

THE FRIAR PAINTER'S DREAM

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FRIAR-PAINTER of the Florentine School was once commissioned to depict on the walls of his convent chapel a Nativity scene; not according to the usual standards, however, for he was told to substitute figures suggesting the Apostolic Father, Dominic, and the Seraphic Father, Francis. And a dubious commission it was. For, what did his superiors desire to insinuate in such an innovation? The poor friar passed many a sleepless night striving to formulate the scene, a vision, if you will, of this unheard-of imposition. After many witless nights, he was blessed with a dream; one which gave full meaning to the work which was his to accomplish.

This is what he dreamt: a vision in words and music. It was Bethlehem with the Virgin and Child, and angelic choir, and, behold, Father Dominic and Seraphic Francis, all engrossed in song, Mary chanted first, but her song never passed her lips. She sang to her Son deep within her heart, silently. But the friar heard.

Mary's song sung to the Infant:

*My Beloved to me whispered, Come!
I, to my Beloved, said:
Into Thy garden, blinded,
I will come, I will come,
Into Thy garden of the Sun.
Let Him kiss me with His lips.
So I am minded,
Of His love in the garden,
His garden of the sun;
So am I blinded. . .
For, Love's work is done—
In His garden we are one,
We are one.*

*A cluster of cypress,
My Beloved with me;
A pair of turtle doves,
Are we who are one*

*In His garden of the sun.
Lilies of the valley are we,
My Beloved with me;
We are lovers; we are wed,
Forever, now, eternally,
My Beloved with me.*

*He is a fountain flowing free;
I a doe straining thirstingly
A draught He tilts to me.
How beautiful He is to see.
Beautiful is His heart to me!*

*I to my Beloved turn,
Piercing His heart to learn
How deeply my Beloved loves me.
He has come down to His garden,
The garden of my heart;
Coming forth as the morning rising,
He has entered into the very
Soul of me!
Heart of me!*

*Thus, I to my Beloved adoringly. .
And His turning . . . His turning
Is to me! to me!*

An angel chorus invited, then, two spirits kneeling near the Virgin and Child to join in its hymning. The one spirit is clad in white and the other in brown.

*Cherubim and Seraphim—
Dominic and Francis therein,
With Dominic and Francis therein.
To God we sing in praise,
But, not in earthly ways,
Not in earthly ways.
Sing with us, sing, o twain
For in your world
Love is come to be slain,
Love is come to be slain!
Glory to Love in the highest
To the Highest glory!*

Both spirits are moved by this plea, or is it command? The spirit in white first joins the chorus: It is the spirit of Dominic:

*Praise! Praise!
With all my heart
And all my mind!
I have no other
Course to find
But to live
And spend my days
In learning
To praise, praise
Praise!*

Angel chorus:

*Praise, with Dominic.
Praise and glory in the highest
To the Highest praise and glory!
Cherubim and Seraphim
We join in Dominic's hymn.*

The spirit of Francis then sings, soaring in song like a bird in flight:

*Consider the birds of the air
And how they soar
Winging as far as they dare
To heaven's very door.
Consider the lilies of the field
Sprouting from a tiny seed . . .
Sun and rain and earth
Filling their every need.
Mark their spell:
This Child's power they tell!
This Child's power they tell!*

Angel chorus:

*Praise to Thee, o Highest!
Praise to Thee,
Through all Thy creatures,
All the creatures that are.
Praise to Thee!
Through brother sun and sister moon
And tiny infant star;
Praise to Thee, through all creatures
Through all creatures that are!*

The Virgin then sang within her heart this refrain:

*Two spirits of my Son
Have come to sing a song
And taste of Him:
Two of words and deeds
And eloquent hymn.
Praise to my Son,
For Poet and Preacher:
Nature's lover,
And mystery's teacher.
Praise to my Son,
To the God of all.
Praise to Him in wonderment.
Praise to Him for little man
And mighty tree and firmament.
Praise to the God of our Fathers!
Praise to the God of all,
O Spirits' sons and daughters,
Praise to Him Who was and is*

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*There was chorused then,
In the heavens by angels,
In two spirits of men,
A mighty dream-rending
Amen, Amen, Amen!
Sifting thoughts from dreamings spent,
While shrouded round with wonderment,
The friar came to see,
First slowly, then more skilfully,
Superior wisdom for his theme.
Praise to God and glory be!
Adonai Elohim! Adonai Elohim!*