

Oscar Wilde (1856-1900)

1 *Ballade de Marguerite*

(NORMANDE)

I am weary of lying within the chase  
When the knights are meeting in market-place.

Nay, go not thou to the red-roofed town  
Lest the hoofs of the war-horse tread thee down.

But I would not go where the Squires ride, 5  
I would only walk by my Lady's side.

Alack! and alack! thou art overbold,  
A Forester's son may not eat off gold.

Will she love me the less that my Father is seen  
Each Martinmas day in a doublet green? 10

Perchance she is sewing at tapestry,  
Spindle and loom are not meet for thee.

Ah, if she is working the arras bright  
I might ravel the threads by the fire-light.

Perchance she is hunting of the deer, 15  
How could you follow o'er hill and mere?

Ah, if she is riding with the court,  
I might run beside her and wind the morte.

Perchance she is kneeling in St. Denys,  
(On her soul may our Lady have gramercy!) 20

Ah, if she is praying in lone chapelle,  
I might swing the censer and ring the bell.

Come in, my son, for you look sae pale,

The father shall fill thee a stoup of ale.

But who are these knights in bright array? 25  
Is it a pageant the rich folks play?

'T is the King of England from over sea,  
Who has come unto visit our fair countrie.

But why does the curfew toll sae low?  
And why do the mourners walk a-row? 30

O 't is Hugh of Amiens my sister's son  
Who is lying stark, for his day is done.

Nay, nay, for I see white lilies clear,  
It is no strong man who lies on the bier.

O 't is old Dame Jeannette that kept the hall, 35  
I knew she would die at the autumn fall.

Dame Jeannette had not that gold-brown hair,  
Old Jeannette was not a maiden fair.

O 't is none of our kith and none of our kin,  
(Her soul may our Lady assoil from sin!) 40

But I hear the boy's voice chaunting sweet,  
'Elle est morte, la Marguerite.'

Come in , my son, and lie on the bed,  
And let the dead folk bury their dead.

O mother, you know I loved her true: 45  
O mother, hath one grave room for two?

1879

(From *Poems by Oscar Wilde, with the Ballad of Reading Gaol*. London: Methuen & Co., 1908)