Thou who so loved a measure
Of gay and careless pleasure!
But stranger still, perhaps,
That I should have been given
So much, scarce having striven
For aught. Only the lapse
Of time, and intermingling
With others of thy sex,
Has set my thoughts to singling
That young adventure out:
I see its bright reflex
When tempted now to doubt
That clever women e'er
Are generous; the fair
Disposed to rise above
Self-glory and self-love;

That such can ever feel
A stirring of the spirit,
The sting of an ideal,
With courage not to fear it.

O Being spirituelle,
So aptly christened Belle,
I cannot now but wonder,
This fancied shade-tree under,
If thou art dreamer still!
Hath Time purloined the will
To paint thine earth like heaven?
Art thou, perchance, still given
To fairy castle-making?
Or findest thou an aching
Within thee at the thought
Of what was — and is not?
Canst thou, when mem'ry's call-
ing,
And lovèd ghosts come round,
See wilted petals falling
And whitening the ground?

Yet, sweet as is thy sadness,
Thou e'er must envy me:
For mine is all the gladness,
Since I remember thee!

But, like the robin gay,
Rejoicing in his bower,
E'en thus I shake away
The petals from the flower;
I see them downward sifting
Among the jagged leaves,
And as I watch them drifting
My spirit somewhere grieves.
I think of how the years,
These cares and wasted tears,
Are losing me thy laughter
And all it followed after —
Thy wit and joy and smiles,
Thy pretty girlish wiles.
So many a little token
Of friendship, looked or spoken,
Is shaken from the tree,

Each year, of memory ;
A petal frail is blown,
And sinks, forever, down!

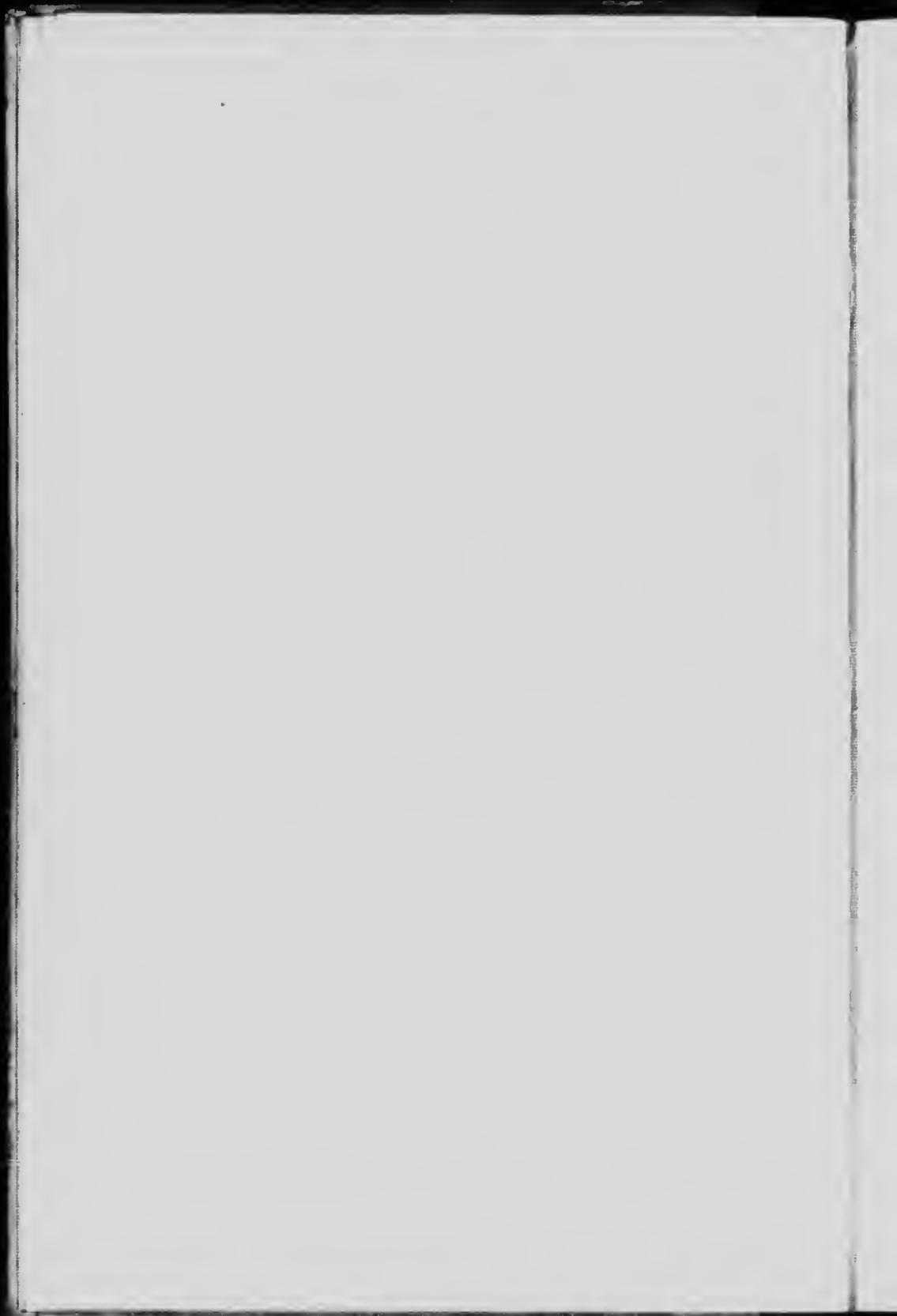
Still, friend of old, be sure,
Some petals e'er shall cling,
Through rain and wind endure ;
The robin long shall sing
High in his apple-tree,
And thou shalt come to me,
Oft when the dull day closes,
Like scent of sweet wild-roses,
Which I have plucked with thee ;
And then it will be morning,
And life shall we be scorning,
Our castles building high
As thine Acadian sky.

