

1881

CHARMIDES

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Charmides (1881) - Charmides, a Grecian boy, hides in the temple of Athena and lavishes his passion on a statue of the goddess.

Opening line: He was a Grecian lad, who coming home ... I He was a Grecian lad, who coming home With pulpy figs and wine from Sicily Stood at his galley's prow, and let the foam Blow through his crisp brown curls unconsciously, And holding wind and wave in boy's despite Peered from his dripping seat across the wet and stormy night.

Till with the dawn he saw a burnished spear Like a thin thread of gold against the sky, And hoisted sail, and strained the creaking gear, And bade the pilot head her lustily Against the nor-west gale, and all day long Held on his way, and marked the rowers' time with measured song.

And when the faint Corinthian hills were red Dropped anchor in a little sandy bay, And with fresh boughs of olive crowned his head, And brushed from cheek and throat the hoary spray, And washed his limbs with oil, and from the hold Brought out his linen tunic and his sandals brazen-soled.

And a rich robe stained with the fishes' juice Which of some swarthy trader he had bought Upon the sunny quay at Syracuse, And was with Tyrian broideries inwrought, And by the questioning merchants made his way Up through the soft and silver woods, and when the laboring day Had spun its tangled web of crimson cloud, Clomb the high hill, and with swift silent feet Crept to the fane unnoticed by the crowd Of busy priests, and from some dark retreat Watched the young swains his frolic playmates bring The firstling of their little flock, and the shy shepherd fling The crackling salt upon the flame, or hang His studded crook against the temple wall To Her who keeps away the ravenous fang Of the base wolf from homestead and from stall; And then the clear-voiced maidens 'gan to sing, And to the altar each man brought some goodly offering, A beechen cup brimming with milky foam, A fair cloth wrought with cunning imagery Of hounds in chase, a waxen honeycomb Dripping with oozy gold which scarce the bee Had ceased from building, a black skin of oil Meet for the wrestlers, a great boar the fierce and white-tusked spoil Stolen from Artemis that jealous maid To please Athena, and the dappled hide Of a tall stag who in some mountain glade Had met the shaft; and then the herald cried, And from the pillared precinct one by one Went the glad Greeks well pleased that they their simple vows had done.

And the old priest put out the waning fires Save that one lamp whose restless ruby glowed For ever in the cell, and the shrill lyres

Came fainter on the wind, as down the road In joyous dance these
country folk did pass, And with stout hands the warder closed the
gates of polished brass.

Long time he lay and hardly dared to breathe, And heard the
cadenced drip of spilt-out wine, And the rose-petals falling from
the wreath As the night breezes wandered through the shrine, And
seemed to be in some entranced swoon Till through the open roof
above the full and brimming moon Flooded with sheeny waves the
marble floor, When from his nook upleapt the venturous lad, And
flinging wide the cedar-carven door Beheld an awful image
saffron-clad And armed for battle! the gaunt Griffin glared From
the huge helm, and the long lance of wreck and ruin flared Like a
red rod of flame, stony and steeled The Gorgon's head its leaden
eyeballs rolled, And writhed its snaky horrors through the shield,
And gaped aghast with bloodless lips and cold In passion
impotent, while with blind gaze The blinking owl between the feet
hooted in shrill amaze.

The lonely fisher as he trimmed his lamp Far out at sea off Sunium,
or cast The net for tunnies, heard a brazen tramp Of horses smite
the waves, and a wild blast Divide the folded curtains of the night,
And knelt upon the little poop, and prayed in holy fright.

And guilty lovers in their venery Forgat a little while their stolen
sweets, Deeming they heard dread Dian's bitter cry; And the grim
watchmen on their lofty seats Ran to their shields in haste
precipitate, Or strained black-bearded throats across the dusky
parapet.

For round the temple rolled the clang of arms, And the twelve
Gods leapt up in marble fear, And the air quaked with dissonant
alarums Till huge Poseidon shook his mighty spear, And on the
frieze the prancing horses neighed, And the low tread of hurrying
feet rang from the cavalcade.

