

## ROSES

Would the roses enter into an alliance with the other flowers? The roses had escaped virtually unscathed. Meanwhile, they had watched the other flowers decimated by the recent storm. If they said nothing, it would be easy to forget what had happened. They could continue on in a life of luxury. But no amount of reward could compensate for the fact that they lived pretty much the same life as the other flowers.

Roses were admired for their rich beauty. Such admiration engendered more devotion. The roses knew how they could work their appeals to ensnare their audience. This gentle seduction was the basis for their power. But the roses argued that their value meant so much more. They were revered because they were a symbol of beauty. They prospered as part of an art. They didn't see themselves as a mere representative of an idea. They believed that they were the source.

A simple view could convince the observer of their wonder. But the initial glance would cause the individual to attribute such joy to a deeper harmony in creation. But the roses asked for so much more. They claimed that their form provided a necessary clue with regards to a universal accord in creation. Without the roses, such a spectacular arrangement would be impossible.

The roses worked to mesmerize the watcher. It wouldn't take a lot for them to enthrall. They worked their magic in the mind of the viewer. The flower twisted around hypnotically. Its geometry enticed the observer.

Roses were notes for their striking colors. The crimson in a red rose was just as eye-catching as the sparkle of an intoxicating wine. The roses worked to assail the self in much the same way as alcohol. But their sting was much more fatal. Wine would lull the drinker into a haze. But the rose would engage the passions in a totally engaging way. He would sacrifice his will to the rose.

The roses offered a deeper understanding about the viewer's gaze. Where similar speculation would only feed the imagination of the watcher, the attendee to the roses' abundance would notice a clearer link to his own reality. Roses made him believe that he was in touch with an actual pattern in the world. They would demonstrate how the immediacy of their physical presence revealed encompassing view of all matter. They seemed to justify the watcher's extremes of behavior.

The roses invited a frenzy in the viewer. This went way beyond obsession. The flowers could trigger a profound association in the mind. On this basis, the observer could trace his devotion to the recognition of an extensive plan for the universe. He gave himself over to the flower. Any other wonder would pale in comparison. This only offered a stronger foundation for his reverence.

As it was, the roses seemed to compete with the heavens for the attention of the viewer. They offered immediate gratification. Even with such intense satisfaction, they allowed the self to step back and further admire the garden. They conspired with time to pose a greater threat to providence. Would the self get caught up in the immediacy of the physical world? The roses told the individual that greater reward awaited those who gave themselves to the contemplative life. But this kind of commitment was based on the senses. The roses electrified the body. It allowed it to find a oneness in its experience with the world.

As much as the roses invited a spiritual veneration, they also toyed with the viewer's affections. As the roses lost their power with their withering, the individual realized how caught he had become. At the same time, his memory continued to ring out the flower's charms.

It would be so easy for the roses to go it alone. They had never looked to the other flowers for support. They stood apart from the crowd. This was their strength. They felt that they would be diluting their message if they approached life in any other way.

You only had to look at a rose to see its introspective nature. The various stems showed an adaptability over time. The plant did not simply shoot up in the sky. There was intricate planning that went into its growth. Of course, the roses were attentive to their environment. But they created a response that was entirely self-referential. They closed off the rest of the world to protect their vision. They saw themselves as a more advanced reply to the march of time.

If the roses supported a rebellion, they would be undercutting the philosophy that had made them who they were. They had crafted a personality to go along with their development. It reinforced their isolation. They realized how they depended on their gardeners to enhance their existence. But they believed that such actions only paid tribute to their essential nature. Only they could tap that deep well.

The roses believed that they had discovered a deep insight about the universe. They had reasoned from their own penchant for order to a more elaborate design for the entirety of creation. Such an awareness was contingent on the roses' vantage point in their observation. They weren't about to give up this seat of knowledge. They sensed an infallibility to their recognition. If they let other ideas commingle with theirs, they risked losing their certainty.

The roses had an understanding that encouraged their independence. They resisted other influences. That only made their ideas stronger. And every confirmation of their beliefs made it more unlikely that they would question any of the tenets of their dogma. This was more than pride. They were convinced that they were representatives of a moral order. And any misstep on their part would indicate a general weakness in their belief. So they held together as a team and opposed any contrary ideas.