What matter though we find
Earth-ties to hold and bind?
'Tis said of highest Heaven :

To none the right is given
Up there, to bind the spirit—
And we lived very near it.

That day so bright, so fair,
Is gone, I know not where,
No more than I can tell
How thou did'st vanish, Belle!
For years will e'er be going
Onward, silent flowing
Far, far beyond our knowing,
 Though we would have them
 stay;
Life's flowers ever blowing,
And blown, their petals snow-
 ing —
What truths, what purpose show-
 ing?
 Who — who shall dare to say?

ROMANCE AND THE WEST
(*A MONTANA BALLAD*)



ROMANCE and the WEST

(A MONTANA BALLAD)

Let no man say Romance is dead
Or e'en that she is sleeping,
But let him read this tale, instead,
And then, his counsel keeping,
Set forth, as men must ever do,
Upon his great adventure,
Regardless of the bugaboo
Of others' smiles or censure!

'Twas in Montana (this, I think,
Is how the poets do it),
And I was hard upon the brink
(And everybody knew it)
Of bachelorhood. A friend had I
And he was also stranded
Upon that barren shore where lie
The hopeless, who have ceased to
try,

And as they live expect to die,
Nor ever understand it.

We had an office, each of us,
And daily wore white collars,
Nor was the problem serious,
With us, of getting dollars.
We knew no pinch of poverty,
And prospects did not
frighten —
Except the one. Alone were we!
Though with each other con-
stantly
Alone we were! And hourly
Our heartstrings seemed to
tighten.

At first my friend was reticent
Upon the awful matter,
And circling round the edge we
went
In superficial chatter;

But then at last a word came out,
By force of feeling goaded,
Which put hypocrisy to rout —
And both of us exploded.

The confidences we exchanged,
Had ever they been printed,
Our patrons might have well es-
tranged,
For truth was scarcely stinted ;
We swore we loved Montana air,
And everything about it,
And that its women folks were
fair,
That is, such women as there
were ;
In short, we thought them very
rare ---
Yes, very. Who shall doubt it?

“The only girls I’ve met,” said
Sol,

(Now, Sol had been to college)
“Whom I could ever love at all,
 Within my certain knowledge,
Were married — married — dead
 and gone —
 I wonder why—I wonder?”
We dropped our heads and dwelt
 upon
This problem. Suddenly the dawn
Of two ideas, one by one,
 Into my head did blunder.

