



1890

THE GARDEN OF EROS
by Oscar Wilde

It is full summer now, the heart of June,
Not yet the sun-burnt reapers are a-stir
Upon the upland meadow where too soon
Rich autumn time, the season's usurer,
Will lend his hoarded gold to all the trees,
And see his treasure scattered by the wild and
spendthrift breeze.

Too soon indeed! yet here the daffodil,
That love-child of the Spring, has lingered on
To vex the rose with jealousy, and still
The harebell spreads her azure pavilion,
And like a strayed and wandering reveller
Abandoned of its brothers, whom long since June's
messenger

The missel-thrush has frightened from the glade,
One pale narcissus loiters fearfully
Close to a shadowy nook, where half afraid
Of their own loveliness some violets lie
That will not look the gold sun in the face
For fear of too much splendour,- ah! methinks
it is a place

Which should be trodden by Persephone
When wearied of the flowerless fields of Dis!
Or danced on by the lads of Arcady!
The hidden secret of eternal bliss
Known to the Grecian here a man might find,
Ah! you and I may find it now if Love and Sleep
be kind.

There are the flowers which mourning Herakles
Strewed on the tomb of Hylas, columbine,
Its white doves all a-flutter where the breeze
Kissed them too harshly, the small celandine,
That yellow-kirtled chorister of eve,
And lilac lady's-smock,- but let them bloom alone
and leave

Yon spired holly-hock red-crocketed
To sway its silent chimes, else must the bee,
Its little bell-ringer, go seek instead
Some other pleasaunce; the anemone
That weeps at daybreak, like a silly girl
Before her love, and hardly lets the butterflies
unfurl

Their painted wings beside it,- bid it pine
In pale virginity; the winter snow
Will suit it better than those lips of thine
Whose fires would but scorch it, rather go
And pluck that amorous flower which blooms alone,

Fed by the pander wind with dust of kisses not its own.

The trumpet-mouths of red convolvulus
So dear to maidens, creamery meadow-sweet
Whiter than Juno's throat and odorous
As all Arabia, hyacinths the feet
Of Huntress Dian would be loath to mar
For any dappled fawn,- pluck these, and those fond
flowers which are

Fairer than what Queen Venus trod upon
Beneath the pines of Ida, eucharis,
That morning star which does not dread the sun,
And budding marjoram which but to kiss
Would sweeten Cytheraea's lips and make
Adonis jealous,- these for thy head,- and for thy
girdle take

Yon curving spray of purple clematis
Whose gorgeous dye outflames the Tyrian King,
And fox-gloves with their nodding chalices,
But that one narciss which the startled Spring
Let from her kirtle fall when first she heard
In her own woods the wild tempestuous song of
summer's bird,

Ah! leave it for a subtle memory
Of those sweet tremulous days of rain and sun,
When April laughed between her tears to see
The early primrose with shy footsteps run
From the gnarled oak-tree roots till all the wold,
Spite of its brown and trampled leaves, grew bright
with shimmering gold.

Nay, pluck it too, it is not half so sweet
As thou thyself, my soul's idolatry!
And when thou art a-wearied at thy feet
Shall oxlips weave their brightest tapestry,
For thee the woodbine shall forget its pride
And veil its tangled whorls, and thou shalt walk
on daisies pied.

And I will cut a reed by yonder spring
And make the wood-gods jealous, and old Pan
Wonder what young intruder dares to sing
In these still haunts, where never foot of man
Should tread at evening, lest he chance to spy
The marble limbs of Artemis and all her company.

And I will tell you why the jacinth wears
Such dread embroidery of dolorous moan,
And why the hapless nightingale forbears
To sing her song at noon, but weeps alone
When the fleet swallow sleeps, and rich men feast,
And why the laurel trembles when she sees the
lightening east.

And I will sing how sad Proserpina
Unto a grave and gloomy Lord was wed,
And lure the silver-breasted Helena

Back from the lotus meadows of the dead,
So shalt thou see that awful loveliness
For which two mighty Hosts met fearfully in
war's abyss!

