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Maurine and Other Poems

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8472-2540-9

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MAURINE

AND OTHER POEMS

**BY
ELLA WHEELER WILCOX**

**W. B. CONKEY COMPANY
CHICAGO**

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By ELLA WHEELER WILCOX**

*I step across the mystic border-land,
And look upon the wonder-world of Art.
How beautiful, how beautiful its hills!
And all its valleys, how surpassing fair!*

*The winding paths that lead up to the heights
Are polished by the footsteps of the great.
The mountain-peaks stand very near to God:
The chosen few whose feet have trod thereon
Have talked with Him, and with the angels walked.*

*Here are no sounds of discord – no profane
Or senseless gossip of unworthy things –
Only the songs of chisels and of pens.
Of busy brushes, and ecstatic strains
Of souls surcharged with music most divine.
Here is no idle sorrow, no poor grief
For any day or object left behind –
For time is counted precious, and herein
Is such complete abandonment of Self
That tears turn into rainbows, and enhance
The beauty of the land where all is fair.*

*Awed and afraid, I cross the border-land.
Oh, who am I, that I dare enter here
Where the great artists of the world have trod –
The genius-crowned aristocrats of Earth?
Only the singer of a little song;
Yet loving Art with such a mighty love
I hold it greater to have won a place
Just on the fair land's edge, to make my grave,
Than in the outer world of greed and gain
To sit upon a royal throne and reign.*

CONTENTS

MAURINE

PART I.

PART II.

PART III.

PART IV.

PART V.

PART VI.

PART VII.

TWO SUNSETS.

UNREST.

"ARTIST'S LIFE."

NOTHING BUT STONES.

THE COQUETTE.

INEVITABLE.

THE OCEAN OF SONG.

"IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN."

IF.

GETHSEMANE.

DUST-SEALED.

"ADVICE."

OVER THE BANISTERS.

MOMUS, GOD OF LAUGHTER.

I DREAM.

THE PAST.

THE SONNET.

SECRETS.

A DREAM.

USELESSNESS.

WILL.

WINTER RAIN.

APPLAUSE.

LIFE.

BURDENED.

THE STORY.

LET THEM GO.

THE ENGINE.
NOTHING NEW.
DREAMS.
HELENA.
NOTHING REMAINS.
LEAN DOWN.
COMRADES.
WHAT GAIN?
LIFE.
TO THE WEST.
THE LAND OF CONTENT.
A SONG OF LIFE.
WARNING.
THE CHRISTIAN'S NEW YEAR PRAYER.
IN THE NIGHT.
GOD'S MEASURE.
A MARCH SNOW.
AFTER THE BATTLES ARE OVER.
NOBLESSE OBLIGE.
AND THEY ARE DUMB.
NIGHT.
ALL FOR ME.
PHILOSOPHY.
"CARLOS."
THE TWO GLASSES.
THROUGH TEARS.
INTO SPACE.
THROUGH DIM EYES.
LA MORT D'AMOUR.
THE PUNISHED.
HALF FLEDGED.
LOVE'S SLEEP.
TRUE CULTURE.
THE VOLUPTUARY.
THE YEAR.
THE UNATTAINED.
IN THE CROWD.
LIFE AND I.

GUERDON.
SNOWED UNDER.
PLATONIC.
WHAT WE NEEDED.
"LEUDEMANN'S-ON-THE-RIVER."
IN THE LONG RUN.
PLEA TO SCIENCE.
LOVE'S BURIAL.
LITTLE BLUE HOOD.
NO SPRING.
LIPPO.
MIDSUMMER.
A REMINISCENCE.
RESPITE.
A GIRL'S FAITH.
TWO.
SLIPPING AWAY.
IS IT DONE?
A LEAF.
G^rTHETIC.
POEMS OF THE WEEK.
SUNDAY.
MONDAY.
TUESDAY.
WEDNESDAY.
THURSDAY.
FRIDAY.
SATURDAY.

GHOSTS.
FLEEING AWAY.
ALL MAD.
HIDDEN GEMS.
BY-AND-BY.
OVER THE MAY HILL.
A SONG.
FOES.
FRIENDSHIP.

MAURINE

PART I.