Ready for death with parted lips he stood, And well content at
such a price to see That calm wide brow, that terrible maidenhood.

The marvel of that pitiless chastity, Ah! well content indeed, for
never wight Since Troy's young shepherd prince had seen so
wonderful a sight.

Ready for death he stood, but lo! the air Grew silent, and the horses
ceased to neigh, And off his brow he tossed the clustering hair,
And from his limbs he threw the cloak away, For whom would not
such love make desperate, And nigher came, and touched her
throat, and with hands violate Undid the cuirass, and the crocus

gown, And bared the breasts of polished ivory, Till from the waist
the peplos falling down Left visible the secret mystery Which no
lover will Athena show, The grand cool flanks, the crescent thighs,
the bossy hills of snow.

Those who have never known a lover's sin Let them not read my
ditty, it will be To their dull ears so musicless and thin That they
will have no joy of it, but ye To whose wan cheeks now creeps the
lingering smile, Ye who have learned who Eros is,- O listen yet a-
while.

A little space he let his greedy eyes Rest on the burnished image,
till mere sight Half swooned for surfeit of such luxuries, And then
his lips in hungering delight Fed on her lips, and round the
towered neck He flung his arms, nor cared at all his passion's will
to check.

Never I ween did lover hold such tryst, For all night long he
murmured honeyed word, And saw her sweet unravished limbs,
and kissed Her pale and argent body undisturbed, And paddled
with the polished throat, and pressed His hot and beating heart
upon her chill and icy breast.

It was as if Numidian javelins Pierced through and through his
wild and whirling brain, And his nerves thrilled like throbbing
violins In exquisite pulsation, and the pain Was such sweet
anguish that he never drew His lips from hers till overhead the
lark of warning flew.

They who have never seen the daylight peer Into a darkened room,
and drawn the curtain, And with dull eyes and wearied from some
dear And worshipped body risen, they for certain Will never know
of what I try to sing, How long the last kiss was, how fond and late
his lingering.

The moon was girdled with a crystal rim, The sign which shipmen
say is ominous Of wrath in heaven, the wan stars were dim And
the low lightening cast was tremulous With the faint fluttering
wings of flying dawn, Ere from the silent sombre shrine this lover
had withdrawn.

Down the steep rock with hurried feet and fast Clomb the brave
lad, and reached the cave of Pan, And heard the goat-foot snoring
as he passed, And leapt upon a grassy knoll and ran Like a young
fawn unto an olive wood Which in a shady valley by the well-built
city stood.

And sought a little stream, which well he knew, For oftentimes with boyish careless shout The green and crested grebe he would pursue, Or snare in woven net the silver trout, And down amid the startled reeds he lay Panting in breathless sweet affright, and waited for the day.

On the green bank he lay, and let one hand Dip in the cool dark eddies listlessly, And soon the breath of morning came and fanned His hot flushed cheeks, or lifted wantonly The tangled curls from off his forehead, while He on the running water gazed with strange and secret smile.

And soon the shepherd in rough woollen cloak With his long crook undid the wattled cotes, And from the stack a thin blue wreath of smoke Curled through the air across the ripening oats, And on the hill the yellow house-dog bayed As through the crisp and rustling fern the heavy cattle strayed.

And when the light-foot mower went a-field Across the meadows laced with threaded dew, And the sheep bleated on the misty weald, And from its nest the wakening corn-crake flew, Some woodmen saw him lying by the stream And marvelled much that any lad so beautiful could seem, Nor deemed him born of mortals, and one said, "It is young Hylas, that false runaway Who with a Naiad now would make his bed Forgetting Herakles," but others, "Nay, It is Narcissus, his own paramour, Those are the fond and crimson lips no woman can allure."

And when they nearer came a third one cried, "It is young Dionysos who has hid His spear and fawnskin by the river side Weary of hunting with the Bassarid, And wise indeed were we away to fly, They live not long who on the gods immortal come to spy."

So turned they back, and feared to look behind, And told the timid swain how they had seen Amid the reeds some woodland God reclined, And no man dared to cross the open green, And on that day no olive-tree was slain, Nor rushes cut, but all deserted was the fair domain.

