

THE  
NIGHTINGALE  
AND THE  
ROSE

OSCAR WILDE



Éditions l'Escalier





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AND  
THE ROSE

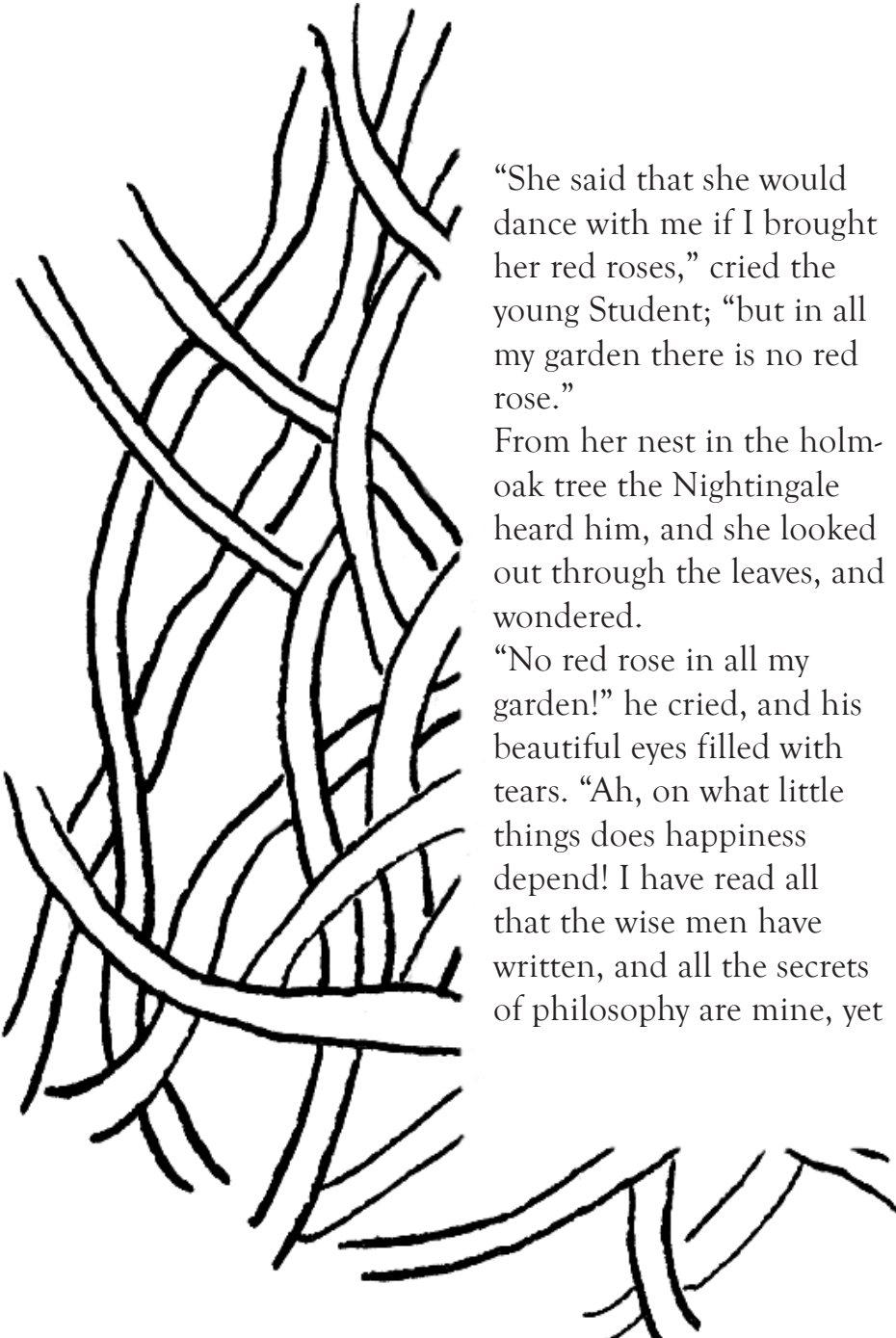
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ILLUSTRATIONS BY SOPHIE DESPREZ