“Sol, Sol,” said I, illuminate,
 “I have it, boy, I have it!
You cannot blame a hostile Fate —
 Just make your affidavit!
The truth is obviously this:
 The fancied ones you met there
Received some other fellow’s kiss
 Before yourself could get there!
By Jove, I think I see a fact:

For since we both have met
them,
These creatures who can so attract,
Although we never get them,
The circumstance that they exist
Should give us, I declare it,
A hope to find some one who's
missed --
And by young Eros swear it!"

"Yo, ho!" he laughed, "A jolly
joke --
From you especially coming."
He grinned behind a cloud of
smoke,
And sat his fingers drumming.
This sally, I am free to say,
Annoyed me not a trifle;
But I would pay him back some
day --
Meanwhile annoyance stifle.

'The upshot of my pardner's thrust
Was that our conversation
For several days was dry as dust
And bored was our relation.
Then, as I sat one night alone,
In newspapers half buried,
My eyes, my brain were set upon,
My heart unduly flurried.
I read that in an eastern State
Were thirty thousand women
Who there could never find a
mate . . .
I took it as an omen.

Forgetting, then, the slight that
Sol
Had put upon me lately,
I went to him excited, all
Aflame, withal sedately,
And showed him here in black
and white
The thing I had discovered;

But Sol was in a wretched plight
Of pessimism, out of sight
Had sunk in it; and black as night
The ravens round him hovered.

“Well, what of that?” he croaked
at last.

I swallowed, disconcerted.

“Come, Sol,” I said, “forget the
past,

Our lives have been diverted.

We cannot sit here, lazy toads,

And wait for our bluebottle,

Packing round these heavy loads

That so our spirits throttle.

If we are men, it seems to me,

We should resort to action.”

He stared so idiotically

I trembled for his sanity —

But suddenly his vanity

From silence brought reaction.

“If such a thing you contemplate,
My boy,” he uttered coldly,
“As finding me a diff’rent state
By venturing so boldly
Upon a chase of goslings wild
In far-off Massachusetts,
Reflect that I am not a child.
Your fiction’s like de Musset’s!
Why, think of how the town
would laugh
If you and I went wiving?
Besides, the chances are, by half,
The crazy trip surviving,
We’d come back less contented
than
The chase of visions we began.”

“Knight errant!” I exclaimed.
“Brave knight!
What matter that the maiden’s
part
Compels her, till her hair is white,

To wait, with dully paining
heart?
What matter that she cannot speak
Because the men have spoken,
Nor go like them a mate to seek —
Until her youth is broken!"

"I will admit you argue well,"
Quoth Sol, with some contri-
tion,
"But all one's faculties rebel
At thought of such a mission.
It seems to me that we must wait,
No matter how we feel;
And some day, maybe, soon or
late,
Will come the one ideal."

I laughed — I laughed until I
cried,
For surely Sol was funny.
"Yes, doubtless, when we both
have died —

Sol, have you any money
To wager that, in seven years,
In view of our location,
A single eligible appears —
Say, comes here on vacation?
Computing chances that will be
By those we know were bootless
These seven years past — come,
wager me
Your hope will not be fruit-
less?"

He parried, and he smiled and
sighed,
And his position shifted.
And "How could such a thing be
tried,
By one with reason gifted?
For, looking at the brightest side,
And granting Fate's assistance,
How many futile days might
glide,

With Her still in the distance?
What town — what city — how
and where —
The business here—the people
there —”

“Look here,” said I, “is not a wife,
The kind that we are seeking,
The most important thing in life?”
(He looked a trifle sneaking.)
“Sol, I propose to spend a year,
And all I have if need be;
And if I fail — the ranchers here
Won’t ever have to feed me.
But never fear: the price I set
Upon my blessed being
Is doubtless quite sufficient; yet
An equal I am seeing
In more than one lost little girl
Whose vision comes to haunt
me —
Some atom in the city’s swirl,