Save when the neat-herd's lad, his empty pail Well slung upon his back, with leap and bound Raced on the other side, and stopped to hail Hoping that he some comrade new had found, And gat no answer, and then half afraid Passed on his simple way, or down the still and silent glade. A little girl ran laughing from the farm Not thinking of love's secret mysteries, And when she saw the white and gleaming arm And all his manlihood, with longing eyes

Whose passion mocked her sweet virginity
Watched him a-while,
and then stole back sadly and wearily.

Far off he heard the city's hum and noise,
And now and then the shriller laughter where
The passionate purity of brown-limbed
boys Wrestled or raced in the clear healthful air,
And now and then a little tinkling bell
As the shorn wether led the sheep down to
the mossy well.

Through the gray willows danced the fretful gnat,
The grasshopper chirped idly from the tree,
In sleek and oily coat the water-rat
Breasting the little ripples manfully
Made for the wild-duck's nest,
from bough to bough Hopped the shy finch, and the huge tortoise
crept across the slough.

On the faint wind floated the silky seeds,
As the bright scythe swept through the waving grass,
The ousel-cock splashed circles in
the reeds And flecked with silver whorls the forest's glass,
Which scarce had caught again its imagery
Ere from its bed the dusky
tench leapt at the dragon-fly.

But little care had he for anything
Though up and down the beech
the squirrel played, And from the copse the linnet 'gan to sing
To her brown mate her sweetest serenade,
Ah! little care indeed, for
he had seen The breasts of Pallas and the naked wonder of the
Queen.

But when the herdsman called his straggling goats
With whistling pipe across the rocky road,
And the shard-beetle with its trumpet-
notes Boomed through the darkening woods, and seemed to bode
Of coming storm, and the belated crane
Passed homeward like a shadow, and the dull big drops of rain
Fell on the pattering fig-leaves, up he rose,
And from the gloomy forest went his way
Past sombre homestead and wet orchard-close,
And came at last unto a little quay,
And called his mates a-board, and took his seat
On the high poop, and pushed from land, and loosed the dripping sheet,
And steered across the bay, and when nine suns
Passed down the long and laddered way of gold,
And nine pale moons had breathed their orisons
To the chaste stars their confessors, or told
Their dearest secret to the downy moth
That will not fly at noonday, through the foam and surging froth
Came a great owl with yellow sulphurous eyes
And lit upon the ship, whose timbers
creaked As though the lading of three argosies
Were in the hold, and flopped its wings, and shrieked,
And darkness straightway stole across the deep,
Sheathed was Orion's sword, dread Mars
himself fled down the steep, And the moon hid behind a tawny
mask
Of drifting cloud, and from the ocean's marge
Rose the red

plume, the huge and horned casque, The seven cubit spear, the brazen targe!

And clad in bright and burnished panoply Athena strode across the stretch of sick and shivering sea!

To the dull sailors' sight her loosened locks Seemed like the jagged storm-rack, and her feet Only the spume that floats on hidden rocks, And marking how the rising waters beat Against the rolling ship, the pilot cried To the young helmsman at the stern to luff to windward side.

But he, the over-bold adulterer, A dear profaner of great mysteries, An ardent amorous idolater, When he beheld those grand relentless eyes Laughed loud for joy, and crying out "I come" Leapt from the lofty poop into the chill and churning foam.

Then fell from the high heaven one bright star, One dancer left the circling galaxy, And back to Athens on her clattering car In all the pride of venged divinity Pale Pallas swept with shrill and steely clank, And a few gurgling bubbles rose where her boy lover sank.

And the mast shuddered as the gaunt owl flew, With mocking hoots after the wrathful Queen, And the old pilot bade the trembling crew Hoist the big sail, and told how he had seen Close to the stern a dim and giant form, And like a dripping swallow the stout ship dashed through the storm.

And no man dared to speak of Charmides Deeming that he some evil thing had wrought, And when they reached the strait Symplegades They beached their galley on the shore, and sought The toll-gate of the city hastily, And in the market showed their brown and pictured pottery.