I sat and sewed, and sang some
tender tune,
Oh, beauteous was that morn in
early June!
Mellow with sunlight, and with
blossoms fair:
The climbing rose-tree grew
about me there,
And checked with shade the sun-
ny portico
Where, morns like this, I came to
read, or sew.

I heard the gate click, and a firm
quick tread
Upon the walk. No need to turn
my head;
I would mistake, and doubt my
own voice sounding,
Before his step upon the gravel
bounding.
In an unstudied attitude of grace,
He stretched his comely form;
and from his face
He tossed the dark, damp curls;
and at my knees,
With his broad hat he fanned the
lazy breeze,
And turned his head, and lifted
his large eyes,
Of that strange hue we see in
ocean dyes,
And call it blue sometimes, and
sometimes green

And save in poet eyes, not else-
where seen.

[Pg 10]"Lest I should meet with
my fair lady's scorning,
For calling quite so early in the
morning,
I've brought a passport that can
never fail,"
He said, and, laughing, laid the
morning mail
Upon my lap. "I'm welcome? so I
thought!
I'll figure by the letters that I
brought
How glad you are to see me. Only
one?
And that one from a lady? I'm
undone!
That, lightly skimmed, you'll
think me *such* a bore,
And wonder why I did not bring
you four.
It's ever thus: a woman cannot get
So many letters that she will not
fret
O'er one that did not come."
"I'll prove you wrong,"
I answered gayly, "here upon the
spot!
This little letter, precious if not
long,
Is just the one, of all you might
have brought,
To please me. You have heard me
speak, I'm sure,
Of Helen Trevor: she writes here
to say
She's coming out to see me; and

will stay
Till Autumn, maybe. She is, like
her note,
Petite and dainty, tender, loving,
pure.
You'd know her by a letter that
she wrote,
For a sweet tinted thing. 'Tis al-
ways so: —
Letters all blots, though finely
written, show
A slovenly person. Letters stiff
and white
Bespeak a nature honest, plain,
upright.
And tissuey, tinted, perfumed
notes, like this,
Tell of a creature formed to pet
and kiss."

My listener heard me with a slow,
odd smile;
Stretched in abandon at my feet,
the while,
[Pg 11]He fanned me idly with
his broad-brimmed hat.
"Then all young ladies must be
formed for that!"
He laughed, and said.
"Their letters read, and look,
As like as twenty copies of one
book.
They're written in a dainty, spi-
der scrawl,
To 'darling, precious Kate,' or
'Fan,' or 'Moll.'
The 'dearest, sweetest' friend they
ever had.
They say they 'want to see you,

oh, so bad!"
Vow they'll 'forget you, never,
never, oh!"
And then they tell about a splen-
did beau —
A lovely hat — a charming dress,
and send
A little scrap of this to every
friend.
And then to close, for lack of
something better,
They beg you'll 'read and burn
this horrid letter.'"

He watched me, smiling. He was
prone to vex
And hector me with flings upon
my sex.
He liked, he said, to have me
flash and frown,
So he could tease me, and then
laugh me down.
My storms of wrath amused him
very much:
He liked to see me go off at a
touch;
Anger became me — made my
color rise,
And gave an added luster to my
eyes.
So he would talk — and so he
watched me now,
To see the hot flush mantle cheek
and brow.

Instead, I answered coolly, with a
smile,
Felling a seam with utmost care,
meanwhile.

"The caustic tongue of Vivian
Dangerfield
Is barbed as ever, for my sex, this
morn.
Still unconvinced, no smallest
point I yield.
[Pg 12]Woman I love, and trust,
despite your scorn.
There is some truth in what you
say? Well, yes!
Your statements usually hold
more or less.
Some women write weak let-
ters—(some men do;)
Some make professions, knowing
them untrue.
And woman's friendship, in the
time of need,
I own, too often proves a broken
reed.
But I believe, and ever will con-
tend,
Woman can be a sister woman's
friend,
Giving from out her large heart's
bounteous store
A living love—claiming to do no
more
Than, through and by that love,
she knows she can;
And living by her professions,
like a man.
And such a tie, true friendship's
silken tether,
Binds Helen Trevor's heart and
mine together.
I love her for her beauty, meek-
ness, grace;
For her white lily soul and angel

face.
She loves me, for my greater
strength, may be;
Loves – and would give her
heart's best blood for me
And I, to save her from a pain, or
cross,
Would suffer any sacrifice or loss.
Such can be woman's friendship
for another.
Could man give more, or ask
more from a brother?"

