

Hypatia

Norman Hugh Redington

1.

In the time of disturbances
When the idols were overthrown
Abba Bessarion stood for fourteen days
With his arms outstretched.
His disciple thought,
"Surely he is dead by now,
And I am next.
There is no more water."

Then Abba Bessarion lowered his arms and said,
"A judgement will come from above,
And every false god be destroyed.
Come, let us go hence."

2.

The disciple, however, fell on his face and cried:
"Father, it has been fourteen days,
And there is no more water."


So Abba Bessarion set a sheep-skin down in the sand,
And when he picked it up again,
It was full of water,
Very cold and clear.

3.

As they walked down the trail toward Lycopolis
They passed a hermit with no beard
Who sat unmoving in the mouth of a cave on the hillside
And did not greet them.
Abba Bessarion said:
"Perhaps this Father will have a word for us
On our way home."

Toward evening, as the sun was setting,
They reached the little hut of Abba John.
(It was he who had watered the dry stick
For a year at the Lord's command.)





While the three of them were praying,
A brother dressed all in white went by on the road,
Dancing for joy and singing.
He called out to them:

“We country monks have taken Alexandria!
We have cleansed the city!
God is greater!”

Abba Bessarion’s disciple said:
“Father, it is just as you prophesied:
Every false god is destroyed.”
But Abba John sat on the ground and said:

*I have had a vision.
I have had a memory.
I have had a vision.*

4.

*I see a fire lit in Alexandria ...
Knotted prayer-ropes ... sharpened bits of oyster-shell ...
I hear a woman screaming on the avenue ...
In hers I hear another’s cry as well.*

*Lord, I remember:
Golden-voiced ... her age not very far from mine ...
The notaries ... the courtiers of Maximin ...
The wheel. She remarked on its design.*

*She was ... Christ God, I could not watch her martyrdom.
I say I could not watch, and yet I stared.
“From past the spheres, my Jesus, Love, You’ve come for me!”
They gave the order, and the trumpet blared.*

*And then, great Christ, the panic of the multitude:
Milk was pouring from her severed head.
At last I see the meaning of this miracle:
Her blood remained for monks to spill instead.*

5.

Abba Bessarion’s disciple and the brother in white said:
“Father, we do not understand.
Speak to us plainly.”
But he gave them no answer,
Not even a word.

6.

In the morning, the brother in white said to Abba John:

"Father, let me stay here."

But Abba John said:

"This place is not your home."

So the brother turned to Abba Bessarion and said:

"Father, is my home with you, then?"

Abba Bessarion told him: "Perhaps.

Come and see what God will show you."

So Abba Bessarion left by the way he came,

And his two disciples went with him,

Heading toward the desert.

As they were walking,

The first disciple pointed out the hermit who had not greeted them

Still sitting in the mouth of the cave on the hillside:

"Here is a holy Elder deep in prayer:

He has not moved a bit all night."

Abba Bessarion answered, "Clearly,

That is because the holy Elder has died!

Go, prepare the body for burial."

7.

So the two disciples went up to the place where the hermit sat,

But they ran back at once in confusion:

"Father! It is a woman's body!

Has such a thing ever been known in this land of Egypt

As a woman Elder?"

8.

Abba Bessarion answered them:

"Look:

Women are taking the kingdom of heaven by violence,

While we men run about in the streets of the capital.

Go, prepare the body

For the Resurrection."



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