

George Crabbe (1754-1832)

1 *Sir Eustace Grey*

Scene — A Mad-house.

Persons — Visitor, Physician, and Patient.

Veris miscens falsa. —

Seneca in Herc. furente [Act IV. v. 1070].

VISITOR.

I'll know no more: — the heart is torn
By views of wo we cannot heal;
Long shall I see these things forlorn,
And oft again their griefs shall feel,
As each upon the mind shall steal; 5
That wan projector's mystic style,
That lumpish idiot leering by,
That peevish idler's ceaseless wile,
And that poor maiden's half-form'd smile,
While struggling for the full-drawn sigh! — 10

I'll know no more.

PHYSICIAN.

— Yes, turn again;

Then speed to happier scenes thy way,
When thou hast view'd, what yet remain,
The ruins of Sir Eustace Grey,
The sport of madness, misery's prey. 15
But he will no historian need;
His cares, his crimes, will he display,
And show (as one from frenzy freed)
The proud-lost mind, the rash-done deed.

That cell to him is Greyling Hall: — 20
Approach; he'll bid thee welcome there;
Will sometimes for his servant call,
And sometimes point the vacant chair:
He can, with free and easy air,

Appear attentive and polite; 25
Can veil his woes in manners fair,
And pity with respect excite.

PATIENT.

Who comes? — Approach! — 'tis kindly done: —
My learn'd physician, and a friend, 30
Their pleasures quit, to visit one
Who cannot to their ease attend,
Nor joys bestow, nor comforts lend,
As when I lived so bless'd, so well,
And dreamt not I must soon contend
With those malignant powers of hell. 35

PHYSICIAN.

Less warmth, Sir Eustace, or we go. —

PATIENT.

See! I am calm as infant-love,
A very child, but one of wo,
Whom you should pity, not reprove: —
But men at ease, who never strove 40
With passions wild, will calmly show
How soon we may their ills remove,
And masters of their madness grow.

Some twenty years I think are gone: —
(Time flies, I know not how, away;) — 45
The sun upon no happier shone,
Nor prouder man, than Eustace Grey.
Ask where you would, and all would say,
The man admired and praised of all,
By rich and poor, by grave and gay[,] 50
Was the young lord of Greyling Hall.

Yes! I had youth and rosy health;
Was nobly form'd, as man might be;
For sickness then, of all my wealth,
I never gave a single fee: 55
The ladies fair, the maidens free,
Were all accusom'd then to say,

Who would a handsome figure see
Should look upon Sir Eustace Grey.

He had a frank and pleasant look, 60
A cheerful eye and accent bland;
His very speech and manner spoke
The generous heart, the open hand;
About him all was gay or grand,
He had the praise of great and small; 65
He bought, improved, projected, plann'd,
And reign'd a prince at Greyling Hall.

My lady! — she was all we love;
All praise (to speak her worth) is faint;
Her manners show'd the yielding dove, 70
Her morals, the seraphic saint;
She never breathed nor look'd complaint;
No equal upon earth had she: —
Now, what is this fair thing I paint?
Alas! as all that live shall be. 75

There was, beside, a gallant youth,
And him my bosom's friend I had: —
Oh! I was rich in very truth,
It made me proud — it made me mad! —
Yes, I was lost — but there was cause! — 80
Where stood my tale? — I cannot find —
But I had all mankind's applause,
And all the smiles of womankind.

There were two cherub-things beside,
A gracious girl, a glorious boy; 85
Yet more to swell my full-blown pride,
To varnish higher my fading joy,
Pleasures were ours without alloy,
Nay, Paradise, — till my frail Eve
Our bliss was tempted to destroy, 90
Deceived and fated to deceive.

But I deserved; for all that time,
When I was loved, admired, caress'd,

There was within each secret crime,
Unfelt, uncancell'd, unconfess'd: 95
I never then my God address'd,
In grateful praise or humble prayer;
And, if His Word was not my jest,
(Dread thought!) it never was my care.

I doubted — fool I was to doubt! — 100
If that all-piercing eye could see;
If He who looks all worlds throughout,
Would so minute and careful be,
As to perceive and punish me: —
With man I would be great and high, 105
But with my God so lost, that He,
In his large view, should pass me by.

