



1890

THE FOURTH MOVEMENT

by Oscar Wilde

IMPRESSION

Le Reveillon

The sky is laced with fitful red,  
The circling mists and shadows flee,  
The dawn is rising from the sea,  
Like a white lady from her bed.

And jagged brazen arrows fall  
Athwart the feathers of the night,  
And a long wave of yellow light  
Breaks silently on tower and hall,

And spreading wide across the wold  
Wakes into flight some fluttering bird,  
And all the chestnut tops are stirred,  
And all the branches streaked with gold.

AT VERONA

How steep the stairs within Kings' houses are  
For exile-wearied feet as mine to tread,  
And O how salt and bitter is the bread  
Which falls from this Hound's table,- better far  
That I had died in the red ways of war,  
Or that the gate of Florence bare my head,  
Than to live thus, by all things comraded  
Which seek the essence of my soul to mar.

"Curse God and die: what better hope than this?  
He hath forgotten thee in all the bliss  
Of his gold city, and eternal day"-  
Nay peace: behind my prison's blinded bars  
I do possess what none can take away,  
My love, and all the glory of the stars.

APOLOGIA

Is it thy will that I should wax and wane,  
Barter my cloth of gold for hodden gray,  
And at thy pleasure weave that web of pain  
Whose brightest threads are each a wasted day?

Is it thy will- Love that I love so well-  
That my Soul's House should be a tortured spot  
Wherein, like evil paramours, must dwell  
The quenchless flame, the worm that dieth not?

Nay, if it be thy will I shall endure,  
And sell ambition at the common mart,  
And let dull failure be my vestiture,  
And sorrow dig its grave within my heart.

Perchance it may be better so- at least  
I have not made my heart a heart of stone,

Nor starved my boyhood of its goodly feast,  
Nor walked where Beauty is a thing unknown.

Many a man hath done so; sought to fence  
In straitened bonds the soul that should be free,  
Trodden the dusty road of common sense,  
While all the forest sang of liberty,

Not marking how the spotted hawk in flight  
Passed on wide pinion through the lofty air,  
To where the steep untrodden mountain height  
Caught the last tresses of the Sun God's hair.

Or how the little flower he trod upon,  
The daisy, that white-feathered shield of gold,  
Followed with wistful eyes the wandering sun  
Content if once its leaves were aureoled.

But surely it is something to have been  
The best beloved for a little while,  
To have walked hand in hand with Love, and seen  
His purple wings flit once across thy smile.

Ay! though the gorged asp of passion feed  
On my boy's heart, yet have I burst the bars,  
Stood face to face with Beauty, known indeed  
The Love which moves the Sun and all the stars!  
QUIA MULTUM AMAVI

Dear heart I think the young impassioned priest  
When first he takes from out the hidden shrine  
His God imprisoned in the Eucharist,  
And eats the Bread, and drinks the Dreadful Wine,

Feels not such awful wonder as I felt  
When first my smitten eyes beat full on thee,  
And all night long before thy feet I knelt  
Till thou wert wearied of Idolatry.

Ah! had'st thou liked me less and loved me more,  
Through all those summer days of joy and rain,  
I had not now been sorrow's heritor,  
Or stood a lackey in the House of Pain.

Yet, though remorse, youth's white-faced seneschal  
Tread on my heels with all his retinue,  
I am most glad I loved thee- think of all  
The sums that go to make one speedwell blue!  
SILENTIUM AMORIS

As oftentimes the too resplendent sun  
Hurries the pallid and reluctant moon  
Back to her sombre cave, ere she hath won  
A single ballad from the nightingale,  
So doth thy Beauty make my lips to fail,  
And all my sweetest singing out of tune.

And as at dawn across the level mead  
On wings impetuous some wind will come,  
And with its too harsh kisses break the reed

Which was its only instrument of song,  
So my too stormy passions work me wrong,  
And for excess of Love my Love is dumb.

But surely unto thee mine eyes did show  
Why I am silent, and my lute unstrung;  
Else it were better we should part, and go,  
Thou to some lips of sweeter melody,  
And I to nurse the barren memory  
Of unkissed kisses, and songs never sung.

HER VOICE

The wild bee reels from bough to bough  
With his furry coat and his gauzy wing.  
Now in a lily-cup, and now  
Setting a jacinth bell a-swing,  
In his wandering;  
Sit closer love: it was here I trow  
I made that vow,

Swore that two lives should be like one  
As long as the sea-gull loved the sea,  
As long as the sunflower sought the sun-  
It shall be, I said, for eternity  
'Twixt you and me!  
Dear friend, those times are over and done,  
Love's web is spun.

Look upward where the poplar trees  
Sway and sway in the summer air,  
Here in the valley never a breeze  
Scatters the thistledowns, but there  
Great winds blow fair  
From the mighty murmuring mystical seas,  
And the wave-lashed leas.

Look upward where the white gull screams  
What does it see that we do not see?  
Is that a star? or the lamp that gleams  
On some outward voyaging argosy,-  
Ah! can it be  
We have lived our lives in land of dreams!  
How sad it seems.

Sweet, there is nothing left to say  
But this, that love is never lost.  
Keen winter stabs the breasts of May  
Whose crimson roses burst his frost,  
Ships tempest-tossed  
Will find a harbour in some bay,  
And so we may.

And there is nothing left to do  
But to kiss once again, and part,  
Nay, there is nothing we should rue,  
I have my beauty,- you your Art.  
Nay, do not start,  
One world was not enough for two  
Like me and you.

MY VOICE

Within this restless, hurried, modern world  
We took our heart's full pleasure- You and I,  
And now the white sails of our ship are furled,  
And spent the lading of our argosy.

Wherefore my cheeks before their time are wan,  
For very weeping is my gladness fled  
Sorrow hath paled my lip's vermilion,  
And Ruin draws the curtains of my bed.

But all this crowded life has been to thee  
No more than lyre, or lute, or subtle spell  
Of viols, or the music of the sea  
That sleeps, a mimic echo, in the shell.

TAEDIUM VITAE

To stab my youth with desperate knife, to wear  
This paltry age's gaudy livery,  
To let each base hand filch my treasury,  
To mesh my soul within a woman's hair,  
And be mere Fortune's lackeyed groom,- I swear,  
I love it not! these things are less to me  
Than the thin foam that frets upon the sea,  
Less than the thistle-down of summer air  
Which hath no seed: better to stand aloof  
Far from these slanderous fools who mock my life  
Knowing me not, better the lowliest roof  
Fit for the meanest hind to sojourn in,  
Than to go back to that hoarse cave of strife  
Where my white soul first kissed the mouth of sin.

THE END