

TIRIEL

William Blake

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TIRIEL

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William Blake

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TIRIEL

i

And agèd Tirièl stood before the gates of his beautiful palace
With Myratana, once the Queen of all the western plains;
But now his eyes were darkenèd, and his wife fading in death.
They stood before their once delightful palace; and thus the voice
Of agèd Tirièl arose, that his sons might hear in their gates: —
`Accursèd race of Tirièl! behold your father;
Come forth and look on her that bore you! Come, you accursed sons!
In my weak arms I here have borne your dying mother.
Come forth, sons of the Curse, come forth! see the death of Myratana!'
His sons ran from their gates, and saw their agèd parents stand;
And thus the eldest son of Tirièl rais'd his mighty voice: —
`Old man! unworthy to be call'd the father of Tirièl's race!
For every one of those thy wrinkles, each of those grey hairs
Are cruel as death, and as obdurate as the devouring pit!
Why should thy sons care for thy curses, thou accursèd man?
Were we not slaves till we rebell'd? Who cares for Tirièl's curse?
His blessing was a cruel curse; his curse may be a blessing.'
He ceas'd: the agèd man rais'd up his right hand to the heavens.
His left supported Myratana, shrinking in pangs of death:
The orbs of his large eyes he open'd, and thus his voice went forth: —
`Serpents, not sons, wreathing around the bones of Tirièl!
Ye worms of death, feasting upon your agèd parent's flesh!
Listen! and hear your mother's groans! No more accursed sons
She bears; she groans not at the birth of Heuxos or Yuva.
These are the groans of death, ye serpents! these are the groans of death!
Nourish'd with milk, ye serpents, nourish'd with mother's tears and cares!
Look at my eyes, blind as the orbless skull among the stones!
Look at my bald head! Hark! listen, ye serpents, listen! . . .
What, Myratana! What, my wife! O Soul! O Spirit! O Fire!
What, Myratana! art thou dead? Look here, ye serpents, look!
The serpents sprung from her own bowels have drain'd her dry as this.
Curse on your ruthless heads, for I will bury her even here!'
So saying, he began to dig a grave with his agèd hands;
But Heuxos call'd a son of Zazel to dig their mother a grave.
`Old Cruelty, desist! and let us dig a grave for thee.
Thou hast refus'd our charity, thou hast refus'd our food,
Thou hast refus'd our clothes, our beds, our houses for thy dwelling,
Choosing to wander like a son of Zazel in the rocks.
Why dost thou curse? Is not the curse now come upon your head?
Was it not you enslav'd the sons of Zazel? And they have curs'd,
And now you feel it. Dig a grave, and let us bury our mother.'
`There, take the body, cursed sons! and may the heavens rain wrath
As thick as northern fogs, around your gates, to choke you up!
That you may lie as now your mother lies, like dogs cast out,
The stink of your dead carcasses annoying man and beast,
Till your white bones are bleached with age for a memorial.
No! your remembrance shall perish; for, when your carcasses
Lie stinking on the earth, the buriers shall arise from the East,

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And not a bone of all the sons of Tiriël remain.

Bury your mother! but you cannot bury the curse of Tiriël.'

He ceas'd, and darkling o'er the mountains sought his pathless way.

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ii

He wander'd day and night: to him both day and night were dark.
The sun he felt, but the bright moon was now a useless globe:
O'er mountains and thro' vales of woe the blind and agèd man
Wander'd, till he that leadeth all led him to the vales of Har.

And Har and Heva, like two children, sat beneath the oak:
Mnetha, now agèd, waited on them, and brought them food and clothing;
But they were as the shadow of Har, and as the years forgotten.
Playing with flowers and running after birds they spent the day,
And in the night like infants slept, delighted with infant dreams.

Soon as the blind wanderer enter'd the pleasant gardens of Har,
They ran weeping, like frightened infants, for refuge in Mnetha's arms.
The blind man felt his way, and cried: `Peace to these open doors!
Let no one fear, for poor blind Tiriel hurts none but himself.
Tell me, O friends, where am I now, and in what pleasant place?'

`This is the valley of Har,' said Mnetha, `and this the tent of Har.
Who art thou, poor blind man, that takest the name of Tiriel on thee?
Tiriel is King of all the West. Who art thou? I am Mnetha;
And this is Har and Heva, trembling like infants by my side.'
`I know Tiriel is King of the West, and there he lives in joy.
No matter who I am, O Mnetha! If thou hast any food,
Give it me; for I cannot stay; my journey is far from hence.'

