

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

3 *Ghasta, or, the Avenging Demon!!!*

The idea of the following tale was taken from a few unconnected German Stanzas. — The principal Character is evidently the Wandering Jew, and although not mentioned by name, the burning Cross on his forehead undoubtedly alludes to that superstition, so prevalent in the part of Germany called the Black Forest, where this scene is supposed to lie.

Hark! the owlet flaps her wing,
In the pathless dell beneath,
Hark! night ravens loudly sing,
Tidings of despair and death.

Horror covers all the sky, 5
Clouds of darkness blot the moon,
Prepare! for mortal thou must die,
Prepare to yield thy soul up soon —

Fierce the tempest raves around,
Fierce the volleyed lightnings fly, 10
Crashing thunder shakes the ground,
Fire and tumult fill the sky. —

Hark! the tolling village bell,
Tells the hour of midnight come,
Now can blast the powers of Hell, 15
Fiend-like goblins now can roam —

See! his crest all stained with rain,
A warrior hastening speeds his way,
He starts, looks round him, starts again,
And sighs for the approach of day. 20
See! his frantic steed he reins,
See! he lifts his hands on high,
Implores a respite to his pains,
From the powers of the sky. —

He seeks an Inn, for faint from toil, 25

Fatigue had bent his lofty form,
To rest his wearied limbs awhile,
Fatigued with wandering and the storm.

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Slow the door is opened wide —
With trackless tread a stranger came, 30
His form Majestic, slow his stride,
He sate, nor spake, — nor told his name —

Terror blanched the warrior's cheek,
Cold sweat from his forehead ran,
In vain his tongue essayed to speak, — 35
At last the stranger thus began:

'Mortal! thou that saw'st the sprite,
Tell me what I wish to know,
Or come with me before 'tis light,
Where cypress trees and mandrakes grow. 40

'Fierce the avenging Demon's ire,
Fiercer than the wintry blast,
Fiercer than the lightning's fire,
When the hour of twilight 's past' —

The warrior raised his sunken eye, 45
It met the stranger's sullen scowl,
'Mortal! Mortal! thou must die,'
In burning letters chilled his soul.

Warrior.

Stranger! whoso'er you are,
I feel impelled my tale to tell — 50
Horrors stranger shalt thou hear,
Horrors drear as those of Hell.

O'er my Castle silence reigned,
Late the night and drear the hour,
When on the terrace I observed, 55
A fleeting shadowy mist to lower. —

Light the cloud as summer fog,
Which transient shuns the morning beam;
Fleeting as the cloud on bog,
That hangs or on the mountain stream. — 60

Horror seized my shuddering brain,
Horror dimmed my starting eye,
In vain I tried to speak, — In vain
My limbs essayed the spot to fly —

At last the thin and shadowy form, 65
With noiseless, trackless footsteps came, —
Its light robe floated on the storm,
Its head was bound with lambent flame.

In chilling voice drear as the breeze 70
Which sweeps along th' autumnal ground,
Which wanders through the leafless trees,
Or the mandrake's groan which floats around.

'Thou art mine and I am thine,
'Till the sinking of the world,
I am thine and thou art mine, 75
'Till in ruin death is hurled —

'Strong the power and dire the fate,
Which drags me from the depths of Hell,
Breaks the tomb's eternal gate,
Where fiendish shapes and dead men yell, 80

'Haply I might ne'er have shrank
From flames that rack the guilty dead,
Haply I might ne'er have sank
On pleasure's flow'ry, thorny bed —

— 'But stay! no more I dare disclose, 85
Of the tale I wish to tell,
On Earth relentless were my woes,
But fiercer are my pangs in Hell —

'Now I claim thee as my love,

Lay aside all chilling fear, 90
My affection will I prove,
Where sheeted ghosts and spectres are!

‘For thou art mine, and I am thine,
’Till the dreaded judgement day,
I am thine, and thou art mine — 95
Night is past — I must away.’

Still I gazed, and still the form
Pressed upon my aching sight,
Still I braved the howling storm,
When the ghost dissolved in night. — 100

Restless, sleepless fled the night,
Sleepless as a sick man’s bed,
When he sighs for morning light,
When he turns his aching head, —

Slow and painful passed the day, 105
Melancholy seized my brain,
Lingering fled the hours away,
Lingering to a wretch in pain. —

At last came night, ah! horrid hour,
Ah! chilling time that wakes the dead, 110
When demons ride the clouds that lower,
— The phantom sat upon my bed.

In hollow voice, low as the sound
Which in some charnel makes its moan,
What floats along the burying ground, 115
The phantom claimed me as her own.

Her chilling finger on my head,
With coldest touch congealed my soul —
Cold as the finger of the dead,
Or damps which round a tombstone roll — 120

Months are passed in lingering round,
Every night the spectre comes,

With thrilling step it shakes the ground,
With thrilling step it round me roams —

Stranger! I have told to thee, 125
All the tale I have to tell —
Stranger! canst thou tell to me,
How to 'scape the powers of Hell? —

Stranger.

Warrior! I can ease thy woes,
Wilt thou, wilt thou, come with me — 130
Warrior! I can all disclose,
Follow, follow, follow me.

Yet the tempest's duskiest wing,
Its mantle stretches o'er the sky,
Yet the midnight ravens sing, 135
'Mortal! Mortal! thou must die.'

At last they saw a river clear,
That crossed the heathy path they trod,
The Stranger's look was wild and drear,
The firm Earth shook beneath his nod — 140

He raised a wand above his head,
He traced a circle on the plain,
In a wild verse he called the dead,
The dead with silent footsteps came.

A burning brilliance on his head, 145
Flaming filled the stormy air,
In a wild verse he called the dead,
The dead in motley crowd were there. —

'Ghasta! Ghasta! come along,
Bring thy fiendish crowd with thee, 150
Quickly raise th' avenging Song,
Ghasta! Ghasta! come to me.'

Horrid shapes in mantles gray,
Flit athwart the stormy night,

'Ghasta! Ghasta! come away,
Come away before 'tis light.' 155

See! the sheeted Ghost they bring,
Yelling dreadful o'er the heath,
Hark! the deadly verse they sing,
Tidings of despair and death! 160

The yelling Ghost before him stands,
See! she rolls her eyes around,
Now she lifts her bony hands,
Now her footsteps shake the ground.

Stranger.

Phantom of Theresa say, 165
Why to earth again you came,
Quickly speak, I must away!
Or you must bleach for aye in flame, —

Phantom.

Mighty one I know thee now,
Mightiest power of the sky, 170
Know thee by thy flaming brow,
Know thee by thy sparkling eye.

That fire is scorching! Oh! I came,
From the caverned depth of Hell,
My fleeting false Rodolph to claim, 175
Mighty one! I know thee well. —

Stranger.

Ghasta! seize yon wandering sprite,
Drag her to the depth beneath,
Take her swift, before 'tis light,
Take her to the cells of death! 180

Thou that heardst the trackless dead,
In the mouldering tomb must lie,
Mortal! look upon my head,
Mortal! Mortal! thou must die.

Of glowing flame a cross was there, 185
Which threw a light around his form,
Whilst his lank and raven hair,
Floated wild upon the storm. —

The warrior upwards turned his eyes,
Gazed upon the cross of fire, 190
There sat horror and surprise,
There sat God's eternal ire. —

A shivering through the Warrior flew,
Colder than the nightly blast,
Colder than the evening dew, 195
When the hour of twilight 's past. —

Thunder shakes th' expansive sky,
Shakes the bosom of the heath,
'Mortal! Mortal! thou must die' —
The warrior sank convulsed in death. 200

1810

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