

# **Lucifer in Starlight**

**by**

**George Meredith**

***Free*editorial** 

## *Lucifer in Starlight*

ON a starred night Prince Lucifer arose.  
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend  
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,  
Where sinners hugged the spectre of repose.  
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.  
And now upon his western wing he leaned,  
Now his huge bulk over Afric's sands careened,  
Now the black planet sheltered Arctic snows.  
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars  
With memory of the old revolt from Awe,  
He reached a middle height, and at the stars  
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.  
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,  
The army of unalterable law.

**George Meredith**

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## *Love in the Valley*

UNDER yonder beech-tree single on the green-sward,  
Couched with her arms behind her golden head,  
Knees and tresses folded to slip and ripple idly,  
Lies my young love sleeping in the shade.  
Had I the heart to slide an arm beneath her,  
Press her parting lips as her waist I gather slow,  
Waking in amazement she could not but embrace me:  
Then would she hold me and never let me go?  
Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow,  
Swift as the swallow along the river's light  
Circling the surface to meet his mirrored winglets,  
Fleeter she seems in her stay than in her flight.  
Shy as the squirrel that leaps among the pine-tops,  
Wayward as the swallow overhead at set of sun,  
She whom I love is hard to catch and conquer,  
Hard, but O the glory of the winning were she won!  
When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror,  
Tying up her laces, looping up her hair,  
Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded,  
More love should I have, and much less care.

When her mother tends her before the lighted mirror,  
Loosening her laces, combing down her curls,  
Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded,  
I should miss but one for many boys and girls.  
Heartless she is as the shadow in the meadows  
Flying to the hills on a blue and breezy noon.  
No, she is athirst and drinking up her wonder:  
Earth to her is young as the slip of the new moon.  
Deals she an unkindness, 'tis but her rapid measure,  
Even as in a dance; and her smile can heal no less:  
Like the swinging May-cloud that pelts the flowers with hailstones  
Off a sunny border, she was made to bruise and bless.  
Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping  
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.  
Lone on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,  
Brooding o'er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.  
Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting:  
So were it with me if forgetting could be willed.  
Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-spring,  
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled.  
Stepping down the hill with her fair companions,  
Arm in arm, all against the raying West  
Boldly she sings, to the merry tune she marches,  
Brave in her shape, and sweeter unpossessed.  
Sweeter, for she is what my heart first awaking  
Whispered the world was; morning light is she.  
Love that so desires would fain keep her changeless;  
Fain would fling the net, and fain have her free.  
Happy happy time, when the white star hovers  
Low over dim fields fresh with bloomy dew,  
Near the face of dawn, that draws athwart the darkness,  
Threading it with colour, as yewberries the yew.  
Thicker crowd the shades while the grave East deepens  
Glowing, and with crimson a long cloud swells.  
Maiden still the morn is; and strange she is, and secret;  
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells.  
Sunrays, leaning on our southern hills and lighting  
Wild cloud-mountains that drag the hills along,  
Oft ends the day of your shifting brilliant laughter  
Chill as a dull face frowning on a song.  
Ay, but shows the South-West a ripple-feathered bosom

