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FAUST

by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

translated by George Madison Priest

DEDICATION

Ye wavering forms draw near again as ever
When ye long since moved past my clouded eyes.
To hold you fast, shall I this time endeavour?
Still does my heart that strange illusion prize?
Ye crowd on me! 'Tis well! Your might assever
While ye from mist and murk around me rise.
As in my youth my heart again is bounding,
Thrilled by the magic breath your train surrounding.

Ye bring with you glad days and happy faces.
Ah, many dear, dear shades arise with you;
Like some old tale that Time but half erases,
First Love draws near to me and Friendship too.
The pain returns, the sad lament retraces
Life's labyrinthine, erring course anew
And names the good souls who, by Fortune cheated
Of lovely hours, forth from my world have fled.

They do not hear the melodies I'm singing,
The souls to whom my earliest lays I sang;
Dispersed that throng who once to me were clinging,
The echo's died away that one time rang.
Now midst an unknown crowd my grief is ringing,
Their very praise but gives my heart a pang,

While those who once my song enjoyed and flattered,
If still they live, roam through the wide world scattered.

And I am seized with long-unwonted yearning
Toward yonder realm of spirits grave and still.
My plaintive song's uncertain tones are turning
To harps aeolian murmuring at will.
Awe binds me fast; tear upon tear falls burning,
My stern heart feels a gentle, tender thrill;
What I possess, as if far off I'm seeing,
And what has vanished, now comes into being.

PRELUDE ON THE STAGE

MANAGER. DRAMATIC POET. JESTER.

Manager. Ye two that have so often stood by me
In time of need and tribulation,
Come, say: what hope in any German nation
For what we undertake have ye?
I much desire to give the crowd a pleasure,
In chief, because they live and let us live.
The posts, the boards are up, and here at leisure
The crowd expects a feast in what we'll give.
They're sitting now with eyebrows raised,
Quite calmly there, would gladly be amazed.
I know how one can make all minds akin,
Yet so embarrassed I have never been.
In truth, accustomed to the best they're not,
But they have read a really awful lot.
How shall we plan that all be fresh and new
And with a meaning, yet attractive too?
For I do like to see them crowding, urging,
When toward our booth the stream sets in apace

And with its powerful, repeated surging
Pours through the strait and narrow gate of grace,
When still in broad daylight, ere it is four,
They fight and push their way up to the wicket
And as the famine-stricken at the baker's door
They nearly break their necks to get a ticket.
This miracle, upon such varied folk, the poet
Alone can work; today, my friend, oh, show it!

Poet. I beg you, of that motley crowd cease telling

At sight of whom the spirit takes to flight!
Enveil from me the billowing mass compelling
Us to its vortex with resistless might.
No, lead me to the tranquil, heavenly dwelling
Where only blooms for poets pure delight,
Where Love and Friendship give the heart their blessing,
With godlike hand creating and progressing.

Ah, all that from the bosom's depths sprang flowing,
All that from shy and stammering lips has passed,
Sometimes success and sometimes failure knowing,
To each wild moment's power a prey is cast.
Oft only after years, in credit growing,
Doth it appear in perfect form at last.
What gleams is born but for the moment's pages;
The true remains, unlost to after-ages.

Jester. Could I but hear no more of after-ages!

Suppose the thought of them my mind engages,
Who'd give the present world its fun?
That will it have and ought to have it too.
The presence of a gallant chap, revealed to you,
I think, is also worth while being shown.
Who pleasantly can just himself impart,
Is not embittered by the people's whim;
He likes to have a crowd surrounding him,

More certainly to stir and thrill each heart.

So do be good, show you can set the fashion.

Let Fantasy be heard with all her chorus:

Sense, Reason, Sentiment, and Passion;

Yet mark you well! bring Folly too before us!

Manager. But, more than all, do let enough occur!

Men come to look, to see they most prefer.

If, as they gaze, much is reeled off and spun,

So that the startled crowd gapes all it can,

A multitude you will at once have won;

You then will be a much-loved man.

You can compel the mass by mass alone;

Each in the end will seek out something as his own.

Bring much and you'll bring this or that to everyone

And each will leave contented when the play is done.

If you will give a piece, give it at once in pieces!

Ragout like this your fame increases.

Easy it is to stage, as easy to invent.

What use is it, a whole to fashion and present?

The Public still will pick it all to pieces.

Poet. You do not feel how bad such handiwork must be,

How little that becomes the artist true!

I see, neat gentlemanly botchery

Is now a sovereign rule with you.

