

Rain Fugue
Jessie Redmon Fauset

Slanting, driving, Summer rain
How you wash my heart of pain!
How you make me think of trees,
Ships and gulls and flashing seas!
In your furious, tearing wind,
Swells a chant that heals my mind;
And your passion high and proud,
Makes me shout and laugh aloud!
Autumn rains that start at dawn,
“Dropping veils of thinnest lawn,”
Soaking sod between dank grasses,
Sweeping golden leaves in masses,—
Blotting, blurring out the Past,
In a dream you hold me fast;
Calling, coaxing to forget
Things that are, for things not yet.
Winter tempest, winter rain,
Hurling down with might and main,
You but make me hug my hearth,
Laughing, sheltered from your wrath.
Now I woo my dancing fire,
Piling, piling drift-wood higher.
Books and friends and pictures old,
Hearten while you pound and scold!
Pattering, wistful showers of Spring
Set me to remembering
Far-off times and lovers too,
Gentle joys and heart-break rue,—
Memories I'd as lief forget,
Were not oblivion sadder yet.
Ah! you twist my mind with pain,
Wistful, whispering April rain!
Summer, Autumn, Winter rain,
How you ease my heart of pain!
Whispering, wistful showers of Spring,
How I love the hurt you bring!

Christmas Eve in France
Jessie Redmon Fauset

Oh, little Christ, why do you sigh
As you look down tonight
On breathless France, on bleeding France,
And all her dreadful plight?
What bows your childish head so low?
What turns your cheek so white?
Oh, little Christ, why do you moan,
What is it that you see
In mourning France, in martyred France,
And her great agony?
Does she recall your own dark day,
Your own Gethsemane?
Oh, little Christ, why do you weep,
Why flow your tears so sore
For pleading France, for praying France,
A suppliant at God's door?
"God sweetened not my cup," you say,
"Shall He for France do more?"
Oh, little Christ, what can this mean,
Why must this horror be
For fainting France, for faithful France,
And her sweet chivalry?
"I bled to free all men," you say
"France bleeds to keep men free."
Oh, little, lovely Christ—you smile!
What guerdon is in store
For gallant France, for glorious France,
And all her valiant corps?
"Behold I live, and France, like me,
Shall live for evermore."

Again it is September
Jessie Redmon Fauset

Again it is September!
It seems so strange that I who made no vows
Should sit here desolate this golden weather
And wistfully remember—

A sigh of deepest yearning,
A glowing look and words that knew no bounds,
A swift response, an instant glad surrender
To kisses wild and burning!

Ay me!

Again it is September!
It seems so strange that I who kept those vows
Should sit here lone, and spent, and mutely praying
That I may not remember!

Douce Souvenance
Jessie Redmon Fauset

Again, as always, when the shadows fall,
 In that sweet space between the dark and day,
I leave the present and its fretful claims
 And seek the dim past where my memories stay.
I dream an old, forgotten, far-off dream,
 And think old thoughts and live old scenes anew,
Till suddenly I reach the heart of Spring—
 The spring that brought me you!
I see again a little woody lane,
 The moonlight rifting golden through the trees;
I hear the plaintive chirp of drowsy bird
 Lulled dreamward by a tender, vagrant breeze;
I hold your hand, I look into your eyes,
 I touch your lips,—oh, peerless, matchless dower!
Oh, Memory thwarting Time and Space and Death!
 Oh, Little Perfect Hour!

Oblivion
Jessie Redmon Fauset

From the French of Massillon Coicou (Haiti)

I hope when I am dead that I shall lie
In some deserted grave—I cannot tell you why,
But I should like to sleep in some neglected spot
Unknown to every one, by every one forgot.
There lying I should taste with my dead breath
The utter lack of life, the fullest sense of death;
And I should never hear the note of jealousy or hate,
The tribute paid by passersby to tombs of state.
To me would never penetrate the prayers and tears
That futilely bring torture to dead and dying ears;
There I should annihilate and my dead heart would bless
Oblivion—the shroud and envelope of happiness.

