

THE ALCHEMIST

“So . . . you wish to serve as healer for these peasants. . .
Freely squander balms and potions for their aches?”
Then he waved his trembling hand around the workshop.
“All my fame came not from charity’s mistakes!”

Slinking back, the boy, face petrified in wonder,
Bumped and knocked a shelf of flasks onto the floor.
In an instant, clay and mixtures smashed and splattered,
And the frightened youngster bolted out the door.

“Clumsy oaf,” the aged alchemist lamented.
“Just like me . . . his words were mine, when I began.”
But the mess was gone when he rose up to clean it. . .
Down his wrinkled cheek a wistful teardrop ran.

“Yes, like you! And it was you, my wayward brother!”
Spoke a hooded monk appearing in the room.
“Long ago, before you tasted of their magic,
Stars and spells had not yet bound your heart in gloom.”

Sudden weariness descended on the wizard,
As he felt himself drawn back into his chair.
“Stay awake!” the old monastic sharply warned him.
Grimly garbled whispers jabbered in the air.

Dreamy drowsiness was draining all his senses,
When the friar pulled his hood back from his head.
This aroused the dozing chemist from his stupor,
For the hermit was his brother who was dead.

“Stay awake!” he cried, “Let not the demons’ babble
Drown the little sparks of love that yet remain!”
But a dangling crystal spinning at the window
Caught the sun and glittered in his eyes and brain.

Lured and lulled, he craved for restful sleep and slumber.
Down his heavy eyelids dropped with deep desire.
Yet, the alchemist, in fantasy’s enchantment,
Still could hear the monk persist with words of fire.

“Let the hellish host be gone this holy moment!”
Cried the hermit with his stern and steady voice.

Darkness lifted, and the weary wizard awakened.
“Brother, look to Christ! You have a final choice!”

“What I mastered cost too much!” the chemist grumbled.
“Ask me not to cast my secrets all away!”
“You bought stolen and forbidden fruit!” he answered.
“Your eternal soul’s too high a price to pay!”

“Search no longer for a sage’s stone of magic!
Transmutation is the sham of Eden’s tree.
Find the cornerstone of God in Christ the Savior!
Drink the living water that will set you free!”

But the wizard felt a surging lust for power
Once again begin to bubble up in pride
With a certainty that he would soon discover
The elixir others missed before they died.

“I will live! Decay will soon be just a stranger!
Purest gold and lasting youth are in my path!”
“Leave hell’s lies before they chain you in its furnace!
Come, by Heaven’s grace, before you know God’s wrath!”

When the alchemist had scrutinized his workshop,
Books and brews and potions neatly in their place,
Laughing loud, he turned to quarrel with his brother,
But the ghost had vanished, leaving not a trace.

“It was something that I ate,” the chemist muttered,
“Or a daydream,” and his stomach was upset.
Heavy burning churned and spread within his bosom.
“I will drink a chalk emulsion, and forget.”

But the pain increased with fierce and crushing pressure.
Terror filled his mind as phantoms swarmed about.
When he tried to think of prayers his brother taught him,
Only cursing from his twisted lips poured out.

Then his swearing merged with groans from other voices,
As dim shadows sucked him into hell’s dark flame.
Devils frolicked on his fading books and bottles,
And his life went out as quickly as it came.

— *David L. Hatton 5/3/1995*