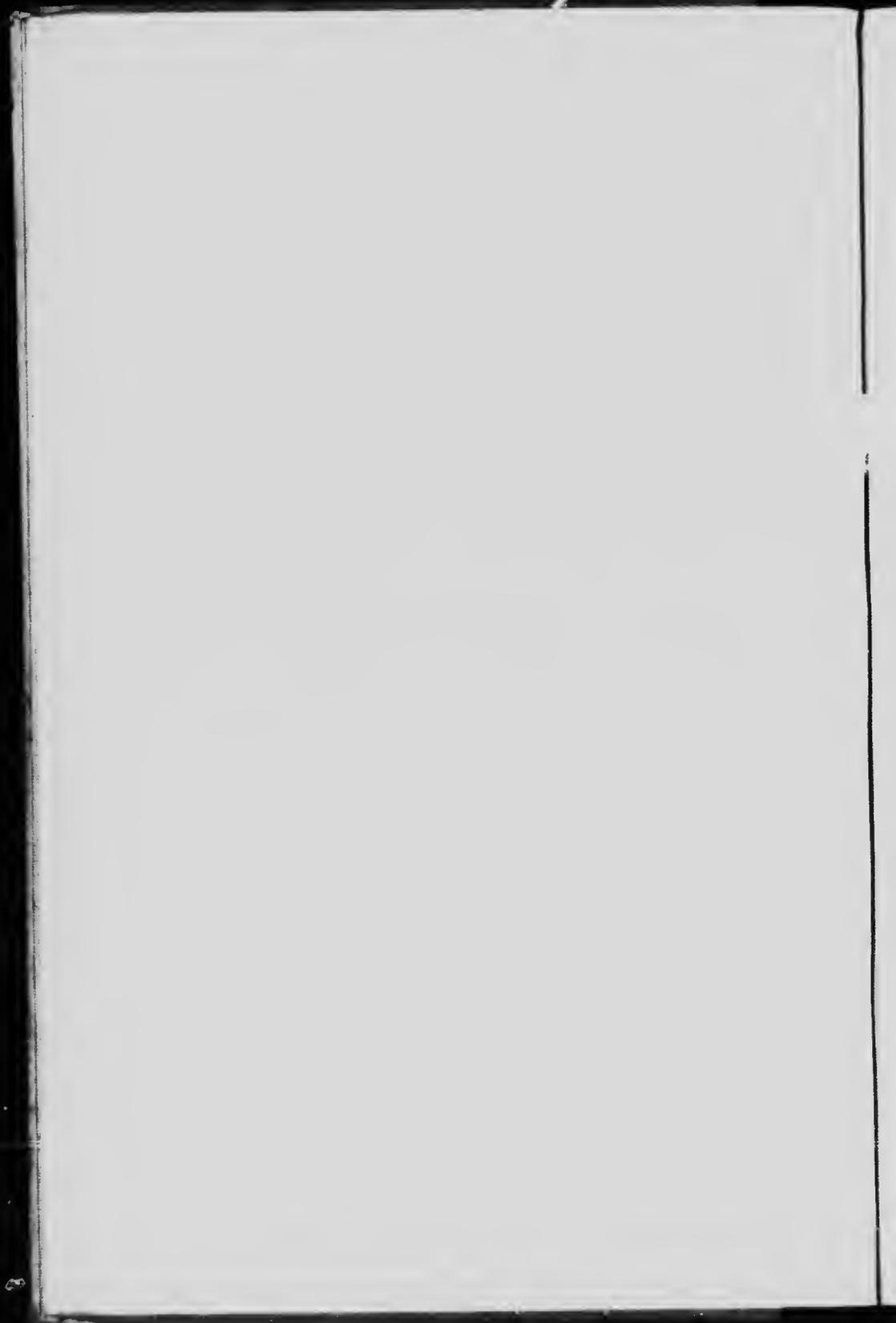
In need enough to want *me!*
This thing of fancying, old boy,
That one and one girl only
Can bring the common share of
joy
To stray old stags, as lonely
As we — or any other man,
Shows ignorance of earth,
Of woman, since the world began,
Of such superior worth!"

Sol turned an eagle eye on me:
"Then marriage is a farce!
You kill its ideality
And make a human scarce
Less guided in his choice of love
Than cattle that the prairies
rove."