Thus bless'd with children, friend, and wife,
Bless'd far beyond the vulgar lot;
Of all that gladdens human life, 110
Where was the good, that I had not?
But my vile heart had sinful spot,
And Heaven beheld its deep'ning stain;
Eternal justice I forgot,
And mercy sought not to obtain. 115

Come near — I'll softly speak the rest! —
Alas! 'tis known to all the crowd,
Her guilty love was all confess'd,
And his, who so much truth avow'd,
My faithless friend's. — In pleasure proud 120
I sat, when these cursed tidings came;
Their guilt, their flight was told aloud,
And Envy smiled to hear my shame!

I call'd on Vengeance; at the word
She came: — Can I the deed forget? 125
I held the sword, th' accursed sword,
The blood of his false heart made wet;
And that fair victim paid her debt;
She pined, she died, she loath'd to live; —
I saw her dying — see her yet: 130

Fair fallen thing! my rage forgive!

Those cherubs still, my life to bless,
Were left; could I my fears remove,
Sad fears that check'd each fond caress,
And poison'd all parental love? 135
Yet that with jealous feelings strove,
And would at last have won my will,
Had I not, wretch! been doom'd to prove
Th' extremes of mortal good and ill.

In youth! health! joy! in beauty's pride! 140
They droop'd: as flowers when blighted bow,
The dire infection came. — They died,
And I was cursed — as I am now. —
Nay, frown not, angry friend — allow
That I was deeply, sorely tried; 145
Hear then, and you must wonder how
I could such storms and strifes abide.

Storms! — not that clouds embattled make,
When they afflict this earthly globe;
But such as with their terrors shake 150
Man's breast, and to the bottom probe:
They make the hypocrite disrobe,
They try us all, if false or true;
For this, one devil had pow'r on Job;
And I was long the slave of two. 155

PHYSICIAN.

Peace, peace, my friend; these subjects fly;
Collect thy thoughts — go calmly on. —

PATIENT.

And shall I then the fact deny?
I was, — thou know'st — I was begone,
Like him who fill'd the eastern throne, 160
To whom the Watcher cried aloud;
That royal wretch of Babylon,
Who was so guilty and so proud.

Like him, with haughty, stubborn mind,
I, in my state, my comforts sought; 165
Delight and praise I hoped to find,
In what I builded, planted, bought!
Oh! arrogance! by misery taught —
Soon came a voice! I felt it come:
“Full be his cup, with evil fraught, 170
“Demons his guides, and death his doom!”

Then was I cast from out my state;
Two fiends of darkness led my way;
They waked me early, watch’d me late,
My dread by night, my plague by day! 175
Oh! I was made their sport, their play,
Through many a stormy troubled year;
And how they used their passive prey
Is sad to tell; — but you shall hear.

And first, before they sent me forth, 180
Through this unpitying world to run,
They robb’d Sir Eustace of his worth,
Lands, manors, lordships, every one;
So was that gracious man undone,
Was spurn’d as vile, was scorn’d as poor, 185
Whom every former friend would shun,
And menials drove from every door.

Then those ill-favour’d Ones, whom none
But my unhappy eyes could view,
Led me, with wild emotion, on, 190
And, with resistless terror, drew.
Through lands we fled, o’er seas we flew,
And halted on a boundless plain;
Where nothing fed, nor breathed, nor grew,
But silence ruled the still domain. 195

Upon that boundless plain, below,
The setting sun’s last rays were shed,
And gave a mild and sober glow,
Where all were still, asleep, or dead;
Vast ruins in the midst were spread, 200

Pillars and pediments sublime,
Where the grey moss had form'd a bed,
And clothed the crumbling spoils of time.

There was I fix'd, I know not how,
Condemn'd for untold years to stay: 205
Yet years were not; — one dreadful *now*
Endured no change of night or day;
The same mild evening's sleeping ray
Shone softly-solemn and serene,
And all that time I gazed away, 210
The setting sun's sad rays were seen.

At length a moment's sleep stole on —
Again came my commission'd foes;
Again through sea and land we're gone,
No peace, no respite, no repose: 215
Above the dark broad sea we rose,
We ran through bleak and frozen land;
I had no strength their strength t' oppose,
An infant in a giant's hand.