Manager. Reproof like this leaves me quite unoffended!

A man who does his work, effectively intended,

Must stick to tools that are the best for it.

Reflect! You have a tender wood to split;

And those for whom you write, just see!

If this one's driven hither by ennui,

Another leaves a banquet sated with its vapours;

And- what the very worst will always be-

Many come fresh from reading magazines and papers.

Men haste distraught to us as to the masquerade,
And every step but winged by curiosity;
The ladies give a treat, all in their best arrayed,
And play their part without a fee.
Why do you dream in lofty poet-land?
Why does a full house make you gay?
Observe the patrons near at hand!
They are half cold, half coarse are they.
One, when the play is over, hopes a game of cards;
A wild night on a wench's breast another chooses.
Why then, with such an aim, poor silly bards,
Will you torment so much the gracious Muses?
Give only more and ever, ever more, I say.
Then from the goal you nevermore can stray.
Seek to bewilder men- that is my view.
But satisfy them? That is hard to do.-
What is attacking you? Pain or delight?
Poet. Go hence and seek yourself another slave!
What! Shall the poet take that highest right,
The Right of Man, that Right which Nature gave,
And wantonly for your sake trifle it away?
How doth he over every heart hold sway?
How doth he every element enslave?
Is it not the harmony that from his breast doth start,
Then winds the world in turn back in his heart?
When Nature forces lengths of thread unending
In careless whirling on the spindle round,
When all Life's inharmonic throngs unblending
In sullen, harsh confusion sound,
Who parts the changeless series of creation,
That each, enlivened, moves in rhythmic time?
Who summons each to join the general ordination,
In consecrated, noble harmonies to chime?

Who bids the storm with raging passion lower?
The sunset with a solemn meaning glow?
Who scatters Springtime's every lovely flower
Along the pathway where his love may go?
Who twines the verdant leaves, unmeaning, slighted,
Into a wreath of honour, meed of every field?
Who makes Olympus sure, the gods united?
That power of Man the Poet has revealed!

Jester. Then use these handsome powers as your aid

And carry on this poet trade
As one a love-adventure carries!
By chance one nears, one feels, one tarries!
And, bit by bit, one gets into a tangle.
Bliss grows, then comes a tiff, a wrangle;
One is enrapt, now one sees pain advance,
And ere one is aware, it is a real romance!
So let us also such a drama give!
Just seize upon the full life people live!
Each lives it though it's known to few,
And grasp it where you will, there's interest for you.
In motley pictures with a little clarity,
Much error and a spark of verity,
Thus can the best of drinks be brewed
To cheer and edify the multitude.
Youth's fairest bloom collects in expectation
Before your play and harks the revelation.
Then from your work each tender soul, intent,
Absorbs a melancholy nourishment.
Then now one thought and now another thought you start;
Each sees what he has carried in his heart.
As yet they are prepared for weeping and for laughter;
They still revere the flight, illusion they adore.
A mind once formed finds naught made right thereafter;

A growing mind will thank you evermore.

Poet. Then give me back the time of growing

When I myself was growing too,
When crowding songs, a fountain flowing,
Gushed forth unceasing, ever new;
When still the mists my world were veiling,
The bud its miracle bespoke;
When I the thousand blossoms broke,
Profusely through the valleys trailing.
Naught, yet enough had I when but a youth,
Joy in illusion, yearning toward the truth.
Give impulse its unfettered dower,
The bliss so deep 'tis full of pain,
The strength of hate, Love's mighty power,
Oh, give me back my youth again!

Jester. Youth, my good friend, you need most in the fight

When enemies come on, hard pressing,
When, clinging to your necks so tight,
The dearest maidens hang caressing,
When, from afar, a wreath entrances,
Luring to hard-won goal the runner's might,
When, after madly whirling dances,
A man carousing drinks away the night.
But on the lyre's familiar strings
To play with grace and spirit ever
And sweep with lovely wanderings
Toward goals you choose for your endeavour,
That is your duty, aged sirs,
And we revere you for it no less dearly.
Age makes not childish, as one oft avers;
It finds us still true children merely.

Manager. Words have been interchanged enough,

Let me at last see action too.

While compliments you're turning- idle stuff!
Some useful thing might come to view.
Why talk of waiting for the mood?
No one who dallies ever will it see.
If you pretend you're poets- good!
Command then, poets, poetry!
What we're in need of, that full well you know,
We want to sip strong drink, so go
And start the brew without delay!
Never is done tomorrow what is not done today
And one should let no day slip by.
With resolution seize the possible straightway
By forelock and with quick, courageous trust;
Then holding fast you will not let it further fly
And you will labour on because you must.

