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To the Most Illustrious
The Contessina Allagia degli Aldodrandeschi
On the via de' Martelli - Firenze

Most noble Contessina:
I Salute you. Believe me your most devoted servant.

The rascal who carries this letter, if he devour them not on the way, will crave your acceptance of some of the fruits of our garden. Would that peace of Heaven might reach you through such things of earth.

Contessina, forgive anold man's babble. But I am your friend and my love for you goes deep. There is nothing I can give you which you have not got; but there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give you, you can take. No Heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today. Take Heaven. No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in the present little instant. Take Peace!
The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see; and to see we have only to look. Contessina, I beseech youto look. Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by their covering, cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard. Remove the covering, and you will find beneath it a living splendor, woven of love, by wisdom, with power. Welcome it, grasp it and you touch the angel's hand that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty; believe me, that Angel's hand is there; the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing presence. Our joys too. Be not content with them as joys. They,too, conceal diviner gifts. Life is so full of meaning and of purpose, so full of beauty (beneath its covering) that you will find earth but cloaks your heaven. Courage , then, to claim it: That is all!

But courage you have; and the knowledge that we are pilgrims together, wending through unknown country, home. And so, at this Christmas time, I greet you: not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem, and with the prayer that for you now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away. I have the honour to be thy servant though the least worthy of them.

Fra Giovanni.

Alas, I live in a cultivated garden
With endless shrubbery.
My only duty is to grow, just so,
Against the garden wall.

Snip, snip, snip go the pruning shears
To all my wild young shoots.
My paths are ordered
And my orange trees grow
In wooden boxes, painted white
With cramped roots.

Oh to climb over this garden wall
And find me a hiding place
Outside -
A high hill, where old apple trees
With tired branches -
Send deep roots into the earth
And dream of spring.

I live forever in a cultivated garden
With endless shrubbery -
Oh to climb over this garden wall
And find me a hiding place
Outside.