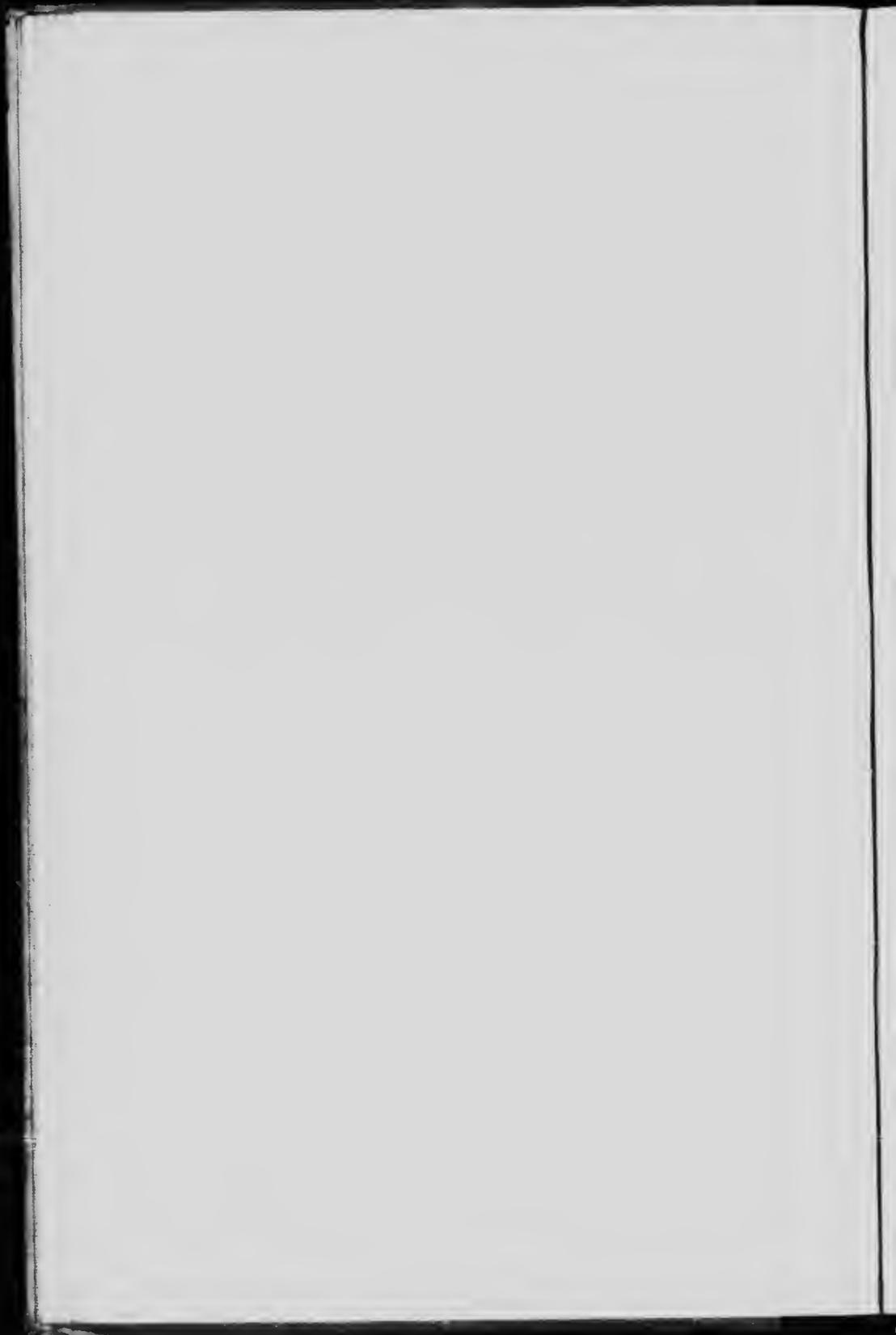
"You almost spoke a truth, I
swear,"
I tantalized old Sol,

“For if we turn to Nature, there
We find a law for all.
And who are you and who am I
That we should be neglecting
The inner pang, the unhusht cry
A mate to be selecting?
And what is there, in heaven’s
name,
Of this selfsame selection,
In sitting down, in pride and
shame
And impotent dejection?”

