

# **The Bride of Corinth and Other Poems**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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# The Bride of Corinth and Other Poems

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### *THE BRIDE OF CORINTH.*

**ONCE** a stranger youth to Corinth came,

Who in Athens lived, but hoped that he  
From a certain townsman there might claim,

As his father's friend, kind courtesy.

Son and daughter, they

Had been wont to say

Should thereafter bride and bridegroom be.

But can he that boon so highly prized,

Save tis dearly bought, now hope to get?  
They are Christians and have been baptized,

He and all of his are heathens yet.

For a newborn creed,

Like some loathsome weed,

Love and truth to root out oft will threat.

Father, daughter, all had gone to rest,

And the mother only watches late;  
She receives with courtesy the guest,

And conducts him to the room of state.

Wine and food are brought,

Ere by him besought;

Bidding him good night. she leaves him straight.

But he feels no relish now, in truth,

For the dainties so profusely spread;  
Meat and drink forgets the wearied youth,

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And, still dress'd, he lays him on the bed.

Scarce are closed his eyes,

When a form in-hies

Through the open door with silent tread.

By his glimmering lamp discerns he now

How, in veil and garment white array'd,  
With a black and gold band round her brow,

Glides into the room a bashful maid.

But she, at his sight,

Lifts her hand so white,

And appears as though full sore afraid.

"Am I," cries she, "such a stranger here,

That the guest's approach they could not name?  
Ah, they keep me in my cloister drear,

Well nigh feel I vanquish'd by my shame.

On thy soft couch now

Slumber calmly thou!

I'll return as swiftly as I came."

"Stay, thou fairest maiden!" cries the boy,

Starting from his couch with eager haste:  
"Here are Ceres', Bacchus' gifts of joy;

Amor bringest thou, with beauty grac'd!

Thou art pale with fear!

Loved one let us here

Prove the raptures the Immortals taste."

"Draw not nigh, O Youth! afar remain!

Rapture now can never smile on me;

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For the fatal step, alas! is ta'en,

Through my mother's sick-bed phantasy.

Cured, she made this oath:

'Youth and nature both

Shall henceforth to Heav'n devoted be.'

"From the house, so silent now, are driven

All the gods who reign'd supreme of yore;  
One Invisible now rules in heaven,

On the cross a Saviour they adore.

Victims slay they here,

Neither lamb nor steer,  
But the altars reek with human gore."

And he lists, and ev'ry word he weighs,

While his eager soul drinks in each sound:  
"Can it be that now before my gaze

Stands my loved one on this silent ground?

Pledge to me thy troth!

Through our father's oath:

With Heav'ns blessing will our love be crown'd."

"Kindly youth, I never can be thine!

'Tis my sister they intend for thee.  
When I in the silent cloister pine,

Ah, within her arms remember me!

Thee alone I love,

While love's pangs I prove;

Soon the earth will veil my misery."

"No! for by this glowing flame I swear,

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Hymen hath himself propitious shown:  
Let us to my fathers house repair,

And thoult find that joy is not yet flown,

Sweetest, here then stay,

And without delay

Hold we now our wedding feast alone!"

Then exchange they tokens of their truth;

She gives him a golden chain to wear,  
And a silver chalice would the youth

Give her in return of beauty rare.

"That is not for me;

Yet I beg of thee,  
One lock only give me of thy hair."

Now the ghostly hour of midnight knell'd,

And she seem'd right joyous at the sign;  
To her pallid lips the cup she held,

But she drank of nought but blood—red wine.

For to taste the bread

There before them spread,

Nought he spoke could make the maid incline.

To the youth the goblet then she brought,—

He too quaff'd with eager joy the bowl.  
Love to crown the silent feast he sought,

Ah! full love—sick was the stripling's soul.

From his prayer she shrinks,

Till at length he sinks

On the bed and weeps without control.