Blown to silver while the clouds are shaken and ascend  
Scaling the mid-heavens as they stream, there comes a sunset  
Rich, deep like love in beauty without end.  
When at dawn she sighs, and like an infant to the window  
Turns grave eyes craving light, released from dreams,  
Beautiful she looks, like a white water-lily  
Bursting out of bud in havens of the streams.  
When from bed she rises clothed from neck to ankle  
In her long nightgown sweet as boughs of May,  
Beautiful she looks, like a tall garden lily  
Pure from the night, and splendid for the day.  
Mother of the dews, dark eye-lashed twilight,  
Low-lidded twilight, o'er the valley's brim,  
Rounding on thy breast sings the dew-delighted skylark,  
Clear as though the dewdrops had their voice in him.  
Hidden where the rose-flush drinks the rayless planet,  
Fountain-full he pours the spraying fountain-showers.  
Let me hear her laughter, I would have her ever  
Cool as dew in twilight, the lark above the flowers.  
All the girls are out with their baskets for the primrose;  
Up lanes, woods through, they troop in joyful bands.  
My sweet leads: she knows not why, but now she totters,  
Eyes the bent anemones, and hangs her hands.  
Such a look will tell that the violets are peeping,  
Coming the rose: and unaware a cry  
Springs in her bosom for odours and for colour,  
Covert and the nightingale; she knows not why.  
Kerchiefed head and chin she darts between her tulips,  
Streaming like a willow grey in arrowy rain:  
Some bend beaten cheek to gravel, and their angel  
She will be; she lifts them, and on she speeds again.  
Black the driving raincloud breasts the iron gateway:  
She is forth to cheer a neighbour lacking mirth.  
So when sky and grass met rolling dumb for thunder  
Saw I once a white dove, sole light of earth.  
Prim little scholars are the flowers of her garden,  
Trained to stand in rows, and asking if they please.  
I might love them well but for loving more the wild ones:  
O my wild ones! they tell me more than these.  
You, my wild one, you tell of honied field-rose,  
Violet, blushing eglantine in life; and even as they,

They by the wayside are earnest of your goodness,  
You are of life's, on the banks that line the way.  
Peering at her chamber the white crowns the red rose,  
Jasmine winds the porch with stars two and three.  
Parted is the window; she sleeps; the starry jasmine  
Breathes a falling breath that carries thoughts of me.  
Sweeter unpossessed, have I said of her my sweetest?  
Not while she sleeps: while she sleeps the jasmine breathes,  
Luring her to love; she sleeps; the starry jasmine  
Bears me to her pillow under white rose-wreaths.  
Yellow with birdfoot-trefoil are the grass-glades;  
Yellow with cinquefoil of the dew-grey leaf;  
Yellow with stonecrop; the moss-mounds are yellow;  
Blue-necked the wheat sways, yellowing to the sheaf:  
Green-yellow bursts from the copse the laughing yaffle;  
Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine:  
Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens,  
Thinking of the harvest: I look and think of mine.  
This I may know: her dressing and undressing  
Such a change of light shows as when the skies in sport  
Shift from cloud to moonlight; or edging over thunder  
Slips a ray of sun; or sweeping into port  
White sails furl; or on the ocean borders  
White sails lean along the waves leaping green.  
Visions of her shower before me, but from eyesight  
Guarded she would be like the sun were she seen.  
Front door and back of the mossed old farmhouse  
Open with the morn, and in a breezy link  
Freshly sparkles garden to stripe-shadowed orchard,  
Green across a rill where on sand the minnows wink.  
Busy in the grass the early sun of summer  
Swarms, and the blackbird's mellow fluting notes  
Call my darling up with round and roguish challenge:  
Quaintest, richest carol of all the singing throats!  
Cool was the woodside; cool as her white dairy  
Keeping sweet the cream-pan; and there the boys from school,  
Cricketing below, rushed brown and red with sunshine;  
O the dark translucence of the deep-eyed cool!  
Spying from the farm, herself she fetched a pitcher  
Full of milk, and tilted for each in turn the beak.  
Then a little fellow, mouth up and on tiptoe,

Said, "I will kiss you": she laughed and leaned her cheek.

Doves of the fir-wood walling high our red roof  
Through the long noon coo, crooning through the coo.

Loose droop the leaves, and down the sleepy roadway  
Sometimes pipes a chaffinch; loose droops the blue.

Cows flap a slow tail knee-deep in the river,  
Breathless, given up to sun and gnat and fly.

Nowhere is she seen; and if I see her nowhere,  
Lightning may come, straight rains and tiger sky.

O the golden sheaf, the rustling treasure-armful!  
O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced!

O the treasure-tresses one another over  
Nodding! O the girdle slack about the waist!

Slain are the poppies that shot their random scarlet  
Quick amid the wheatears: wound about the waist,  
Gathered, see these brides of Earth one blush of ripeness!

O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced!

Large and smoky red the sun's cold disk drops,  
Clipped by naked hills, on violet shaded snow:  
Eastward large and still lights up a bower of moonrise,  
Whence at her leisure steps the moon aglow.

