

PART ONE OF THE TRAGEDY

NIGHT

A high-vaulted, narrow Gothic room. FAUST, sitting restless at a desk.

FAUST. I've studied now, to my regret,
Philosophy, Law, Medicine, 355
and—what is worst—Theology
from end to end with diligence.
Yet here I am, a wretched fool
and still no wiser than before.
I've become Master, and Doctor as well, 360
and for nearly ten years I have led
my young students a merry chase,
up, down, and every which way—
and find we can't have certitude.
This is too much for heart to bear! 365
I well may know more than all those dullards,
those doctors, teachers, officials, and priests,
be unbothered by scruples or doubts,
and fear neither hell nor its devils—
but I get no joy from anything, either, 370
know nothing that I think worthwhile,
and don't imagine that what I teach
could better mankind or make it godly.
Then, too, I don't have land or money,
or any splendid worldly honors. 375
No dog would want to linger on like this!
That is why I've turned to magic,
in hope that with the help of spirit-power
I might solve many mysteries,
so that I need no longer toil and sweat 380
to speak of what I do not know,
can learn what, deep within it,
binds the universe together,
may contemplate all seminal forces—
and be done with peddling empty words. 385
O radiant moon for whom I have
so often, waking at this desk,
sat at midnight watching until
I saw you, melancholy friend, appear
above my books and papers—would that this 390
were the last time you gazed upon my grief!
If only I, in your kind radiance,

could wander in the highest hills
and with spirits haunt some mountain cave,
could rove the meadows in your muted light 395
and, rid of all learned obfuscation,
regain my health by bathing in your dew!

Alas! I'm still confined to prison.
Accursed, musty hole of stone
to which the sun's fair light itself 400
dimly penetrates through painted glass.
Restricted by this great mass of books
that worms consume, that dust has covered,
and that up to the ceiling-vault
are interspersed with grimy papers, 405
confined by glassware and wooden boxes
and crammed full of instruments,
stuffed with the household goods of generations—
such is your world, if world it can be called!

And still you wonder why your heart 410
is anxious and your breast constricted,
why a pain you cannot account for
inhibits your vitality completely!
You are surrounded, not by the living world
in which God placed mankind, 415
but, amid smoke and mustiness,
only by bones of beasts and of the dead.

You must escape from this confining world!
And will not this mysterious book
from Nostradamus' very hand 420
amply provide the guidance you need?
If you can read the courses of the stars
and take from Nature your instruction,
you will understand the psychic power
by which the spirit world communicates. 425
But arid speculation won't explain
the sacred symbols to you. —
Spirits that hover near to me,
give me an answer if you hear my voice!

(Opening the book and seeing the sign of the Macrocosm.)

Ha! as I gaze what rapture suddenly 430
begins to flow through all my senses!
I feel youth's sacred-vital happiness
course with new fire through every vein and fiber.
Did some god inscribe these signs
that quell my inner turmoil, 435
fill my poor heart with joy,

and with mysterious force unveil
the natural powers all about me?
Am I a god? I see so clearly now!
In these lines' perfection I behold 440
creative nature spread out before my soul.
At last I understand the sage who says:
"The spirit world is not sealed off—
your mind is closed, *your* heart is dead!
Go, neophyte, and boldly bathe 445
your mortal breast in roseate dawn!"

(Contemplating the sign.)

How all things interweave as one
and work and live each in the other!
Lo! heavenly forces rise, descend,
pass golden urns from hand to hand, 450
crowd from on high through all the earth
on pinions redolent of blessings,
and fill the universe with harmony!

How grand a show! But, still, alas! mere show.
Infinite Nature, when can I lay hold of you 455
and of your breasts? You fountains of all life
on which the heavens and earth depend,
towards which my withered heart is straining—
you flow, you nurse, and yet I thirst in vain!

(Turning the pages angrily, he sees the sign of the Earth Spirit.)

How different is this sign's effect on me! 460
You, Spirit of Earth, are closer—
I feel my faculties becoming more acute,
I know the quickening glow of new-made wine.
I now feel brave enough to venture forth
and bear earth's torments and its joys, 465
to grapple with the hurricane
and not to quail although the creaking ship break up. —

The sky becomes overcast —
the moon hides its light —
my lamp's flame vanishes! 470
Mists arise! — Beams of red flash
about my head — a dread chill
flows down from the ceiling-vault
and has me in its hold!