Upon our German stage, you are aware,
Each tries out what he wishes to display,
So in your work for me today
Scenes, mechanism you are not to spare.
Use both the lights of heaven, great and small;
The stars above are yours to squander;
Nor water, fire, nor rocky wall,
Nor beasts nor birds are lacking yonder.
Thus in our narrow house of boards preside
And on through all Creation's circle stride;
And wander on, with speed considered well,
From Heaven, through the world, to Hell!

PROLOGUE IN HEAVEN

The LORD. The HEAVENLY HOSTS.

Afterwards MEPHISTOPHELES.

The THREE ARCHANGELS come forward.

Raphael. The Sun intones, in ancient tourney

With brother-spheres, a rival song,

Fulfilling its predestined journey,

With march of thunder moves along.

Its aspect gives the angels power,

Though none can ever solve its ways;

The lofty works beyond us tower,

Sublime as on the first of days.

Gabriel. And swift beyond where knowledge ranges,

Earth's splendour whirls in circling flight;

A paradise of brightness changes

To awful shuddering depths of night.

The sea foams up, widespread and surging

Against the rocks' deep-sunken base,

And rock and sea sweep onward, merging

In rushing spheres' eternal race.

Michael. And rival tempests roar and shatter,

From sea to land, from land to sea,

And, raging, form a circling fetter

Of deep, effective energy.

There flames destruction, flashing, searing,

Before the crashing thunder's way;

Yet, Lord, Thy angels are revering

The gentle progress of Thy day.

The Three. Its aspect gives the angels power,

Since none can solve Thee nor Thy ways;

And all Thy works beyond us tower,

Sublime as on the first of days.

Mephistopheles. Since you, O Lord, once more draw near

And ask how all is getting on, and you

Were ever well content to see me here,

You see me also midst your retinue.

Forgive, fine speeches I can never make,
Though all the circle look on me with scorn;
Pathos from me would make your sides with laughter shake,
Had you not laughter long ago forsworn.

Of suns and worlds I've naught to say worth mention.
How men torment them claims my whole attention.

Earth's little god retains his same old stamp and ways
And is as singular as on the first of days.

A little better would he live, poor wight,
Had you not given him that gleam of heavenly light.

He calls it Reason, only to pollute
Its use by being brutaler than any brute.

It seems to me, if you'll allow, Your Grace,
He's like a grasshopper, that long-legged race
That's made to fly and flying spring
And in the grass to sing the same old thing.

If in the grass he always were reposing!

But in each filthy heap he keeps on nosing.

The Lord. You've nothing more to say to me?

You come but to complain unendingly?

Is never aught right to your mind?

Mephistopheles. No, Lord! All is still downright bad, I find.

Man in his wretched days makes me lament him;

I am myself reluctant to torment him.

The Lord. Do you know Faust?

Mephistopheles. The Doctor?

The Lord. Yes, my servant!

Mephistopheles. He!

Forsooth, he serves you most peculiarly.

Unearthly are the fool's drink and his food;

The ferment drives him forth afar.

Though half aware of his insensate mood,

He asks of heaven every fairest star

And of the earth each highest zest,
And all things near and all things far
Can not appease his deeply troubled breast.

The Lord. Although he serves me now confusedly,
I soon shall lead him forth where all is clear.
The gardener knows, when verdant grows the tree,
That bloom and fruit will deck the coming year.

Mephistopheles. What will you wager? Him you yet shall lose,
If you will give me your permission
To lead him gently on the path I choose.

The Lord. As long as on the earth he shall survive,
So long you'll meet no prohibition.
Man errs as long as he doth strive.

Mephistopheles. My thanks for that, for with the dead I've never
got

Myself entangled of my own volition.
I like full, fresh cheeks best of all the lot.
I'm not at home when corpses seek my house;
I feel about it as a cat does with a mouse.

The Lord. 'Tis well! So be it granted you today!
Divert this spirit from its primal source
And if you can lay hold on him, you may
Conduct him downward on your course,
And stand abashed when you are forced to say:
A good man, though his striving be obscure,
Remains aware that there is one right way.

Mephistopheles. All right! But long it won't endure!
I have no fear about my bet, be sure!
When I attain my aim, do not protest,
But let me triumph with a swelling breast.
Dust shall he eat, and that with zest,
As did the famous snake, my near relation.

