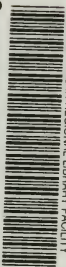


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THE DEMON



THE DEMON

OF

LERMONTOFF

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY FRANCIS STORR

RIVINGTON, PERCIVAL & CO.

KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN

LONDON

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T H E D E M O N

I

I

A SPIRIT fallen from the realms of light
Above this dim world winged his weary flight,
For memories came crowding thick and fast
Of vanished splendours and delights long past.—
How erst, a Cherub bright, he loved to race 5
With fiery comets through the fields of space ;
No mists could blind, no clouds his progress bar,
He followed knowledge on from star to star.
Creation's heir, the first-born of all time,
He loved, he trusted in that happy prime. 10
Ah, little recked he safe from doubts and fears,
The sad monotony of coming years,
Trouble on trouble, pain succeeding pain—
Tortures that racked his ever-teeming brain.
Long had he wandered without goal or aim 15
Through the dull round of centuries still the same,
Ruling this puny world, and sowing ill,
Ceaseless, resistless, unenjoying still.

The Demon

II

Now o'er Caucasian heights with pinions slow
The outcast spirit steered his course ; below, 20
Gleamed like a diamond facet Kasbek's snow,
And, in the deep-cleft gorge, where dragons hide,
He saw the Darial like a serpent glide ;
The Terek foamed, a lion with bristling mane,
Plunging in cataracts to the distant plain, 25
And beasts and birds, that high in ether soar,
Quailed, as they caught the mighty torrent's roar.
Clouds from the golden south his course attend,
The giant rocks in dreamy slumber bend
Their heads, and muse where all these waves can
tend. 30

To ward the entrance, as he hurries down,
Through mists he sees majestic castles frown.
Thus at his feet in all its beauty lay
God's earth ;—contemptuous he looked away,
It moved him not ; of beauty recked he nought ; 35
He passed, nor gave the scene a second thought.

III

The landscape changed ; as on his way he sped,
Grusien's broad valley far beneath was spread

The Demon

With richest colours, like a carpet, shot,
Of earth the choicest, fairest, happiest spot. 40
Enchanted castles, crystal streams, that strayed
Mid jewelled pebbles and sweet music made ;
Bowers of roses, where the nightingale
Sings to his mate unheeding of love's tale,
The sycamores with ivy crowned, the glade 45
Where timid hinds at noontide seek the shade,
The rustling leaves, the breath of myriad flowers,
Murmurous with bees, the glow of sultry hours,
Alternating each eve with dewy showers ;
And stars that shine like Grusien maiden's eyes,—
All this the Demon in his flight descries, 51
Yet, the fair prospect no fresh feeling moved
In his seared heart, that neither joyed nor loved ;
Touched by no passion save contempt and spite,
He gazed on loveliness and loathed the sight. 55

IV

A lofty castle and a high-walled court
His toiling serfs long years ago had wrought
For Gudal.

The broad shadow of the walls
At noon across the rocky platform falls,

The Demon

A rock-hewn stairway to the stream descends, 60
Down which at morn wrapped in white tschadra
wends
Gudal's fair child, Tamara, sent to draw
Water from out the limpid Aragwa.

v

For years in silence the dark house had frowned
Above the valley, but to-day the sound 65
Of revelry was heard and surnas bray,
For Gudal holds a wedding feast to-day,
Bids kith and kindred. On the roof were laid
Tables with wine and dainties. There the maid
With her bride-maidens idly sang and played. 70
Still sang they clapping hands in time, till now
The sun was sinking 'neath the mountain's brow.
But lo, the bride, fired by a sudden thought,
A tambourine, that lay beside her, caught,
Waved it aloft and, moving to the sound, 75
Fled like a swallow that just skims the ground ;
Sudden she paused and stood with dewy eyes,
Upturned as one commercing with the skies,
Now knit her brows and frowned, now bending
o'er
Her tambourine, she tripped across the floor, 80

The Demon

And as she danced she smiled with childish glee,
Like a wild moonbeam flashing o'er the sea.

