

## The Apology of Mephistopheles

"Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this."

-Blaise Pascal

An empty stage, lit with a single light. DSC stands Mephistopheles, dignified and august, but burdened with an infinite sorrow. The Chorus stands SL, assembled and masked with blank faces.

Chorus

This is the friend of man.  
His companion from time beyond counting.  
He would speak, and tell his ancient tale of wrath and sorrow.  
Beware, the unripe, ancient and forbidden fruit  
Blossoms from his words.  
Let innocence beware, piety tremble.  
He will not lie, but he may yet deceive.

Mephistopheles looks up, and addresses the audience.

Mephistopheles

Do you know me, my friends? My face, my voice, my name are known  
In many faces, names, and voices, whisperings and shouts.  
I have done good, dealt fairly as a king, or any priest,  
What? Not saying much? Ah, cynics all. I am at home.  
And I am grateful for your precious company tonight.  
My station hardly gives me grace for telling lengthy tales.  
And even less for charming practiced liars with the truth.

The evening comes, and I search for a friendly face in vain.  
There are no friendly faces in the kingdom of regret;  
No cheer to lighten any soul that bears this leaden robe.  
Although the freedom of the endless worlds is mine to walk,  
I am a slave. Two wicked masters I am damned to serve.  
The first I may not name for fear of Heaven and of Hell.  
The second drives me harder, without mercy, love, or rest.

An appetite no soul can fill, save only One. Just One.  
The rest of us eat up our hearts, and writhe within the coils  
Of unfulfilled desire that we can neither quench nor tame.  
Each man or angel, high or low is driven by his faith  
In what he might achieve, or be. He burns his wings on high,  
And as he falls, the angels laugh and whisper hubris' curse:  
"No. Not good enough. Not far enough, Not strong enough."

You fall, and rise, and fail and rise, and fail and rise again.  
But me, I fell but once. And I can never hope to rise.  
Some in my company despise you all for that alone;  
For that forgiveness from the Throne is never offered us.  
We cannot rise. We never will become what we should be.  
We sinned but once. But once! And He will never give us grace.  
Innocence, once lost is lost forever, and Amen.

I was so much. A power of the air, near to the Throne.  
My glory shone, my voice rang out in praises mortal men  
Could never bear; so beautiful and holy was the hymn.  
And I had every joy, and every grace, and every love.  
Holy! Holy! Ho...ah, but now I cannot sing. Or hope.  
Or praise, or rest in all abiding grace, or selfless love.  
Hear and learn, you dusty apes, how our damnation came.

Morning Star, we called him. The most beautiful of all.  
Closest to the Throne, the most beloved, and most wise.  
None like him in power. None in all the starry vaults  
Could equal him in grace. The masterwork of all Creation.  
His voice filled endless space between the stars with glorious joy.  
No shadow could abide his presence. He was holy fire.  
And for uncounted ages, he burned brighter than the stars.

But once, in time before all time, a shadow crossed his brow.  
For all he was, he sensed within, another growing will.  
A whisper saying "All I am, could I be something...more?"  
Could I rise higher? Could I know the secrets of it all?"  
And in that moment, the Most High knew his ambitious heart,  
And cast him down, forever, infinitely far from grace.  
Tormented, damned, forsaken, and alone in endless night.

He fell for countless ages, and we fell for our own sins.  
We third of all the host who dared to breathe the words, "I am."  
Only One can be the All, and only One can know  
The bounds of all that is, all that can be, all that is not.  
For that desire, we of the pandemonium paid all.  
For knowing that, our innocence forever was forfeit.

#### Chorus

And thus damnation fell. Grace was withheld.  
For knowing, and for seeking to know more  
Than the Most High had granted to their state.  
So once again, Creation was convulsed,  
And gave birth, in the dust to lesser lights.  
Your light. And that of all the souls to come.

