

1881

WIND FLOWERS

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. Wind Flowers (1881) - A collection of Wilde's shorter poems which includes Impression du Matin, Magdalen Walks, Athanasia, Serenade- For Music, Endymion, La Bella Donna Della Mia Mente, and Chanson.

IMPRESSION DU MATIN

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold Changed to a Harmony in gray: A barge with ochre-colored hay Dropt from the wharf: and chill and cold The yellow fog came creeping down The bridges, till the houses' walls Seemed changed to shadows, and St. Paul's Loomed like a bubble o'er the town.

Then suddenly arose the clang Of waking life; the streets were stirred With country waggons: and a bird Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

But one pale woman all alone, The daylight kissing her wan hair, Loitered beneath the gas lamp's flare, With lips of flame and heart of stone.

MAGDALEN WALKS

The little white clouds are racing over the sky, And the fields are strewn with the gold of the flower of March The daffodil breaks underfoot, and the tasselled larch Sways and swings as the thrush goes hurrying by.

A delicate odor is borne on the wings of the morning breeze, The odor of leaves, and of grass, and of newly upturned earth, The birds are singing for joy of the Spring's glad birth, Hopping from branch to branch on the rocking trees, And all the woods are alive with the murmur and sound of Spring, And the rosebud breaks into pink on the climbing brier, And the crocus-bed is a quivering moon of fire Girdled round with the belt of an amethyst ring.

And the plane to the pine-tree is whispering some tale of love Till it rustles with laughter and tosses its mantle of green And the gloom of the wych-elm's hollow is lit with the iris sheen Of the burnished rainbow throat and the silver breast of a dove.

See! the lark starts up from his bed in the meadow there, Breaking the gossamer threads and the nets of dew, And flashing a-down the river, a flame of blue!

The kingfisher flies like an arrow, and wounds the air.

ATHANASIA

To that gaunt House of Art which lacks for naught Of all the great things men have saved from Time, The withered body of a girl was brought Dead ere the world's glad youth had touched its prime,

And seen by lonely Arabs lying hid In the dim wound of some
black pyramid.

But when they had unloosed the linen band Which swathed the
Egyptian's body,- lo! was found Closed in the wasted hollow of her
hand A little seed, which sown in English ground Did wondrous
snow of starry blossoms bear, And spread rich odors through our
springtide air.

With such strange arts this flower did allure That all forgotten was
the asphodel, And the brown bee, the lily's paramour, Forsook the
cup where he was wont to dwell, For not a thing of earth it seemed
to be, But stolen from some heavenly Arcady.

In vain the sad narcissus, wan and white At its own beauty, hung
across the stream, The purple dragon-fly had no delight With its
gold-dust to make his wings a-gleam, Ah! no delight the jasmine-
bloom to kiss, Or brush the rain-pearls from the eucharis.

For love of it the passionate nightingale Forgot the hills of Thrace,
the cruel king, And the pale dove no longer cared to sail Through
the wet woods at time of blossoming, But round this flower of
Egypt sought to float, With silvered wing and amethystine throat.

While the hot sun blazed in his tower of blue A cooling wind crept
from the land of snows, And the warm south with tender tears of
dew Drenched its white leaves when Hesperos uprose Amid those
sea-green meadows of the sky On which the scarlet bars of sunset
lie.

But when o'er wastes of lily-haunted field The tired birds had
stayed their amorous tune, And broad and glittering like an argent
shield High in the sapphire heavens hung the moon, Did no
strange dream or evil memory make Each tremulous petal of its
blossoms shake?

Ah no! to this bright flower a thousand years Seemed but the
lingering of a summer's day, It never knew the tide of cankering
fears Which turn a boy's gold hair to withered gray, The dread
desire of death it never knew, Or how all folk that they were born
must rue.

For we to death with pipe and dancing go, Nor would we pass the
ivory gate again, As some sad river wearied of its flow Through
the dull plains, the haunts of common men, Leaps lover-like into
the terrible sea!

And counts it gain to die so gloriously.

We mar our lordly strength in barren strife With the world's
legions led by clamorous care, It never feels decay but gathers life
From the pure sunlight and the supreme air, We live beneath
Time's wasting sovereignty, It is the child of all eternity.

