

The Nightingale's Nest

Up this green woodland ride let's softly rove
And list the nightingale – she dwelleth here.
Hush! let the wood gate softly clap – for fear
The noise might drive her from her home of love;
For here I've heard her many a merry year
At morn and eve, nay, all the live-long day
As though she lived on song – this very spot,
Just where that old man's beard all wildly trails
Rude arbours o'er the road and stops the way,
And where that child its bluebell flowers hath got,
Laughing and creeping through the mossy rails.
There have I hunted like a very boy
Creeping on hands and knees through matted thorns
To find her nest and see her feed her young,
And vainly did I many hours employ:
All seemed as hidden as a thought unborn.
And where these crimping fern leaves ramp among
The hazel's underboughs – I've nestled down
And watched her while she sung – and her renown
Hath made me marvel that so famed a bird
Should have no better dress than russet brown.
Her wings would tremble in her ecstasy
And feathers stand on end as 'twere with joy
And mouth wide open to release her heart
Of its out-sobbing songs – the happiest part
Of Summer's fame she shared – for so to me
Did happy fancies shapen her employ;
But if I touched a bush or scarcely stirred
All in a moment stopped – I watched in vain:
The timid bird had left the hazel bush
And at a distance hid to sing again,
Lost in a wilderness of listening leaves.
Rich ecstasy would pour its luscious strain
Till envy spurred the emulating thrush
To start less wild and scarce inferior songs,
For cares with him for half the year remain
To damp the ardour of his speckled breast,
While nightingales to Summer's life belongs,
And naked trees and Winter's nipping wrongs
Are strangers to her music and her rest.
Her joys are evergreen; her world is wide.
– Hark! there she is, as usual, let's be hush,
For in this blackthorn clump if rightly guessed
Her curious house is hidden – part aside
These hazel branches in a gentle way
And stoop right cautious 'neath the rustling boughs;
For we will have another search today
And hunt this fern-strown thorn-clump round and round,

And where this seeded woodgrass idly bows
 We'll wade right through; it is a likely nook.
 In such-like spots and often on the ground
 They'll build where rude boys never think to look.
 Aye, as I live, her secret nest is here,
 Upon this whitethorn stulp – I've searched about
 For hours in vain – there; put that bramble by.
 Nay, trample on its branches and get near
 – How subtle is the bird; she started out
 And raised a plaintive note of danger nigh
 Ere we were past the brambles, and now near
 Her nest she sudden stops – as choking fear
 That might betray her home – so even now
 We'll leave it as we found it – safety's guard
 Of pathless solitudes shall keep it still.
 See; there she's sitting on the old oak bough,
 Mute in her fears – our presence doth retard
 Her joys and doubt turns every rapture chill.
 Sing on, sweet bird; may no worse hap befall
 Thy visions than the fear that now deceives.
 We will not plunder music of its dower
 Nor turn this spot of happiness to thrall,
 For melody seems hid in every flower
 That blossoms near thy home – these harebells all
 Seems bowing with the beautiful in song,
 And gaping cuckoo with its spotted leaves
 Seems blushing of the singing it has heard.
 How curious is the nest. No other bird
 Uses such loose materials or weaves
 Their dwellings in such spots – dead oaken leaves
 Are placed without and velvet moss within
 And little scraps of grass – and scant and spare
 Of what seems scarce materials, down and hair,
 For from man's haunts she seemeth nought to win.
 Yet nature is the builder and contrives
 Homes for her children's comfort even here
 Where solitude's disciples spend their lives
 Unseen save when a wanderer passes near
 That loves such pleasant places – Deep adown
 The nest is made an hermit's mossy cell.
 Snug lies her curious eggs, in number five,
 Of deadened green or rather olive brown
 And the old prickly thorn bush guards them well.
 And here we'll leave them still unknown to wrong
 As the old woodland's legacy of song.

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