Spirit to whom I pray, I feel you hover near. 475
Reveal yourself!
How my heart is torn asunder!
Strange feelings
stir my entire being!

My heart is now completely yours! 480

Obey! Obey, although my life should be the price!

He takes the book and mysteriously utters the sign of the spirit.

In a flash of reddish flame the EARTH SPIRIT appears.

SPIRIT. Who calls to me?

FAUST (*turning away*). A fearful apparition!

SPIRIT. You've used great efforts to attract me,
have long exerted suction on my sphere,
and now —

FAUST. Alas, I lack the strength to face you! 485

SPIRIT. You beg and pant to see me,
to hear my voice, to view my face;
your urgent prayer has made me well disposed,
so here I am! What paltry fear
now cows a demigod! Where is the summoning soul, 490

the breast that in itself conceived a world
it bore and cherished, the breast that swelled
in trembling joy to reach our spirit-plane?
Where are you, Faust, whose ringing voice I heard,
who strove with all his faculties to reach me? 495

Can he be you who in my aura
tremble in all your depths of being—
a worm that writhes away in fright?

FAUST. I stand my ground before you, shape of flame!
I am that Faust, I am your peer! 500

SPIRIT. In the tides of life, in action's storm,
I surge and ebb,
move to and fro!
As cradle and grave,
as unending sea, 505
as constant change,
as life's incandescence,

I work at the whirring loom of time
and fashion the living garment of God.

FAUST. How close I feel to you, industrious spirit, 510
whose strands encompass all the world!

SPIRIT. Your peer is the spirit you comprehend;
mine you are not! *[Disappears.]*

FAUST (*collapsing*). Not yours?
Whose then? 515
I, made in God's image,
not even your counterpart!

(A knocking is heard.)

Damnation! I know the sound of my assistant—
my happiest moment is destroyed.

Why must that humdrum plodder
disturb this plenitude of visions! 520

Enter WAGNER, in dressing-gown and nightcap, a lamp in his hand. FAUST turns, irritated.

WAGNER. Excuse me, but I hear you are declaiming;
no doubt you've been reciting some Greek tragedy?
That's a skill I wish I could improve,
since it's so useful nowadays. 525

I've often heard it said, with no disparagement,
that actors could give preachers useful lessons.

FAUST. They can, if the preachers are only performers,
which I suppose may sometimes be the case.

WAGNER. Still, confined to one's study so much, 530
even on holidays hardly seeing people
and getting only distant glimpses with a spyglass,
how can one hope to affect them with rhetoric?

FAUST. That can't be done unless you feel some passion,
unless there's something bursting from within 535
that by its easy innate force
conquers the hearts of all who hear you.

You may sit and compile forever,
concoct a stew of morsels left by others,
and from your feeble heap of ashes 540
fan paltry flames,

if you've an appetite for adulation
from children and from simpletons;
and yet, unless your heart is where all starts,
your efforts won't affect the hearts of others. 545

WAGNER. Delivery alone can make a speech a hit—
I'm well aware how much I've still to learn.

FAUST. Just try to make an honest living,
and don't put on a cap and bells!
Intelligence and proper sense 550
need little art to be expressed;

if you have something that you really want to say,
is there a need to hunt for words?

Let me be blunt: those sparkling speeches you admire,
those paper baubles for mankind's amusement, 555
give no more solace than fog-laden winds
that sigh through withered autumn leaves!

WAGNER. Alas, that art is long,
and human life so short!
Even when I'm involved in critical endeavors 560
my heart and mind will often have misgivings.
How hard it is to get the tools

that let one get back to the sources—
and even before one's halfway there
he's very likely to be dead. 565

FAUST. Is parchment then the sacred fount,
and does one drink from it forever slake our thirst?
There's nothing you can gain refreshment from
except what has its source in your own soul. 570

WAGNER. Excuse me if I think it a great treat
to put oneself into the spirit of past ages;
we see how wise men thought before our time,
and to what splendid heights we have attained at last.

FAUST. Oh yes, we've reached the very stars!
My friend, for us the ages that are past
must be a book with seven seals. 575

What's called the spirit of an age
is in the end the spirit of you persons
in whom past ages are reflected.
And then it often is a sorry sight— 580

one look's enough to make you run away!
A trash bin and a lumber-garret;
at most, a grand-historical display
with excellent pragmatic maxims
well suited to the mouths of puppet-actors! 585

WAGNER. Still, the world, the human heart and mind—
everyone wants some knowledge of these things!