VI

Witness, thou star of midnight, witness, sun,
Rising and setting, king upon his throne,
Nor Shah of golden Persia, e'er did kiss 85
A face so bright, so beautiful as this,
No houri in the noontide heat did lave
A form so perfect in the fountain's wave,
And lover's hand, since Eden days, I trow,
Ne'er smoothed the wrinkles from so fair a brow. 90

VII

For the last time she danced. Alas that she,
Gudal's sole heir, a maid unfettered, free
As her own mountain breezes, should await
With the next dawn the imprisoned harem's fate.
Of those strange faces and that alien home 95
Musing, a cloud would o'er her features come,
Yet neither cloud could hide nor gloom efface
Her artless witchery, her native grace,
Which, if the Demon in his flight had spied,
He sure had turned away for ruth and sighed. 100

The Demon

VIII

And he has seen her. Through his bosom shot
A spark, a thrill of feeling long forgot,
As if across his spirit parched and bare,
Had passed a breath of paradisal air.
Long gazed he ravished as the vision's spell 105
Recalled the happy days before he fell ;
Like star on star they passed before his eyes,
The train of long vanished memories.
And recollection brought new sense of pain
When his heart whispered to him once again, 110
In his own tongue. Was conscience inly stirred ?
No, his lips murmured no repentant word.
Should he forget ? That gift had God denied,
Proffered, he would have scorned it in his pride.

IX

On wearied steed the impatient bridegroom rode,
And, as the sun went down, Aragwa showed 116
Her banks of emerald green. Behind, a train
Of laden camels wind along the plain,
Jingling their bells ; unnumbered bales they bear,—
So Synodal's great chieftain dowers his fair. 120

The Demon

Tall is the prince and lissom, and beneath
His girdle flashed a dagger's jewelled sheath,
At his left hand a glittering rapier hung,
And from his back his damasked gun was slung.
Round his long caftan ran a golden braid, 125
With its broad flapping sleeves the breezes played.
The selle was stitched with many a silken thread,
And silken tassels decked his charger's head,
In Karabach, a fiery chestnut, bred. 129
Now as he passed the mountain brow, he stood
And gazed upon Aragwa's foaming flood,
He pricked his ears and shivering pawed the
ground,
The path is steep, and darkness closes round,
The mists are rising, from the heights is gone
The glow—the caravan must hurry on. 135

X

A little chapel rose beside the sward
Where rest the ashes of a murdered lord,
Now canonised. Here every traveller prayed,
Whether to feast he hied or border raid ;
Such prayer preserved him from the Moslem's
dirk, 140
But the young wooer laughed at priest and kirk,

The Demon

Unholy thoughts the cunning Fiend inspired,
Visions of bridal bliss his fancy fired.
So as he dreams, up start two men, and, hark !
A shot—what means it? Others from the dark 145
Spring up. He rises in his stirrup, glares
As a lion taken in the hunter's snares,
Then clutched his Turkish rifle, fiercely lashed
His steed, and down into the mêlée dashed.
A second shot—a scream, a long-drawn wail, 150
Startles the slumbers of the dreaming vale,
Then all again is silent ; short the fight,
Soon are the coward Grusiens put to flight.

XI

Again 'twas silence all. The camels, scared,
Now huddling close, at their dead master stared.
Only, from time to time, a tinkling bell 156
Broke on the deathlike stillness of the dell.
Spoiled the rich caravan, night vultures dread
Circled and wheeled above the Christian dead,
No place for them, where, 'neath the sacred sod,
The ashes of their grandsires rest with God. 161
No white-robed train will come from far to weep
Beside the grave where husbands, brothers sleep ;

The Demon

Yet some kind hand a rude-carved cross will rear
To mark the spot, and with the early year 165
The ivy round its emerald shoots will wind,
And the wayfarer grateful shadow find.

XII

Fast sped the gallant steed, as if below
The fight were raging, swifter than a roe.
Now stopped and sniffed the air and shook his
mane, 170
And stamped, then fled precipitous ; again
The hillside heard the thunder of his feet,
While his mute rider, swaying in his seat,
With feet pressed home in stirrup, drooping head,
Slack reins, and unresisting as the dead, 175
Was carried onward by his faithful horse ;
A trail of purple marked his headlong course,
Thus had a brigand Ossetin's random ball
Laid in the dust the pride of Synodal.

XIII

In Gudal's house arose a sound of woe, 180
And in the court men hurried to and fro.

The Demon

What means this foam-flecked horse? who rides
so late?

Why did it stumble at the very gate,
And fall death-stricken? Who this rider pale?—
That settled frown, those blood-stains tell a tale
Of battle stour, and his stiff fingers, see, 186
Still clutch the mane in mortal agony.
On her dead lover's face Tamara cast
One horror-stricken look—the first, the last ;
He had kept tryst and ridden to find his bride, 190
But ne'er again to feast or fray shall ride.

