

1626

**ON THE DEATH OF A FAIR INFANT DYING OF A
COUGH**

John Milton

Milton, John (1608-1674) - English poet and prose writer who is one of the most highly regarded figures in world literature and is widely considered the greatest poet since Shakespeare. Often called the "Puritan Poet," he had many of the good traits of the Puritans as well as many of the bad and spent much of his life immersed in political and religious controversy. Death of a Fair Infant (1626) - One of Milton's minor poems. The subject of this poem is Milton's infant niece, his sister's first-born child.

**ON THE DEATH OF A FAIR INFANT
DYING OF A COUGH**

Anno aetatis 17

I

O FAIREST flower no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken Primrose fading timelessly,
Summers chief honour if thou hadst out-lasting
Bleak winters force that made thy blossome drie;
For he being amorous on that lovely die
That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss
But kill'd alas, and then bewayl'd his fatal bliss.

II

For since grim Aquilo his charioteer
By boistrous rape th' Athenian damsel got,
He thought it toucht his Deitie full neer,
If likewise he some fair one wedded not,
Thereby to wipe away th' infamous blot,
Of long-uncoupled bed, and childless eld,
Which 'mongst the wanton gods a foul reproach was held.

III

So mounting up in ycie-pearled carr,
Through middle empire of the freezing aire
He wanderd long, till thee he spy'd from farr,
There ended was his quest, there ceast his care.
Down he descended from his Snow-soft chaire,
But all unwares with his cold-kind embrace
Unhous'd thy Virgin Soul from her fair biding place.

IV

Yet art thou not inglorious in thy fate;
For so Apollo, with unweeting hand
Whilome did slay his dearly-loved mate
Young Hyacinth born on Eurotas' strand,
Young Hyacinth the pride of Spartan land;
But then transform'd him to a purple flower
Alack that so to change thee winter had no power.

V

Yet can I not perswade me thou art dead
Or that thy coarse corrupts in earths dark wombe,
Or that thy beauties lie in wormie bed,
Hid from the world in a low delved tombe;
Could Heavn for pittie thee so strictly doom?
Oh no! for something in thy face did shine

Above mortalitie that shew'd thou wast divine.

VI

Resolve me then oh Soul most surely blest
 (If so it be that thou these plaints dost hear)
 Tell me bright Spirit where e're thou hoverest
 Whether above that high first-moving Spheare
 Or in the Elisian fields (if such there were.)
 Oh say me true if thou wert mortal wight
 And why from us so quickly thou didst take thy flight.

VII

Wert thou some Starr which from the ruin'd roofe
 Of shak't Olympus by mischance didst fall;
 Which carefull Jove in natures true behoofe
 Took up, and in fit place did reinstall?
 Or did of late earths Sonnes besiege the wall
 Of sheenie Heav'n, and thou some goddess fled
 Amongst us here below to hide thy nectar'd head.

VIII

Or wert thou that just Maid who once before
 Forsook the hated earth, O tell me sooth
 And cam'st again to visit us once more?
 Or wert thou that sweet smiling Youth!
 Or that crown'd Matron sage white-robed Truth?
 Or any other of that heav'nly brood
 Let down in clowdie throne to do the world some good.

IX

Or wert thou of the golden-winged hoast,
 Who having clad thy self in humane weed,
 To earth from thy praefixed seat didst poast,
 And after short abode flie back with speed,
 As if to shew what creatures Heav'n doth breed,
 Thereby to set the hearts of men on fire
 To scorn the sordid world, and unto Heav'n aspire.

X

But oh why didst thou not stay here below
 To bless us with thy heav'n-lov'd innocence,
 To slake his wrath whom sin hath made our foe
 To turn Swift-rushing black perdition hence,
 Or drive away the slaughtering pestilence,
 To stand 'twixt us and our deserved smart
 But thou canst best perform that office where thou art.

XI

Then thou the mother of so sweet a child
 Her false imagin'd loss cease to lament,

And wisely learn to curb thy sorrows wild;
Think what a present thou to God hast sent,
And render him with patience what he lent;
This if thou do he will an off-spring give,
That till the worlds last-end shall make thy name to live.

THE END