FAUST. Yes, what they choose to call knowledge!
Who dares give the child its proper name?
The foolish few who, with such knowledge, failed
to keep their wealth of intuitions in their hearts, 590
revealed their feelings and their visions to the rabble,
have in all times been crucified and burned. —
Excuse me, friend, the night is far advanced;
we'll have to stop for now. 595

WAGNER. I would have gladly stayed up longer
discussing such learned matters with you.
But tomorrow's Easter Sunday, when I hope
you'll let me ask a few more questions—
I've been assiduous in my pursuit of learning; 600
true, I know much, but all is what I'd like to know. [Exit.

FAUST. How can a person still have any hopes
who is addicted to what's superficial,
who grubs with greedy hand for treasures
and then is happy to discover earthworms! 605

Is it right to let that voice be heard
where inspiration compassed me about?

And yet, this once you have my gratitude,
you sorriest of mortals—
you snatched me from a desperation 610
that threatened to destroy my mind.
So gigantic was the apparition
that I, alas, could only think myself a dwarf.
I, made in God's image, who fancied
that I was close to truth's eternal mirror, 615
who, sloughing off mortality,
reveled in clear celestial radiance;
I, more than Cherub, whose presentient powers then
dared flow untrammelled through the veins of Nature
and share the gods' creative life— 620
how I am punished!
One thundered word has been my death.
It's arrogance to claim I am your peer.
Although I had the power to attract you,
I lacked the strength to hold you fast. 625
In that blest moment
I felt so small and yet so great;
ruthlessly you thrust me back
into the uncertainties that are man's lot.
Who will now teach me? What am I to shun, 630
is there an impulse that I must obey?
Alas, the things we do, no less than those we suffer,
impose restraints upon our lives.
More and more that is extraneous
obtrudes upon what's noblest in our minds; 635
When we attain this world's material goods,
all better things are called a madman's fancies.
Feelings that before were glorious and vital
grow torpid in the mundane hurly-burly.
Sustained by hope, Imagination once 640
soared boldly on her boundless flights;
now that our joys are wrecked in time's abyss,
she is content to have a narrow scope. —
Deep in our heart Care quickly makes her nest,
there she engenders secret sorrows 645
and, in that cradle restless, destroys all quiet joy;
the masks she wears are always new—
she may appear as house and home, as wife and child,
as fire, water, dagger, poison;
we live in dread of things that do not happen 650
and keep bemoaning losses that never will occur.
No peer of gods! I suffer from that truth—

my counterpart's the worm that grovels in the dust
and, as in dust it eats and lives,
is crushed and buried by a vagrant foot. 655

What else but dust is cramped within
these high and multi-alcoved walls of mine—
the heap of countless, useless things
that in this world of moths beset me?
Is this the place to find the help I need? 660

Should I perhaps peruse a thousand books to learn
that people everywhere have suffered,
that now and then someone was happy? –
You empty skull, why bare your teeth at me
unless to say that once, like mine, your addled brain 665
sought buoyant light but, in its eagerness for truth,
went wretchedly astray beneath the weight of darkness.

You instruments are only mocking me
with wheel and cogs, with cylinder and bridle—
you were to be my key when I stood at the gate, 670
but though it's intricate, the key will lift no bolts.
Nature, mysterious in day's clear light,
lets none remove her veil,

and what she won't discover to your understanding
you can't extort from her with levers and with screws. 675
You ancient implements I've never used are here
only because you served my father's needs. –
You, ancient scroll, have gotten ever grimmer
since the dim lamp beside this desk first smoldered.

Far better to have squandered the little I have
than to sweat here beneath that little's burden! 680
If you would own the things your forebears left you,
you first must earn and merit their possession.
What serves no use becomes a heavy burden;
the moment can use only what it itself creates. 685

But what is there that holds my gaze—
does that vial act as magnet on the eye?
Why do I sense a sudden gentle brightness,
as when in some dark forest moonlight stirs about us?

Hail, vial of vials! With reverence 690
I take you down—my homage to
the human wit and skill embodied in you.
You essence of kind soporific forces,
you extract of all subtle poisons,
bestow your favors on your master! 695
I see you, and my pain is eased,
I hold you, and my striving lessens—

my turbulence of spirit slowly ebbs away.