XIV

O'er Gudal's house the wrath of Heaven had broke,
And sweet Tamara cowered beneath the stroke ;
With heaving breast she lay, while tear chased tear
Down her pale cheeks . . .

Sudden she starts, for, near,
A spirit seemed to whisper in her ear : 196
Weep not, maiden, tears are vain,
Tears will never bring again
Back to life a lover slain.
Idle tears will only stain 200
Beauty's cheeks ; thy lover's gone
Far from ken of mortal moan,

The Demon

Dim to mortal light, his eyes
Drink the beauty of the skies ;
Eden's music in his ears, 205
What to him are maiden's tears,
Human hopes or human fears ?
Trust me, angel, nought to thee
Mortals' shifting destiny,
'Tis not worth a passing sigh. 210
O'er the ocean depths of sky
Mark the shining orbs that roll
Sailless, helmless, to their goal,
Ever quiring sphere on sphere.
Over boundless fields of air 215
Roam the fleecy clouds at will,
Nought know they of human ill,
Shifts of change and rack of time,
Funeral knell and marriage chime,
Budding hopes that age will blast, 220
Yearnings after joy long past.
In thine hour of agony
Think of them, my child, and be,
Like them, passionless and free.
When the garments of the night 225
Muffle each Caucasian height,
When the trancèd world is dumb,
And the winds that nightly roam

The Demon

'Mid the rustling beech-leaves, creep,
Startling the little birds asleep, 230
When shy flowers that shun the light
Ope to drink the dews of night,
When moonlight sheds her mellowest ray,
Then will I fly to thee and stay
Beside thee, till the break of day, 235
Slide into all thy dreams, and steep
Thy blue-veined lids with golden sleep.
Far off, and farther still, the whispers sound—
Then cease. She started up and gazed around,
Thrilled by a strange emotion, a new sense 240
Of trouble, terror, rapture too intense
For utterance, a tumult of the soul,
A fire that raged and ravaged past control.
Haunted by that strange voice awake she lay
All night, and ere she slept the morn was grey. 245
Nor with broad daylight fled the magic spell,
Waking, a presence still invisible,
Clad in celestial light beside her moved
As one that pitied, sympathised, and loved.
'Twas not her guardian angel, heaven-spel'd, 250
No rainbow-woven aureole crowned his head,
'Twas not a goblin damned, a tempter. No,
His looks were like the evening's after-glow—
Not day, not night, not darkness, and not light.

The Demon

II

I

O FATHER, cease, from taunts and threats forbear,
See my wet cheeks, thy poor Tamara spare. 256
Tell all my suitors that I ne'er shall wed,
Earth has my one love, and my heart is dead.
Since to the tomb his bleeding corse we bore,
High in the mountain's side, I can no more 260
Cast from my soul possessed the ghostly powers
That haunt and rack me through the stilly hours.
All night in dreamland's mazy paths I stray,
All day I strive, but strive in vain, to pray :
My veins run fire, a fire consumes my breast, 265
I faint, I perish in a wild unrest.
O pity me, dear father, let me find
Rest in a convent from a distraught mind ;
There to my Saviour's bosom would I fly
For refuge from all earthly misery. 270
Henceforth to earthly joy I bid farewell ;
Let me be buried in a convent cell.

The Demon

II

So to a far-off convent the fair maid
Was carried, and in coarsest serge arrayed.
Yet, 'neath the sad robes, burned the selfsame fire 275
As when she walked in silk and gold attire.
Oft by the altar lit with tapers dim,
Above the litanies and solemn hymn
Soft to her ear the whispered words would come,
And oft, beneath the minster's shadowy dome, 280
Silent and trackless stole upon her sight
The same mysterious phantom of the night,
Gleamed starlike through the incense-laden air,
And beckoned her to follow—where, ah where ?

III

In a cool glen remote the cloister stood, 285
Circled by poplars and a plane-tree wood.
When darkness brooded o'er the shadowy dell
A light oft glimmered from the novice cell.
Hard by a cemetery ; row on row
Crosses stand sentry o'er the dead below ; 290
Above, broad almond-trees with silvery sprays,
Where small birds meet to sing their roundelays.
Springs bubble from the grassy sward, and leap
With mad precipitancy down the steep,

The Demon

And rush together like long-parted friends ; 295
'Twixt flowery banks the wedded river wends.