II But some good Triton-god had ruth, and bare The boy's drowned body back to Grecian land, And mermaids combed his dank and dripping hair And smoothed his brow, and loosed his clinching hand, Some brought sweet spices from far Araby, And others made the halcyon sing her softest lullaby.

And when he neared his old Athenian home, A mighty billow rose up suddenly Upon whose oily back the clotted foam Lay diapered in some strange fantasy, And clasping him unto its glassy breast, Swept landward, like a white-maned Steed upon a venturesome quest!

Now where Colonos leans unto the sea There lies a long and level stretch of lawn, The rabbit knows it, and the mountain bee For it

deserts Hymettus, and the Faun Is not afraid, for never through the day Comes a cry ruder than the shout of shepherd lads at play.

But often from the thorny labyrinth And tangled branches of the circling wood The stealthy hunter sees young Hyacinth Hurling the polished disk, and draws his hood Over his guilty gaze, and creeps away, Nor dares to wind his horn, or- else at the first break of day The Dryads come and throw the leathern ball Along the reedy shore, and circumvent Some goat-eared Pan to be their seneschal For fear of bold Poseidon's ravishment, And loose their girdles, with shy timorous eyes, Lest from the surf his azure arms and purple beard should rise.

On this side and on that a rocky cave, Hung with yellow-bell'd laburnum, stands, Smooth is the beach, save where some ebbing wave Leaves its faint outline etched upon the sands, As though it feared to be too soon forgot By the green rush, its playfellow,- and yet, it is a spot So small, that the inconstant butterfly Could steal the hoarded honey from each flower Ere it was noon, and still not satisfy Its over-greedy love,- within an hour A sailor boy, were he but rude enow To land and pluck a garland for his galley's painted prow, Would almost leave the little meadow bare, For it knows nothing of great pageantry, Only a few narcissi here and there Stand separate in sweet austerity, Dotting the unmown grass with silver stars, And here aid there a daffodil waves tiny scimetars.

Hither the billow brought him, and was glad Of such dear servitude, and where the land Was virgin of all waters laid the lad Upon the golden margent of the strand, And like a lingering lover oft returned To kiss those pallid limbs which once with intense fire burned, Ere the wet seas had quenched that holocaust, That self-fed flame, that passionate lustihead, Ere grisly death with chill and nipping frost Had withered up those lilies white and red Which, while the boy would through the forest range, Answered each other in a sweet antiphonal counter-change.

And when at dawn the wood-nymphs, hand-in-hand, Threaded the bosky dell, their satyr spied The boy's pale body stretched upon the sand, And feared Poseidon's treachery, and cried, And like bright sunbeams flitting through a glade, Each startled Dryad sought some safe and leafy ambushade.

Save one white girl, who deemed it would not be So dread a thing to feel a sea-god's arms Crushing her breasts in amorous tyranny, And longed to listen to those subtle charms Insidious lovers weave when they would win Some fenced fortress, and stole back again, nor thought it sin To yield her treasure unto one so fair, And lay

beside him, thirsty with love's drouth, Called him soft names,
 played with his tangled hair, And with hot lips made havoc of his
 mouth Afraid he might not wake, and then afraid Lest he might
 wake too soon, fled back, and then, fond renegade, Returned to
 fresh assault, and all day long Sat at his side, and laughed at her
 new toy, And held his hand, and sang her sweetest song, Then
 frowned to see how froward was the boy Who would not with her
 maidenhood entwine, Nor knew that three days since his eyes had
 looked on Proserpine, Nor knew what sacrilege his lips had done,
 But said, "He will awake, I know him well, He will awake at
 evening when the sun Hangs his red shield on Corinth's citadel,
 This sleep is but a cruel treachery To make me love him more, and
 in some cavern of the sea "Deeper than ever falls the fisher's line
 Already a huge Triton blows his horn, And weaves a garland from
 the crystalline And drifting ocean-tendrils to adorn The emerald
 pillars of our bridal bed, For sphered in foaming silver, and with
 coral-crowned head.

