

A Rose from Homer's Grave

All the songs of the Orient tell of the nightingale's love of the rose; in the silent, starry nights the winged singer trills a serenade to its fragrant flower.

Not far from *Smyrna*, under the tall plane trees, where the merchant drives his loaded camels that proudly raise their long necks and clumsily walk on soil that is holy, I saw a flowering rose bush, wild doves flew among its tall branches, and their wings shimmered when a sun's ray slid over them, as if they were of mother-of-pearl.

In this rose bush, one flower was the most beautiful of them all, and for this flower the nightingale sang its love's anguish; but the rose remained silent, not a single dewdrop lay, like some tear of pity, on its petals; it bent with its branch down over some large stones.

'Here lies the Earth's greatest singer!' the rose said, 'over his grave will I spread my fragrance, on it I will scatter my petals when the storm tears them off me! The singer of the *Iliad* became earth in this earth, out of which I grow! – I, a rose from *Homer's* grave, am too holy to flower for the poor nightingale!'

And the nightingale sang itself to death.

The camel driver came with his loaded camels and his black slaves; his little boy found the dead bird, he buried the little singer in the great *Homer's* grave; and the rose quivered in the wind. Evening came, the rose wrapped its petals more tightly around itself and dreamt – that it was a lovely, sunny day, that a group of foreign, Frankish men came, they had made a pilgrimage to *Homer's* grave; among the strangers was a singer from the North, from the home of mists and the Northern lights; he broke off the rose, pressed it in a book and in this way took it with him to another part of the world, to his distant native country. And the rose withered with sorrow and lay within the confines of the book, which he opened in his home, and he said: 'Here is a rose from *Homer's* grave.'

See, that is what the flower dreamt, and it woke up and shivered in the wind; a dewdrop fell from its petals onto the singer's grave, and the sun rose, the day turned hot, and the rose blazed more beautiful than before, it was in its warm Asia. Then footsteps could be heard, foreign Frankish men came that the rose had seen in its dream, and among the strangers was a poet from the North; he broke off the rose, pressed a kiss on its fresh lips and took it with him to the home of mists and the Northern lights.

Like a mummy, the corpse of the flower now rests in his *Iliad*, and as in dreams it hears him open the book and say: 'Here is a rose from *Homer's* grave!'