

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: 20  
*There 's a rose that 's ready for clipping.*

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: 150  
*Red rose and white in the garden;*  
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

1862

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