"We two will sit upon a throne of pearl, And a blue wave will be
 our canopy, And at our feet the water-snakes will curl In all their
 amethystine panoply Of diamonded man, and we will mark The
 mullets swimming by the mast of some storm-foundered bark,
 "Vermilion-finned with eyes of bossy gold Like flakes of crimson
 light, and the great deep His glassy-portaled chamber will unfold,
 And we will see the painted dolphins sleep Cradled by murmuring
 halcyons on the rocks Where Proteus in quaint suit of green
 pastures his monstrous flocks.

"And tremulous opal hued anemones Will wave their purple
 fringes where we tread Upon the mirrored floor, and argosies Of
 fishes flecked with tawny scales will thread The drifting cordage of
 the shattered wreck, And honey-colored amber beads our twining
 limbs will deck."

But when that baffled Lord of War the Sun With gaudy pennon
 flying passed away Into his brazen House, and one by one The
 little yellow stars began to stray Across the field of heaven, ah!
 then indeed She feared his lips upon her lips would never care to
 feed, And cried, "Awake, already the pale moon Washes the trees
 with silver, and the wave Creeps gray and chilly up this sandy
 dune, The croaking frogs are out, and from the cave The night-jar
 shrieks, the fluttering bats repass, And the brown stoat with hollow
 flanks creeps through the dusky grass.

"Nay, though thou art a God, be not so coy, For in yon stream there
 is a little reed That often whispers how a lovely boy Lay with her

once upon a grassy mead, Who when his cruel pleasure he had done
Spread wings of rustling gold and soared aloft into the sun.

“Be not so coy, the laurel trembles still With great Apollo’s kisses,
and the fir Whose clustering sisters fringe the sea-ward hill Hath
many a tale of that bold ravisher Whom men call Boreas, and I
have seen The mocking eyes of Hermes through the poplar’s
silvery sheen.

“Even the jealous Naiads call me fair, And every morn a young
and ruddy swain Wooes me with apples and with locks of hair,
And seeks to soothe my virginal disdain By all the gifts the gentle
wood-nymphs love; But yesterday he brought to me an iris-
plumaged dove “With little crimson feet, which with its store
Of seven spotted eggs the cruel lad Had stolen from the lofty
sycamore At daybreak when her amorous comrade had Flown off
in search of berried juniper Which most they love; the fretful wasp,
that earliest vintager “Of the blue grapes, hath not persistency
So constant as this simple shepherd-boy For my poor lips, his joyous
purity And laughing sunny eyes might well decoy A Dryad from
her oath to Artemis; For very beautiful is he, his mouth was made
to kiss.

“His argent forehead, like a rising moon Over the dusky hills of
meeting brows, Is crescent shaped, the hot and Tyrian noon
Leads from the myrtle-grove no goodlier spouse For Cytheraea, the first
silky down Fringes his blushing cheeks, and his young limbs are
strong and brown: “And he is rich, and fat and fleecy herds
Of bleating sheep upon his meadows lie, And many an earthen bowl
of yellow curds Is in his homestead for the thievish fly To swim
and drown in, the pink clover mead Keeps its sweet store for him,
and he can pipe on oaten reed.

“And yet I love him not, it was for thee I kept my love, I knew that
thou would’st come To rid me of this pallid chastity; Thou fairest
flower of the flowerless foam Of all the wide Aegean, brightest star
Of ocean’s azure heavens where the mirrored planets are!

“I knew that thou would’st come, for when at first The dry wood
burgeoned, and the sap of Spring Swelled in my green and tender
bark or burst To myriad multitudinous blossoming Which mocked
the midnight with its mimic moons That did not dread the dawn,
and first the thrushes’ rapturous tunes “Startled the squirrel from
its granary, And cuckoo flowers fringed the narrow lane, Through
my young leaves a sensuous ecstasy Crept like new wine, and
every mossy vein Throbbled with the fitful pulse of amorous blood,
And the wild winds of passion shook my slim stem’s maidenhood.

“The trooping fawns at evening came and laid Their cool black noses on my lowest boughs And on my topmost branch the blackbird made A little nest of grasses for his spouse, And now and then a twittering wren would light On a thin twig which hardly bare the weight of such delight.