Nightlong on black print-branches our beech-tree  
Gazes in this whiteness: nightlong could I.

Here may life on death or death on life be painted.  
Let me clasp her soul to know she cannot die!

Gossips count her faults; they scour a narrow chamber  
Where there is no window, read not heaven or her.

"When she was a tiny," one aged woman quavers,  
Plucks at my heart and leads me by the ear.

Faults she had once as she learnt to run and tumbled:  
Faults of feature some see, beauty not complete.

Yet, good gossips, beauty that makes holy  
Earth and air, may have faults from head to feet.

Hither she comes; she comes to me; she lingers,  
Deepens her brown eyebrows, while in new surprise

High rise the lashes in wonder of a stranger;

Yet am I the light and living of her eyes.

Something friends have told her fills her heart to brimming,  
Nets her in her blushes, and wounds her, and tames.--

Sure of her haven, O like a dove alighting,  
Arms up, she dropped: our souls were in our names.

Soon will she lie like a white-frost sunrise.  
Yellow oats and brown wheat, barley pale as rye,  
Long since your sheaves have yielded to the thresher,  
Felt the girdle loosened, seen the tresses fly.  
Soon will she lie like a blood-red sunset.  
Swift with the to-morrow, green-winged Spring!  
Sing from the South-West, bring her back the truants,  
Nightingale and swallow, song and dipping wing.  
Soft new beech-leaves, up to beamy April  
Spreading bough on bough a primrose mountain, you,  
Lucid in the moon, raise lilies to the skyfields,  
Youngest green transfused in silver shining through:  
Fairer than the lily, than the wild white cherry:  
Fair as in image my seraph love appears  
Borne to me by dreams when dawn is at my eyelids:  
Fair as in the flesh she swims to me on tears.  
Could I find a place to be alone with heaven,  
I would speak my heart out: heaven is my need.  
Every woodland tree is flushing like the dog-wood,  
Flashing like the whitebeam, swaying like the reed.  
Flushing like the dog-wood crimson in October;  
Streaming like the flag-reed South-West blown;  
Flashing as in gusts the sudden-lighted white beam:  
All seem to know what is for heaven alone.  
**George Meredith**

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## *Pictures of the Rhine*

### I

THE spirit of Romance dies not to those  
Who hold a kindred spirit in their souls:  
Even as the odorous life within the rose  
Lives in the scattered leaflets and controls  
Mysterious adoration, so there glows  
Above dead things a thing that cannot die;  
Faint as the glimmer of a tearful eye,  
Ere the orb fills and all the sorrow flows.  
Beauty renews itself in many ways;  
The flower is fading while the new bud blows;  
And this dear land as true a symbol shows,

While o'er it like a mellow sunset strays  
The legendary splendour of old days,  
In visible, inviolate repose.

## II

About a mile behind the viny banks,  
How sweet it was, upon a sloping green,  
Sunspread, and shaded with a branching screen,  
To lie in peace half-murmuring words of thanks!  
To see the mountains on each other climb,  
With space for rich meadows flowery bright;  
The winding river freshiening the sight  
At intervals, the trees in leafy prime;  
The distant village-roofs of blue and white,  
With intersections of quaint-fashioned beams  
All slanting crosswise, and the feudal gleams  
Of ruined turrets, barren in the light; --  
To watch the changing clouds, like clime in clime;  
Oh! sweet to lie and bless the luxury of time.

## III

Fresh blows the early breeze, our sail is full;  
A merry morning and a mighty tide.  
Cheerily O! and past St Goar we glide,  
Half hid in misty dawn and mountain cool.  
The river is our own! and now the sun  
In saffron clothes the warming atmosphere;  
The sky lifts up her white veil like a nun,  
And looks upon the landscape blue and clear; --  
The lark is up; the hills, the vines in sight;  
The river broadens with his waking bliss  
And throws up islands to behold the light;  
Voices begin to rise, all hues to kiss; --  
Was ever such a happy morn as this!  
Birds sing, we shout, flowers breathe, trees shine with one delight!

