

24 Benjamin Britten: Give him this orchid (*The Rape of Lucretia*)

Give him this orchid.

Tell him I find its purity apt;

and that its petals contain

woman's pleasure and woman's pain,

and all of Lucretia's shame.

Give him this orchid,

and tell him a Roman harlot sent it,

and tell him to ride straight to her.

Tell him to come home.

Go! Go! Go! Go!

No, ha! ha! ha! ha!

Wait, tell the messenger to take my love.

Yes! give my love to the messenger,

give my love to the stable boy,

and the coachman too,

and hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry,

for all men love the chaste Lucretia!

No! I will arrange them.

Flowers bring to ev'ry year

the same perfection;

even their root and leaf

keep solemn vow in pretty detail.

Flowers alone are chaste,

for their beauty is so brief,

years are their love,

and time's their thief.

...

Women bring to ev'ry man
the same defection,
even their love's
debauched by vanity, or flattery.
Flowers alone are chaste.
Let their pureness show my grief
to hide my shame and be my wreath.

That is how you taught me as a child
to weave the wild flowers together.
Do you remember yesterday,
that was a hundred years ago?
Do you remember?