

1881

THE GARDEN OF EROS

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. Garden of Eros (1881) - One of Wilde's long poems, it deals with Venus and Adonis and is an example of Wilde's early attraction to artificial pastoral settings. Opening line: It is full summer now, the heart of June, ...

THE GARDEN OF EROS

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

troublesome 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