

GATHERED  
LEAVES

JESSIE M. BUCKTON



MASKEW MILLER LIMITED  
CAPE TOWN

# GATHERED LEAVES

BY

JESSIE M. BUCKTON

*Marjorie, with love  
from your godmother  
Jessie M. Buckton*

MASKEW MILLER LIMITED  
CAPE TOWN

TO MY FAMILY  
I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE VOLUME

♣ Standard Press, Cape Town.

## SONNET

### SEVEN ECHOES

One summer evening when the wind was still,  
And round the setting sun in fold on fold  
Massed fiery clouds were piled like mountains bold,  
High on the crest of Seven Echoes hill  
We stood, we joyous four, and drank our fill  
Of all the beauty round—the sunset's gold,  
The coast-line at our feet like map unrolled,  
The crescent moon and evening star—until  
We turned to where across a narrow glen  
Our calls came ringing back in merry mock  
With repetition swift, again, again—  
As Echo lightly leapt from rock to rock.  
Entranced we listened, counted, were there seven ?  
Ah yes, and more—faint, far, yet clear—eleven !

## RUBY

Come, my Ruby, now shall you be  
Made the hero of my rhyme ;  
Step to measure for my pleasure,  
Helping to beat out the time !

Hoofs loud-clashing, eye white-flashing,  
Proud you follow from your stall—  
Every curve a line of beauty,  
Critics find no fault at all.

While so tame you, none shall blame you  
If a playful nip you fling,  
Seeing that you stand like statue  
While up to my seat I swing !

Now sedately, still and stately,  
Down the avenue we glide,  
And the gentlest touch controls you,  
And a thought, 'twould seem, can guide.

All so steady and so ready,  
Who to see you now can guess  
That that knightly air so lightly  
Turns to naughty wilfulness.

When, rebelling, spirits welling,  
Feet scarce touching ground,  
Madly prancing, sideways dancing,  
Curvetting in bound on bound.

All a-shiver and a-quiver,  
From pricked ear to ringing shoe,  
Plain as words you beg a gallop  
In the only speech you know !

And my reining hand, restraining  
Hardly checks your madcap fire  
Till we reach a level stretch where  
I can grant your heart's desire

And the teasing curb releasing,  
Give you leave at last  
For the flight we both delight in,  
With the bushes slipping past.

And your flowing mane out-blowing,  
Streaming on the wind,  
And the dust-cloud that you lifted  
Following far behind.

Ah ! my Peerless, swift and fearless,  
Rhyming tells the tale but ill  
Of the rapture that we capture  
When we roam the veld at will.

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CAMPING UNDER THE OLDEST YELLOW-  
WOOD TREE ON THE PIQUETBERG.

*To Frank.*

You paint the age-old giant, and I sit  
Silent beside you, watching small birds flit  
Hither and thither through the moss-grown boughs  
And lose themselves amid the silvery sheen  
Of old-man's beard, that, in its waving screen,  
Hides from my searching eyes the tiny house  
Where nestlings gape and flutter, just as those  
The old tree cradled in its youthful green  
Two thousand years ago: each tiny tit  
As like as leaf to leaf to those far sires of it.

How many thousand ages would it be  
Since the sure type was fixed of this great tree?  
The little long-shaped leaf, small oblong seed?  
Its brother of the forest towers—it leans,  
And shadows the grey rocks with leafy screens,  
Entwining them in depths where its roots feed,  
And resting heavy limbs, to suit its need,  
Upon their withered crowns, as though it means  
To grow at one with them, of all we see  
They only older, sturdier! While we?

Where were our grandfathers when the treelet bold  
First raised its small seed-leaves above the mould  
Below this mighty crag, unchanged since then,  
Where leopards couched and prowled and struck  
their prey,

Or roared a challenge in the twilight grey  
To lions stalking down that narrow glen,  
And to what most they feared, the small brown  
men

Whose red fires filled them with a fierce dismay ;  
Whose poisoned bolts dealt death to young and old  
And left them lying stark and still and cold ?

Nought now remains of leopards grim and fell,  
Powder and bullet long since rang their knell.  
And where the little Bushmen dwelt in fear  
We sleep serenely in our brushwood bed.  
While the same stars shine through the leaves  
o'erhead,

And still their paintings on the rocks appear !  
So may it be when you and I, my dear,  
While the old tree lives on, have long been dead,  
Your picture and my verses still will tell  
Something of us, and what we loved so well.



## IN OLD BUSHMAN HAUNTS.

When we found the cool cave-shelter  
In the hush of noon-day heat,  
And the tired children nestled  
In the bracken at our feet.

And we talked with quiet interest  
Of the old-time Bushman clan  
That had left those quaint rock-pictures  
For our alien eyes to scan.

Did you see how they peeped from the crannies  
Of that green rock-girdled glen,  
And, dazzled by daylight and sunshine  
Stole back to the shadows again?

Then when we explored the recesses  
Of their storm-worn fortress of old,  
Did you hear how they muttered in slumber,  
And turned on their pillows cold?

But when evening came and homeward  
Our holiday cavalcade passed  
When voices had died in the distance  
And hoof-beats were faint on the blast

While the dove-tints of sunset faded  
And mixed with the twilight grey,  
They'd have sunk back to deeper quiet  
And forgotten the dreams of the day.

\* \* \* \*

But now that the magic of midnight  
Has softly aroused them from sleep  
And the dark has unsealed their eyelids,  
How they whisper and chatter and peep !

Their inquisitive brown ghost-fingers  
In swift search pass and re-pass  
Where the orange-peel and nut-shells  
Lie scattered among the grass,

And they peer at a printed paper  
And the marks of a high-heeled shoe,  
And stare at each other, bewildered,  
And question : " Can dreams be true ? "

While ghost lions hunt ghost zebras,  
And little ghost-dassies creep,  
And great ghost-elephants trample,  
' Tis we who in turn must sleep.

And there in the rugged fastness  
Of that green rock-girdled glen,  
With eyes sleep-cleared for visions  
We see the little brown men.

We mark how they poison their arrows  
And warily stalk their prey,  
And little brown women dig "uintjies"  
And little brown children play.

Or, lured by the skill of the artist  
Stand grave in a wondering row,  
As fashioned by magical touches  
The shapes of wild creatures grow !

And see, while the painter lingers  
Intent on his pictured flock,  
With his colours small pilfering fingers  
Are imprinting themselves on the rock !

'Tis morn, and we wake and remember  
And picture the rock-haunts anew—  
The cave, and the paintings and hand-prints  
And WE marvel "Can dreams be true ?"

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## GUARDIAN ANGEL

I slept—my body slept—but where my Self  
Had wandered much I wish that I could say.  
I only know that I came back, and paused  
A moment at the door that leads from sleep  
In a dim passage-way with angled turn  
That hid the farther end whence I had come,  
And that, beside me in the dimness, stood  
A Being, scarcely seen, but felt and known  
By the strong sense of guardianship and care  
That poured from him to me, irradiating  
My senses with a joy past words to tell.  
Then, while I stood entranced, the door was shut  
Behind me, and I felt the well-known mesh  
Of earthly fibre draw me gently in—  
So gently that the radiance lingered yet  
And permeated every nerve and pulse,  
Forging a conscious link to bless my day,  
While I lay still, so still I hardly breathed.