And she comes, and lays her near the boy:

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"How I grieve to see thee sorrowing so!  
If thou think'st to clasp my form with joy,

Thou must learn this secret sad to know;

Yes! the maid, whom thou

Call'st thy loved one now,

Is as cold as ice, though white as snow."

Then he clasps her madly in his arm,

While love's youthful might pervades his frame:  
"Thou might'st hope, when with me, to grow warm,

E'en if from the grave thy spirit came!

Breath for breath, and kiss!

Overflow of bliss!

Dost not thou, like me, feel passion's flame?"

Love still closer rivets now their lips,

Tears they mingle with their rapture blest,  
From his mouth the flame she wildly sips,

Each is with the other's thought possess'd.

His hot ardour's flood

Warms her chilly blood,

But no heart is beating in her breast.

In her care to see that nought went wrong,

Now the mother happen'd to draw near;  
At the door long hearkens she, full long,

Wond'ring at the sounds that greet her ear.

Tones of joy and sadness,

And love's blissful madness,

As of bride and bridegroom they appear,

From the door she will not now remove

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'Till she gains full certainty of this;  
And with anger hears she vows of love,

Soft caressing words of mutual bliss.

"Hush! the cock's loud strain!

But thoult come again,

When the night returns!"—then kiss on kiss.

Then her wrath the mother cannot hold,

But unfastens straight the lock with ease  
"In this house are girls become so bold,

As to seek e'en strangers' lusts to please?"

By her lamp's clear glow

Looks she in,—and oh!

Sight of horror!—'tis her child she sees.

Fain the youth would, in his first alarm,

With the veil that o'er her had been spread,  
With the carpet, shield his love from harm;

But she casts them from her, void of dread,

And with spirit's strength,

In its spectre length,

Lifts her figure slowly from the bed.

"Mother! mother!"—Thus her wan lips say:

"May not I one night of rapture share?  
From the warm couch am I chased away?

Do I waken only to despair?

It contents not thee

To have driven me

An untimely shroud of death to wear?

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"But from out my coffin's prison—bounds

By a wond'rous fate I'm forced to rove,  
While the blessings and the chaunting sounds

That your priests delight in, useless prove.

Water, salt, are vain

Fervent youth to chain,

Ah, e'en Earth can never cool down love!

"When that infant vow of love was spoken,

Venus' radiant temple smiled on both.  
Mother! thou that promise since hast broken,

Fetter'd by a strange, deceitful oath.

Gods, though, hearken ne'er,

Should a mother swear

To deny her daughter's plighted troth.

From my grave to wander I am forc'd,

Still to seek The Good's long—sever'd link,  
Still to love the bridegroom I have lost,

And the life—blood of his heart to drink;

When his race is run,

I must hasten on,

And the young must 'neath my vengeance sink,

"Beauteous youth! no longer mayst thou live;

Here must shrivel up thy form so fair;  
Did not I to thee a token give,

Taking in return this lock of hair?

View it to thy sorrow!

Grey thoult be to—morrow,

Only to grow brown again when there.

"Mother, to this final prayer give ear!

Let a funeral pile be straightway dress'd;  
Open then my cell so sad and drear,

That the flames may give the lovers rest!

When ascends the fire

From the glowing pyre,

To the gods of old we'll hasten, blest."

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*THE PUPIL IN MAGIC.*

I AM now,—what joy to hear it!—

Of the old magician rid;  
And henceforth shall ev'ry spirit

Do whate'er by me is bid;

I have watch'd with rigour

All he used to do,

And will now with vigour

Work my wonders too.

Wander, wander

Onward lightly,

So that rightly

Flow the torrent,

And with teeming waters yonder

In the bath discharge its current!

And now come, thou well-worn broom,

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And thy wretched form bestir;  
Thou hast ever served as groom,

So fulfil my pleasure, sir!

On two legs now stand,

With a head on top;

Waterpail in hand,

Haste, and do not stop!

Wander, wander

Onward lightly,

So that rightly

Flow the torrent,

And with teeming waters yonder

In the bath discharge its current!