IV

Northward a chain of mountains shuts the view,
When from the vale at dawn a cloudlet blue
Of cottage smoke ascends, and matin bells
Awake the sisters in their convent cells, 300
And the Muezzin eastward turns to prayer,
When Grusien maids descend the rock-hewn stair,
Bearing tall pitchers on their heads, to fill
With water from the downward-hurrying rill,
Then the snow mountains like a bastion grey 305
Frown on the valley, but the orient day
Throws o'er their barren sides a purple pall
And clad in royal brocade with turban tall
Great Kasbek towers, crowned monarch of them all.

V

But o'er Tamara's virgin soul had passed 310
The Demon's breath like some Sirocco blast.
Wrapped in the lurid shadow round her spread,
To earthly passions and earth's beauty dead,
She loathed the day ; night brought her no relief,
Save haply when at eve, forspent with grief, 315
Delirious, by the crucifix she lay ;

The Demon

And the belated traveller on his way
Started, and listened to a human wail,
More piercing than the shrill-voiced nightingale,
Drowning the far-off waterfall. Her hair 320
Streams all dishevelled down her shoulders bare.
Then would she stare with glassy eyes, and croon
Strange words, like one recovered from a swoon.
Her bosom heaves ; she pants, she yearns, she faints,
And Fancy on the dark her lover paints. 325

VI

All day alone, wrapt in soft reverie,
Tamara sat and gazed with wistful eye,
For a voice whispered ever, ' Soon or late
He cometh, he hath promised—only wait.'
That tender promise time can ne'er annul 330
Or blur that face, so sad, so beautiful.
Filled with a longing, far-off, mystic, dim,
When to the Saints she prayed, she prayed to him.
Spent with the endless struggle when she turns
And sinks upon her bed, the pillow burns, 335
Sleepless she starts again in wild unrest
Up from her couch and stands with heaving breast ;
From her embrace the airy shadow slips,
And joyless kisses quiver on her lips.

The Demon

VII

Already eve had drawn her airy veil 340
Around the hills that girdle Grusien's dale,
When to his tryst, now grown familiar, true
The Demon o'er the monastery flew.
Long, long he paused, as though he would relent,
Nor violate the shrine of sweet content ; 345
Then at a bound he cleared the convent pale ;
Beneath his feet the shivering poplars quail.
A light is burning in her casement ; long,
Long has she waited . . . Hark ! a low-breathed song,
Notes that fall soft as tears of maid forlorn, 350
A cherub seemed o'er Eden's loss to mourn,
Soothing a kindred spirit from its pains,
With heavenly echoes of forgotten strains.
Then first the Demon marked Tamara's woe,
And, smit with pity, spread his wings to go. 355
But his wings drooped, and lo, a miracle !
From the dark eye a splendid tear-drop fell,
No mortal tear, but agonising, hot
As lava ; still men show the blackened spot.

VIII

He paused, he faltered ; o'er his melting soul 360
A sense of pity and compassion stole,

The Demon

With hope and fear his bosom thrills again
Like a coy maid's who waits to meet her swain.
Ah me ! such love foreboded little good.
Her cell he enters. Lo ! before him stood 365
Her guardian genius sent from Eden's bower
To fend the maiden in temptation's hour ;
With radiant brow he stood and wings outspread,
Smiling serenely, o'er Tamara's head. 369
Beneath the heavenly light the Demon quailed,
And for love's greeting taunts his ear assailed.

IX

Restless Demon, sinful sprite,
Who hath summoned thee from night ?
Here thou wilt not find thy mates,
Nought of ill may pass these gates. 375
Hence, avaunt, foul fiend ! nor dare
To soil my saint, my special care.
To him the Demon with a scornful smile,
His eye inflamed with jealousy the while,
And his breast swoln anew with poisonous
hate : 380
'She is mine, not thine ; too late thou comest, too
late ;

The Demon

Thou art not here to judge us—I, not thou,
Am lord ; behold my stamp upon her brow ;
Spoiled is thy sanctuary, fallen thy throne.
I am her lord and lover, I alone.⁷
One long sad look the guardian angel cast
On the lost sheep, and soaring upwards past.

385

X

TAMARA

Who art thou? Dread spirit, tell ;
From heaven comest thou, or hell?
Say, what mean those accents fell?

390

DEMON

Beauteous maid !

TAMARA

Who art thou? Tell !