At that we parted; later, when
I started on my journey,
He came, in better spirits then,
To say, as my attorney,
That if I needed his advice
Upon my quest fantastic,
Or found I could not pay the price
Of Someone’s whims elastic,
He hoped that I would not forget
He loved me like a brother yet!



PART II



ROMANCE and the WEST

(A MONTANA BALLAD)

PART II

I never shall forget that day
Upon the Boston Common,
The beauty, as Bostonians say,
All 'round about me "swawm-
in'."

I stood like some one in a trance,
Amid the merry whirl,
Imploring Guardian Circum-
stance

To point me out the girl.
It seemed to me that any one
Of all the Unescorted
Would most emphatically have
done,
However loosely sorted.
I wondered how I ever lived
So long on plains of sand

Where bachelors so seldom wived,
Since wives were not at hand.

I thought about my pardner, too,
Inclined to telegraph;
But, knowing well what he would
do,

Recalling, too, his laugh,
Decided not to even write,
But leave him to his foolish fight.
Perhaps when I should victor be,
And that would not be long,
He might receive a word from me,
In accent clear and strong,
Descriptive of celibacy:

But meanwhile, life — the
throng!
My first impression lasted through
An active week, or more;
The buildings and the streets I
knew;
And many a marble door,

Or corner, knew my figure well,
For there I loved to stand
And watch the crowds of people
swell
Like waves upon the sand.

Oh, many a face that passed me by
Did yet in passing cast
A curious glance that brought a
sigh
And made my heart go fast;
For some were queerly sad, I
thought,
As if they wished to find
A friend above the common lot,
More constant or more kind;
As if they knew the world too well
To quite believe in men.
They came, they glanced, and in
the swell
Of life were lost again.

The weeks moved on, as did the
throng,
And I began to see
That something had gone
strangely wrong
Within the heart of me.
For I could now no longer yearn
To care for one alone,
So many seemed to me to turn
For help! And, too, was gone
Concern about myself; indeed
It seemed a selfish thing,
Amid this universal need,
This silent suffering.

At times, in thinking now of lives
Outside my petty own,
And how a human custom drives
Man's soul to folly down,
I wondered why these women here
Submitted to their lot,
With silent sigh, suppressed tear.

When what their beings sought
Existed in a world far less

Extensive than we think,
Where there are wells of happi-
ness

Whereof we all may drink,
Or most of us, if but we dare
To let not vanity,
The serf of custom, tell us where
To go, and what to be!

Yet, might they not be slaves of
Gold,

The thought occurred to me,
As well as custom; growing old
That others might be free
To revel in the joys of youth —
Devoid of justice as of ruth?
Perhaps it was the memory
Of freedom of the prairie
That brought the bondage home
to me

Of this life sedentary,
This life of waiting, hidden from
The very thing desired —
Expecting, praying it will come,
Until at last too tired.

It seemed to me that I must try
My hand at the invention
Of some new system; nay, defy
The world and its convention;
That I must bring the prairies east
And take the cities west;
And make man happy as the beast,
And women quite as blest.

But when I walked the streets
again,
Among the busy masses,
Among those mighty, heartless
men,
And pretty, helpless lasses,

I knew the world would laugh at
me,
And cheat me, being stronger;
And so, discouraged, presently
I thought of lives no longer,
But only of my little scheme,
Of how I might be finding
The creature of my former dream,
In streets so wide and winding.

Accordingly I laid a plan,
And marshalled all my forces,
As well becometh any man
Who hand of Fate coerces.
I'd make a tour of every store
Of size, and there were many —
But Fate threw something in my
eyes,
And tossed a magic penny!

I saw Her run to catch a car,
But stumble on the curbing;

And I was not so very far
 Away, oh, thought perturbing!
But that I managed to assist
 A suitcase in preventing
Collision with the thing she
 missed —
 A block of sound cementing.
She thanked me hurriedly, her
 eyes
 Into my spirit burning,
But ere my brain could realize
 That here the point of turning
In all my life had come at length,
 Another car had taken
This girl, my heart, my thoughts,
 my strength —
 And I stood there, forsaken!