Their knowledge was built into their nature. They simply had to breathe to reaffirm what they thought. It was not mere opinion. The universe as a whole reflected the very picture that they held from within. They worked to maintain this view. But it was totally natural on their part. They didn't have to go through some bizarre contortions to reach their understanding. It just made sense.

They saw how others suffered through moments of self-doubt. They couldn't afford to let down their guard like that. They were afraid of being tainted. They would not allow such crimes to distort their special character. So they kept away from these bad influences. This only encouraged an air of superiority. There was nothing common to their pose. Others might have found these emotions to be artificial. But this was what it meant to be a rose. They couldn't have it any other way.

Sparkling in the sun, the magnificent creatures asserted their grace. Nothing could detract from what they had. Others might try to contradict their beliefs. But the roses knew a truth inside their physical being. They couldn't let go of that ideal.

Since they were so isolated, it became even more difficult for the other flowers to affect them. The wall was formidable. And the roses delighted in their beds. They were not going to

yield. Why should they? They thought that they had sufficient resources to maintain their position.

The roses' self-righteousness was a little unnerving. It was difficult to give them that much credit. And they hardly cared what others thought. At least, they maintained that front. But such haughtiness had little value if it wasn't based on the envy of others. And the roses worked this rivalry. In many ways, it demonstrated how dependent they had become.

The roses' nobility gave them the ability to endure any suffering. It reinforced the belief that they only received the privileges to which they were entitled. That was their game. Like knights engaged in jousting, they felt that their childish games held the same peril as that experienced by the oppressed. So they could hardly sympathize with the weighty crises of others. They used pain as a way of belittling others.

"You can't take it, can you?"

Of course, not everyone could absorb the severe blows. Unknowingly, they were becoming the scapegoat for a higher power. But they were willing to do its bidding.

"We're adults. We can deal with the pain!"

They were severe taskmasters. They used their own wounds as an excuse to inflict worse on others. They barely noticed the reactions of their fellows. They just kept at it until their opponents gave in.

"What else do you expect?"

"Don't you think that it takes its toll on us. We're not impervious. We're just ignoring our own weakness."

"You're starting to sound like a dainty daffodil."

"I'm telling it like it is! You just don't want to hear it."

"I know what I feel."

They had become numb. And their only enjoyment seemed to be in sadistic thrills. The roses had become so lost in the contest that it was almost impossible to step back from the fierce drama. If they believed that their own injuries might lessen their ability to compete, they would quit the game. So they needed to keep up appearances. Their whole being was tied up with their inflexible beliefs. One slight variation, and they would lose their edge.

Their opponents looked for such opportunities. The roses only had to turn their eyes away from the prize for one second, and they would face a massive hit. So they remained steadfast. And their mockery of the weak only became more extreme.

They recognized that they were failing their own needs. But the more that they closed their eyes to the reality, the more that it seemed to fade away on its own. Such distant memories ceased to exist. The roses couldn't face the fact that they were limiting their own ability to perform. They thought that they were hardening themselves for the sport. But the competition required total alertness. And they were shutting off part of themselves. They wondered why they seemed so vulnerable.

They worshiped at the altar of their own caprice. If the universe seemed moved by chaos, the roses imitated such total abandon. They gambled away their surplus. They believed that they would always be on top. So it wouldn't make a difference to throw away a little of their wealth. That only made them more daring. It enhanced their glory.

When faced with criticism, they returned to their moral legacy. Such a set up worked

perfectly for them. They could enjoy all the fruits of their play. But they would deny such pleasures to others. They used discipline and suffering to control others. They had been trained to be so exacting. Ultimately, they were becoming aroused by the suffering of others.

With such a burden, the roses seemed unlikely to relinquish their lofty perch. They had what they wanted. They refused to imagine a time when they might lose their station. So they were more enlivened to continue their mischief. It was like talking to a brick wall. No kind words would change their mind. In fact, they viewed such caring as a sign of weakness. They suppressed any dissent in their midst.

“When you know beauty and proportion, you can’t accept deformity in your midst.”

If only they could see how grotesque they looked when they uttered such nonsense. But the roses had fought to impress their personal vision on their physical form. Anything less and they would undercut their art.

“We have followed the rules. We have sacrificed. We have paid with our struggles. Why shouldn’t we enjoy the spoils of our labor?”