DEMON

I am he whose mystic spell
Lulled to rest thy troubled brain,
Turned to ecstasy thy pain,

The Demon

Wove around thy soul a chain 395
That thou seek'st to break in vain.
I am he before whose breath,
Like a flower, hope withereth ;
I am he whom all men shun,
Loved by nothing 'neath the sun ; 400
Scourge of all thy fallen race.
Nought to me are time and space,
Lord of knowledge, lord of will,
Foe of God and friend of ill.
Such am I : and lo ! I kneel 405
At thy feet, to thee appeal,
Offer thee (sweet maiden, hear !),
My first earthly ruth, a tear.
Pity me, one word of thine
Can my soul to good incline. 410
If thou only bidst me hope,
Heaven again its gates will ope.
Pity me, kind angel, save
Thine adorer, lover, slave !
'Twas the witchery of thine eye 415
That first taught me to descry
Aught of good in men, and feel
Sense of human woe and weal.
Fain to change supernal power
For one transitory hour 420

The Demon

Of love. I, love, would live like thee,
And doff my immortality.
O'er my icebound spirit crept
A breath of springtide—thoughts that slept,
Like a dragon's brood, upstart 425
And gnaw again my wounded heart.
What were all eternity,
Power almighty, without thee?
Empty words, illusion vain,
A kingless crown, a godless fane. 430

TAMARA

Tempter, hence! Can I believe
Words that flatter to deceive,
Honeyed falsehoods that instil
Venom, and by inches kill,
Coursing through my poisoned veins? 435
Jesu! save me from the pains
Of hell; alas! I cannot pray.
Demon, why thou lov'st me, say!

DEMON

I know not, only this I know,
With new-born life my heart 's aglow; 440

The Demon

From my head the crown of thorns
Has fallen, and my spirit scorns
The past—its sins, its agonies—
My heaven and hell are in thine eyes.
Mine is a passion too intense, 445
Too sublimate, for mortal sense,
The ecstasy of gods above,
Quintessence of immortal love,
My spirit since creation's morn
Hath thy predestined image borne, 450
The reflex of thy features bright
Gleamed from the empyrean height,
And from a shoreless ocean came
Echoes that syllabled thy name,
And e'en the light of Paradise
Paled at the dawning of thine eyes. 455
To thee such anguish is unknown,
To live, to joy, to endure alone,
Evil to sow and reap no praise,
Fight for the good and win no bays— 460
Self-centred, self-sufficient,
Still unenjoying, uncontent,
Commanding knowledge, power, skill,
With nought to wish for, wishing still,
Monarch of this terrestrial ball, 465
Despising, scorning, loathing all.

The Demon

When erst the awful doom had sped,
Nature to me lay cold and dead,
The planets still rejoiced to run
Their destined course around the sun, 470
A bridal train with aureoles crowned,
But all their whilom peer disowned.
I called to them ; their alien eyes
Stared with contemptuous surprise ;
Abashed I spread my wings to fly, 475
To escape,—I knew not where or why,—
Scorned by my friends, from heaven hurled,
An outcast on an unknown world ;
Helpless as some dismantled bark
That drifts at random through the dark, 480
Or like the ragged cloud-rack driven
As the wind lists athwart the heaven ;
Still travelling on, without a goal
Or port or rest, from pole to pole.
Right soon by use I learnt the way 485
To practise upon men my sway ;
Soon were they subject to my will,
Took foul for fair and good for ill.
Too soon, alas ! the heavenly spark
Was quenched, and all within grew dark. 490
Finding anon too willing tools,
I scorned the hypocrites and fools.

The Demon

Then would I lurk a gnome, or flare
A meteor through the midnight air.
Sometimes a lone, belated knight, 495
Misguided by my wandering light,
Plunged o'er the precipice and cried
For help; the rocks alone replied,
Rocks with his purple life-blood dyed.
Of such mad pranks I had my fill, 500
And soon I tired of working ill.
Oft on some ice-encircled throne
I sat 'twixt earth and heaven alone;
A rainbow roofed my head, below
The furious blasts of sleet and snow 505
Tossed their grey manes and roared and
raged
In maniac wrath like lions caged.
Oft in the eddy vortex cast,
I fought with the tornado's blast,
Or clad in mists and armed with leven 510
Thundered and lightened over heaven.
Thus in the elemental strife
I sought to stimulate a life
Of dull monotony, and numb
Thoughts that like guest unbidden come, 515
The voice of conscience never dumb.
Oh, what to grief like mine the wail

The Demon

Of suffering men?—An idle tale.
Add all the misery and moil
Of living men, their tears and toil, 520
Then let the total sum be cast
Of generations future, past,—
One moment of my grief, I say,
All human griefs would far outweigh.
For what is man? He comes and goes, 525
His are but transitory woes,
He still has hope, he still can trust
That God will pardon—God is just.
Hopeless through all eternity,
My grief, like me, can never die; 530
A vulture now it gnaws my heart,
Now the forked tongues of flame upstart,
As from a furnace mouth; anon,
Beneath a granite slab I groan,
Sepulchred in a living tomb, 535
Like child within its mother's womb.
Nor God nor man away can roll
The stone that presses on my soul.

