



# THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING

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By Olive Schreiner



# Olive Schreiner (1855 – 1920)

Olive Schreiner is a celebrated South African writer.  
Most famous book: *The story of an African farm*.

She was born and lived in the Karoo region of the Eastern Cape

She wrote on a range of political issues.

Her only child, a daughter, died within a day of being born.

This poem conveys a strong sense of the natural environment, but the last 4 lines are more personal and sad.

# THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING – OLIVE SCHREINER

The morning sun is shining on  
The green, green willow tree,  
And sends a golden sunbeam  
To dance upon my knee.  
The fountain bubbles merrily,  
The yellow locusts spring,  
Of life and light and sunshine  
The happy brown birds sing.

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The earth is clothed with beauty,  
The air is filled with song,  
The yellow thorn trees load the wind  
With odours sweet and strong.  
There is a hand I never touch  
And a face I never see;  
Now what is sunshine, what is song  
Now what is light to me?

10

15





# Summary

- In this poem the speaker praises the beauty of Nature around her.
- She describes various aspects and uses many auditory images to engage the reader.
- The last four lines step away from the natural scene.
- The sadness in these lines are surprising, given the tone and content of the preceding lines.

# FORM & STRUCTURE

- Lyric poem: musical quality to the poem.
- 2 stanzas of 8 lines each
- 16-line poem made up of 4 distinct parts:
- 1-4 = the sense of sight
- 5-8 = the sense of hearing
- 9-12 = the sense of smell
- Rhyme scheme: ABCBDEFE GHIHJKHK

# The Title:

Sun = yellows and  
golds

“A morning sun” often has  
the connotation of a new  
beginning/ new life

The title introduces a  
positive image – we  
associate a bright, sunny  
morning with warmth and  
happiness.

## The Morning Sun is Shining

- BUT this is in contrast to the last 4 lines. The “sun” is actually her last born (or a loved one) who died shortly after her birth.
- Thus it is figurative irony: her sun (child) is no longer shining (has died)
- What begins as a lyrical celebration of nature ends up as a lament for the loss of a loved one.
- The juxtaposition between the beauty and abundance of Nature, and the immense loss suffered by the speaker contributes to the sad tone of the poem.

# Lines 1-4

Lines 1-4 :Joyful mood. Focuses on the sense of sight



Sets the cheerful scene: sight of the world awakening

The morning sun is shining on

The **green, green** willow tree,

And sends a **golden** sunbeam

To dance on **my** knee.

Repetition & alliteration reinforces beauty of nature & vibrancy of colour of tree. Everything is full of life

Personification - sun is dancing (connotations of life)

Hue of yellow; connotation of wealth/ riches

1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun



# Lines 5 -8

Lines 5 -8: Happy mood & focuses on sense of sound. The natural world is celebrating

Link to golden connects to sunbeam

The fountain **bubbles merrily**,  
The **yellow** locusts **spring**,  
Of life **and** light **and** sunshine  
The happy brown birds **sing**.

Onomatopoeia  
Water = life

Personification  
of fountain and  
birds

Energy &  
vibrancy

Repetition of  
"and" conveys  
spontaneity

Alliteration –  
conveys freedom  
of movement

# Lines 9- 12

Lines 9 - 12: celebrates the beauty of nature with a cheerful mood.  
Focuses on the sense of smell.

Personification: the earth is wearing beautiful clothes

Colour repeated;  
link to happiness

The earth is clothed with beauty,

The air is filled with song,

The yellow thorn trees load the wind

With odours sweet and strong.

Provides South African context

Sibilance: contributes to lyrical quality and reinforces the strength of the smell

Fills the wind. The smell of the flowers is persuasive. L 10 & 11 convey idea of an abundance of life.

# Lines 13 - 16

Lines 13 - 16: despondent/hopeless mood. Lack of rhyme and change in tone reinforce the loss of speaker.

Repetition of word "never" emphasises a lack of possibility/finality

Touching a hand: close relationship/connection

There is a **hand** I **never** touch

And a face I **never** see;

Now what **is** sunshine, what **is** song

Now what **is** light to me?

Present tense – conveys how despite time passing, speaker still grieves. No sense of resolution

Rhetorical Questions: engages reader to empathise  
The beauty of the morning cannot overshadow the speaker's loss.

# Tone:

- Lines 1 – 12: cheerful\ joyful/celebratory tone. Words such as “happy”, “merrily”, “dance”, “spring” & “sing”.
- Lines 13 – 16: Tone changes to despair/ despondent/ sorrowful. The final stanza is a lament for the loss of someone special. Words such as the repetition of “never” and the rhetorical questions.

# Themes:

- “Happiness is real when shared”: The poet comments on the beauty of a morning. It high-lights the permanence of nature, but then changes and asks, rhetorically, what is the purpose of a beautiful morning if it cannot be shared with anyone.
- A nature poem that highlights the beauty of nature, but also the speaker’s loneliness.
- Futility of human nature and brevity of human life
- Loneliness and despair