Oriflamme
Jessie Redmon Fauset

"I can remember when I was a little, young girl, how my old mammy would sit out of doors in the evenings and look up at the stars and groan, and I would say, 'Mammy, what makes you groan so?' And she would say, 'I am groaning to think of my poor children; they do not know where I be and I don't know where they be. I look up at the stars and they look up at the stars!'"

—Sojourner Truth.

I think I see her sitting bowed and black,
Stricken and seared with slavery's mortal scars,
Reft of her children, lonely, anguished, yet
Still looking at the stars.
Symbolic mother, we thy myriad sons,
Pounding our stubborn hearts on Freedom's bars,
Clutching our birthright, fight with faces set,
Still visioning the stars!

Rondeau
Jessie Redmon Fauset

When April's here and meadows wide
Once more with spring's sweet growths are pied
 I close each book, drop each pursuit,
 And past the brook, no longer mute,
I joyous roam the countryside.

Look, here the violets shy abide
And there the mating robins hide—
 How keen my sense, how acute,
 When April's here!

And list! down where the shimmering tide
Hard by that farthest hill doth glide,
 Rise faint strains from shepherd's flute,
 Pan's pipes and Bercyntian lute.
Each sight, each sound fresh joys provide
 When April's here.

La Vie C'est La Vie
Jessie Redmon Fauset

On summer afternoons I sit
Quiescent by you in the park
And idly watch the sunbeams gild
And tint the ash-trees' bark.
Or else I watch the squirrels frisk
And chaffer in the grassy lane;
And all the while I mark your voice
Breaking with love and pain.
I know a woman who would give
Her chance of heaven to take my place;
To see the love-light in your eyes,
The love-glow on your face!
And there's a man whose lightest word
Can set my chilly blood afire;
Fulfillment of his least behest
Defines my life's desire.
But he will none of me, nor I
Of you. Nor you of her. 'Tis said
The world is full of jests like these.—
I wish that I were dead.

Dead Fires
Jessie Redmon Fauset

If this is peace, this dead and leaden thing,
 Then better far the hateful fret, the sting.
Better the wound forever seeking balm
 Than this gray calm!
Is this pain's surcease? Better far the ache,
 The long-drawn dreary day, the night's white wake,
Better the choking sigh, the sobbing breath
 Than passion's death!

Stars in Alabama
Jessie Redmon Fauset

In Alabama
Stars hang down so low,
So low, they purge the soul
With their infinity.
Beneath their holy glance
Essential good
Rises to mingle with them
In that skiey sea.
At noon
Within the sandy cotton-field
Beyond the clay, red road
Bordered with green,
A Negro lad and lass
Cling hand in hand,
And passion, hot-eyed, hot-lipped,
Lurks unseen.
But in the evening
When the skies lean down,
He's but a wistful boy,
A saintly maiden she,
For Alabama stars
Hang down so low,
So low they purge the soul
With their infinity.

Fragment
Jessie Redmon Fauset

The breath of life imbued those few dim days!
Yet all we had was this, —
A flashing smile, a touch of hands, and once
A fleeting kiss.
Blank futile death inheres these years between!
Still, naught have you and I
But frozen tears, and stifled words, and once
A sharp caught cry!

Words! Words!
Jessie Redmon Fauset

How did it happen that we quarreled?
We two who loved each other so!
Only the moment before we were one,
Using the language that lovers know.
And then of a sudden, a word, a phrase
That struck at the heart like a poignard's blow.
And you went beserk, and I saw red,
And love lay between us, bleeding and dead!
Dead! When we loved each other so!
How could it happen that we quarreled!
Think of the things we used to say!
“What does it matter, dear, what you do?
Love such as ours has to last for aye!”
—“Try me! I love to ensure your test!”
—“Love, we shall always love, come what may!”
What are the words the apostle saith?
“In the power of the tongue are Life and Death!”
Think of the things we used to say!

