

LENORE

Gottfried August Burger

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Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Up rose Lenore as the red morn wore,
From weary visions starting:
"Art faithless, William, or, William, art dead?
'Tis long since thy departing."
For he, with Frederick's men of might,
In fair Prague waged the uncertain fight;
Nor once had he writ in the hurry of war,
And sad was the true heart that sickened afar.

The Empress and the King,
With ceaseless quarrel tired,
At length relaxed the stubborn hate
Which rivalry inspired:
And the martial throng, with laugh and song,
Spoke of their homes as they rode along,
And clank, clank, clank! came every rank,
With trumpet-sound that rose and sank.

And here and there and everywhere,
Along the swarming ways,
Went old man and boy, with the music of joy,
On the gallant bands to gaze;
And the young child shouted to spy the vaward,
And trembling and blushing the bride pressed forward:
But ah! for the sweet lips of Lenore
The kiss and the greeting are vanished and o'er.

From man to man all wildly she ran
With a swift and searching eye;
But she felt alone in the mighty mass,
As it crushed and crowded by:
On hurried the troop, a gladsome group,
And proudly the tall plumes wave and droop:
She tore her hair and she turned her round,
And madly she dashed her against the ground.

Her mother clasped her tenderly

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With soothing words and mild:
"My child, may God look down on thee,
God comfort thee, my child."
"Oh! mother, mother! gone is gone!
I reckon no more how the world runs on:
What pity to me does God impart?
Woe, woe, woe! for my heavy heart!"

"Help, Heaven, help and favour her!
Child, utter an Ave Maria!
Wise and great are the doings of God;
He loves and pities thee."
"Out, mother, out, on the empty lie!
Doth he heed my despair, doth he list to my cry?
What boots it now to hope or to pray?
The night is come, there is no more day."

"Help, Heaven, help! who knows the Father
Knows surely that he loves his child:
The bread and the wine from the hand divine
Shall make thy tempered grief less wild."
"Oh! mother, dear mother! the wine and the bread
Will not soften the anguish that bows down my head;
For bread and for wine it will yet be as late
That his cold corpse creeps from the grim grave's gate."

"What if the traitor's false faith failed,
By sweet temptation tried,
What if in distant Hungary
He clasp another bride?
Despise the fickle fool, my girl,
Who hath ta'en the pebble and spurned the pearl:
While soul and body shall hold together
In his perjured heart shall be stormy weather."

"Oh! mother, mother! gone is gone,
And lost will still be lost!
Death, death is the goal of my weary soul,
Crushed and broken and crost.
Spark of my life! down, down to the tomb:
Die away in the night, die away in the gloom!
What pity to me does God impart?
Woe, woe, woe! for my heavy heart!"

"Help, Heaven, help, and heed her not,
For her sorrows are strong within;
She knows not the words that her tongue repeats,
Oh! count them not for sin!
Cease, cease, my child, thy wretchedness,
And think on thy promised happiness;
So shall thy mind's calm ecstasy

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Be a hope and a home and a bridegroom to thee."

"My mother, what is happiness?
My mother, what is Hell?
With William is my happiness
Without him is my Hell!
Spark of my life! down, down to the tomb:
Die away in the night, die away in the gloom!
Earth and Heaven, and Heaven and earth,
Reft of William are nothing worth."

Thus grief racked and tore the breast of Lenore,
And busy was her brain;
Thus rose her cry to the Power on high,
To question and arraign:
Wringing her hands and beating her breast,
Tossing and rocking without any rest;
Till from her light veil the moon shone thro',
And the stars leapt out of the darkling blue.

But hark to the clatter and the pat pat patter!
Of a horse's heavy hoof!
How the steel clanks and rings as the rider springs!
How the echo shouts aloof!
While slightly and lightly the gentle bell
Tingles and jingles softly and well;
And low and clear through the door plank thin
Comes the voice without to the ear within:

"Holla! holla! unlock the gate;
Art waking, my bride, or sleeping?
Is thy heart still free and still faithful to me?
Art laughing, my bride, or weeping?"
"Oh! wearily, William, I've waited for you,
Woefully watching the long day thro',
With a great sorrow sorrowing
For the cruelty of your tarrying."

"Till the dead midnight we saddled not,
I have journeyed far and fast
And hither I come to carry thee back
Ere the darkness shall be past."
"Ah! rest thee within till the night's more calm;
Smooth shall thy couch be, and soft, and warm:
Hark to the winds, how they whistle and rush
Thro' the twisted twine of the hawthorn-bush."

"Thro' the hawthorn-bush let whistle and rush,
Let whistle, child, let whistle!
Mark the flash fierce and high of my steed's bright eye,
And his proud crest's eager bristle.

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Up, up and away! I must not stay:
Mount swiftly behind me! up, up and away!
An hundred miles must be ridden and sped
Ere we may lie down on the bridal-bed."