The Lord. In that too you may play your part quite free;

Your kind I never did detest.
Of all the spirits of negation
The wag weighs least of all on me.
Mankind's activity can languish all too easily,
A man soon loves unhampered rest;
Hence, gladly I give him a comrade such as you,
Who stirs and works and must, as devil, do.
But ye, real sons of God, lift up your voice,
In living, profuse beauty to rejoice!
May that which grows, that lives and works forever,
Engird you with Love's gracious bonds, and aught
That ever may appear, to float and waver,
Make steadfast in enduring thought!

Heaven closes, the ARCHANGELS disperse.

Mephistopheles [alone]. I like to see the Old Man not infrequently,
And I forbear to break with Him or be uncivil;
It's very pretty in so great a Lord as He
To talk so like a man even with the Devil.

NIGHT

The First Part
OF THE TRAGEDY

NIGHT.

In a high-vaulted, narrow Gothic chamber FAUST,
restless in his chair by his desk.

Faust. I've studied now Philosophy
And Jurisprudence, Medicine,
And even, alas! Theology
All through and through with ardour keen!
Here now I stand, poor fool, and see

I'm just as wise as formerly.
Am called a Master, even Doctor too,
And now I've nearly ten years through
Pulled my students by their noses to and fro
And up and down, across, about,
And see there's nothing we can know!
That all but burns my heart right out.
True, I am more clever than all the vain creatures,
The Doctors and Masters, Writers and Preachers;
No doubts plague me, nor scruples as well.
I'm not afraid of devil or hell.
To offset that, all joy is rent from me.
I do not imagine I know aught that's right;
I do not imagine I could teach what might
Convert and improve humanity.
Nor have I gold or things of worth,
Or honours, splendours of the earth.
No dog could live thus any more!
So I have turned to magic lore,
To see if through the spirit's power and speech
Perchance full many a secret I may reach,
So that no more with bitter sweat
I need to talk of what I don't know yet,
So that I may perceive whatever holds
The world together in its inmost folds,
See all its seeds, its working power,
And cease word-threshing from this hour.
Oh, that, full moon, thou didst but glow
Now for the last time on my woe,
Whom I beside this desk so oft
Have watched at midnight climb aloft.
Then over books and paper here
To me, sad friend, thou didst appear!

Ah! could I but on mountain height
Go onward in thy lovely light,
With spirits hover round mountain caves,
Weave over meadows thy twilight laves,
Discharged of all of Learning's fumes, anew
Bathe me to health in thy healing dew.

Woe! am I stuck and forced to dwell
Still in this musty, cursed cell?
Where even heaven's dear light strains
But dimly through the painted panes!
Hemmed in by all this heap of books,
Their gnawing worms, amid their dust,
While to the arches, in all the nooks,
Are smoke-stained papers midst them thrust,
Boxes and glasses round me crammed,
And instruments in cases hurled,
Ancestral stuff around me jammed-
That is your world! That's called a world!

And still you question why your heart
Is cramped and anxious in your breast?
Why each impulse to live has been repressed
In you by some vague, unexplained smart?
Instead of Nature's living sphere
In which God made mankind, you have alone,
In smoke and mould around you here,
Beasts' skeletons and dead men's bone.

Up! Flee! Out into broad and open land!
And this book full of mystery,
From Nostradamus' very hand,
Is it not ample company?
The stars' course then you'll understand
And Nature, teaching, will expand
The power of your soul, as when

One spirit to another speaks. 'Tis vain
To think that arid brooding will explain
The sacred symbols to your ken.
Ye spirits, ye are hovering near;
Oh, answer me if ye can hear!

He opens the book and perceives the sign of the Macrocosm.

What rapture, ah! at once is flowing
Through all my senses at the sight of this!
I feel a youthful life, its holy bliss,
Through nerve and vein run on, new-glowing.
Was it a god who wrote these signs that still
My inner tumult and that fill
My wretched heart with ecstasy?
Unveiling with mysterious potency
The powers of Nature round about me here?
Am I a god? All grows so clear to me!
In these pure lineaments I see
Creative Nature's self before my soul appear.
Now first I understand what he, the sage, has said:
"The world of spirits is not shut away;
Thy sense is closed, thy heart is dead!
Up, Student! bathe without dismay
Thy earthly breast in morning-red!"

He contemplates the sign.

Into the whole how all things blend,
Each in the other working, living!
How heavenly powers ascend, descend,
Each unto each the golden vessels giving!
On pinions fragrant blessings bringing,
From Heaven through Earth all onward winging,