“I was the Attic shepherd’s trysting place, Beneath my shadow Amaryllis lay, And round my trunk would laughing Daphnis chase The timorous girl, till tired out with play She felt his hot breath stir her tangled hair, And turned, and looked, and fled no more from such delightful snare.

“Then come away unto my ambuscade Where clustering woodbine weaves a canopy For amorous pleasaunce, and the rustling shade Of Paphian myrtles seems to sanctify The dearest rites of love, there in the cool And green recesses of its furthest depth there is a pool, “The ouzel’s haunt, the wild bee’s pasturage; For round its rim great creamy lilies float Through their flat leaves in verdant anchorage, Each cup a white-sailed golden-laden boat Steered by a dragon-fly,- be not afraid To leave this wan and wave-kissed shore, surely the place were made “For lovers such as we, the Cyprian Queen, One arm around her boyish paramour, Strays often there at eve, and I have seen The moon strip off her misty vestiture For young Endymion’s eyes, be not afraid, The panther feet of Dian never tread that secret glade.

“Nay, if thou wil’st, back to the beating brine, Back to the boisterous billow let us go, And all day beneath the hyaline Huge vault of Neptune’s watery portico, And watch the purple monsters of the deep Sport in ungainly play, and from his lair keen Xiphias leap.

“For if my mistress find me lying here She will not ruth or gentle pity show, But lay her boar-spear down, and with austere Relentless fingers string the cornel bow, And draw the feathered notch against her breast, And loose the arched cord, ay, even now upon the quest “I hear her hurrying feet,- awake, awake, Thou laggard in love’s battle! once at least Let me drink deep of passion’s wine, and slake My parched being with the nectarous feast Which even Gods affect! O come Love come, Still we have time to reach the cavern of thine azure home.”

Scarce had she spoken when the shuddering trees Shook, and the leaves divided, and the air Grew conscious of a God, and the gray seas Crawled backward, and a long and dismal blare Blew from some tasseled horn, a sleuth-hound bayed And like a flame a barbed reed flew whizzing down the glade.

And where the little flowers of her breast
 Just brake in to their milky blossoming,
 This murderous paramour, this unbidden guest,
 Pierced and struck deep in horrid chambering,
 And plowed a bloody furrow with its dart,
 And dug a long red road, and cleft
 with winged death her heart.

Sobbing her life out with a bitter cry
 On the boy's body fell the Dryad maid,
 Sobbing for incomplete virginity,
 And raptures unenjoyed, and pleasures dead,
 And all the pain of things unsatisfied,
 And the bright drops of crimson youth crept down her
 throbbing side.

Ah! pitiful it was to hear her moan,
 And very pitiful to see her die
 Ere she had yielded up her sweets, or known
 The joy of passion, that dread mystery
 Which not to know is not to live at all,
 And yet to know is to be held in death's most deadly thrall.

But as it hapt the Queen of Cythere,
 Who with Adonis all night long had lain
 Within some shepherd's hut in Arcady,
 On team of silver doves and gilded wane
 Was journeying Paphos-ward, high up afar
 From mortal ken between the mountains and the morning
 star, And when low down she spied the hapless pair,
 And heard the Oread's faint despairing cry,
 Whose cadence seemed to play upon the air
 As though it were a viol, hastily She bade her pigeons
 fold each straining plume, And dropt to earth, and reached the
 strand, and saw their dolorous doom.

For as a gardener turning back his head
 To catch the last notes of the linnet, mows
 With careless scythe too near some flower bed,
 And cuts the thorny pillar of the rose,
 And with the flower's loosened loveliness
 Strews the brown mold, or as some shepherd
 lad in wantonness Driving his little flock along the mead
 Treads down two daffodils which side by side
 Have lured the lady-bird with yellow brede
 And made the gaudy moth forget its pride,
 Treads down their brimming golden chalices
 Under light feet which were not made for such rude ravages,
 Or as a schoolboy tired of his book
 Flings himself down upon the reedy grass
 And plucks two water-lilies from the brook,
 And for a time forgets the hour glass,
 Then wearies of their sweets, and goes his way,
 And lets the hot sun kill them, even so these lovers lay,
 And Venus cried, "It is dread Artemis
 Whose bitter hand hath wrought this cruelty,
 Or else that mightier mayde whose care it is
 To guard her strong and stainless majesty
 Upon the hill Athenian,- alas!