TAMARA

Wherefore confide thy woes to me?—
Thou hast sinned . . .

The Demon

DEMON

Sinned against thee? 540

TAMARA

Hush! Hush! they'll hear us.

DEMON

None is near.

TAMARA

And God?

DEMON

He heeds not—never fear,
He's in the heaven of heavens, not here.

TAMARA

The day of wrath, the pains of hell!

DEMON

What matter if at one we dwell? 545

The Demon

TAMARA

Whoe'er thou art, my friend unknown,
With thee, alas ! my rest is flown,
Thy siren words have witched my ear,
Poor sufferer, and I needs must hear ;
But were they artful falsehoods, meant 550
To cheat and cozen me—relent,
Oh, pity !—'twere no worthy feat
For thee a maiden's soul to cheat.
Are there not maids more fair, more bright,
Than ever dawned upon thy sight, 555
Maids as pure and white as those
Who sleep within this convent close ?
Oh, in mercy stay and speak ;
I am a woman, fond and weak,
And melt at any tale of woe ; 560
Thou knowest all, and needs must know
My weakness : oh, in pity swear
From thoughts unholy to forbear,
Sure there are oaths whose awful spell
Can bind the powers of heaven and hell. 565

DEMON

I swear by first created light,
By the last judgment and the night

The Demon

Of black despair that follows sin,
The immortal triumph truth shall win,
By all the shades of melancholy 570
That dog the love-light steps of folly,
By all my hopes to meet again,
By all my dread of parting pain,
By all the host of heaven—the fate
Of demons damned, who on me wait, 575
The tears of seraphs pure, who keep
Strict guard on me, their foe, and weep,—
By all that mortal men revere
On earth, by heaven and hell I swear,
By thy last look, by thy first tear, 580
The ripples of thy silken hair,
The quivering of thy lips, the bliss,
The torture of love's first, last kiss.
Henceforth I swear to lay aside
My study of revenge, my pride ; 585
Henceforth I swear my flattering arts
Shall lure to death no simple hearts.
To God and goodness reconciled,
I will be humble, gentle, mild,
Innocent as an unweanèd child, 590
Tears of repentance shall efface
From my smirched forehead the last trace
Of heaven's fires, and I shall shine

The Demon

With looks as pure, as bright as thine.
Free from my reign of sin and crime, 595
Earth shall renew her golden prime.
Trust me, Tamara, I alone
Have looked into thy soul and known
How fair beyond compare thou art ;
My sanctuary is thine heart, 600
Lo, at thy feet I fall, resign
My power, an offering, at thy shrine,
To love, to live one hour with thee
Is more than immortality.
My love is infinitely great, 605
Ungovernable as my hate.
Listen, Tamara, thou shalt fly
With me, the nursling of the air,
Above the heights of azure sky,
Above the starry spheres, and share 610
With me for ever my demesne,
The world's sole empress and my queen.
Thence shalt thou view dispassionate,
Without emotion, love, or hate,
The shifting scene of man's estate— 615
Beauty a perishable flower,
And deathless fame that lives an hour,
Unlovely love, unmeaning spite,
A spark, a flash, and all is night.

The Demon

For what is mortal love? a whim, 620
A fancy or a toy in blood ;
Time flies apace and eyes grow dim,
And hearts turn cold that hotly wooed,
Or beauty cloys or fancies range ;
No mortal love but suffers change. 625
Let others cling to earthly love,
They never felt one heavenly touch,
Or caught one glimpse of worlds above
Their purblind eyes. Thou art not such.
Thou child of radiance, not for thee 630
The weight of sad humanity,
Thine is no common horoscope
Of trivial care and petty hope.
O fly these level flats and know
The heights of bliss, the depths of woe. 635
The mine, with me for guide, explore
Of knowledge, find her richest ore ;
The nimblest of the sprites that wait
My pleasure shall attend thy state,
Thy tiring-maids, light-handed fays ; 640
From Phosphorus the brightest rays
I'll pluck to weave thy coronal,
Its gems the ambrosial dews that fall
On flowers at night. . . . Thou shalt be dressed
With flushes of the roseate west ; 645