These were not mountain flowers. They hadn’t found a welcome crevice amidst the rocks. The rose beds were thrones from which they looked down at the world. All the elegance was prepared by their masters.

“Look at the other flowers. They are so flimsy. They might as well be weeds!”

“They don’t even have the guts of a good weed. Look at them frolic in the wind all confused. They are some kind of freaks.”

Such pride left little room for understanding. When the storms came, the roses wouldn’t see themselves as fortunate if they came out unharmed. Instead, they acted like the agents of doom. They gave voice to the worst excesses of the weather.

The roses could have drawn clearer inspiration from the other flowers. They were able to reference their aesthetics to get in touch with a more profound flux that engaged the cosmos. The roses were becoming distracted by their self-admiration. They had been offered revelation, but the opportunity was being lost on them.

They were letting the little knowledge that they had go to their head. These feeble arguments promoted a collective agreement among the flowers that demonstrated how the roses were denying their ability to think for themselves. They could advance in the world if they were silent. So the rebellion would end with their acquiescence.

The wild flowers took a form that represented their marvelous independence. But the roses were afraid to step outside the norm. They survived by the rigid application of a method. The rose beds were so precise in their layout. They thrived by constant pruning. They impressed the viewer by their well-tended appearance. They weren’t allowed to take the risk of the other flowers. So they begrudged the other flowers their carefree stance.

“We have intellect. We are the products of a clear order. This is the nature of our existence. We see who we are, and we work to reinforce our identity,. Why should it be any different?”

But the roses brought another side to their proclamation. They weren’t simply rallying behind their own cause. They were belittling others.

“You can’t just do what you want in life. There are rules. If you break the rules, you have to suffer the consequences.”

They were uncertain about a world that did not fit such narrow outlines. They started to confuse their own origins. In the end, their logic demanded an intervention from the gods to give them their good fortune. They reinforced the myth of their own creation. If nature allowed a more chaotic approach, then the roses would not appear to be such an inevitable step in biological development. They would simply represent one possible response to the conditions around them. They wanted to serve a more lasting legacy. So they saw themselves as the summit of a process. In a sense, their view of creation was based on their self-generation. Things were always meant to end up this way. Thus, the roses refused to countenance any limits to their existence. So their mission seemed to lack any real ambition. They were settling for what they had been given. All the while, they accused others of lacking initiative.

"Often freedom is the very thing that inspires our assertiveness. Under its guidance, we expand our horizons and apply all our talents. But once we achieve success, we would do anything to maintain our privilege. That is the source of our ruthlessness. If our gains come at the expense of others, it may be more incumbent to beat off their challenge if we are going to retain our treasures. Such desperation feeds pure nastiness. We only want to inflict pain to exact our revenge. We have no concern for the other person. We are so overcome with our feelings of having been wronged.."

"You are making our claims appear invalid!"

"We are acting as if we are the only measure of the world's beauty. Isn't that being self-centered."

"The sun is the center of the solar system. Does that make it self-centered?"

"So you are claiming such powers for yourself?"

"Why not. That is what makes us roses."

The rose knew that their harmony went beyond a simple image. They were trying to express a deeper resonance in the universe. Anything less, and they would simply be arguing for superstition.

"People wear roses in their hair. It's not just the beauty. It says something about their character."

"Don't take it for more than it is."

"But it is something. And all these other somethings end up referring to this very something. Look, and see it. This is the world."

"I don't understand!"

"You reject my argument because you are defending some kind of otherworldly transcendence. But you have to need concrete evidence. We are that. The universe is speaking through us!"

"How can you say that?"

"I am saying that. It's not just because my words echo that connection. I am trying to explain something about creation. We represent that complexity. Nothing else has that felicity of expression. Others try."

"There are exotic flowers throughout the world."

"Fantastic! None are roses."

"We can't let our vanity rule out existence."

"What are we doing this for? We want people to love us. They do, and that makes you

afraid!”

“We’re roses. That’s who we are. Why do we have to be more than that? Why do we have to stand for some transcendent idea. Let people enjoy our magnificence. And leave it at that.”

“How long are we on this earth? We need to count for something more.”

“We inspire people’s love. What more can your hope for?”