## IV

Between the two white breasts of her we love,  
A dewy blushing rose will sometimes spring;  
Thus Nonnenwerth like an enchanted thing  
Rises mid-stream the crystal depths above.  
On either side the waters heave and swell,  
But all is calm within the little Isle;  
Content it is to give its holy smile,



And bless with peace the lives that in it dwell.  
Most dear on the dark grass beneath its bower  
Or kindred trees embracing branch and bough,  
To dream of fairy foot and sudden flower;  
Or haply with a twilight on the brow,  
To muse upon the legendary hour,  
And Roland's lonely love and Hildegard's sad vow.

V

Hark! how the bitter winter breezes blow  
Round the sharp rocks and o'er the half-lifted wave,  
While all the rocky woodland branches rave  
Shrill with the piercing cold, and every cave,  
Along the icy water-margin low,  
Rings bubbling with the whirling overflow;  
And sharp the echoes answer distant cries  
Of dawning daylight and the dim sunrise,  
And the gloom-coloured clouds that stain the skies  
With pictures of a warmth, and frozen glow  
Spread over endless fields of sheeted snow;  
And white untrodden mountains shining cold,  
And muffled footpaths winding thro' the wold,  
O'er which those wintry gusts cease not to howl and blow.

VI

Rare is the loveliness of slow decay!  
With youth and beauty all must be desired,  
But 'tis the charm of things long past away,  
They leave, alone, the light they have inspired:  
The calmness of a picture; Memory now  
Is the sole life among the ruins grey,  
And like a phantom in fantastic play  
She wanders with rank weeds stuck on her brow,  
Over grass-hidden caves and turret-tops,  
Herself almost as tottering as they;  
While, to the steps of Time, her latest props  
Fall stone by stone, and in the Sun's hot ray  
All that remains stands up in rugged pride,  
And bridal vines drink in his juices on each side.

**George Meredith**

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***The Lark Ascending***

HE rises and begins to round,  
He drops the silver chain of sound,  
Of many links without a break,  
In chirrup, whistle, slur, and shake,  
All interwoven and spreading wide,  
Like water-dimples down a tide  
Where ripple ripple overcurls  
And eddy into eddy whirls;  
A press of hurried notes that run  
So fleet they scarce are more than one,  
Yet changingly the trills repeat  
And linger ringing while they fleet,  
Sweet to the quick o' the ear, and dear  
To her beyond the handmaid ear,  
Who sits beside our inner springs,  
Too often dry for this he brings,  
Which seems the very jet of earth  
At sight of sun, her music's mirth,  
As up he wings the spiral stair,  
A song of light, and pierces air  
With fountain ardor, fountain play,  
To reach the shining tops of day,  
And drink in everything discerned  
An ecstasy to music turned,  
Impelled by what his happy bill  
Disperses; drinking, showering still,  
Unthinking save that he may give  
His voice the outlet, there to live  
Renewed in endless notes of glee,  
So thirsty of his voice is he,  
For all to hear and all to know  
That he is joy, awake, aglow,  
The tumult of the heart to hear  
Through pureness filtered crystal-clear,  
And know the pleasure sprinkled bright  
By simple singing of delight,  
Shrill, irreflective, unrestrained,  
Rapt, ringing, on the jet sustained  
Without a break, without a fall,  
Sweet-silvery, sheer lyrical,  
Perennial, quavering up the chord

Like myriad dewdrops of sunny sward  
That trembling into fullness shine,  
And sparkle dropping argentine;  
Such wooing as the ear receives  
From zephyr caught in choric leaves  
Of aspens when their chattering net  
Is flushed to white with shivers wet;  
And such the water-spirit's chime  
On mountain heights in morning's prime,  
Too freshly sweet to seem excess,  
Too animate to need a stress;  
But wider over many heads  
The starry voice ascending spreads,  
Awakening, as it waxes thin,  
The best in us to him akin;  
And every face to watch him raised  
Puts on the light of children praised,  
So rich our human pleasure ripes  
When sweetness on sincereness pipes,  
Though naught be promised from the seas,  
But only a soft-ruffling breeze  
Sweep glittering on a still content,  
Serenity in ravishment.  
For singing till his heaven fills,  
'Tis love of earth that he instills,  
And ever winging up and up,  
Our valley is his golden cup;  
And he the wine which overflows  
To lift us with him as he goes--  
But not from earth is he divorced,  
He joyfully to fly enforced.  
The woods and brooks, the sheep and kine,  
He is, the hills, the human line,  
The meadows green, the fallows brown,  
The dreams of labor in the town;  
He sings the sap, the quickened veins;  
The wedding song of sun and rains  
He is, the dance of children, thanks  
Of sowers, shout of primrose-banks,  
And eye of violets while they breathe;  
All these the circling song will wreath,

