

# DRAGON ORCHARD

LOUISE MOREY BOWMAN

(1)

Her grave gray days  
Were filled with starved monotony  
Of pale and wan routine.  
The increasing weirdness of her silent ways  
Passed quite unnoticed by her grim gray mate.  
He was absorbed, content, proud of his heritage,  
Loving his fertile fields with all his heart;  
While she had accepted, quite unquestioning,  
The woman's part.  
She grappled with her stark, lack-lustre tasks  
Unshaken by weak self-pity for her fate.  
Within the weather-beaten time-stained walls  
Of the old farm-house all the grave gray days  
Passed and repassed  
Through pallid placid years.  
But when sometimes she suddenly realized  
That she was whispering to herself all day  
She would leave baking, ironing,  
The butter, dishes or mending, and look out  
Where close about the house the apple trees  
Saved and redeemed,  
And sanctified her world.

(2)

But what she thought of the orchard, none but kind gods could know.  
When buds unfolded in the glad green Spring  
It seemed to her a throbbing melody  
Poured from the trunks and branches twisted and brown—  
A melody quite apart from the bubbling throats  
Of golden orioles and bobolinks—  
A melody that filled her weary eyes  
And soaked her thirsty soul

With glory!

She loved the orchard in the winter time—  
 The rich, dark-brown bark of the gnarled old trees  
 Holding their miracle bloom all deep and warm—  
 Strong, friendly, and sheltering through a drifting storm—  
 She thanked God for the orchard on her knees.

(3)

And then at last when she was very old,  
 One April, the weird silver-green terror came.  
 A sinister shuddering spell over her fell:  
 To her it never, never had a name.  
 "That orchard should be sprayed" her nephew said.  
 She listened and shivered with queer nervous dread.  
 The men discussed old and new ways with zest  
 Deciding "copper solution—that's the best."  
 One day she set her straining shrivelled face  
 Against the window pane, stood gazing there.  
 Gnarled trunks and twisted branches all had turned  
 To sinister writhing dragons! Her eyes burned  
 With horror in a fascinated glare.  
 Ghastly green dragons in their orchard lair  
 Possessing it wholly? In the cool damp air  
 They writhed with night-mare grace of silvered green,  
 And passers-by grinned mockingly between  
 The unearthly shapes.  
 She clutched the window-ledge  
 She shivered—  
 Then she fled  
 With one long shuddering cry,  
 Frantic and stumbling, up the steep narrow stair,  
 And fell upon her patchwork covered bed.

(4)

Her folk were kind to her. They tried and tried  
 To reassure and comfort—to explain.

"Now listen Auntie—now I've never lied.  
 Those apple trees will all come brown again" . . . .  
 "Your orchard'll be much better than before" . . . .  
 "Your apples—you'll have ever so many more" . . . .  
 "I don't see why you feel so—all the stains  
 Will be washed off with some good heavy rains" . . . .  
 And then she lay and waited for the rain  
 While haunted days passed with bright cloudless skies.

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At last in a gray dawn she woke and heard  
 The rustling, rhythmical patter of the rain.  
 "Look! Look! The Orchard!—Is it—real again?"—  
 Then quivering peace crept into her frightened eyes.  
 In the gray morning light she smiled—and died.

(5)

And in the dragon orchard apple-bloom  
 Like rosy snow,  
 Drifted—  
 Then sifted  
 To brown earth below.