

73 ROSE IN THE GARDEN

Thirty years have come and gone,
Melting away like Southern snows,
Since, in the light of a summer's night,
I went to the garden to seek my Rose.

Mine! Do you hear it, silver moon,
Flooding my heart with your mellow shine?
Mine! Be witness, ye distant stars,
Looking on me with eyes divine!

Tell me, tell me, wandering winds,
Whisper it, if you may not speak --
Did you ever, in all your round,
Fan a lovelier brow or cheek?

Long I nursed in my heart the love,
Love which I felt, but dared not tell,
Till, I scarcely know how or when --
It found wild words, --*and all was well!*

I can hear her sweet voice even now --
It makes my pulse leap and thrill --
"I owe you more than I well can pay;
You may take, me, Robert, if you will!"

Days passed. One pleasant summer night,
I paced the garden walks alone,
Looking about with restless eyes,
Wondering whither my Rose had flown,

Till, from a leafy arbor near,
There came to my ears the sound of speech.
Who can be with my Rose to-night?
Let me hide under the beach.

It must be one of her female friends,
Talking with her in the gloaming gray;
Perchance -- I thought -- they may speak of me:
Let me listen to what they say.

This I said with a careless smile,
And a joyous heart that was free from fears;
Little I dreamed that the words I heard
Would weigh on my heavy heart for years.

"Rose, my Rose! for your heart is mine,"
I heard in a low voice, passion-fraught,
"In the sight of Heaven we are truly one;
Why will you cast me away for naught?"

"Will you give your hand where your heart goes not,
To a man who is grave and stern and old;
And whose love compared with my passion-heat,
As the snow of the frozen North, is cold?"

And Rose -- I could *feel* her cheek grow pale --
Her voice was tremulous, then grew strong --
"Richard," she said, "your words are wild,
And you do my guardian bitter wrong.

"Did you never hear how, years gone by," --
She spoke in a tremulous undertone --
"Bereft of friends, o'er the world's highways,
I wandered forth as a child alone?"

"He opened to me his home and heart --
He whom you call so stern and cold --
And my grateful heart I may well bestow
On him for his kindness manifold."

"Rose," he said, in a saddened tone,
"I thank him for all he has done for thee;
He has acted nobly -- I did him wrong --
But is there no voice in your heart for me?"

And Rose -- she trembled -- I felt it all;
I heard her quick breath come and go;
Her voice was broken; she only said,
"Have pity, Richard, and let me go!"

And then -- Heaven gave me strength, I think --
I stood before them calm and still;
You might have thought my tranquil breast
Had never known one passion-thrill.

And they alternate flushed and paled;
Rose tottered, and I feared would fall;
I caught her in supporting arms,
And whispered, "Rose, I heard it all.

"I had a dream, but it is passed,
That we might journey, hand in hand
Along the rugged steeps of life,
Until we reached God's promised land.

"This was my dream; -- 'tis over now; --
Thank Heaven, it is not yet too late!
I pray no selfish act of mine
May keep two young hearts separate."

I placed her passive hand in his --
With how much pain God only knows --
And blessing him for her sweet sake,
I left him standing with my Rose!

Sources:

Grand'ther Baldwin's Thanksgiving, 1875.
Alger Street, 1964.