I paused: and Vivian leaned his
massive head
Against the pillar of the portico,
Smiled his slow, skeptic smile,
then laughed, and said:
"Nay, surely not – if what you say
be so.
You've made a statement, but no
proof's at hand.
Wait – do not flash your eyes so!
Understand
I think you quite sincere in what
you say:
[Pg 13]You love your friend, and
she loves you, to-day;
But friendship is not friendship at
the best
Till circumstances put it to the
test.
Man's, less demonstrative, stands
strain and tear,
While woman's, half profession,
fails to wear.
Two women love each other pass-
ing well –
Say Helen Trevor and Maurine

La Pelle,
Just for example.
Let them daily meet
At ball and concert, in the church
and street,
They kiss and coo, they visit,
chat, caress;
Their love increases, rather than
grows less;
And all goes well, till 'Helen dear'
discovers
That 'Maurine darling' wins too
many lovers.

And then her 'precious friend,'
her 'pet,' her 'sweet,'
Becomes a 'minx,' a 'creature all
deceit.'
Let Helen smile too oft on Mau-
rine's beaux,
Or wear more stylish or becom-
ing clothes,
Or sport a hat that has a longer
feather –
And lo! the strain has broken
'friendship's tether.'
Maurine's sweet smile becomes a
frown or pout;
'She's just begun to find that Hel-
en out'
The breach grows wider – anger
fills each heart;
They drift asunder, whom 'but
death could part.'
You shake your head? Oh, well,
we'll never know!
It is not likely Fate will test you
so.
You'll live, and love; and, meet-

ing twice a year,
While life shall last, you'll hold
each other dear.
I pray it may be so; it were not
best
[Pg 14]To shake your faith in
woman by the test.
Keep your belief, and nurse it
while you can.
I've faith in woman's friendship
too – for man!
They're true as steel, as mothers,
friends, and wives:
And that's enough to bless us all
our lives.
That man's a selfish fellow, and a
bore,
Who is unsatisfied, and asks for
more."

"But there is need of more!" I here
broke in.
"I hold that woman guilty of a
sin,
Who would not cling to, and de-
fend another,
As nobly as she would stand by a
brother.
Who would not suffer for a sis-
ter's sake,
And, were there need to prove
her friendship, make
'Most any sacrifice, nor count the
cost.
Who would not do this for a
friend is lost
To every nobler principle."
"Shame, shame!"
Cried Vivian, laughing, "for you

now defame
The whole sweet sex; since there's
not one would do
The thing you name, nor would I
want her to.
I love the sex. My mother was a
woman —
I hope my wife will be, and whol-
ly human.
And if she wants to make some
sacrifice,
I'll think her far more sensible
and wise
To let her husband reap the bene-
fit,
Instead of some old maid or
senseless chit.
Selfish? Of course! I hold all love
is so:
And I shall love my wife right
well, I know.
Now there's a point regarding
selfish love,
You thirst to argue with me, and
disprove.
But since these cosy hours will
soon be gone
[Pg 15]And all our meetings bro-
ken in upon,
No more of these rare moments
must be spent
In vain discussions, or in argu-
ment.
I wish Miss Trevor was in —
Jericho!
(You see the selfishness begins to
show.)
She wants to see you? — So do I:
but she

Will gain her wish, by taking you
from me.
'Come all the same?' that means
I'll be allowed
To realize that 'three can make a
crowd.'
I do not like to feel myself _de
trop_.
With two girl cronies would I not
be so?
My ring would interrupt some
private chat.
You'd ask me in and take my
cane and hat,
And speak about the lovely
summer day,
And think — 'The lout! I wish he'd
kept away.'
Miss Trevor'd smile, but just to
hide a pout
And count the moments till I was
shown out.
And, while I twirled my thumbs,
I would sit wishing
That I had gone off hunting birds,
or fishing.
No, thanks, Maurine! The iron
hand of Fate,
(Or otherwise Miss Trevor's dain-
ty fingers,)
Will bar my entrance into Eden's
gate;
And I shall be like some poor soul
that lingers
At heaven's portal, paying the
price of sin,
Yet hoping to be pardoned and
let in."