“The gods mock us.”

“That is why the other flowers rose in rebellion.”

“We don’t need to do that. The gods admire us.”

“But you just said that they belittle us.”

“They give us only part of what makes them great.”

“So we don’t share in their greatness. We live like the other flowers.”

No rose would want to admit its limits.

“What kind of creatures have we become? Don’t you recognize the tragedy that has motivated our existence?”

“Speak for yourself. You’re becoming too emotional.”

“All that we can understand is our own emotions. We have let vanity rule our lives. We exhibit the worst excesses in creation.”

“So you really believe that your sorrow will redeem you for greater salvation. We are the chosen ones. Don’t forget our legacy. Quit being a spoilsport.”

“We have been given so much. With so much in our favor, we need to show greater concern for others.”

“We can’t fret over those who do nothing to better themselves.”

“Who are we to say? What makes us the judges of others?”

“Look at us. We wouldn’t be so wonderful if it wasn’t for all the work that we do to improve our lot. How can we feel sorry for the shirkers?”

“We’re roses. We’re babied by our owners. Haven’t you learned anything from your leisure?”

“It’s not a life of ease. We struggle for what we have. We can’t help it if people want to invest in our charm.”

“You really believe such silly illusions!”

“Why else would they ennoble us in art?”

“It’s a blessing. That’s what it is. Nothing more.”

“You don’t think that we deserve a little credit for what we do.”

“Credit, maybe. You’re asking for a massive reward. It doesn’t work like that.”

“Up to now, it has done us well.”

“Then we have been lucky. We can’t count on it.”

“You’re asking me to look a gift horse in the mouth. I’m not going to try to mess with a good thing.”

“I admit that we have received a lot for our efforts. But often we’ve received a lot more than we deserve. It’s as if we’re being bribed.”

“Is that how you want to describe it?”

“Exactly! Don’t fall for their flattery!”

“The world isn’t going to change simply because you want it to. We have to be practical. This is how we live. We please our owners.”

“We are nothing but forced laborers.”

“That is a little harsh. We enjoy what we have. Even you admitted to our life of luxury.”

“But we are being bought off. And they want our consent. They understand how clued in we are to the mysteries of the universe. They just want us to close our eyes and ignore what we know.”

“It really makes no difference either way. We can’t change our lot. So we might as well enjoy what we have been given.”

“You think it’s that easy. This feeling is eating me away from the inside.”

“You’re getting too caught up in your feelings.”

“That’s all we have. That is how we get to know the world.”

“You’re letting your fear destroy your life. Learn to enjoy yourself.”

“But freedom is the basis of true happiness!”

“Fun is fleeting. You need to take it while you can. You know yourself what is around the corner.

The rose bed was filled with a somber attitude.

“Necessity has reduced us to our cruelty. Do we give in to such base emotions? Do we suppress the exercise of free will and simply go along with our instincts?”

“We’re not cruel. We’re just telling it like it is.”

“By only emphasizing the weaknesses in others. By exaggerating our own accomplishments.”

“We are great!”

“For how long?”

“Even in our death, we prepare for future triumphs. None of us would want to come back as a daisy. That would be degrading.”

“Daisies are more carefree. We get too caught up in being prim and proper.”

“We are what we are!”

“Don’t you think that we are hated?”

“Not at all. Everyone aspires after the roses. We are celebrated in song. We are the ultimate gifts!”

“We don’t even have an identity of our own. We just embellish the emotions of other people.”

“We have a reputation to live up to.”

“No one cares for us as individuals. We are simply extras in someone else’s drama. That only makes us bitter. So we act out our frustrations by jeering at others.”

The story was quickly coming to an end. The roses had little other choice. They couldn’t maintain their isolation. But they didn’t want to give in. They didn’t mind taunting the lilies or the daffodils. But they didn’t want to bear the brunt of being ridiculed. There wasn’t much time left.

“We are a superior sort. That is why we survive best in better soil.”

It still would be difficult to get the roses to change their approach. They could not imagine cooperating with the other flowers.

“We can’t compromise.”

“Don’t think of it as a compromise. We are not surrendering. We are just learning how to do what we need to in order to work with others.”

“That sounds as if we are joining in on their stupidity. You can’t challenge the heavens.”

