

I cannot say, and I will not say  
That she is dead. She is just away.  
With a cheery smile, and a wave of the  
hand,  
She has wandered into an unknown  
land  
And left us dreaming how very fair  
It needs must be, since she lingers  
there.  
And you—oh you, who the wildest yearn  
For an old-time step, and the glad  
return,  
Think of her faring on, as dear  
In the love of There as the love of  
Here.  
Think of her still as the same. I say,  
She is not dead—she is just away.”  
— James Whitcomb Riley



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Zelma Verdean Gray

JANUARY 6, 1938 - NOVEMBER 13, 2024



### **God's Garden**

God looked around his garden,  
And found an empty place,  
He then looked down upon the earth,  
And saw your tired face.  
He put his arms around you,  
And lifted you to rest,  
God's garden must be beautiful,  
He always takes the best.  
He saw the road was getting rough,  
And the hills were hard to climb,  
So He closed your weary eyelids,  
And whispered "Peace be thine".  
It broke our hearts to lose you,  
But you didn't go alone,  
For part of us went with you,  
The day God called you home.

The angels called Zelma "Verdean" Elliott-Fleck-Gray, aged 86, home on November 13, 2024, in Fort Myers, Florida. Born on January 6, 1938, she lived a life marked by devotion to her family and her role as a homemaker.

Verdean is survived by her loving daughter, Beth Fleck of Lehigh Acres, Florida; Stepson Jack (Amy) Gray of Yellville, Arkansas; sisters, Jetta Masters and Jackie Bonifate, both of Three Oaks, MI; granddaughter, Charity (Heath) Dycus of Dyersburg, TN; grandsons, Jason Blake of Lehigh Acres, FL, Eric Fleck of Three Rivers, MI, and Brian Shupp of Granite City, IL; great-granddaughters, Ciara Dycus of Memphis, TN, Codie (Autry) Sartin of Dyersburg, TN, Lelani Jimenez of Albuquerque, NM, and Lillianna Fleck of Three Rivers, MI; and her beloved dog "Baby". Verdean also leaves behind numerous nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Fred Elliott and Lillie Mae Jackson, stepmother Etta Elliott, husband Jack Gray, son Rick Fleck, sisters DeVoe Moore, Rennie Waybright, Joannie Koss, and Chris Hardy; grandson Ricky Fleck II, and granddaughter Jamie Shupp.

A graduate of River Valley High School in Three Oaks, MI, Verdean's life was a testament to the deep bonds and enduring love within her family. She enjoyed painting and playing the piano. Her earthly presence will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