And you shall hear the herb and tree,  
The better heart of men shall see,  
Shall feel celestially, as long  
As you crave nothing save the song.  
Was never voice of ours could say  
Our inmost in the sweetest way,  
Like yonder voice aloft, and link  
All hearers in the song they drink.  
Our wisdom speaks from failing blood,  
Our passion is too full in flood,  
We want the key of his wild note  
Of truthful in a tuneful note,  
The song seraphically free  
Of taint of personality,  
So pure that it salutes the suns,  
The voice of one for millions,  
In whom the millions rejoice  
For giving their one spirit voice.  
Yet men have we, whom we revere,  
Now names--and men still housing here--  
Whose lives, by many a battle-dint  
Defaced, and grinding wheels on flint,  
Yield substance, though they sing not, sweet  
For song our highest heaven to greet;  
Whom heavenly singing gives us new,  
Enspheres them brilliant in our blue,  
From firmest base to farthest leap,  
Because their love of Earth is deep,  
And they are warriors in accord  
With life to serve, and pass reward--  
So touching purest and so heard  
In the brain's reflex of yon bird.  
Wherefore their soul in me--or mine,  
Through self-forgetfulness divine,  
In them--that song aloft maintains,  
To fill the sky and thrill the plains  
With showerings drawn from human stores,  
As he to silence hearer soars,  
Extends the world at wings and dome,  
More spacious making more our home,  
Till lost on his aerial rings

In light--and then the fancy sings.

**George Meredith**

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*Outer and Inner*

FROM twig to twig the spider weaves  
At noon his webbing fine.  
So near to mute the zephyrs flute  
That only leaflets dance.  
The sun draws out of hazel leaves  
A smell of woodland wine.  
I wake a swarm to sudden storm  
At any step's advance.  
Along my path is bugloss blue,  
The star with fruit in moss;  
The foxgloves drop from throat to top  
A daily lesser bell.  
The blackest shadow, nurse of dew,  
Has orange skeins across;  
And keenly red is one thin thread  
That flashing seems to swell.  
My world I note ere fancy comes,  
Minutest hushed observe:  
What busy bits of motioned wits  
Through antlered mosswork strive.  
But now so low the stillness hums,  
My springs of seeing swerve,  
For half a wink to thrill and think  
The woods with nymphs alive.  
I neighbor the invisible  
So close that my consent  
Is only asked for spirits masked  
To keep from trees and flowers.  
And this because with them I dwell  
In thought, while calmly bent  
To read the lines dear Earth designs  
Shall speak her life on ours.  
Accept, she says; it is not hard  
In woods; but she in towns  
Repeats, accept; and have we wept,

And have we quailed with fears,  
Or shrunk with horror, sure reward  
We have whom knowledge crowns;  
Who see in mold the rose unfold,  
The soul through blood and tears.  
**George Meredith**

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### ***Nature and Life***

LEAVE the uproar! At a leap  
Thou shalt strike a woodland path,  
Enter silence, not of sleep,  
Under shadows, not of wrath;  
Breath which is the spirit's bath,  
In the old Beginnings find,  
And endow them with a mind,  
Seed for seedling, swathe for swathe.  
That gives Nature to us, this  
Give we her, and so we kiss.  
Fruitful is it so--but hear  
How within the shell thou art,  
Music sounds; nor other near  
Can to such a tremor start.  
Of the waves our life is part;  
They our running harvests bear--  
Back to them for manful air,  
Laden with the woodland's heart!  
That gives Battle to us, this  
Give we it, and good the kiss.

**Free**editorial 