They placed me where those streamers play, 220
Those nimble beams of brilliant light;
It would the stoutest heart dismay,
To see, to feel, that dreadful sight:
So swift, so pure, so cold, so bright,
They pierced my frame with icy wound, 225
And, all that half-year's polar night,
Those dancing streamers wrapp'd me round.

Slowly that darkness pass'd away,
When down upon the earth I fell; —
Some hurried sleep was mine by day; 230
But, soon as toll'd the evening bell,
They forced me on, where ever dwell
Far-distant men in cities fair,
Cities of whom no trav'lers tell,
Nor feet but mine were wanderers there. 235

Their watchmen stare, and stand aghast,

As on we hurry through the dark;
The watch-light blinks as we go past,
The watch-dog shrinks and fears to bark;
The watch-tower's bell sounds shrill; and, hark! 240
The free wind blows — we've left the town —
A wide sepulchral ground I mark,
And on a tombstone place me down.

What monuments of mighty dead!
What tombs of various kinds are found! 245
And stones erect their shadows shed
On humble graves, with wickers bound;
Some risen fresh, above the ground,
Some level with the native clay,
What sleeping millions wait the sound, 250
"Arise, ye dead, and come away!"

Alas! they stay not for that call;
Spare me this wo! ye demons, spare! —
They come! the shrouded shadows all —
'Tis more than mortal brain can bear; 255
Rustling they rise, they sternly glare
At man, upheld by vital breath;
Who, led by wicked fiends, should dare
To join the shadowy troops of death!

Yes, I have felt all man can feel, 260
Till he shall pay his nature's debt:
Ills that no hope has strength to heal,
No mind the comfort to forget:
Whatever cares the heart can fret,
The spirits wear, the temper gall, 265
Wo, want, dread, anguish, all beset
My sinful soul! — together all!

Those fiends upon a shaking fen
Fix'd me, in dark tempestuous night;
There never trod the foot of men; 270
There flock'd the fowl in wint'ry flight;
There danced the moor's deceitful light
Above the pool where sedges grow;

And, when the morning-sun shone bright,
It shone upon a field of snow. 275

They hung me on a bough so small,
The rook could build her nest no higher;
They fix'd me on the trembling ball
That crowns the steeple's quiv'ring spire;
They set me where the seas retire, 280
But drown with their returning tide;
And made me flee the mountain's fire,
When rolling from its burning side.

I've hung upon the ridgy steep
Of cliffs, and held the rambling brier; 285
I've plunged below the billowy deep,
Where air was sent me to respire;
I've been where hungry wolves retire;
And (to complete my woes) I've ran
Where Bedlam's crazy crew conspire 290
Against the life of reasoning man.

I've furl'd in storms the flapping sail,
By hanging from the topmast-head;
I've served the vilest slaves in jail,
And pick'd the dunghill's spoil for bread; 295
I've made the badger's hole my bed,
I've wander'd with a gipsy crew;
I've dreaded all the guilty dread,
And done what they would fear to do.

On sand, where ebbs and flows the flood, 300
Midway they placed and bade me die;
Propp'd on my staff, I stoutly stood,
When the swift waves came rolling by;
And high they rose, and still more high,
Till my lips drank the bitter brine; 305
I sobb'd convulsed, then cast mine eye,
And saw the tide's re-flowing sign.

And then, my dreams were such as nought
Could yield but my unhappy case;

I've been of thousand devils caught, 310
And thrust into that horrid place,
Where reign dismay, despair, disgrace;
Furies with iron fangs were there,
To torture that accursed race,
Doom'd to dismay, disgrace, despair. 315

Harmless I was, yet hunted down
For treasons, to my soul unfit;
I've been pursued through many a town,
For crimes that petty knaves commit;
I've been adjudged t' have lost my wit, 320
Because I preach'd so loud and well;
And thrown into the dungeon's pit,
For trampling on the pit of hell.

Such were the evils, man of sin,
That I was fated to sustain; 325
And add to all, without – within,
A soul defiled with every stain
That man's reflecting mind can pain;
That pride, wrong, rage, despair, can make;
In fact, they'd nearly touch'd my brain, 330
And reason on her throne would shake.

