A Rose from Homer's Grave

All Eastern tales speak of the nightingale's love for the rose: on quiet starry nights, the serenade of the winged singer flies toward the fragrant flower.

Not far from Smyrna, beside a road bordered by tall plane trees, I saw a blooming rose bush. Past it pass camels laden with burdens, proudly straightening their long necks and awkwardly treading with slender feet upon the sacred earth. Wild doves nest in the branches of the plane trees, and their wings shimmer in the sun with mother-of-pearl.

On this rose bush, one rose was especially beautiful; to her flew the nightingale's song; he sang of the sufferings of love, but the rose remained silent; not a single drop of dew glistened on her petals like a tear of compassion; she bowed together with her branches toward a large stone lying beneath the bush.

"Here rests the greatest of earthly singers!" said the rose. "Only over his grave shall I emit my fragrance, upon it shall I shed my petals torn off by the wind! The dust of the creator of the 'Iliad' has mingled with the earth, and from this earth have I grown! I, the rose from Homer's grave, am too sacred to bloom for some poor nightingale!"

And the nightingale sang, sang, until he died.

A caravan passed; behind the caravan leader walked laden camels and black slaves. His little son found the dead bird, and the tiny singer was buried in the grave of the great Homer, above which the rose swayed in the breath of the wind.

Evening came; the rose folded her petals more tightly and fell asleep. And she dreamed of a wonderful sunny day; a crowd of foreign Franks came to pay homage at Homer's grave; among them was a singer from the land of mists and northern lights. He plucked the rose, placed it within a book, and carried it away with him to another part of the world, to his distant homeland. And the rose withered from longing, while the singer, returning home, opened the book and said:

"This is a rose from Homer's grave!"

This is what the rose dreamed; awakening, she trembled all over from a strong gust of wind. A drop of dew fell from her petals onto the singer's grave, but then the sun rose, and the rose bloomed more luxuriantly than before,—for she was still in her warm Asia.

Footsteps were heard, foreigners-Franks appeared, whom the rose had seen in her dream, and among them was one poet, a native of the north. He plucked the rose, imprinted his kiss upon her fresh lips, and carried her away to the land of mists and northern lights. Like a mummy she now lies in his "Iliad" and, as if through sleep, hears how he speaks, opening the book:

"Here is the rose from Homer's grave."