SERENADE For Music

The western wind is blowing fair Across the dark Aegean sea, And
at the secret marble stair My Tyrian galley waits for thee.

Come down! the purple sail is spread, The watchman sleeps within
the town.

O leave thy lily-flowered bed, O lady mine come down, come
down!

She will not come, I know her well, Of lover's vows she hath no
care, And little good a man can tell Of one so cruel and so fair.

True love is but a woman's toy, They never know the lover's pain,
And I who loved as loves a boy.

Must love in vain, must love in vain.

O noble pilot tell me true Is that the sheen of golden hair? Or is it
but the tangled dew That binds the passion-flowers there? Good
sailor come and tell me now Is that my lady's lily hand? Or is it but
the gleaming prow, Or is it but the silver sand?

No! no! 'tis not the tangled dew, 'Tis not the silver-fretted sand, It
is my own dear Lady true With golden hair and lily hand!

O noble pilot steer for Troy, Good sailor ply the laboring oar, This
is the Queen of life and joy Whom we must bear from Grecian
shore!

The waning sky grows faint and blue, It wants an hour still of day,
Aboard! aboard! my gallant crew, O Lady mine away! away!

O noble pilot steer for Troy, Good sailor ply the laboring oar, O
loved as only loves a boy!

O loved for ever evermore!

ENDYMION For Music

The apple trees are hung with gold, And birds are loud in Arcady,
The sheep lie bleating in the fold, The wild goat runs across the
wold, But yesterday his love he told, I know he will come back to
me.

O rising moon! O Lady moon!

Be you my lover's sentinel, You cannot choose but know him well,
For he is shod with purple shoon, You cannot choose but know my
love, For he a shepherd's crook doth bear, And he is soft as any
dove, And brown and curly is his hair.

The turtle now has ceased to call Upon her crimson-footed groom,
The gray wolf prowls about the stall, The lily's singing seneschal
Sleeps in the lily-bell, and all The violet hills are lost in gloom.

O risen moon! O holy moon!

Stand on the top of Helice, And if my own true love you see, Ah! if
you see the purple shoon, The hazel crook, the lad's brown hair,
The goat-skin wrapped about his arm, Tell him that I am waiting
where The rushlight glimmers in the Farm.

The falling dew is cold and chill, And no bird sings in Arcady, The
little fauns have left the hill, Even the tired daffodil Has closed its
gilded doors, and still My lover comes not back to me.

False moon! False moon! O waning moon!

Where is my own true lover gone, Where are the lips vermilion,
The shepherd's crook, the purple shoon? Why spread that silver
pavilion, Why wear that veil of drifting mist? Ah! thou hast young
Endymion, Thou hast the lips that should be kissed!

LA BELLA DONNA DEL MIA MENTE

My limbs are wasted with a flame, My feet are sore with travelling,
For calling on my Lady's name My lips have now forgot to sing.

O Linnet in the wild-rose brake Strain for my Love thy melody, O
Lark sing louder for love's sake My gentle Lady passeth by.

She is too fair for any man To see or hold his heart's delight, Fairer
than Queen or courtesan Or moon-lit water in the night.

Her hair is bound with myrtle leaves, (Green leaves upon her
golden hair!) Green grasses through the yellow sheaves Of autumn
corn are not more fair.

Her little lips, more made to kiss Than to cry bitterly for pain, Are
tremulous as brook-water is, Or roses after evening rain.

Her neck is like white melilote Flushing for pleasure of the sun,
The throbbing of the linnet's throat Is not so sweet to look upon.

As a pomegranate, cut in twain, White-seeded, is her crimson
mouth, Her cheeks are as the fading stain Where the peach reddens
to the south.

O twining hands! O delicate White body made for love and pain!
O House of Love! O desolate Pale flower beaten by the rain!

CHANSON

A ring of gold and a milk-white dove Are goodly gifts for thee,
And a hempen rope for your own love To hang upon a tree.

For you a House of Ivory (Roses are white in the rose-bower)!

A narrow bed for me to lie (White, O white is the hemlock flower)!
Myrtle and jessamine for you (O the red rose is fair to see)!
For me the cypress and the rue (Fairest of all is rosemary)!
For you three lovers of your hand (Green grass where a man lies
dead)!
For me three paces on the sand (Plant lilies at my head)!

THE END