See! he's running to the shore,

And has now attain'd the pool,  
And with lightning speed once more

Comes here, with his bucket full!

Back he then repairs;

See how swells the tide!

How each pail he bears

Straightway is supplied!

Stop, for, lo!

All the measure

Of thy treasure

Now is right!—

Ah, I see it! woe, oh woe!

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I forget the word of might.

Ah, the word whose sound can straight

Make him what he was before!

Ah, he runs with nimble gait!

Would thou wert a broom once more!

Streams renew'd for ever

Quickly bringeth he;

River after river

Rusheth on poor me!

Now no longer

Can I bear him;

I will snare him,

Knaveish sprite!

Ah, my terror waxes stronger!

What a look! what fearful sight

Oh, thou villain child of hell!

Shall the house through thee be drown'd  
Floods I see that wildly swell,

O'er the threshold gaining ground.

Wilt thou not obey,

Oh, thou broom accurs'd?

Be thou still I pray,

As thou wert at first!

Will enough

Never please thee?

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I will seize thee,

Hold thee fast,

And thy nimble wood so tough,

With my sharp axe split at last.

See, once more he hastens back!

Now, oh Cobold, thou shalt catch it!  
I will rush upon his track;

Crashing on him falls my hatchet.

Bravely done, indeed!

See, he's cleft in twain!

Now from care I'm freed,

And can breathe again.

Woe, oh woe!

Both the parts,

Quick as darts,

Stand on end,

Servants of my dreaded foe!

Oh, ye gods protection send!

And they run! and wetter still

Grow the steps and grows the hail.  
Lord and master hear me call!

Ever seems the flood to fill,

Ah, he's coming! see,

Great is my dismay!

Spirits raised by me

Vainly would I lay!

"To the side  
Of the room  
Hasten, broom,  
As of old!  
Spirits I have ne'er untied  
Save to act as they are told."

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*THE DANCE OF DEATH.*

THE warder looks down at the mid hour of night,  
On the tombs that lie scatter'd below:  
The moon fills the place with her silvery light,  
And the churchyard like day seems to glow.  
When see! first one grave, then another opes wide,  
And women and men stepping forth are descried,  
In cerements snow-white and trailing.  
In haste for the sport soon their ankles they twitch,  
And whirl round in dances so gay;  
The young and the old, and the poor, and the rich,  
But the cerements stand in their way;  
And as modesty cannot avail them aught here,  
They shake themselves all, and the shrouds soon appear  
Scatter'd over the tombs in confusion.  
Now waggles the leg, and now wriggles the thigh,  
As the troop with strange gestures advance,  
And a rattle and clatter anon rises high,  
As of one beating time to the dance.  
The sight to the warder seems wondrously queer,  
When the villainous Tempter speaks thus in his ear:  
"Seize one of the shrouds that lie yonder!"

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Quick as thought it was done! and for safety he fled

Behind the church-door with all speed;  
The moon still continues her clear light to shed

On the dance that they fearfully lead.  
But the dancers at length disappear one by one,  
And their shrouds, ere they vanish, they carefully don,

And under the turf all is quiet.

But one of them stumbles and shuffles there still,

And gropes at the graves in despair;  
Yet 'tis by no comrade he's treated so ill

The shroud he soon scents in the air.  
So he rattles the door--for the warder 'tis well  
That 'tis bless'd, and so able the foe to repel,

All cover'd with crosses in metal.

The shroud he must have, and no rest will allow,

There remains for reflection no time;  
On the ornaments Gothic the wight seizes now,

And from point on to point hastes to climb.  
Alas for the warder! his doom is decreed!  
Like a long-legged spider, with ne'er-changing speed,

Advances the dreaded pursuer.

The warder he quakes, and the warder turns pale,

The shroud to restore fain had sought;  
When the end,--now can nothing to save him avail,--

In a tooth formed of iron is caught.  
With vanishing lustre the moon's race is run,  
When the bell thunders loudly a powerful One,

And the skeleton fails, crush'd to atoms.

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