"What! ride an hundred miles tonight,
By thy mad fancies driven!
Dost hear the bell with its sullen swell,
As it rumbles out eleven?"
"Look forth! look forth! the moon shines bright:
We and the dead gallop fast thro' the night.
'Tis for a wager I bear thee away
To the nuptial couch ere the break of day."

"Ah, where is the chamber, William dear,
And William, where is the bed?"
"Far, far from here: still, narrow, and cool;
Plank and bottom and lid."
"Hast room for me?" "For me and thee;
Up, up to the saddle right speedily!
The wedding-guests are gathered and met,
And the door of the chamber is open set."

She busked her well, and into the selle
She sprang with nimble haste,
And gently smiling, with a sweet beguiling,
Her white hands clasped his waist:
And hurry, hurry! ring, ring, ring!
To and fro they sway and swing;
Snorting and snuffing they skim the ground,
And the sparks spurt up, and the stones run round.

Here to the right and there to the left
Flew fields of corn and clover,
And the bridges flashed by to the dazzled eye,
As rattling they thundered over.
"What ails my love? the moon shines bright:
Bravely the dead men ride through the night.
Is my love afraid of the quiet dead?"
"Ah! no; let them sleep in their dusty bed!"

On the breeze cool and soft what tune floats aloft,
While the crows wheel overhead?
Ding dong! ding dong! 'tis the sound, 'tis the song,
"Room, room for the passing dead!"
Slowly the funeral-train drew near,
Bearing the coffin, bearing the bier;
And the chime of their chaunt was hissing and harsh,
Like the note of the bull-frog within the marsh.

"You bury your corpse at the dark midnight,

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With hymns and bells and wailing;
But I bring home my youthful wife
To a bride-feast's rich regaling.
Come, choister, come with thy choral throng,
And solemnly sing me a marriage-song;
Come, friar, come, let the blessing be spoken,
That the bride and the bridegroom's sweet rest be unbroken."

Died the dirge and vanished the bier:
Obedient to his call,
Hard hard behind, with a rush like the wind,
Came the long steps' pattering fall:
And ever further! ring, ring, ring!
To and fro they sway and swing;
Snorting and snuffing they skim the ground,
And the sparks spurt up, and the stones run round.

How flew to the right, how flew to the left,
Trees, mountains in the race!
How to the left, and the right and the left,
Flew the town and market-place!
"What ails my love? the moon shines bright:
Bravely the dead men ride thro' the night.
Is my love afraid of the quiet dead?"
"Ah, let them alone in their dusty bed!"

See, see, see! by the gallows tree,
As they dance on the wheel's broad hoop,
Up and down, in the gleam of the moon
Half lost, an airy group:
"Ho! ho! mad mob, come hither amain,
And join in the wake of my rushing train;
Come, dance me a dance, ye dancers thin,
Ere the planks of the marriage-bed close us in."

And hush, hush, hush! the dreamy rout
Came close with a ghastly bustle,
Like the whirlwind in the hazel-bush,
When it makes the dry leaves rustle:
And faster, faster! ring, ring, ring!
To and fro they sway and swing;
Snorting and snuffing they skim the ground,
And the sparks spurt up, and the stones run round.

How flew the moon high overhead,
In the wild race madly driven!
In and out, how the stars danced about,
And reeled o'er the flashing heaven!
"What ails my love? the moon shines bright:
Bravely the dead men ride thro' the night.
Is my love afraid of the quiet dead?"

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"Alas! let them sleep in their narrow bed."

"Horse, horse! meseems 'tis the cock's shrill note,
And the sand is well nigh spent;
Horse, horse, away! 'tis the break of day,
'Tis the morning air's sweet scent.
Finished, finished is our ride:
Room, room for the bridegroom and the bride!
At last, at last, we have reached the spot,
For the speed of the dead man has slackened not!"

And swiftly up to an iron gate
With reins relaxed they went;
At the rider's touch the bolts flew back
And the bars were broken and bent;
The doors were burst with a deafening knell,
And over the white graves they dashed pell mell:
The tombs around looked grassy and grim,
As they glimmered and glanced in the moonlight dim.

But see! but see! in an eyelid's beat,
Towhoo! a ghastly wonder!
The horseman's jerkin, piece by piece,
Dropped off like brittle tinder!
Fleshless and hairless, a naked skull,
The sight of his weird head was horrible;
The lifelike mask was there no more,
And a scythe and a sandglass the skeleton bore.

Loud snorted the horse as he plunged and reared,
And the sparks were scattered round:
What man shall say if he vanished away,
Or sank in the gaping ground?
Groans from the earth and shrieks in the air!
Howling and wailing everywhere!
Half dead, half living, the soul of Lenore
Fought as it never had fought before.

The churchyard troop, a ghostly group,
Close round the dying girl;
Out and in they hurry and spin
Through the dance's weary whirl:
"Patience, patience, when the heart is breaking;
With thy God there is no question-making:
Of thy body thou art quit and free:
Heaven keep thy soul eternally!"