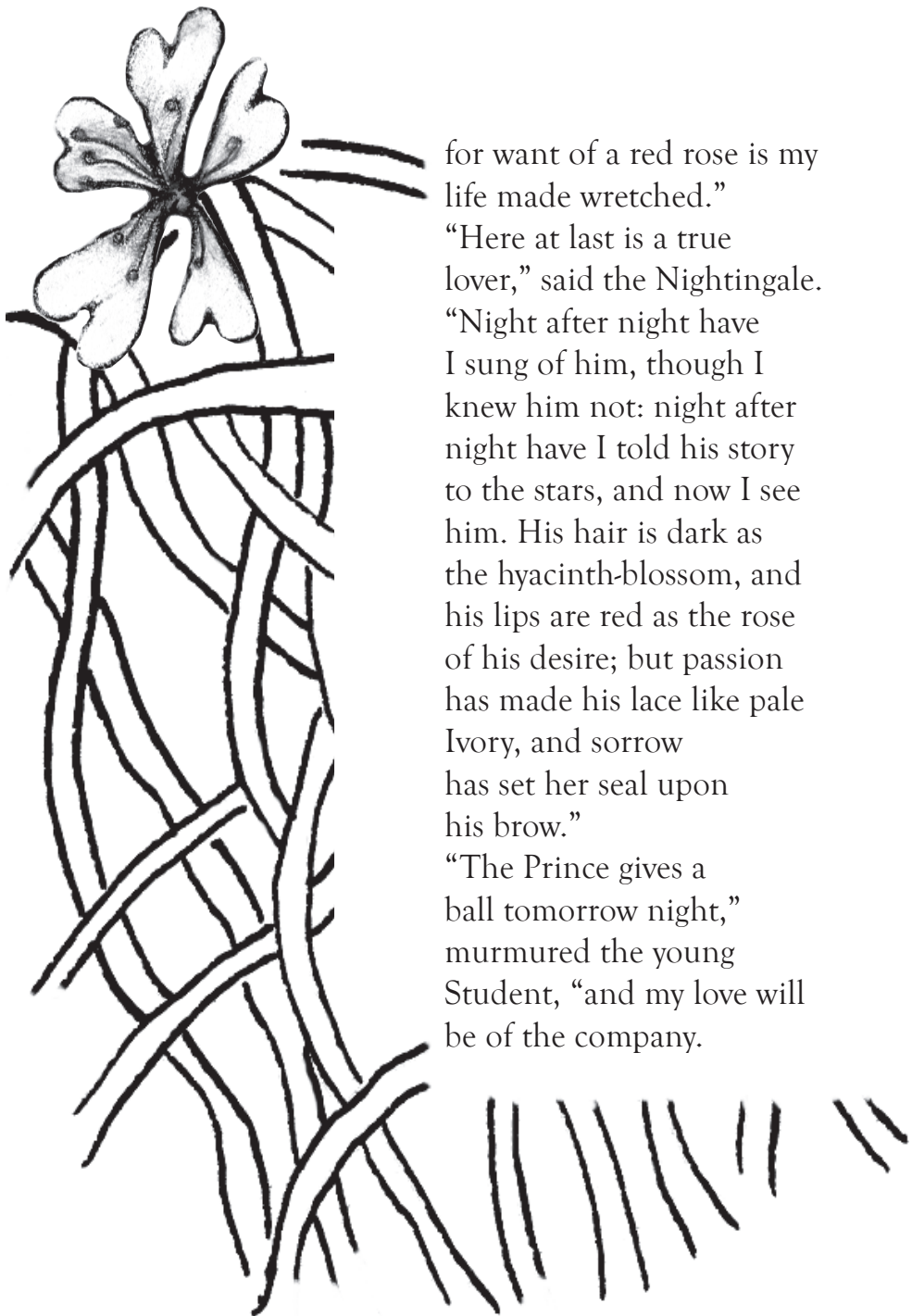




“She said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses,” cried the young Student; “but in all my garden there is no red rose.”

From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

“No red rose in all my garden!” he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. “Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet



for want of a red rose is my life made wretched.”

