

My Pride of Barbados

(To my future wife)

Flowers. Only God knows how the world would have been without them. Perhaps colorless. Therefore the Great Artist seeing how unbeautiful the earth would have looked like in the absence of these plants, decided to add them as a finishing stroke in his canvas. So God said: "Let there be flowers." And there were flowers. And God looked and saw that they were very good.

Very good? Very good! Because flowers are beautiful things, they have delighted all creation. Birds and insects won't leave them alone. Some have died sucking their nectar. Wild animals gaze at these masterpieces of creation. And humans have put them to better uses as gifts and objects of decoration in selected places.

But God was not choosy when he decorated the earth with these plants. Flowers can be found everywhere: on volcanic peaks (the Tower of jewels in Canary islands); in the Alps and Pyrenees (the Carline thistles); in the wild (the English iris); on mountain tops (the mountain houseleek or the better name, live-forever); in tropical forests (the Bromeliads); in the deserts (the primroses and lilacs of Death Valley, California); on the sea (the lotus). And in whatever clime you find them, they are a beauty to behold.

Because of this, women have enhanced their beauty by wearing a garland of flowers on their heads or around their necks—from the ubiquitous Hibiscus flower to the majestic Rose flower. But flowers have played ignominious roles too. Like what?

It is common to send a bouquet of flowers to loved ones. And women have been wooed and won by them. Flowers with names like Queen of the night and Morning-glory work magic. On the contrary, flowers have been used to send negative messages by estranged lovers to one another. In this infamous group are Touch-me-not and Forget-me-not. God didn't think of such roles when he created them.

Neither did he consider them as national symbols. The beautiful daffodil or the musical long name, daffodowndilly, has become the national symbol of Wales. Not the whales of the sea but Wales the republic. Then clan of the former is reputed for swallowing run-away prophets. Ask Jonah. But Wales, the nation, is not alone in this respect. Which land comes next?

Barbados, the tourists' paradise, popular for her pristine surrounding and lovely beaches. Famous for her hospitality and rich culture. None of these, however, has popularized this island more than a simple flower—the Pride of Barbados.

What name, Pride of Barbados! If you are in temperate lands, you may not live to see this flower. Even if you waited for 76 years. You might only see Halley's Comet—that is if you can cheat death. For none sees it twice. Mark Twain didn't. Pride of Barbados is a tropical flower. So you have to travel to the land of abundant sunshine to behold it. What if you live in the tropical climate but are yet to see this flower?

Then let me show you the flower as we walk in your garden. Sorry, it isn't there. The 10 to 15 feet Dwarf Poinciana or Flower Fence, which blooms all year round, could be found in your fence. We see many flowers as we inspect your fence. But look at the fiery red or yellow one with five petals and yellow margins whose fifth petal is smaller than the other four. As you examine the flower, be mindful of its prickly branches. You will notice that it has large leaves with many small leaflets. You will also find out that each flower is about 1 1/2 inches across with five sepals. You will equally discover that the ten stamens—with colored filaments and anthers at the tips—are long and that pistils project from the center of the flower. You have seen the Pride of Barbados! The red variety appears on the Barbados Coat of Arms and is the National flower of Barbados. But which is your favorite flower?

We seem to liken our best flower to a loved one. Consider this: if you have a lover, to what would you compare her? A Morning rose or a sun flower?

Certainly not a bramble. Or a thorn tree.

But there lived women in times past, who were bramble and thorn trees. And they still live today. God deliver thee from their hands. And may the good Lord not give me thorns and brambles.

Give me not Samson's bride who will give my riddles to my detractors. Or a nagging Delilah that would lay bare the secret of my success and bring me to an untimely grave. But do give me a woman with the tenacity of Juliet and sensibility of Abigail.

Give me not Agememnon's wife, the unfaithful Klytaimestra, who murdered the warrior for the love of Aigisthos. But give me Penelope, daughter of Ikarios, and tenacious wife of the much endearing man, Odysseus.

Give me not a wicked Jezebel the exterminator of imaginary foes, or a Marozia, Donna Senatrix of Rome, killer of popes and "holy men." But give me a godly lady like the beautiful Queen Esther of Susa—shapely like a sculptor's handiwork, skin like cinnamon, eyes like the dove's and feet like the gazelle's. And Minerva grant me the power to compose sweet poems for fair maiden.

Give me not Helen or a Lucretia, the causes of many fights and sorrows. Rather give me a Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, a woman hard to woo by men. Or a La Gioconda—the stately Mona Lisa with the bewitching smile.

I do not desire a Queen of Sheba, the wealthy visitor of wise Solomon, who lacking honor ended up on the bed of the libidinous king. But give me the shepherd boy's wife, the Shulammite, "a garden barred," "a spring sealed up," and "a wall," with "breasts like towers," shunning "circlets of gold" and "studs of silver." May her breasts like a cluster of pomegranates, continue to tickle me till my dying day. Let her very bosom delight my soul from summer to spring and from autumn to winter.

May I be in the ecstasy when she plants her sweet lips on mine as I look into her dreamy eyes. Let her angelic fingers caress my bones as we lay by the fireside in winter confirming our love to each other. May her rich mellifluous voice liven my spirit and make my day.

Let her—my Penelope, my Juliet, my Abigail—be beside me in my sleeping and waking hours. May she—my Esther, my Elizabeth, my Mona Lisa, my Shulammite—be with me in fair and in bad weather.

Let her be the majestic flower in the fence of my country home.

Let her be the flower of all seasons—purveyor of joy, harbinger of happiness.

Let her be my forever red and yellow petals— yellow for sun rise, red for sunset— unfailing as the sun.

Let her, even she—my love, my life—be the pride of paradisaic islands in far away waters.

Let her be my Pride of Barbados!

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