

## Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Sensitive Plant"

### PART I.

A Sensitive Plant in a garden grew,  
And the young winds fed it with silver dew,  
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light.  
And closed them beneath the kisses of Night.

And the Spring arose on the garden fair,  
Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere;  
And each flower and herb on Earth's dark  
breast  
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.

But none ever trembled and panted with bliss  
In the garden, the field, or the wilderness,  
Like a doe in the noontide with love's sweet  
want,  
As the companionless Sensitive Plant.

The snowdrop, and then the violet,  
Arose from the ground with warm rain wet,  
And their breath was mixed with fresh odour,  
sent  
From the turf, like the voice and the  
instrument.

Then the pied wind-flowers and the tulip tall,  
And narcissi, the fairest among them all,  
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream's recess,  
Till they die of their own dear loveliness;

And the Naiad-like lily of the vale,  
Whom youth makes so fair and passion so pale  
That the light of its tremulous bells is seen  
Through their pavilions of tender green;

And the hyacinth purple, and white, and blue,  
Which flung from its bells a sweet peal anew  
Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,  
It was felt like an odour within the sense;

And the rose like a nymph to the bath  
addressed,  
Which unveiled the depth of her glowing  
breast,  
Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air  
The soul of her beauty and love lay bare:

And the wand-like lily, which lifted up,  
As a Maenad, its moonlight-coloured cup,  
Till the fiery star, which is its eye,  
Gazed through clear dew on the tender sky;

And the jessamine faint, and the sweet  
tuberose,  
The sweetest flower for scent that blows;  
And all rare blossoms from every clime  
Grew in that garden in perfect prime.

And on the stream whose inconstant bosom  
Was pranked, under boughs of embowering  
blossom,  
With golden and green light, slanting through  
Their heaven of many a tangled hue,

Broad water-lilies lay tremulously,  
And starry river-buds glimmered by,  
And around them the soft stream did glide  
and dance  
With a motion of sweet sound and radiance.

And the sinuous paths of lawn and of moss,  
Which led through the garden along and  
across,  
Some open at once to the sun and the breeze,  
Some lost among bowers of blossoming trees,

Were all paved with daisies and delicate bells  
As fair as the fabulous asphodels,  
And flow'rets which, drooping as day drooped  
too,  
Fell into pavilions, white, purple, and blue,  
To roof the glow-worm from the evening dew.

And from this undefiled Paradise  
The flowers (as an infant's awakening eyes  
Smile on its mother, whose singing sweet  
Can first lull, and at last must awaken it),

When Heaven's blithe winds had unfolded  
them,  
As mine-lamps enkindle a hidden gem,  
Shone smiling to Heaven, and every one  
Shared joy in the light of the gentle sun;

For each one was interpenetrated  
With the light and the odour its neighbour  
shed,

Like young lovers whom youth and love make  
dear  
Wrapped and filled by their mutual  
atmosphere.



And wherever her aery footstep trod,  
Her trailing hair from the grassy sod  
Erased its light vestige, with shadowy sweep,  
Like a sunny storm o'er the dark green deep.

I doubt not the flowers of that garden sweet  
Rejoiced in the sound of her gentle feet;  
I doubt not they felt the spirit that came  
From her glowing fingers through all their  
frame.

She sprinkled bright water from the stream  
On those that were faint with the sunny beam;  
And out of the cups of the heavy flowers  
She emptied the rain of the thunder-showers.

She lifted their heads with her tender hands,  
And sustained them with rods and osier-bands;  
If the flowers had been her own infants, she  
Could never have nursed them more tenderly.

And all killing insects and gnawing worms,  
And things of obscene and unlovely forms,  
She bore, in a basket of Indian woof,  
Into the rough woods far aloof,--

In a basket, of grasses and wild-flowers full,  
The freshest her gentle hands could pull  
For the poor banished insects, whose intent,  
Although they did ill, was innocent.

But the bee and the beamlike ephemeris  
Whose path is the lightning's, and soft moths  
that kiss  
The sweet lips of the flowers, and harm not,  
did she  
Make her attendant angels be.

And many an antenatal tomb,  
Where butterflies dream of the life to come,  
She left clinging round the smooth and dark  
Edge of the odorous cedar bark.

This fairest creature from earliest Spring  
Thus moved through the garden ministering  
Mi the sweet season of Summertime,  
And ere the first leaf looked brown--she died!

### PART III.

Three days the flowers of the garden fair,  
Like stars when the moon is awakened, were,

Or the waves of Baiae, ere luminous  
She floats up through the smoke of Vesuvius.

And on the fourth, the Sensitive Plant  
Felt the sound of the funeral chant,  
And the steps of the bearers, heavy and slow,  
And the sobs of the mourners, deep and low;

The weary sound and the heavy breath,  
And the silent motions of passing death,  
And the smell, cold, oppressive, and dank,  
Sent through the pores of the coffin-plank;

The dark grass, and the flowers among the  
grass,  
Were bright with tears as the crowd did pass;  
From their sighs the wind caught a mournful  
tone,  
And sate in the pines, and gave groan for  
groan.

The garden, once fair, became cold and foul,  
Like the corpse of her who had been its soul,  
Which at first was lovely as if in sleep,  
Then slowly changed, till it grew a heap  
To make men tremble who never weep.

Swift Summer into the Autumn flowed,  
And frost in the mist of the morning rode,  
Though the noonday sun looked clear and  
bright,  
Mocking the spoil of the secret night.

The rose-leaves, like flakes of crimson snow,  
Paved the turf and the moss below.  
The lilies were drooping, and white, and wan,  
Like the head and the skin of a dying man.

And Indian plants, of scent and hue  
The sweetest that ever were fed on dew,  
Leaf by leaf, day after day,  
Were massed into the common clay.

And the leaves, brown, yellow, and gray, and  
red,  
And white with the whiteness of what is dead,  
Like troops of ghosts on the dry wind passed;  
Their whistling noise made the birds aghast.

And the gusty winds waked the winged seeds,  
Out of their birthplace of ugly weeds,  
Till they clung round many a sweet flower's  
stem,  
Which rotted into the earth with them.



## CONCLUSION.

Whether the Sensitive Plant, or that  
Which within its boughs like a Spirit sat,  
Ere its outward form had known decay,  
Now felt this change, I cannot say.

Whether that Lady's gentle mind,  
No longer with the form combined  
Which scattered love, as stars do light,  
Found sadness, where it left delight,

I dare not guess; but in this life  
Of error, ignorance, and strife,  
Where nothing is, but all things seem,  
And we the shadows of the dream,

It is a modest creed, and yet  
Pleasant if one considers it,  
To own that death itself must be,  
Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,  
And all sweet shapes and odours there,  
In truth have never passed away:  
'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed; not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,  
There is no death nor change: their might  
Exceeds our organs, which endure  
No light, being themselves obscure.