Noblesse Oblige
Jessie Redmon Fauset

Lolotte, who attires my hair,
Lost her lover. Lolotte weeps;
Trails her hand before her eyes;
Hangs her head and mopes and sighs,
Mutters of the pangs of hell.
Fills the circumambient air
With her plaints and her despair.
Looks at me:
“May you never know, Mam’selle,
Love’s harsh cruelty.”
Love’s dart lurks in my heart too,—
None may know the smart
Throbbing underneath my smile.
Burning, pricking all the while
That I dance and sing and spar,
Juggling words and making quips
To hide the trembling of my lips.
I must laugh
What time I moan to moon and star
To help me stand the gaff.

What a silly thing is pride!
Lolotte bares her heart.
Heedless that each runner reads
All her thoughts and all her needs.
What I hide with my soul’s life
Lolotte tells with tear and cry.
Blurs her pain with sob and sigh
Happy Lolotte, she!
I must jest while sorrow’s knife
Stabs in ecstasy.

“If I live, I shall outlive.”
Meanwhile I am barred
From expression of my pain.
Let my heart be torn in twain,
Only I may know the truth.
Happy Lolotte, blessed she
Who may tell her agony!
On me a seal is set.
Love is lost, and—bitter ruth—
Pride is with me yet!

Touché

Jessie Redmon Fauset

Dear, when we sit in that high, placid room,
'Loving' and 'doving' as all lovers do,
Laughing and leaning so close in the gloom,—
What is the change that creeps sharp over you?
Just as you raise your fine hand to my hair
Bringing that glance of mixed wonder and rue?
'Black hair,' you murmur, 'so lustrous and rare,
Beautiful too, like a raven's smooth wing;
Surely no gold locks were ever more fair.'
Why do you say every night that same thing?
Turning your mind to some old constant theme,
Half meditating and half murmuring?
Tell me, that girl of your young manhood's dream,
Her you loved first in that dim long ago—
Had she blue eyes? Did her hair goldly gleam?
Does she come back to you softly and slow,
Stepping wraith-wise from the depths of the past?
Quickened and fired by the warmth of our glow?
There I've divined it! My wit holds you fast.
Nay, no excuses; 'tis little I care.
I knew a lad in my own girlhood's past,—
Blue eyes he had and such waving gold hair!

Rencontre
Jessie Redmon Fauset

My heart, which beat so passionless,
Leaped high last night when I saw you.
Within me surged the grief of years
And whelmed me with its endless rue.
My heart which slept so still, so spent,
Awoke last night-to break anew.

“Courage!” He Said
Jessie Redmon Fauset

Ulysses, debarking in the Lotos Land,
Struck the one note that the hapless Ithacans
Travel-sick, mazed, bemused, could understand,
And understanding, follow.
“Courage,” he said, “remember, is not Hope!”
He left the worn, safe ship, spume-stained and hollow.
“To be courageous is to face despair.”
And through the groves and ‘thwart the ambient air
Resounded reedy echoes:
“Face despair!”
But this they understood.
And plunging on prepared for best, and most prepared
For worst, found only in their stride
A deep umbrageous wood,
And grassy plains where they disported; eased
And bathed lame feet within a purling stream
And murmured: “Here, Odysseus, would we fain abide!”
But neither the stream’s sweet ease
Nor the shade of the vast beech-trees,
Nor the blessed sense
Of the sweet, sweet soil
Beneath feet salt-cracked and worn
Brought to them even then,
(Still fainting and frayed and forlorn),
Such complete recompense
As the knowledge that once again
Facing the new and untried,
They had kept the courage of men!

Enigma

Jessie Redmon Fauset

There is no peace with you,
Nor any rest!
Your presence is a torture to the brain.
Your words are barbed arrows to the breast,
And one but greets
To wish you sped again.
Frustrate you make desire
And action vain.
There is no peace with you.
No peace . . .
Nor any rest.
Yet in your absence
Longing springs anew,
And hopefulness besets the baffled brain.
“If only you were you and yet not you!”
If you such joy could give as you give pain!
Then what an unguent for the burning breast!
And for the harassed heart
What rapture true!
“If only you were you and yet not you!”
There is no peace with you
Nor ever any rest!