Then Har said: `O my mother Mnetha, venture not so near him;
For he is the king of rotten wood, and of the bones of death;
He wanders without eyes, and passes thro' thick walls and doors.
Thou shalt not smite my mother Mnetha, O thou eyeless man!'

`A wanderer, I beg for food: you see I cannot weep:
I cast away my staff, the kind companion of my travel,
And I kneel down that you may see I am a harmless man.'

He kneelèd down. And Mnetha said: `Come, Har and Heva, rise!
He is an innocent old man, and hungry with his travel.'

Then Har arose, and laid his hand upon old Tiriel's head.
`God bless thy poor bald pate! God bless thy hollow winking eyes!
God bless thy shrivell'd beard! God bless thy many-wrinkled forehead!
Thou hast no teeth, old man! and thus I kiss thy sleek bald head.
Heva, come kiss his bald head, for he will not hurt us, Heva.'

Then Heva came, and took old Tiriel in her mother's arms.
`Bless thy poor eyes, old man, and bless the old father of Tiriel!
Thou art my Tiriel's old father; I know thee thro' thy wrinkles,
Because thou smellest like the fig-tree, thou smellest like ripe figs.
How didst thou lose thy eyes, old Tiriel? Bless thy wrinkled face!'

Mnetha said: `Come in, aged wanderer! tell us of thy name.
Why shouldest thou conceal thyself from those of thine own flesh?'

`I am not of this region,' said Tiriel dissemblingly.
`I am an agèd wanderer, once father of a race
Far in the North; but they were wicked, and were all destroy'd,
And I their father sent an outcast. I have told you all.
Ask me no more, I pray, for grief hath seal'd my precious sight.'

`O Lord!' said Mnetha, `how I tremble! Are there then more people,

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More human creatures on this earth, beside the sons of Har?'

`No more,' said Tiriël, `but I, remain on all this globe;
And I remain an outcast. Hast thou anything to drink?'

Then Mnetha gave him milk and fruits, and they sat down together.

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They sat and ate, and Har and Heva smil'd on Tiriël.

 `Thou art a very old old man, but I am older than thou.
How came thine hair to leave thy forehead? how came thy face so brown?
My hair is very long, my beard doth cover all my breast.
God bless thy piteous face! To count the wrinkles in thy face
Would puzzle Mnetha. Bless thy face! for thou art Tiriël.'

 `Tiriël I never saw but once: I sat with him and ate;
He was as cheerful as a prince, and gave me entertainment;
But long I stay'd not at his palace, for I am forc'd to wander.'

 `What! wilt thou leave us too?' said Heva: `thou shalt not leave us too,
For we have many sports to show thee, and many songs to sing;
And after dinner we will walk into the cage of Har,
And thou shalt help us to catch birds, and gather them ripe cherries.
Then let thy name be Tiriël, and never leave us more.'

 `If thou dost go,' said Har, `I wish thine eyes may see thy folly.
My sons have left me; did thine leave thee? O, 'twas very cruel!'
`No! venerable man,' said Tiriël, `ask me not such things,
For thou dost make my heart to bleed: my sons were not like thine,
But worse. O never ask me more, or I must flee away!'

 `Thou shalt not go,' said Heva, `till thou hast seen our singing-birds,
And heard Har sing in the great cage, and slept upon our fleeces.
Go not! for thou art so like Tiriël that I love thine head,
Tho' it is wrinkled like the earth parch'd with the summer heat.'

 Then Tiriël rose up from the seat, and said: `God bless these tents!
My journey is o'er rocks and mountains, not in pleasant vales:
I must not sleep nor rest, because of madness and dismay.'

 And Mnetha said: `Thou must not go to wander dark, alone;
But dwell with us, and let us be to thee instead of eyes,
And I will bring thee food, old man, till death shall call thee hence.'

 Then Tiriël frown'd, and answer'd: `Did I not command you, saying,
"Madness and deep dismay possess the heart of the blind man,
The wanderer who seeks the woods, leaning upon his staff?"'

 Then Mnetha, trembling at his frowns, led him to the tent door,
And gave to him his staff, and bless'd him. He went on his way.

 But Har and Heva stood and watch'd him till he enter'd the wood;
And then they went and wept to Mnetha: but they soon forgot their tears.