That they who loved so well unloved into
 Death's house should pass."

So with soft hands she laid the boy and girl
 In the great golden waggon tenderly,
 Her white throat whiter than a moony pearl
 Just threaded with a blue vein's tapestry
 Had not yet ceased to throb,
 and still her breast Swayed like a wind-stirred lily in ambiguous
 unrest.

And then each pigeon spread its milky van,
 The bright car soared into the dawning sky
 And like a cloud the aerial caravan
 Passed over the Aegean silently,
 Till the faint air was troubled with the song
 From the wan mouths that call on bleeding Thammuz all
 night long.

But when the doves had reached their wonted goal
 Where the wide stair of orb'd marble dips
 Its snows into the sea, her fluttering soul
 Just shook the trembling petals of her lips
 And passed into the void, and Venus knew
 That one fair maid the less would walk
 amid her retinue, And bade her servants carve a cedar chest
 With all the wonder of this history,
 Within whose scented womb their limbs should rest
 Where olive-trees make tender the blue sky
 On the low hills of Paphos, and the fawn Pipes in the noonday,
 and the nightingale sings on till dawn.

Nor failed they to obey her hest, and ere
 The morning bee had stung the daffodil
 With tiny fretful spear, or from its lair
 The waking stag had leapt across the rill
 And roused the ousel, or the lizard crept
 Athwart the sunny rock, beneath the grass
 their bodies slept.

And when day brake, within that silver shrine
 Fed by the flames of cressets tremulous,
 Queen Venus knelt and prayed to Proserpine
 That she whose beauty made Death amorous
 Should beg a guerdon from her pallid Lord,
 And let desire pass across dread
 Charon's icy ford.

III In melancholy moonless Acheron,
 Far from the goodly earth and joyous day,
 Where no spring ever buds, nor ripening sun
 Weighs down the apple trees, nor flowery May
 Checkers with chestnut blooms the grassy floor,
 Where thrushes never sing, and piping linnets
 mate no more, There by a dim and dark
 Lethaeon well, Young Charmides was lying
 wearily He plucked the blossoms from the
 asphodel, And with its little rifled treasury
 Strewed the dull waters of the dusky stream,
 And watched the white stars founder, and the
 land was like a dream.

When as he gazed into the watery glass
 And through his brown hair's curly tangles
 scanned His own wan face, a shadow seemed
 to pass Across the mirror, and a little
 hand Stole into his, and

warm lips timidly Brushed his pale cheeks, and breathed their secret forth into a sigh.

Then turned he around his weary eyes and saw, And ever nigher still their faces came, And nigher ever did their young mouths draw Until they seemed one perfect rose of flame, And longing arms around her neck he cast, And felt her throbbing bosom, and his breath came hot and fast, And all his hoarded sweets were hers to kiss, And all her maidenhood was his to slay, And limb to limb in long and rapturous bliss Their passion waxed and waned,- O why essay To pipe again of love too venturous reed!

Enough, enough that Eros laughed upon that flowerless mead, Too venturous poesy O why essay To pipe again of passion! fold thy wings O'er daring Icarus and bid thy lay Sleep hidden in the lyre's silent strings, Till thou hast found the old Castilian rill, Or from the Lesbian waters plucked drowned Sappho's golden quill!

Enough, enough that he whose life had been A fiery pulse of sin, a splendid shame, Could in the loveless land of Hades glean One scorching harvest from those fields of flame Where passion walks with naked unshod feet And is not wounded,- ah! enough that once their lips could meet In that wild throb when all existences Seem narrowed to one single ecstasy Which dies through its own sweetness and the stress Of too much pleasure, ere Persephone Had made them serve her by the ebon throne Of the pale God who in the fields of Enna loosed her zone.

THE END