And then I'll pipe to thee that Grecian tale
How Cynthia loves the lad Endymion,
And hidden in a gray and misty veil
Hies to the cliffs of Latmos, once the Sun
Leaps from his ocean bed, in fruitless chase
Of those pale flying feet which fade away in
his embrace.

And if my flute can breathe sweet melody,
We may behold Her face who long ago
Dwelt among men by the Aegean sea,
And whose sad house with pillaged portico
And friezeless wall and columns toppled down
Looms o'er the ruins of that fair and
violet-cinctured town.

Spirit of Beauty! tarry still a-while,
They are not dead, thine ancient votaries,
Some few there are to whom thy radiant smile
Is better than a thousand victories,
Though all the nobly slain of Waterloo
Rise up in wrath against them! tarry still,
there are a few,

Who for thy sake would give their manlihood
And consecrate their being, I at least
Have done so, made thy lips my daily food,
And in thy temples found a goodlier feast
Than this starved age can give me, spite of all
Its new-found creeds so skeptical and so dogmatical.

Here not Cephissos, not Ilissos flows,
The woods of white Colonos are not here,
On our bleak hills the olive never blows,
No simple priest conducts his lowing steer
Up the steep marble way, nor through the town
Do laughing maidens bear to thee the crocus-flowered
gown.

Yet tarry! for the boy who loved thee best,
Whose very name should be a memory
To make thee linger, sleeps in silent rest
Beneath the Roman walls, and melody
Still mourns her sweetest lyre, none can play
The lute of Adonais, with his lips Song passed away.

Nay, when Keats died the Muses still had left
One silver voice to sing his threnody,
But ah! too soon of it we were bereft
When on that riven night and stormy sea
Panthea claimed her singer as her own,
And slew the mouth that praised her; since which
time we walk alone,

Save for that fiery heart, that morning star

Of re-arisen England, whose clear eye
Saw from our tottering throne and waste of war
The grand Greek limbs of young Democracy
Rise mightily like Hesperus and bring
The great Republic! him at least thy love hath
taught to sing,

And he hath been thee at Thessaly,
And seen white Atalanta fleet of foot
In passionless and fierce virginity
Hunting the tusked boar, his honeyed lute
Hath pierced the cavern of the hollow hill,
And Venus laughs to the one knee will bow before
her still.

And he hath kissed the one of Proserpine,
And sung the Galilaeen's requiem,
That wounded forehead dashed with blood and wine
He hath discrowned, the Ancient Gods in him
Have found their last, most ardent worshipper,
And the Sign grows gray and dim before its conqueror

Spirit of Beauty! tarry with us still,
It is not quenched the torch of poesy,
The star that shook above the Eastern hill
Holds unassailed its argent armory
From all the gathering gloom and fretful fight-
O tarry with us still! for through the long and
common night,

Morris, our sweet and simple Chaucer's child,
Dear heritor of Spenser's tuneful reed,
With soft and sylvan pipe has oft beguiled
The weary soul of man in troublous need,
And from the far and flowerless fields of ice
Has brought fair flowers meet to make an earthly
paradise.

We know them all, Gudrun the strong man's bride,
Aslaug and Olafson we know them all,
How giant Grettir fought and Sigurd died,
And what enchantment held the king in thrall
When lonely Brynhild wrestled with the powers
That war against all passion, ah! how oft through
summer hours,

Long listless summer hours when the noon
Being enamored of a damask rose
Forgets to journey westward, till the moon
The pale usurper of its tribute grows
From a thin sickle to a silver shield
And chides its loitering car- how oft, in
some cool grassy field

Far from the cricket-ground and noisy eight
At Bagley, where the rustling bluebells come
Almost before the blackbird finds a mate
And overstay the swallow, and the hum
Of many murmuring bees flits through the leaves,
Have I lain poring on the dreamy tales his fancy weaves,

And through their unreal woes and mimic pain
Wept for myself, and so was purified,
And in their simple mirth grew glad again;
For as I sailed upon that pictured tide
The strength and splendour of the storm was mine
Without the storm's red ruin, for the singer is divine.