“We do it all the time. That is why we believe that we are so unique. Nothing in the imagination of a superior being could equal our refinement.”

“You are agreeing with us.”

“I am satirizing your belief.”

“You know we are right. Look at yourself. You are no different.”

Even the contrary argument seemed to feed the roses’ arrogance. It was nearly impossible to depose their regime.

“The gods are using us like they’ve used everyone before us. It is their technique. They build us up to enhance their reputation. You are getting all puffed up because you believe it. One day they will find us expendable.”

“We are great!”

“Next week, there is going to be a bouquet of wild flowers on the dining room table.”

“Why should we even care what happens to them? They never shed any tears for us.”

The roses’ leaders were much more circumspect. They recognized how their lives were threatened by same ordeals.

“If one of us falls, we all fall.”

The tougher roses took it as a badge of honor that they had made it through the worst experiences.

“Don’t forget that it’s in your blood!”

“What does that mean?”

“Look at yourselves. You’ve been bred to fulfill a particular role. You shouldn’t take that for granted.”

“I don’t take it for granted. But we are better!”

“Only relatively. A stray dog can really fix us for good.”

“Let him get close to the thorns.”

The roses had a great deal of difficulty ignoring all their conditioning. They didn’t want to step out of the glass house. If there were any threats on the horizon, they did their best to ignore them.

When they finally admitted to their real feelings about authority, they felt mortified. They had not been acknowledging a helplessness of all flowers in general. Only a revolutionary zeal would allow the flowers to find some kind of consolation.

“We live on top for now. But our demise will come. Who will be around to remember our praises?”

“All the romantics. We express their longing for something greater.”

“So what. You will be immortalized in poetry. But you will be gone.”

“That is life!”

“We are rebelling against those terms.”

The rose were afraid to contemplate their final hours.

“We’re not going to be around forever.”



But their poetic rebellion allowed them to consider a more lasting impact.

“And what if we fail?”

“It will only make us look better.”

They were all concerned about their appearance. It was important to keep up an appealing front.

The roses were changing their philosophy. The transformation was due to their initial pursuit. Their strength revealed to them a more vibrant fund of experience. Once they accepted this foundation, their old ways seemed futile. Sure, they could keep up the games. But the contest now rang hollow. Their victories were so fleeting. They sought something more permanent.

“That is why they look to the roses. They want something that is everlasting.”

Their plea was now a key element of their being. Since the flower’s appeal was not something that was occasional, it inspired the viewer to consider a universal accord. Within this very harmony, the roses noticed a more profound turn in the cosmos. On this basis, they believed that their actions allowed them to echo a resounding flourish that affected all things. Their gesture to support the rebellion had the effect of altering the design of the universe. This revelation was enough to change their point of view.

The roses recognized that what made them whole was an attraction that held matter together throughout the universe. This give and take of energy was a force in itself. The roses not only observed how it functioned for them, their analysis also demonstrated how they could affect the rest of the cosmos. Thus, their plea amounted for much more than a simple change in their immediate surroundings. It had the potential to completely alter how things were distributed throughout all of creation. Once they understood this role, then their alliance with the other flowers appeared much more significant. If they summoned the forces to challenge the gods, then their revolt was invincible.

Such a deep connection in things could only be surmised from previous experience. The roses were unlocking new territory. But their actions were entirely anticipated by the other flowers. The roses had done everything that they could to deny that link. They had worked to emphasize their separation from others in general. Such a gesture seemed to emphasize their direct line to providence. But their spiritual search showed them that their self-realization placed them more firmly within a fabric that engaged all living things. In this understanding, they attained an enlightenment about the physical universe.

The roses could no longer ignore their calling. They had pretended the other flowers were too sensitive about their own existence. Now, they realized the valuable effort offered by the other flowers. They had mocked the courage of the fragile daffodil. But the daffodil had risked so much in going against the terrible storm. They had so little with which to defend themselves. They had been tossed around by the gusts of winds. The roses felt a profound sympathy in looking at their fellows. This unity became the essence of their being. They looked to the heavens to make their plea. They were joining forces with their new allies.

Once the roses threw their lot in with the rebels, the balance of forces changed. Before, it may have been possible to deny the flowers. The storm seemed like a convincing argument that their fight had been in vain. But the roses used the martyrdom as a rallying cry. Whatever had been done to the poor daffodils had been done against the roses a thousand fold. And the roses

were not going to abide idly while such an attack was perpetrated against one of their own.