What matter that the city raged
 About me in its passion,
That every minute here was staged
 A drama, old of fashion

As life itself ; that here were hearts
As painful in their beating,
As full of agonies and smarts
As mine, their pangs repeating?
I saw no face upon the street,
I heard no city clamor :
Upon my palms I saw the sweat,
Within I heard a hammer.

So went the days, and then the
weeks —
A suitcase—a vacation.
A lover to his shadow speaks :
“By her pronounciation,
I know she was a Boston girl.”
And then would come the flout-
ing
Of fears ; and hopes ; the madden-
ing swirl
Of wishes ; and the doubting.

My appetite forsook me quite,
I lost in weight and color,

I hated day and dreaded night,
And life became a dolor.
Then when the watching palled on
me,
The waiting and the hoping,
I took a cottage by the sea,
And sat there, lifeless, moping.
But this was even worse, me-
thought,
Than scanning passing faces,
And so I left my lonely cot
And sought familiar places;
The corners and the office doors
And parks again frequented,
Like some lost spirit on the moors
Of life, outcast, demented.

One day, when, as it seemed to
me,
I could not thus forever
Go on, I wept — wept bitterly,
My mind upon the river.

But this was well; it made me
 pause,
And not a little shamed me:
Should I give up the fight because
 Old Fate had somewhat lamed
 me?
No, let me wait, and fight, and
 wait,
 Remain and find vocation,
That if she come, however late,
 She find me at my station!

Along the streets, encased in ice,
 The wind swept wet and shiv-
 ery;
I turned into the Post Office
 And passed by "General De-
 livery."
I had a letter in my hand
 To Sol, the first since summer,
Requesting him to sell my land
 And books to some newcomer.

But now I halted ; might not he
Have answered that first letter?
The mail-clerk grinned on hand-
ing me

A wire. "This is better."
And when I saw it was not old
I felt a child's contrition:
Perhaps the tales of fairies told
Were not all superstition!

"Come home at once," the mes-
sage ran,
"If you should get this wire;
I want you, Billy, for best man—
Have found my One Desire."

I laughed—but not from any joy;
I laughed instead of weeping.
"Will try to get there, Sol, old
boy,"
I wired, my courage keeping.

'Twere better; I had thus excuse
To straighten my affairs;
And having fully gotten loose
Would come back—to gray
hairs!

And now my pen unsteady falls
Upon the guileless sheet,
And life alarms, and love appalls;
But yet the task is sweet.

He met me at the depot, he
Who once had looked so glum,
His face a happy mystery.
“I knew — I knew you'd come!”

Perhaps he saw that I had
changed,
In fact, I know he saw;
But naught was dear old Sol es-
tranged —
As stable he as Law.

I felt his hand upon my back,
His blue eyes holding mine:
"Let's wander down the railway
track,
For appetite to dine."

We walked along, as we had
strolled
So often there together,
And I was full of thoughts of old,
In this Montana weather.

Then suddenly he pressed my
arm,
And bruised it in the process;
"Billy," said he, "a new school-
marm
Did come to Stolen Hosses,
And when I went, on business
bent,
Of course I had to meet her;

And by this old prairie scent
There lives no woman
sweeter! . . .

And so for me. But now for you—
You ought to see" — He halted.
"Oh, *pawdon*, Bill; I see, I do,
Old Boston has you salted!"

He spoke of business matters then,
And snow and wheat and
clover;
But I was busy wondering when
The wedding would be over.

The steps with which I turned
with him
Toward a bungalow,
Where lights were bright and
hearth was dim,
A deep and welcome glow,
Was weary as the step I took
Back from a vanished car

That morning of the steady look
From eyes that went so far.

He left me seated by the hearth,
The embers to explore,
And I was rambling o'er the
earth,
And eastern cities o'er,
When someone passed behind my
chair;
I felt her presence in the air;
Before I turned I knew that there
Was She, the one, the One!
"I beg your pardon," she began—
And then — "Why, you — why
you're the man —
The day I left to visit Nan —"

Sol entered, on the run.
"Say, Helen, where's your sister
gone? —"

Oh, by the way, meet Billy
Vaughn —

Down town?—I'll see you two
anon —”

With which the tale is done.