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Over the weary hills the blind man took his lonely way;
To him the day and night alike was dark and desolate;

But far he had not gone when Ijim from his woods came down,
Met him at entrance of the forest, in a dark and lonely way.

‘Who art thou, eyeless wretch, that thus obstruct'st the lion's path?
Ijim shall rend thy feeble joints, thou tempter of dark Ijim!
Thou hast the form of Tiriël, but I know thee well enough.
Stand from my path, foul fiend! Is this the last of thy deceits,
To be a hypocrite, and stand in shape of a blind beggar?’

The blind man heard his brother's voice, and kneel'd down on his knee.

‘O brother Ijim, if it is thy voice that speaks to me,
Smite not thy brother Tiriël, tho' weary of his life.
My sons have smitten me already; and, if thou smitest me,
The curse that rolls over their heads will rest itself on thine.
'Tis now seven years since in my palace I beheld thy face.’

Come, thou dark fiend, I dare thy cunning! know that Ijim scorns
To smite thee in the form of helpless age and eyeless policy.
Rise up! for I discern thee, and I dare thy eloquent tongue.
Come! I will lead thee on thy way, and use thee as a scoff.’

‘O brother Ijim, thou beholdest wretched Tiriël:
Kiss me, my brother, and then leave me to wander desolate!’

‘No! artful fiend, but I will lead thee; dost thou want to go?
Reply not, lest I bind thee with the green flags of the brook.
Aye! now thou art discover'd, I will use thee like a slave.’

When Tiriël heard the words of Ijim, he sought not to reply:
He knew 'twas vain, for Ijim's words were as the voice of Fate.

And they went on together, over hills, thro' woody dales,
Blind to the pleasures of the sight, and deaf to warbling birds:
All day they walk'd, and all the night beneath the pleasant moon,
Westwardly journeying, till Tiriël grew weary with his travel.

‘O Ijim, I am faint and weary, for my knees forbid
To bear me further: urge me not, lest I should die with travel.
A little rest I crave, a little water from a brook,
Or I shall soon discover that I am a mortal man,
And you will lose your once-lov'd Tiriël. Alas! how faint I am!’

‘Impudent fiend!’ said Ijim, ‘hold thy glib and eloquent tongue!
Tiriël is a king, and thou the tempter of dark Ijim.
Drink of this running brook, and I will bear thee on my shoulders.’

He drank; and Ijim rais'd him up, and bore him on his shoulders:
All day he bore him; and, when evening drew her solemn curtain,
Enter'd the gates of Tiriël's palace, and stood and call'd aloud: —
‘Heuxos, come forth! I here have brought the fiend that troubles Ijim.
Look! knowst thou aught of this grey beard, or of these blinded eyes?’

Heuxos and Lotho ran forth at the sound of Ijim's voice,
And saw their agèd father borne upon his mighty shoulders.
Their eloquent tongues were dumb, and sweat stood on their trembling limbs:
They knew 'twas vain to strive with Ijim. They bow'd and silent stood.

‘What, Heuxos! call thy father, for I mean to sport to-night.

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This is the hypocrite that sometimes roars a dreadful lion;
Then I have rent his limbs, and left him rotting in the forest
For birds to eat. But I have scarce departed from the place,
But like a tiger he would come: and so I rent him too.
When like a river he would seek to drown me in his waves;
But soon I buffeted the torrent: anon like to a cloud
Fraught with the swords of lightning; but I brav'd the vengeance too.
Then he would creep like a bright serpent; till around my neck,
While I was sleeping, he would twine: I squeez'd his poisonous soul.
Then like a toad, or like a newt, would whisper in my ears;
Or like a rock stood in my way, or like a poisonous shrub.
At last I caught him in the form of Tirièl, blind and old,
And so I'll keep him! Fetch your father, fetch forth Myratana!

They stood confounded, and thus Tirièl rais'd his silver voice:—

‘Serpents, not sons, why do you stand? Fetch hither Tirièl!
Fetch hither Myratana! and delight yourselves with scoffs;
For poor blind Tirièl is return'd, and this much—injur'd head
Is ready for your bitter taunts. Come forth, sons of the Curse!’

Meantime the other sons of Tirièl ran around their father,
Confounded at the terrible strength of Ijim: they knew 'twas vain.
Both spear and shield were useless, and the coat of iron mail,
When Ijim stretch'd his mighty arm; the arrow from his limbs
Rebounded, and the piercing sword broke on his naked flesh.

