

THE BALLAD SINGER

MARGARET ANNE DOODY

Sunlight, move softly in this room.
Touch the worn carpet, the table,
The doily on it,
The teacup, and the little book of sonnets.
Kindle with March beams the bowl
Of daffodils, and in the corner glow
On the canary perched there like a tropic fruit
Strange in a winter land. Shrill and high
His penny-whistle song
Flickers across the room to join
The worn piano, faintly out of tune.
My fading fingers touch the aging keys
(My touch uncertain now, and once so firm)
And now I sing, where there are none to hear,
The ballads that I loved when I was young.

“A ship I had
In the North Countree
And she went by the name
Of the Golden Vanity” . . .

Once there were minstrels,
Now only such as I
Who wistfully recall
An age they did not know,
A stronger age, grim, sinning, bold, beautiful.
Now in the dim spring light
Through this poor room,
Four tiny walls, and an old voice singing,
Pass bloody knights, the ladies that they loved,
Incestuous lovers,
Fouly murdered kings,
Warriors with ruddy swords,
Bowers, and sinking ships,
Brave deeds, and kisses from a true love's lips.

“Out of his grave grew a red, red rose,
And from her grave a brier” . . .

But what have I to do with songs like these?
Merely a pastime, nothing more.
Quiet my life has been, respectable,
Here in this sheltered street, this pretty room,
My canary, and my singing, and my books—
Life is not unhappy, so I sing.
Lightly the sunlight slips across the room . . .
The ballads busy me all afternoon.