I am transported to the open sea,
its surface sparkles down below,
and a new day beckons to new shores.

700

On airy wings a chariot of fire
sweeps towards me! I am now ready
for the fresh course that lets me pierce the sky
and reach new spheres of pure activity. –

705

Yet, you but now a worm, do you deserve
this grand existence, this celestial joy?
Yes, if you will but turn with firm resolve
your back upon the sun-lit earth!

Be bold and fling the doors asunder
which mortals all prefer to pass in silence!

710

The time has come to prove by deeds that a brave man
is not intimidated by celestial grandeur;
to stand and not to quake before the pit
in which imagination damns itself to torment;
to strive on toward that passageway
about whose narrow mouth all hell spouts flame
and, even at the risk of total dissolution,
to take this step with firm serenity.

715

Now, long-forgotten cup of flawless crystal,
come you down—

720

forth from your ancient case!

You glistened at ancestral celebrations,
enlivening the solemn guests
who raised you as they pledged each other.

725

The lavish splendor of the artist's pictures,
the drinker's duty to make verses on their meaning
and in one draught to drain the bowl,
bring many memories of nights when I was young.

I shall not offer you to some companion now,
nor use your art to demonstrate my wit.

730

Here is a juice that soon intoxicates,
and whose brown stream now rises to your brim.
The last drink that I have prepared and that I take,
let me with all my heart now pledge it,
in solemn salutation, to the Morrow!

735

As he places the cup to his lips, church bells and a choir are heard.

CHOIR (*Angels' chorus*). Christ is arisen!

Joy to the mortal
freed from the baneful,
insidious ills
that man is heir to.

740

- FAUST. What depth of resonance, what clarity of tone,
can drag the goblet from my lips?
Do you announce so soon, you muffled bells,
the first solemnities of Eastertide? 745
Do you sing now, you choirs, the hymn of consolation
that by the darkened tomb, from angels' lips,
proclaimed the certainty of a new covenant?
- CHOIR (*Women's chorus*).
With balm and spices
we ministered to Him, 750
we who were faithful
laid down His body,
carefully wrapped it
in pieces of linen—
lo! we discover 755
Christ is not here.
- CHOIR (*Angels' chorus*). Christ is arisen!
Blessed the Loving One,
He has sustained
the grievous ordeal 760
that bringeth salvation.
- FAUST. Celestial tones, so gently strong,
why do you seek me here amid the dust?
Be heard where tender mortals dwell!
Although I hear your gospel, I lack your faith,
a faith whose dearest child is the miraculous. 765
I do not dare aspire to the spheres
from which your word of grace peals forth,
and yet these sounds, familiar since my youth,
summon me now again to life. 770
There was a time when in the sabbath's solemn quiet
the kiss of heaven's love would overcome me,
when there were portents in the choiring chimes,
and when a prayer was fervent pleasure;
some strange sweet longing would compel me 775
to rove through wood and meadow,
and to a flood of ardent tears
I'd feel a world arise within me.
This hymn announced the lively games of youth,
the happy freedom of spring celebrations; 780
the memory of childlike feelings now
keeps me from taking the last, solemn step.
O sweet celestial songs, sound on—
my tears well forth, and I am earth's again!

NIGHT

23

CHOIR (*Disciples' chorus*).

Sublime in this life, 785
He who was buried
now has ascended
to glory on high,
joyous to live again
and still to be active. 790
But we, to our sorrow,
remain on earth's breast;
abandoned disciples,
we languish and suffer—
Master, your happiness 795
makes us shed tears!

(*Angels' chorus*).

Christ is arisen
from the womb of corruption.
Be of good cheer
and get rid of your bonds! 800
You whose deeds praise Him,
who demonstrate charity,
nourish your brethren,
wander and teach them,
promise them bliss— 805
to you is your Master near,
for you He is here!

OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE

A variety of people, coming from the city.

SOME APPRENTICES. Why are you going that way?

OTHERS. We're off to Hunter's Lodge.

THE FIRST. And we're heading out toward the Mill. 810

ONE. I'd recommend the River Tavern.

A SECOND. That's not a very pleasant walk.

THE OTHERS. And what will you do?

A THIRD. Go with the others.

A FOURTH. Come on up to Burgdorf—there you can count on
the prettiest girls, the best of beer, 815
and picking a first-class quarrel too.