‘Then is it true, Heuxos, that thou hast turn'd thy agèd parent
To be the sport of wintry winds?’ said Ijim, ‘is this true?
It is a lie, and I am like the tree torn by the wind,
Thou eyeless fiend, and you dissemblers! Is this Tirièl's house?
It is as false as Matha, and as dark as vacant Orcus.
Escape, ye fiends! for Ijim will not lift his hand against ye.’

So saying, Ijim gloomy turn'd his back, and silent sought
The secret forests, and all night wander'd in desolate ways.

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V

And agèd Tirièl stood and said: `Where does the thunder sleep?
Where doth he hide his terrible head? And his swift and fiery daughters,
Where do they shroud their fiery wings, and the terrors of their hair?
Earth, thus I stamp thy bosom! Rouse the earthquake from his den,
To raise his dark and burning visage thro' the cleaving ground,
To thrust these towers with his shoulders! Let his fiery dogs
Rise from the centre, belching flames and roarings, dark smoke!
Where art thou, Pestilence, that bathest in fogs and standing lakes?
Rise up thy sluggish limbs, and let the loathsome of poisons
Drop from thy garments as thou walkest, wrapp'd in yellow clouds!
Here take thy seat in this wide court; let it be strewn with dead;
And sit and smile upon these cursèd sons of Tirièl!
Thunder, and fire, and pestilence, hear you not Tirièl's curse?
He ceas'd. The heavy clouds confus'd roll'd round the lofty towers,
Discharging their enormous voices at the father's curse.

The earth tremblèd; fires belchèd from the yawning clefts;
And when the shaking ceas'd, a fog possess'd the accursèd clime.

The cry was great in Tirièl's palace: his five daughters ran,
And caught him by the garments, weeping with cries of bitter woe.

`Aye, now you feel the curse, you cry! but may all ears be deaf
As Tirièl's, and all eyes as blind as Tirièl's to your woes!

May never stars shine on your roofs! may never sun nor moon
Visit you, but eternal fogs hover around your walls!

Hela, my youngest daughter, you shall lead me from this place;
And let the curse fall on the rest, and wrap them up together!

He ceas'd: and Hela led her father from the noisome place.

In haste they fled; while all the sons and daughters of Tirièl,
Chain'd in thick darkness, utterèd cries of mourning all the night.

And in the morning, lo! an hundred men in ghastly death!

The four daughters, stretch'd on the marble pavement, silent all,
Fall'n by the pestilence! — the rest mop'd round in guilty fears;

And all the children in their beds were cut off in one night.

Thirty of Tirièl's sons remain'd, to wither in the palace,

Desolate, loathèd, dumb, astonish'd — waiting for black death.

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And Hela led her father thro' the silence of the night,
Astonish'd, silent, till the morning beams began to spring.
`Now, Hela, I can go with pleasure, and dwell with Har and Heva,
Now that the curse shall clean devour all those guilty sons.
This is the right and ready way; I know it by the sound
That our feet make. Remember, Hela, I have savèd thee from death;
Then be obedient to thy father, for the curse is taken off thee.
I dwelt with Myratana five years in the desolate rock;
And all that time we waited for the fire to fall from heaven,
Or for the torrents of the sea to overwhelm you all.
But now my wife is dead, and all the time of grace is past:
You see the parent's curse. Now lead me where I have commanded.'
`O leaguèd with evil spirits, thou accursèd man of sin!
True, I was born thy slave! Who ask'd thee to save me from death?
'Twas for thyself, thou cruel man, because thou wantest eyes.'
`True, Hela, this is the desert of all those cruel ones.
Is Tiriel cruel? Look! his daughter, and his youngest daughter,
Laughs at affection, glories in rebellion, scoffs at love.
I have not ate these two days. Lead me to Har and Heva's tent,
Or I will wrap thee up in such a terrible father's curse
That thou shalt feel worms in thy marrow creeping thro' thy bones.
Yet thou shalt lead me! Lead me, I command, to Har and Heva!'
`O cruel! O destroyer! O consumer! O avenger!
To Har and Heva I will lead thee: then would that they would curse!
Then would they curse as thou hast cursèd! But they are not like thee!
O! they are holy and forgiving, fill'd with loving mercy,
Forgetting the offences of their most rebellious children,
Or else thou wouldest not have liv'd to curse thy helpless children.'
`Look on my eyes, Hela, and see, for thou hast eyes to see,
The tears swell from my stony fountains. Wherefore do I weep?
Wherefore from my blind orbs art thou not seiz'd with poisonous stings?
Laugh, serpent, youngest venomous reptile of the flesh of Tiriel!
Laugh! for thy father Tiriel shall give thee cause to laugh,
Unless thou lead me to the tent of Har, child of the Curse!'
`Silence thy evil tongue, thou murderer of thy helpless children!
I lead thee to the tent of Har; not that I mind thy curse,
But that I feel they will curse thee, and hang upon thy bones
Fell shaking agonies, and in each wrinkle of that face
Plant worms of death to feast upon the tongue of terrible curses.'
`Hela, my daughter, listen! thou art the daughter of Tiriel.
Thy father calls. Thy father lifts his hand unto the heavens,
For thou hast laughèd at my tears, and curs'd thy agèd father.
Let snakes rise from thy bedded locks, and laugh among thy curls!'
He ceas'd. Her dark hair upright stood, while snakes infolded round
Her madding brows: her shrieks appall'd the soul of Tiriel.
`What have I done, Hela, my daughter? Fear'st thou now the curse,
Or wherefore dost thou cry? Ah, wretch, to curse thy agèd father!
Lead me to Har and Heva, and the curse of Tiriel

