

A Rose from Homer's Grave

Hans christian Andersen

Through all the songs of the east, the eternal theme is the nightingale's love for the rose. In the silent, starlit nights, the winged songster sings his serenade to his beautiful scented flower.

Under stately plantain trees, not far from Smyrna, where the merchant drives his heavily loaded camels, proudly raising their long necks and clumsily walking over the hallowed ground, I saw a hedge of blooming roses. Wild doves fluttered among the branches of the tall trees, and when the sunbeams floated on their wings they shone like mother-of-pearl. In that rose hedge one flower was more beautiful than all the rest, and to this the nightingale poured out its song of grief. But the rose was silent; no dewdrop lay like a tear of pity on her petals, and with the branch on which she grew, she bent down toward a heap of large stones.

"Here lies the sweetest singer the world has ever heard," said the rose proudly. "I will scent his grave, and when the storms tear off my petals, they shall fall on him. For the singer of the Iliad returned to this good earth whence I sprang! I, a rose from Homer's grave, am too sacred a bloom for a poor mere nightingale!"

And the nightingale sang himself to death.

Then came the bearded camel driver with his laden camels and his black slaves. His little boy found the dead bird, and in pity buried it in the grave of the great Homer while the rose trembled slightly in the wind.

The evening came, and the rose folded her petals tightly and dreamed. It dreamed that it was a beautiful sunny day and that a caravan of foreign Frankish men had come on a pilgrimage to the grave of Homer. And among the strangers was a singer from the north, from the land of drifting mists and crackling northern lights. He broke off the rose, and pressed it between the leaves of a book, and so carried it off with him to his own country, in that far part of the world. Tightly pressed in the narrow book, the rose withered away in grief until, in his own home, a poet opened the book and said, "Here is a rose from Homer's grave!"

This the flower dreamed, and in the morning the rose woke up shivering in the wind; a dewdrop fell gently from her petals upon the grave of the poet. Then the sun rose, and the day was hot, and the rose bloomed in greater beauty than ever; it was still in her warm Asia.

Then the rose heard footsteps. The strange Franks she had seen in her dream came by, and among them was the poet of the north.

He did indeed break off the rose and press a kiss upon her fresh mouth, and carry her off with him to his distant home of mists and northern lights. The rose rests now like a mummy between the leaves of his Iliad, and as in her dream she hears him say as he opens the book, "Here is a rose from Homer's grave!"

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