The Demon

I'll give thee a charmed agate ring
And champak odours round thee fling
Where'er thou mov'st, and in thy ears
Shall sound the music of the spheres.
I'll build thee many a lordly chamber 650
Of turkis, amethyst, and amber ;
Rifle the unplumbed ocean's floor,
Beyond the empyrean soar,
Scour earth, air, sea, and heaven above,
All, all for thee, if thou wilt love. 655

XI

And on her lips, which trembled like a lyre,
Tamara felt a breath of quivering fire,
Words like an opiate stilled her struggling
throes,
It seemed a Presence from the dark arose,
Hard at her breast a naked blade he bore, 660
Inevitable,—and she knew no more ;
His fiery kisses like the lightning spark
Flashed through her veins and all again was
dark.
He was her all, her god, her heaven, her hell—
To youth, to hope, to life her last farewell. 665

The Demon

XII

Just then it chanced the watchman went his round
With clashing brass the midnight hour to sound,
Hard by the lattice (so it fell) he stopped,
In act to strike, but his lax hand down dropped ;
He seemed to hear a sound of lips that kissed, 670
A stifled moan, a sob—he listened, whist,
Struck with amaze and dread. Then all was still,
Save that far murmurs of the mountain rill,
And the sad sougning of the cypress trees
Came floating fitfully upon the breeze. 675
With thought of mortal sin his spirits faint,
His breast he crosses and invokes his saint,
Then, with bent head, and aged, tottering feet,
He hurried on his customary beat.

XIII

Fair as a sleeping Peri the dead maid, 680
Wrapt in a snowy winding-sheet was laid,
Colder and whiter than the sheet her brow,
Her eyes for ever closed, and yet e'en now,
E'en now asleep, not sealed in death, they seem
As if a touch, a kiss, a sunlight beam 685

The Demon

Might wake them. Morn in golden splendour broke.
Friends wept and kissed ; in vain—they never woke,
For death is unrelentless, knows no ruth,
And turns to ashes all the fires of youth.

The frozen lips still keep a dying smile, 690
Like sculptured saint in some cathedral aisle.

What meant that smile mysterious? Was it born
Of irony, or supercilious scorn,

A mock at fate, a jeer at men? Who knows?
Death has the secret, death will ne'er disclose. 695

So o'er some scroll whose dim character'd page
Conceals the mystery of an early age,

Or hieroglyph, whose undeciphered lore
Unlocks all wisdom, blear-eyed sages pore.

And e'en corruption paused a little space, 700
As loth the lines of beauty to efface.

Beauty still lingered on those lips, that brow,
Those lips, that moved not, thought not, felt not
now.

Never at feast nor on her bridal day
Had she been clothed in costlier array, 705

Flowers strewed the bier (so ancient rites command),
Flowers of the vale drooped from her stiffened
hand,

Breathing sweet farewells to their native land.

The Demon

XIV

Friends, neighbours, kinsfolk now at Gudal's call
Had come to grace the solemn funeral. 710
Gudal bestrode his grey-maned horse once more,
He beat his breast, his silver locks he tore.
Slowly the long procession wound its way
To where the bones of all her kindred lay,
A far-off spot (three days, three nights they rode), 715
Fixed by her grandsire for his last abode,
A robber chief, who, as his end drew nigh,
Fearing unshriven of mortal sin to die,
Vowed on the granite heights where vultures nest,
To build a chapel that his soul might rest. 720
So on a wind-swept crag amid the snows
Of Kasbek, the fierce bandit sought repose ;
Perchance he hoped by leaving earth behind
And nearing heaven a sounder sleep to find
After life's stress. Vain hope, illusion vain— 725
Do the Dead dream of past delight or pain ?

XV

Scarce had the father priest his requiem said,
And laid Tamara in her rocky bed,

The Demon

When a storm broke, and, howling with a sound
Fiercer than wolves, the mourning voices drowned, 730
Covering with snowy pall the new-turned ground,
And from the storm-wreathed heaven sudden dropped
A wingèd angel ; by the grave he stopped
And knelt entreating for the sinner's soul,
And, at the selfsame beat of time, there stole, 735
Uprising from the vast abyss, as born
Of elemental strife, the Fiend forlorn.
Grimly he glared, his brows as midnight black,
A trail of lurid lightning marked his track.
He spied that once-loved, now detested form, 740
Her angel, and evanished in the storm ;
The guardian spirit marked his baffled guile,
Still praying, with a sad reproachful smile.