“Here at last is a true lover,” said the Nightingale.

“Night after night have I sung of him, though I knew him not: night after night have I told his story to the stars, and now I see him. His hair is dark as the hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion has made his lace like pale Ivory, and sorrow has set her seal upon his brow.”

“The Prince gives a ball tomorrow night,” murmured the young Student, “and my love will be of the company.”





If I bring her a red rose  
she will dance with me till  
dawn. If I bring her a red  
rose, I shall hold her in my  
arms, and she will lean her  
head upon my shoulder,  
and her hand will be  
clasped in mine. But there  
is no red rose in my garden,  
so I shall sit lonely, and she  
will pass me by. She will  
have no heed of me, and  
my heart will break.”

“Here indeed is the true  
lover,” said the Nightingale.

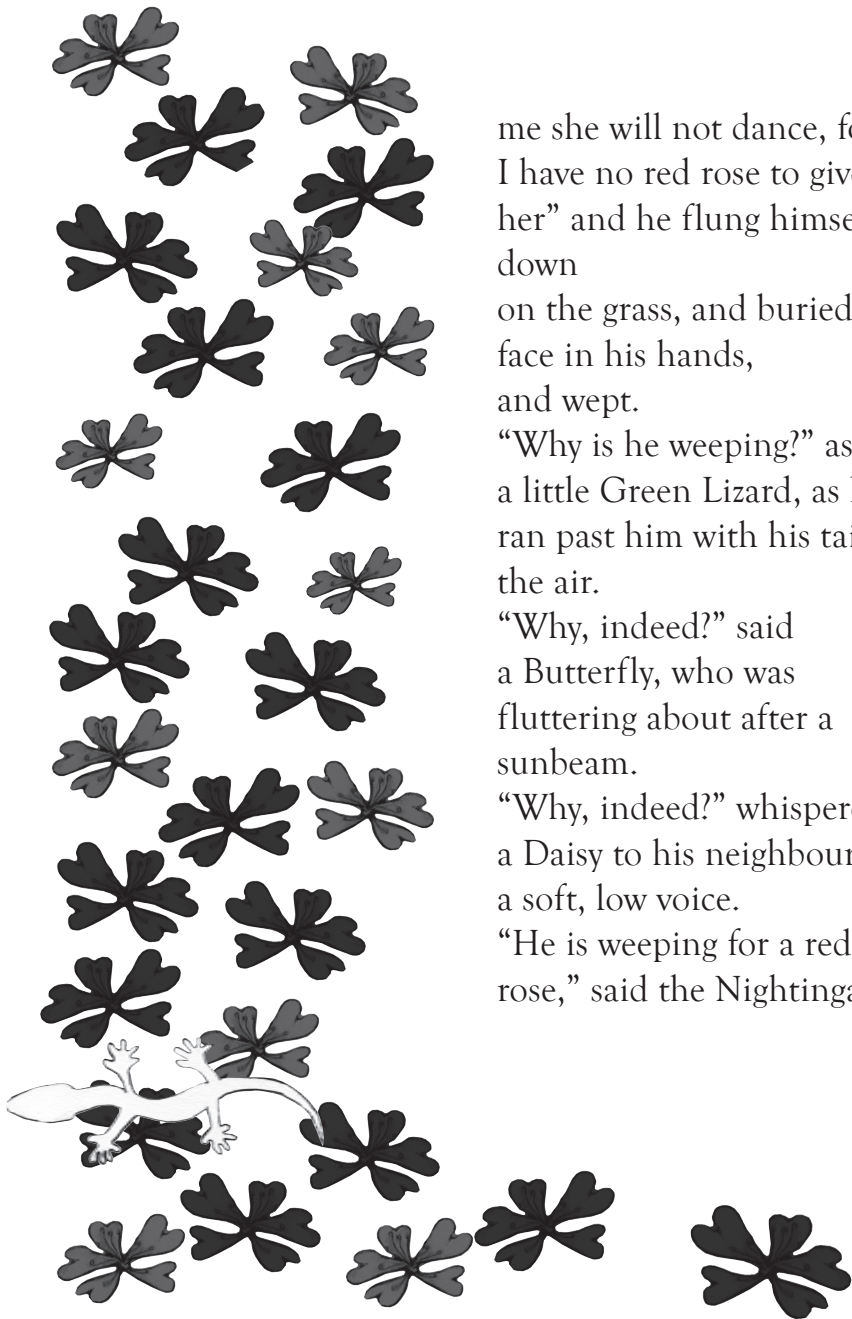
“What I sing of he suffers:  
what is joy to me, to him  
is pain. Surely Love is a  
wonderful thing. It is more  
precious than emeralds,



