



THE SONG OF THE FLOWER

Sarah Winnemucca

make a place for us where we can dance. Each one gathers the flower she is named for, and then all weave them into wreaths and crowns and scarfs, and dress up in them.

Some girls are named for rocks and are called rock-girls, and they find some pretty rocks which they carry; each one such a rock as she is named for, or whatever she is named for. If she cannot she can take a branch of sagebrush, or a bunch or rye-grass, which have no flower.

They all go marching along, each girl in turn singing of herself; but she is not a girl any more, – she is a flower singing. She sings of herself, and her sweetheart, dancing along by her side, helps her sing the song she makes.

I will repeat what we say of ourselves. “I, Sarah Winnemucca, am a shell-flower, such as I wear on my dress. My name is Thocmetony. I am so beautiful! Who will come and dance with me while I am so beautiful? Oh, come and be happy with me! I shall be beautiful while the earth lasts. Some boy will always admire me; and who will come and be happy with me in the Spirit-land? I shall be beautiful forever there. Yes, I shall be more beautiful than my shell-flower, my Thocmetony!” Then come, oh come, and dance and be happy with me!” The young men sing with us and they dance beside us.

Our parents are waiting for us somewhere to welcome us home. And then we praise the sagebrush and the rye-grass that have no flowers, and the pretty rocks some are named for; and then we present our beautiful flowers to these companions who could carry none. And so all are happy; and that closes the beautiful day.

(Sara Winnemucca, *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*)

Many years ago, when my people were happier than they are now, they used to celebrate the Festival of Flowers in the spring. I have been to three of them only in the course of my life.

Oh, with what eagerness we girls used to watch every spring for the time when we could meet with our hearts' delight, the young men, whom in civilized life you call beaux. We would all go in company to see if the flowers we were named for were yet in bloom, for almost all the girls are named for flowers. We talked about them in our wigwams, as if we were the flowers, saying, “Oh, I saw myself today in full bloom!”

We would talk all the evening in this way in our families with such delight and such beautiful thoughts of the happy day when we should meet with those who admired us and would help us to sing our flower-songs which we made up as we sang . . .

At last one evening came a beautiful voice, which made every girl's heart throb with happiness. It was the chief, and every one hushed to hear what he said today.

“My dear daughters, we are told that you have seen yourselves in the hills and in the valleys, in full bloom. Five days from today your festival day will come. I know every young man's heart stops beating while I am talking. I know how it was with me many years ago. I used to wish the Flower Festival would come every day. Dear young men and young women, you are saying, “Why put it off five days?” But you all know that is our rule. It gives you time to think, and to show your sweetheart your flower.”

All the girls who have flower-names dance along together, and those who have not go together also. Our fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers

