

George Meredith (1828-1909)

4 *Margaret's Bridal Eve*

I

The old grey mother she thrummed on her knee:
There is a rose that 's ready;
And which of the handsome young men shall it be?
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

My daughter, come hither, come hither to me: 5
There is a rose that 's ready;
Come, point me your finger on him that you see:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

O mother, my mother, it never can be:
There is a rose that 's ready; 10
For I shall bring shame on the man marries me:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

Now let your tongue be deep as the sea:
There is a rose that 's ready;
And the man 'll jump for you, right briskly will he: 15
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

Tall Margaret wept bitterly:
There is a rose that 's ready;
And as her parent bade did she:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping. 20

O the handsome young man dropped down on his knee:
There is a rose that 's ready;
Pale Margaret gave him her hand, woe 's me!
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

II

O mother, my mother, this thing I must say: 25
There is a rose in the garden;

Ere he lies on the breast where that other lay:
And the bird sings over the roses.

Now, folly, my daughter, for men are men:
There is a rose in the garden; 30
You marry them blindfold, I tell you again:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O mother, but when he kisses me!
There is a rose in the garden;
My child, 'tis which shall sweetest be! 35
And the bird sings over the roses.

O mother, but when I awake in the morn!
There is a rose in the garden;
My child, you are his, and the ring is worn:
And the bird sings over the roses. 40

Tall Margaret sighed and loosened a tress:
There is a rose in the garden;
Poor comfort she had of her comeliness:
And the bird sings over the roses.

My mother will sink if this thing be said: 45
There is a rose in the garden;
That my first betrothed came thrice to my bed:
And the bird sings over the roses.

He died on my shoulder the third cold night:
There is a rose in the garden; 50
I dragged his body all through the moonlight:
And the bird sings over the roses.

But when I came by my father's door:
There is a rose in the garden;
I fell in a lump on the stiff dead floor: 55
And the bird sings over the roses.

O neither to heaven, nor yet to hell:
There is a rose in the garden;

Could I follow the lover I loved so well!
And the bird sings over the roses. 60

III

The bridesmaids slept in their chambers apart:
There is a rose that 's ready;
Tall Margaret walked with her thumping heart:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

The frill of her nightgown below the left breast: 65
There is a rose that 's ready;
Had fall'n like a cloud of the moonlighted West:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

But where the West-cloud breaks to a star:
There is a rose that 's ready; 70
Pale Margaret's breast showed a winding scar:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

O few are the brides with such a sign!
There is a rose that 's ready;
Though I went mad the fault was mine: 75
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

I must speak to him under this roof to-night:
There is a rose that 's ready;
I shall burn to death if I speak in the light:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping. 80

O my breast! I must strike you a bloodier wound:
There is a rose that 's ready;
Than when I scored you red and swooned:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

I will stab my honour under his eye: 85
There is a rose that 's ready;
Though I bleed to the death, I shall let out the lie:
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

O happy my bridesmaids! white sleep is with you!

There is a rose that 's ready; 90
Had he chosen among you he might sleep too!
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

O happy my bridesmaids! your breasts are clean:
There is a rose that 's ready;
You carry no mark of what has been! 95
There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.

IV

An hour before the chilly beam:
Red rose and white in the garden;
The bridegroom started out of a dream:
And the bird sings over the roses. 100

He went to the door, and there espied:
Red rose and white in the garden;
The figure of his silent bride:
And the bird sings over the roses.

He went to the door, and let her in: 105
Red rose and white in the garden;
Whiter looked she than a child of sin:
And the bird sings over the roses.

She looked so white, she looked so sweet:
Red rose and white in the garden; 110
She looked so pure he fell at her feet:
And the bird sings over the roses.

He fell at her feet with love and awe:
Red rose and white in the garden;
A stainless body of light he saw: 115
And the bird sings over the roses.

O Margaret, say you are not of the dead!
Red rose and white in the garden;
My bride! by the angels at night are you led?
And the bird sings over the roses. 120

I am not led by the angels about:
 Red rose and white in the garden;
 But I have a devil within to let out:
 And the bird sings over the roses.

O Margaret! my bride and saint! 125
 Red rose and white in the garden;
 There is on you no earthly taint:
 And the bird sings over the roses.

I am no saint, and no bride can I be: 130
 Red rose and white in the garden;
 Until I have opened my bosom to thee:
 And the bird sings over the roses.

To catch at her heart she laid one hand:
 Red rose and white in the garden;
 She told the tale where she did stand: 135
 And the bird sings over the roses.

She stood before him pale and tall:
 Red rose and white in the garden;
 Her eyes between his, she told him all:
 And the bird sings over the roses. 140

She saw how her body grew freckled and foul:
 Red rose and white in the garden;
 She heard from the woods the hooting owl:
 And the bird sings over the roses.

With never a quiver her mouth did speak: 145
 Red rose and white in the garden;
 O when she had done she stood so meek!
 And the bird sings over the roses.

The bridegroom stamped and called her vile:
 Red rose and white in the garden; 150
 He did but waken a little smile:
 And the bird sings over the roses.

The bridegroom raged and called her foul:
Red rose and white in the garden;
She heard from the woods the hooting owl: 155
And the bird sings over the roses.

He muttered a name full bitter and sore:
Red rose and white in the garden;
She fell in a lump on the still dead floor:
And the bird sings over the roses. 160

O great was the wonder, and loud the wail:
Red rose and white in the garden;
When through the household flew the tale:
And the bird sings over the roses.

The old grey mother she dressed the bier: 165
Red rose and white in the garden;
With a shivering chin and never a tear:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O had you but done as I bade you, my child!
Red rose and white in the garden; 170
You would not have died and been reviled:
And the bird sings over the roses.

The bridegroom he hung at midnight by the bier:
Red rose and white in the garden;
He eyed the white girl thro' a dazzling tear: 175
And the bird sings over the roses.

O had you been false as the women who stray:
Red rose and white in the garden;
You would not be now with the Angels of Day!
And the bird sings over the roses. 180

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