and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the market-place. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.”

“The musicians will sit in their gallery,” said the young Student, “and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her. But with





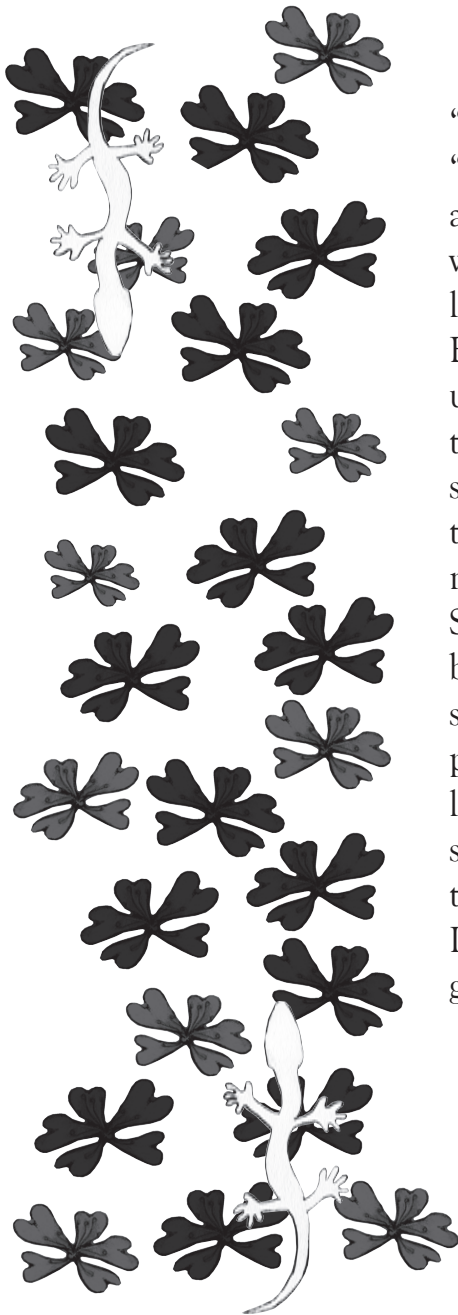
me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her” and he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.

“Why is he weeping?” asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

“Why, indeed?” said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

“Why, indeed?” whispered a Daisy to his neighbour, in a soft, low voice.

“He is weeping for a red rose,” said the Nightingale.



“For a red rose!” they cried;  
“how very ridiculous!”  
and the little Lizard, who  
was something of a cynic,  
laughed outright.

But the Nightingale  
understood the secret of  
the Student’s sorrow, and  
she sat silent in the oak-  
tree, and thought about the  
mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her  
brown wings for flight, and  
soared into the air. She  
passed through the grove  
like a shadow, and like a  
shadow she sailed across  
the garden.

In the centre of the  
grass-plot was standing a



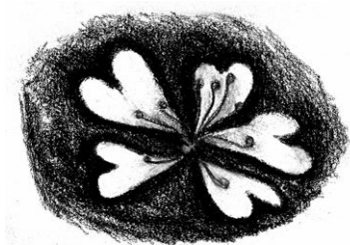
beautiful Rose-tree, and when she saw it, she flew over to it, and lit upon a spray.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are white,” it answered; “as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sundial.



- Printed by *Éditions l'Escalier* -  
Cover paper : Awagami Bamboo 170 g.  
Inside pages paper : Olin Bulk 80 g.  
Font : Goudy Old Style.

Legal deposit: May 2019