

MIKHAIL LERMONTOV

THE DEMON

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■ RUSSIAN CLASSIC LITERATURE ■

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Mikhail
Lermontov

The Demon

Translated by Avril Pyman

THE DEMON

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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСКИЙ ОТДЕЛ



КАРО

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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 caravanseral
Through the
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 zurná¹ skirls;

¹ 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
Crowds 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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