But pity will the vilest seek,
If punish'd guilt will not repine: –
I heard a heavenly teacher speak,
And felt the SUN OF MERCY shine: 335
I hail'd the light! the birth divine!
And then was seal'd among the few;
Those angry fiends beheld the sign,
And from me in an instant flew.

Come, hear how thus the charmers cry 340
To wandering sheep, the strays of sin,
While some the wicket-gate pass by,
And some will knock and enter in:
Full joyful 'tis a soul to win,
For he that winneth souls is wise; 345
Now, hark! the holy strains begin,

And thus the sainted preacher cries: –

“Pilgrim, burthen’d with thy sin,
“Come the way to Zion’s gate,
“There, till Mercy let thee in, 350
“Knock and weep, and watch and wait.
 “Knock! – He knows the sinner’s cry;
 “Weep! – He loves the mourner’s tears;
 “Watch! – for saving grace is nigh;
 “Wait! – till heavenly light appears. 355

“Hark! it is the Bridegroom’s voice;
“Welcome, pilgrim, to thy rest;
“Now within the gate rejoice,
“Safe and seal’d, and bought and bless’d!
 “Safe – from all the lures of vice; 360
 “Seal’d – by signs the chosen know;
 “Bought – by love and life the price;
 “Bless’d – the mighty debt to owe.

“Holy Pilgrim! what for thee
“In a world like this remain? 365
“From thy guarded breast shall flee
“Fear and shame, and doubt and pain.
 “Fear – the hope of Heaven shall fly;
 “Shame – from glory’s view retire;
 “Doubt – in certain rapture die; 370
 “Pain – in endless bliss expire.”

But though my day of grace was come,
 Yet still my days of grief I find;
The former clouds’ collected gloom
 Still sadden the reflecting mind; 375
The soul, to evil things consign’d,
 Will of their evil some retain;
The man will seem to earth inclined,
 And will not look erect again.

Thus, though elect, I feel it hard 380
 To lose what I possess’d before,
To be from all my wealth debarr’d: –

The brave Sir Eustace is no more.
But old I wax and passing poor,
Stern, rugged men my conduct view; 385
They chide my wish, they bar my door,
'Tis hard – I weep – you see I do. –

Must you, my friends, no longer stay?
Thus quickly all my pleasures end;
But I'll remember, when I pray, 390
My kind physician and his friend;
And those sad hours you deign to spend
With me, I shall requite them all;
Sir Eustace for his friends shall send,
And thank their love at Greyling Hall. 395

VISITOR.

The poor Sir Eustace! – Yet his hope
Leads him to think of joys again;
And when his earthly visions droop,
His views of heavenly kind remain. –
But whence that meek and humbled strain, 400
That spirit wounded, lost, resign'd?
Would not so proud a soul disdain
The madness of the poorest mind?

PHYSICIAN.

No! for the more he swell'd with pride,
The more he felt misfortune's blow; 405
Disgrace and grief he could not hide,
And poverty had laid him low:
Thus shame and sorrow working slow,
At length this humble spirit gave;
Madness on these began to grow, 410
And bound him to his fiends a slave.

Though the wild thoughts had touch'd his brain,
Then was he free. – So, forth he ran;
To soothe or threat, alike were vain:
He spake of fiends; look'd wild and wan; 415
Year after year, the hurried man
Obey'd those fiends from place to place;

Till his religious change began
To form a frenzied child of grace.

For, as the fury lost its strength, 420
The mind reposed; by slow degrees
Came lingering hope, and brought at length,
To the tormented spirit ease:
This slave of sin, whom fiends could seize,
Felt or believed their power had end; – 425
“Tis faith,” he cried, “my bosom frees,
“And now my SAVIOUR is my friend.”

But ah! though time can yield relief,
And soften woes it cannot cure,
Would we not suffer pain and grief, 430
To have our reason sound and sure?
Then let us keep our bosoms pure,
Our fancy’s favourite flights suppress;
Prepare the body to endure,
And bend the mind to meet distress: 435
And then HIS guardian care implore,
Whom demons dread and men adore.

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