The little laugh of water falling down
Is not so musical, the clammy gold
Close hoarded in the tiny waxen town
Has less of sweetness in it, and the old
Half-withered reeds that waved in Arcady
Touched by his lips break forth again to
fresher harmony.

Spirit of Beauty tarry yet a-while!
Although the cheating merchants of the mart
With iron roads profane our lovely isle,
And break on whirring wheels the limbs of Art,
Ay! though the crowded factories beget
The blind-worm Ignorance that slays the soul,
O tarry yet!

For One at least there is,- He bears his name
From Dante and the seraph Gabriel,-
Whose double laurels burn with deathless flame
To light thine altar; He too loves thee well
Who saw old Merlin lured in Vivien's snare,
And the white feet of angels coming down the
golden stair,

Loves thee so well, that all the world for him
A gorgeous-colored vestiture must wear,
And Sorrow take a purple diadem,
Or else be no more Sorrow, and Despair
Gild its own thorns, and Pain, like Adon, be
Even in anguish beautiful;- such is the empery

Which painters hold, and such the heritage
This gentle, solemn Spirit doth possess,
Being a better mirror of his age
In all his pity, love, and weariness,
Than those who can but copy common things,
And leave the soul unpainted with its mighty
questionings.

But they are few, and all romance has flown,
And men can prophesy about the sun,
And lecture on his arrows- how, alone,
Through a waste void the soulless atoms run,
How from each tree its weeping nymph has fled,
And that no more 'mid English reeds a Naiad shows
her head.

Methinks these new actaeons boast too soon
That they have spied on beauty; what if we
Have analysed the rainbow, robbed the moon
Of her most ancient, chastest mystery,
Shall I, the last Endymion, lose all hope

Because rude eyes peer at my mistress through
a telescope!

What profit if this scientific age
Burst through our gates with all its retinue
Of modern miracles! Can it assuage
One lover's breaking heart? what can it do
To make one life more beautiful, one day
More god-like in its period? but now the Age of Clay

Returns in horrid cycle, and the earth
Hath borne again a noisy progeny
Of ignorant Titans, whose ungodly birth
Hurls them against the august hierarchy
Which sat upon Olympus, to the Dust
They have appealed, and to that barren arbiter
they must

Repair for judgment, let them, if they can,
From Natural Warfare and insensate Chance,
Create the new ideal rule for man!
Methinks that was not my inheritance;
For I was nurtured otherwise, my soul
Passes from higher heights of life to a more
supreme goal.

Lo! while we spake the earth did turn away
Her visage from the God, and Hecate's boat
Rose silver-laden, till the jealous day
Blew all its torches out: I did not note
The waning hours, to young Endymions
Time's palsied fingers count in vain his
rosary of suns!-

Mark how the yellow iris wearily
Leans back its throat, as though it would be kissed
By its false chamberer, the dragon-fly,
Who, like a blue vein on a girl's white wrist,
Sleeps on that snowy primrose of the night,
Which 'gins to flush with crimson shame, and die
beneath the light.

Come let us go, against the pallid shield
Of the wan sky the almond blossoms gleam,
The corn-crake nested in the unmown field
Answers its mate, across the misty stream
On fitful wing the startled curlews fly,
And in his sedgy bed the lark, for joy that Day
is nigh,

Scatters the pearled dew from off the grass,
In tremulous ecstasy to greet the sun,
Who soon in gilded panoply will pass
Forth from yon orange-curtained pavilion
Hung in the burning east, see, the red rim
O'ertops the expectant hills! it is the God!
for love of him

Already the shrill lark is out of sight,
Flooding with waves of song this silent dell,-

Ah! there is something more in that bird's flight
Than could be tested in a crucible!-
But the air freshens, let us go,- why soon
The woodmen will be here; how we have lived this
night of June!

THE END