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# THE DEMON

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■ RUSSIAN CLASSIC LITERATURE ■

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Lermontov

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Translated by Avril Pyman

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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСКИЙ ОТДЕЛ



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# THE DEMON

## An Eastern Legend

His way above the sinful earth  
The melancholy Demon winged  
And memories of happier days  
About his exiled spirit thronged:  
Of days when in the halls of light  
He shone among the angels bright;  
When cursets in their headlong flight  
Would joy to pay respect to him  
As, chaste among the cherubim,  
Among th' eternal retinue  
With eager mind and quick surmise  
He'd trace their caravanserai  
Through the far-spreading  
When he had  
The happy

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ИНОСТРАННЫЙ ОТДЕЛ

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## Part I

### I

His way above the sinful earth  
The melancholy Demon winged  
And memories of happier days  
About his exiled spirit thronged;  
Of days when in the halls of light  
He shone among the angels bright;  
When comets in their headlong flight  
Would joy to pay respect to him  
As, chaste among the cherubim,  
Among th' eternal nebulae  
With eager mind and quick surmise  
He'd trace their caravanserai  
Through the far spaces of the skies;  
When he had known both faith and love,  
The happy firstling of creation!

When neither doubt nor dark damnation  
Had whelmed him with the bitterness  
Of fruitless exile year by year,  
And when so much, so much... but this  
Was more than memory could bear.

## II

Outcast long since, he wandered lone,  
Having no place to call his own,  
Through the dull desert of the world  
While age on age about him swirled,  
Minute on minute — all the same.  
Prince of this world — which he held cheap —  
He scattered tares among the wheat....  
A joyless task without remission,  
Void of excitement, opposition —  
Evil itself to him seemed tame.

## III

And so — exiled from Paradise —  
He soared above the peaks of ice  
And saw the everlasting snows  
Of Kazbek and the Caucasus,  
And, serpentine, the winding deeps

Of that black, dragon-haunted pass  
The Daryal gorge; then the wild leaps  
Of Terek like a lion bounding  
With mane of tangled spray that blows  
Behind him, and a great roar sounding  
Through all the hills, where beast and bird  
On mountain scree and azure steeps  
The river's mighty voice had heard;  
And, as he flew, the golden clouds  
Streaked from the South in tattered shrouds...  
Companions on his Northbound course;  
And the great cliffs came crowding in  
And brooded darkly over him  
Exuding some compelling force  
Of somnolence above the stream...  
And on the cliff-tops castles reared  
Their towered heads and baleful stared  
Out through the mists — wardens who wait  
Colossal at the mighty gate  
Of Caucasus — and all about  
God's world lay wonderful and wild...  
But the proud Spirit looked with doubt  
And cool contempt on God's creation,  
His brow unruffled and serene  
Admitting no participation.

## IV

Before him now another scene  
In vivid beauty blooms.  
The patterned vales' luxuriant green  
Spread like a carpet on the looms  
Of Georgia, rich and blessed ground!  
These poplars like great pillars tower,  
And sounding streams trip over pebbles  
Of many colours in their courses.  
And, ember-bright, the rose trees flower  
Where nightingales forever warble  
To marble beauties fond discourses  
Forever deaf to their sweet sound.  
On sultry days the timid deer  
Seek out an ivy-curtained cave  
To hide them from the midday heat;  
How bright, how live the leaves are here!  
A hundred voices soft conclave  
A thousand flower-hearts that beat!  
The sensuous warmth of afternoon,  
The scented dew which falls to strew  
The grateful foliage 'neath the moon,  
The stars that shine as full and bright  
As Georgian beauties' eyes by night!...  
Yet in the outcast's barren breast  
Abundant nature woke no new  
Upsurge of forces long at rest,

Touched off no other sentiment  
Than envy, hatred, cold contempt.

## V

Right high the house, right wide the court  
Grey-haired Gudaal has builded him...  
In tears and labour dearly bought  
By slaves submissive to his whim.  
Across the neighbouring cliffs its shade  
From sunrise dark and cool is laid  
A steep stair in the cliff-face hewn  
Leads from the corner-tower down  
To the Aragva. Down this stair  
Princess Tamara, young and fair,  
Goes gleaming, snow white veils a-flutter,  
To fetch her jars of river water.

## VI

In austere silence heretofore  
The house has looked across the valleys;  
But now wide open stands the door  
Gudaal holds feast to mark the marriage  
Of his Tamara: now the wine  
Flows freely and the zurná<sup>1</sup> skirls;

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<sup>1</sup> Zurna — a woodwind musical instrument with a double reed. — *Ed.*

The clan is gathered round to dine  
And on the roof-top, richly spread  
With orient rugs, the promised bride  
Sits all amongst her laughing girls:  
In games and songs their time is sped  
And merriment. Beyond the hills  
The semicircle of the sun  
Has sunk already. Now the fun  
Crows fast and furious. Now the steady  
Rhythmic clapping and the singing  
The bride brings to her feet, poised ready,  
Her tambourine above her head  
Is circling, she herself goes winging  
Bird-light above rug, then stops,  
Looks round, and lets her lashes drop  
That envious hide her shining glance;  
And now she raises raven brows,  
Now suddenly sways forward slightly  
Her slender foot peeps out, and lightly  
It slides and swims into the dance;  
And see she smiles — a joyous gleam  
Aglow with childish merriment.  
And yet... the white moon's sportive beam  
In rippling water liquid bent  
With such a smile could scarce compare  
More live than life, than youth more fair.

## VII

So by the midnight star I swear  
By blazing East and beaming West  
No Shah of Persia knew her peer  
No King on earth was ever blessed  
To kiss an eye so full and fine.  
The harem's sparkling fountain never  
Showered such a form with dewy pearls!  
Nor had mortal fingers ever  
Caressed a forehead so divine  
To loose such splendid curls;  
Indeed, since Eve was first undone  
And man from Eden forth must fare  
No beauty such as this, I swear,  
Had bloomed beneath the Southern sun.

## VIII

So now for the last time she danced  
Alas! Tomorrow, she, the heir  
Of old Gudaal, the daughter fair  
Of liberty must bow her head  
To a slave's fate like one entranced,  
Adopt a country not her own,  
A family she'd never known —  
Often a secret doubt would shed

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