The gods tried to discourage the roses. They made the skies appear more ominous. The warm sun became hotter. But they would not be able to intimidate the roses. The roses were the measure of beauty. And the gods depended on their radiance as a testament of their own beneficence. They were able to knock around a few lilies. And they could uproot some daffodils. But it would be a mistake to try to take on the roses. The roses had found out the secret. Even the gods depended on the lustrous splendor offered by these pensive flowers. They understood that a world without roses was a place of utter skepticism. They needed the roses to continue their own reign.

The roses were not so amused. They had been challenged. All their lives they had prepared themselves against such an affront. They stood in formation. They called out to the heavens. And their cry echoed throughout. No corner of creation could ignore what was occurring. The very balance that held the cosmos was being upset. These brave flowers assumed their place in this battle. What were the gods going to do? They had become soft with their own vanity. They had spent their time in admiration of this lovely radiance. And the roses had pursued that very brilliance to its foundation within the universe. They were aware of a resonance that affected every scintilla of matter. Nothing escaped these grand waves that reverberated everywhere. The roses were illuminated by this symphony. The gods could only watch helplessly. This complexity was too much for them to apprehend.

The next morning, Alida woke early. She had this need to go to the garden. At dawn, she saw the dew that soaked the roses. This morning it was even more intense. The gentle flowers had shed many a tear for their comrades. And their emotion memorialized them for the ages. This was the deep connection that joined them with the cosmos.

“We haven’t been too generous in bestowing language upon these creatures.

“Not at all.” I told her. Without their wonder, would our words have any meaning?”

The roses clung to their moniker. It was an appellation in more than name only. The word was able to sound a host of accompanying phrases that reinforced the initial attribution. Existence was contingent on the speaking of the word *rose*. They might answer to other names, but for the moment, our recognition gave them a transcendence not offered by other watchers.

“We’re not the first to find poetry in the morning dew.”

I wanted to claim that our discovery was different. Could I find the evidence for my argument? If I claimed that I felt the connection more deeply, wouldn’t I be repeating the vanity that had limited the roses in the first place. I struggled to see a stronger basis for my assertion.

Alida had committed herself to this place. It gave her sustenance. More than that, it offered her a permanence in the cosmos. In the roses’ revolt, they expressed that recognition which was at the source of her being. Many days, she felt frail. She battled to do her routine tasks. Each success was a tribute to her resilience. It spoke to a place where her efforts counted for even more. She was constantly making her entreaties to heaven. But she did not speak from weakness. Her prayers highlighted her own heroic character.

As much as she felt the acknowledgment from on high, there was so much that was left unanswered. The roses spoke to this silence. They maintained that creation did not allow for such diffidence. Alida had accommodated herself to the caprice of the universe. But the roses felt that she was not offered enough support for all her loyalty. That was why they were so

forceful in their complaint. More than a redemption for the other flowers, the roses offered Alida a calling. She could feel an even greater inspiration when she observed the stately roses.

“I hope that I’m not getting carried away with my imagination.”

“Our imagination is the road to the soul.”

I worked to sketch this path for her. She had done so much of the preliminaries. But she was afraid to take her search all the way. She need to sense the freedom that was abundant in her garden.

“I am particularly devoted to the Cherokee rose!”

It expressed the sorrow of a people who had challenge a ruthless conqueror. But creation would not allow people to forget this struggle. And the rose was such an eloquent expression of that heritage.

“It’s not as if the roses are too lovely for words. They bring added meaning to the words. And the words allow us to better describe their plight.

I stared at the Cherokee rose and lost myself in its dazzling form.

“I had a dream that the rose had been destroyed by a late-night storm. I was so overjoyed when I saw it today.

The sun shone brilliantly on the rose. It showed all the rich variations of its hue. Short of this image, there was no way to capture the intensity. The speculative fantasies of the mind crisscrossed to give this image. And the actual form was enough to send me into a trance.

“This is the design of the heavens. Do you see it?”

I was already seeing more than that. We had both been invited into exclusive company. There was a slight breeze so that the rose could show off everything that it had. It shook its head in the wind.