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Shall fail. If thou refuse, howl in the desolate mountains!

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vii

She, howling, led him over mountains and thro' frighted vales,
Till to the caves of Zazel they approach'd at eventide.
Forth from their caves old Zazel and his sons ran, when they saw
Their tyrant prince blind, and his daughter howling and leading him.
They laugh'd and mockèd; some threw dirt and stones as they pass'd by;
But when Tirièl turn'd around and rais'd his awful voice,
Some fled away; but Zazel stood still, and thus begun:—
`Bald tyrant, wrinkled cunning, listen to Zazel's chains!
'Twas thou that chainèd thy brother Zazel! Where are now thine eyes?
Shout, beautiful daughter of Tirièl! thou singest a sweet song!
Where are you going? Come and eat some roots, and drink some water.
Thy crown is bald, old man; the sun will dry thy brains away,
And thou wilt be as foolish as thy foolish brother Zazel.'
The blind man heard, and smote his breast, and trembling passèd on.
They threw dirt after them, till to the covert of a wood
The howling maiden led her father, where wild beasts resort,
Hoping to end her woes; but from her cries the tigers fled.
All night they wander'd thro' the wood; and when the sun arose,
They enter'd on the mountains of Har: at noon the happy tents
Were frighted by the dismal cries of Hela on the mountains.
But Har and Heva slept fearless as babes on loving breasts.
Mnetha awoke: she ran and stood at the tent door, and saw
The agèd wanderer led towards the tents; she took her bow,
And chose her arrows, then advanc'd to meet the terrible pair.

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viii

And Mnetha hasted, and met them at the gate of the lower garden.
`Stand still, or from my bow receive a sharp and wingèd death!'
Then Tirièl stood, saying: `What soft voice threatens such bitter things?
Lead me to Har and Heva; I am Tirièl, King of the West.'

And Mnetha led them to the tent of Har; and Har and Heva
Ran to the door. When Tirièl felt the ankles of agèd Har,
He said: `O weak mistaken father of a lawless race,
Thy laws, O Har, and Tirièl's wisdom, end together in a curse.

Why is one law given to the lion and the patient ox?
And why men bound beneath the heavens in a reptile form,
A worm of sixty winters creeping on the dusky ground?
The child springs from the womb; the father ready stands to form
The infant head, while the mother idle plays with her dog on her couch:
The young bosom is cold for lack of mother's nourishment, and milk
Is cut off from the weeping mouth with difficulty and pain:
The little lids are lifted, and the little nostrils open'd:
The father forms a whip to rouse the sluggish senses to act,

And scourges off all youthful fancies from the new-born man.
Then walks the weak infant in sorrow, compell'd to number footsteps
Upon the sand. And when the drone has reach'd his crawling length,
Black berries appear that poison all round him. Such was Tirièl,
Compell'd to pray repugnant, and to humble the immortal spirit;
Till I am subtil as a serpent in a paradise,
Consuming all, both flowers and fruits, insects and warbling birds.
And now my paradise is fall'n, and a drear sandy plain
Returns my thirsty hissings in a curse on thee, O Har,
Mistaken father of a lawless race! — My voice is past.'

He ceas'd, outstretch'd at Har and Heva's feet in awful death.