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The Single Rose

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from THE SINGLE ROSE

VI

Now I am brown because the sun
has kilned my skin as flame does clay,
but not like one who tills all day,
for yesterday the shepherds, every one,
came out to play.

I thought my vineyard had been done:
the pruned stems burnt, tares raked away,
I breasted up the green crests row on row,
spaded the spaces in between, and lay
beneath the tree to wait for grapes to grow.
But there were none,
and I half-hoped a sudden flesh-flower spray
would crown my vineyard with the joy I know.

O Rose, I called your name,
asked where your haunts are, lest I run
after the neighbor's herds. You never came.

And now the quiet pastures had begun
to reel as when wind-rioted poppies sway,
the lads limb-handsome at their lithesome game,
the lasses quaver-rounded, light as they,
and how their dress and tresses fanned their fun
when all the mead was May.

Now I am brown, for shepherds shun
at length the one who also would be gay,
the lone vine-keep whose alien aim
itself will hint he cannot stay
but back into his vineyard go
with shame-red heart and reins a-flame.

Now am I reddened, more than dun,
at what I hear a small voice say:
"Slaves seek the shade, and hirelings
the end of work above all things."

XIII

My vineyard lies before me in the sun and I,
soothed by the greenness of it and the shadow
of the tree nearby,
watch over all my stalks,
each tendriled sprout
grown fuller, taller, all spread flockwise out
up to my ivy-linteled door;
from where I also watch the meadow,
wondering why the shepherds and their flocks,
unscorched as yet from heaven, frolic as before.

O Love, our vines are flourishing in the sun.
Come, visit now the vineyard you have laid,
wherein I planted every switch
with pain-twitched fingers, dunged each one
with wry things done, and dug a ditch
around each, run with tears.
And meanwhile those who revel
on the meadow, man and maid,
do also flourish, fling their jeers
at one whose vines are grapeless even—
visit them with fire from heaven!

“Why (a voice asks) is your eye yet evil?
Have you cause to fret
if I am good
to others, and forget
that it is I who gives
the increase to the wood
and very sap by which it lives?
now answer me!”

There on the lone tree stood
the one I longed so long for, with a stern
but soft-eyed glance on me.
And I was silent. Then my eyes began to burn
so smartingly, I could but faintly see
an empty rood.

XV

The flowers have appeared upon our land
 in riotous sprays of leaf and stem;
 one Flower, too, appeared and went
 when I but thought to touch the hem
 of one soft petal with my hand.

Return, O Love, and stay,
 for it is evening and the day
 far spent.

O little hedge-birds, wedging in among the wall-
 flags, feathered wing to wing together;
 little field-mice, dredging in below the sedges,
 fur near fur from wind and weather,

• have you seen my lover?
 Say how long I must yet yearn
 until I, too, find cover
 in the shadow of white wings
 as chicks beneath a hen,
 in the hollow of light things
 which foxes fix their den

Return, O Rose, return,
 for gone with winter is the fleet
 of wasting sleet, my vineyard's hold
 now stowed with myriad swinging skins
 which fall will blow and fill with finest wines
 from stem to stern!

Or is my heart yet cold?
 Then thaw me
 with your rose-breath's heat
 until my soul melts whole
 like to a brook-filled bowl,
 and draw me!

Love, unseen, then said: "I thirst
 for drink, but pure-encupped.
 Take care your earth-frail vessel does not burst
 from useless heat as well as frost

or sudden changing blasts of both,
a broken cistern that can hold
no water, for the tale is old:
It happened on the night we supped
that one rock vase did overturn
and held moist-faced together,
but another
burst asunder and was lost.
Go, then, into my vineyard, make it yield
a perfect growth
from buds to brook-filled bubbles, not a field
of blood—this look to first.”

FRAY ANGELICO CHAVEZ

THREE POEMS

DESERT ROAD

The asphalt gleams in wet delusion
Sharp across the level sand.
The brindled sage dilates confusion
Over coarse and graying land.
Charred peaks reflect a weighted sky,
And dust lifts white against the blue;
A single chipmunk worries by,
And the road cleaves through.

Unpainted boards in brown precision
Combine to integrate the town.
Faded signs disturb the vision—
Each bragging one saloon's renown.
Dark lanterns vibrate to a sound—
A bird's light peck. His echoed cry
Dies ringing on the empty ground
Where the road sifts by.

MEDUSA

Old trees bristle lean
To break upon the air—
And suddenly are stilled.