XVI

Still from the wooded steeps, that westward crown
Kaichura's vale, half hid in foliage brown, 745
The ruins of a grey old castle frown ;
And aged beldames still the children fright
With legendary tales of lady bright,
Of demon lover and of murdered knight.
Still from the smiling vale a mingled hum 750
Of voices, ripples of glad laughter, come,

The Demon

The splash of rivulets dancing down the dells,
The silver tinkle of the camel bells.
Nature, still youthful, still unheeding, plays
A happy child amid the woodland ways. 755

XVII

Only the castle beetles grim and grey,
A veteran, who has long outlived his day.
Its ghostly habitants by day are dumb,
But, with the moon's first mellow ray, they come,
Troops of mad roisterers, a merry rout, 760
Shout, laugh, and quaff, and riot in and out.
The spider, a grey friar, spins his web
In cloisters tenanted by newt and eel,
Green lizards on the roof play hide-and-seeke,
And from the porch has glided, lithe and sleek, 765
A snake in triple spirals ; then unwound
It suns its glittering length along the ground,
Like sword of warrior, after battle found.

XVIII

All else is ruin. Age succeeding age
Has wiped each line, each word from memory's
page. 770

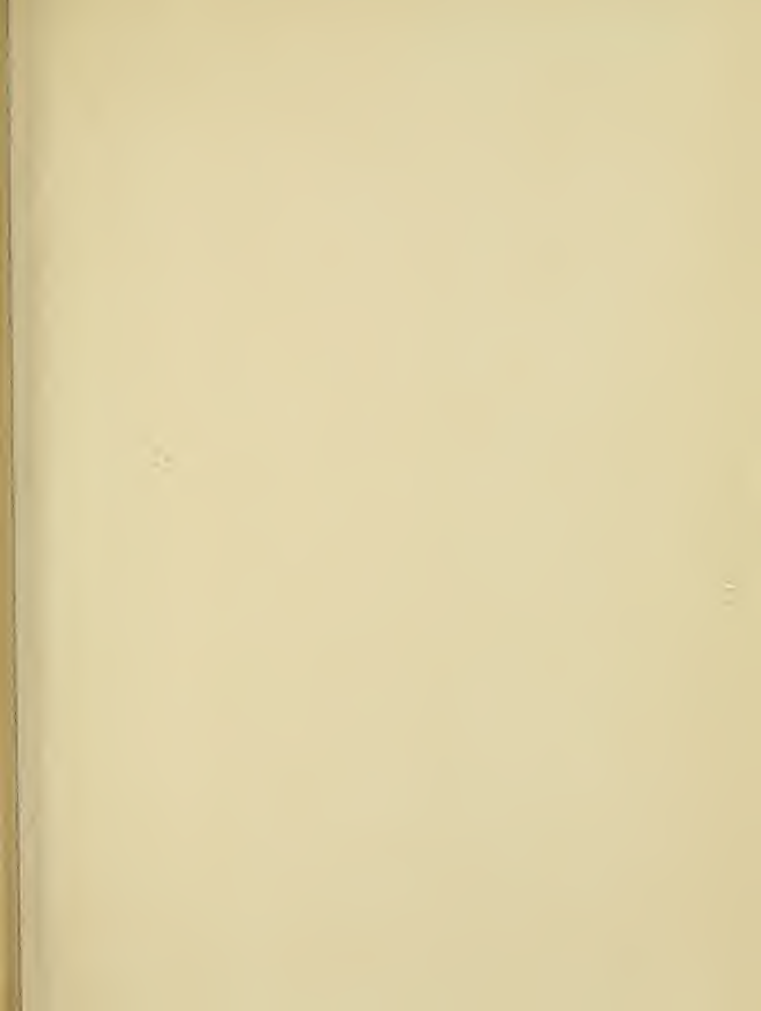
The Demon

No scroll, no verse, not e'en a stone is there
That tells of Gudal and his daughter fair.

XIX

But still, as if not built by human hands,
The cloud-capped chapel on the mountain stands,
Blocks of black granite guard the portals, dressed 775
In snowy casque, ice corselet on the breast.
Around, like mourners mute whom grief appals,
O'erhanging glaciers, ice-bound waterfalls,
Forgather. To the watchman whispering low,
Or whirling from the chapel eaves the snow, 780
The mountain eddy on his rounds will go.
Oft from the East a train of pilgrims come,
Clouds from afar who seek the mountain dome.
But only clouds and mountain airs may know
Whose bones lie mouldering midst ice and snow. 785
Dark Kasbek guards her secret ; she has peace
Where slanderous whispers, tongues of malice, cease.





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