

The Song of the Friend

Mary Austin

Table of Contents

<u>The Song of the Friend</u>	1
<u>Mary Austin</u>	2

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(From the Paiute Indian Dialect, Done into English by Mary Austin)

THIS is the song of the Friend,
Made by the Medicine Man
In the young dusk of the spring,
Moonless and tender,
At the hour when the balm-giving herbs
Begin to be musky and sweet along the creek borders,
When the smell of the sage is sharp in the trails of the cattle
And the ants run busily still
Up the poles of the pine trees;
The shuffle and beat of his feet
We heard in the dust by his doorway.

Out and aside from the hut
The pound of his feet and the roll of the ram's-horn rattle
Was more loud than the purr of the creek
Or the wings of the night hawk,
And the drone of his singing sweet
And the night desirous.

All night he sang till the young, thin moon came out,
And about the wolf hour of the morning
The earth by his hut was beaten to dust by his dancing,
And the eyes of the Medicine Man
Were pale as the sloughs before sun-dawn,
And the shadow of all his songs
Lay under them and in the cheek hollows
Like ash on the hearthstone;
And his voice was bitter and thick
As the dust stirred up by his dancing.

And still in my heart I hear the throb of his singing
When I go by the sweet-smelling trails
In the moonless evenings of April.
My pulse is full of the whisper and beat,
Over-full and aching with song,
When the smell of the camphire comes out by the creeks

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And the nights are young and desirous.