



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