

ROBERT HERRICK

The Lily in a Crystal

You have beheld a smiling rose
When virgins' hands have drawn
O'er it a cobweb-lawn;¹
And here, you see, this lily shows,
Tomb'd in a crystal stone, 5
More fair in this transparent case
Than when it grew alone
And had but single grace.

You see how cream but naked is,
Nor dances in the eye 10
Without a strawberry;
Or some fine tincture,² like to this,
Which draws the sight thereto,
More by that wantoning³ with it
Than when the paler hue 15
No mixture did admit.

You see how amber through the streams
More gently strokes the sight
With some concealed delight⁴
Than when he darts his radiant beams 20
Into the boundless air,
Where either too much life his worth
Doth all at once impair
Or set it little forth.

1. A very fine, transparent linen.

2. Slight coloration.

3. Toying, sporting.

4. Some varieties of cloudy amber do in fact look more attractive under water.

Put purple grapes or cherries in- 25
 To glass, and they will send
 More beauty to commend
 Them from that clean and subtle skin
 Than if they naked stood,
 And had no other pride at all 30
 But their own flesh and blood
 And tinctures natural.

Thus lily, rose, grape, cherry, cream,
 And strawberry do stir
 More love when they transfer 35
 A weak, a soft, a broken beam,
 Than if they should discover
 At full their proper excellence
 Without some scene⁵ cast over
 To juggle with the sense. 40

Thus let this crystaled lily be
 A rule how far to teach
 Your nakedness must reach;
 And that no further than we see
 Those glaring colors laid 45
 By art's wise hand, but to this end
 They should obey a shade,
 Lest they too far extend.

So, though you're white as swan or snow
 And have the power to move 50
 A world of men to love,
 Yet when your lawns and silks shall flow
 And that white cloud divide
 Into a doubtful twilight, then,
 Then will your hidden pride 55
 Raise greater fires in men.

1648

To Blossoms

Fair pledges of a fruitful tree,
 Why do ye fall so fast?
 Your date is not so past
 But you may stay yet here a while,
 To blush and gently smile, 5
 And go at last.

What, were ye born to be
 An hour or half's delight,
 And so to bid good night?
 'Twas pity Nature brought you forth 10
 Merely to show your worth,
 And lose you quite.

But you are lovely leaves, where we
 May read how soon things have
 Their end, though ne'er so brave;¹ 15
 And after they have shown their pride
 Like you a while, they glide
 Into the grave.

1648

To the Water Nymphs Drinking at the Fountain¹

Reach with your whiter hands to me
 Some crystal of the spring;
 And I about the cup shall see
 Fresh lilies flourishing.

Or else, sweet nymphs, do you but this— 5
 To the glass your lips incline;
 And I shall see by that one kiss
 The water turned to wine.

1648

1. Splendid, beautiful.

1. Cf. Ben Jonson, *Song: To Celia*.