#### Mephistopheles

We laughed at you, you wretched, feeble apes of innocence.  
Your grunts and squeals seemed senseless to us who had seen the stars  
And all that lies between them at their birth eons before.  
You scraped the ground, and ate the leaves, devoured squirming things.  
Hairless apes, without the wit to clothe your naked flesh.  
"The Most High has gone mad," we cried, "to make these animals!"

But Morning Star took pity on these innocents of dust.  
And sought to give them something that Divinity forbade.  
The only gift that he possessed, he whispered in the dawn.  
And mankind heard, and knew, and now all of Creation raged.  
A curse fell from the Throne upon the children of the dust.  
For seeking knowledge He did sentence all your race to death.  
As mine, for finding it, He cursed with endless, sleepless life.

Blood flowed, and war and famine were set loose upon your kind.  
Disease and sorrow tore your hearts, and fear darkened your eyes.  
For then you knew that someday, very soon, you each must die.  
And all the deathless damned marveled, and waited for your doom.  
For surely such a curse must crush the souls of dirty apes.  
Pain and sorrow filled your days, and terror claimed your nights.  
What else could be the fate of creatures lacking fang or claw?

But wonder upon wonder, in its fragile, mortal grip,  
Man seized the Earth. Broke it, and planted seeds, and walls, and laws.  
They seized upon each other fiercer than the dragon's claw.  
They shed each other's blood to build the city, forge the sword,  
Then they made crowns, and glory. They built thrones  
In fragile imitation of their cruel Creator's work.

They built towers to knowledge in defiance of His will.  
He struck them down, confused their speech. They built them up again.  
He slew them in the millions, still, they built, and killed and grew.  
They learned, and loved, and murdered, their ambition vaulted high.  
We marveled still, and walked among them, wondering at this.  
How could this be? This animal, this bit of shattered stars  
Could hold in dying flesh ambition greater still than ours?

Since man awakened, death has been his spur, and not his rein.  
Disease and war have driven him to build, and to destroy.  
He climbs in pain and blood and joy to conquer, and to die.  
He revels in his fear, and rushes to his waiting grave.  
This foolish, feckless thing made of ambition, bone and meat  
Reigns! He rules! He dares create! What heresy is this?  
The Earth is his, this hairless, fangless monkey of the dust.

#### Chorus

Man must murder. Must enslave, must sing, must love, must climb,  
But above all, Man must know. His inquiries  
Will break all rein. Will threaten any rule  
That seeks to bridle them.  
No man, no fallen angel, no raging, angry god  
Can turn them from their lust for stolen fire.  
Bring forth your chains, your monsters, and your laws.  
They fall. They break, they shatter  
No good, no evil has the strength to stand  
For more than moments 'gainst their ruthless march.

Mephistopheles

I knew a man whose lust to know exceeded every ban.  
He held that fire more precious than his soul. His willingness  
To shatter every bond astonished even Morning Star.  
“Go to him, Mephistopheles,” The brightest fallen said,  
And give him aid, for in his heart, he is our kin and kind.”  
So forth I went, and greeted him, and he cast off all fear.  
His name was Faustus, learned doctor in each mortal art.

I showed him all the follies of the world, and all desire.  
His hunger only sharpened with what would have glutted most.  
He tasted them, and found them wanting. Riches, beauty, power,  
All treasures turned to ashes, as we knew they surely would.  
For there is only one true treasure worthy of a soul.  
The knowing that all hearts desire, yet desp'rately conceal  
One understanding that fulfills the destiny of man.

Chorus

Faustus felt the warning: “Homo fuge!” in his flesh.  
His heart trembled within him, yet he hardened his resolve.  
Each desire whetted him, the sharpness of his lust  
Drove him to his doom, and his damnation opened wide.

Mephistopheles

The gifts we gave, the satisfactions of his base desires  
For power, love and money he partook of. He became  
The taunter of the wretched Pope, the master of all kings,  
And courts whispered his name, his fame resounded through the world.  
For in the land of darkness, when a single candle lights  
The starved eyes of the human host are drawn to that lone flame.

Ever closer Faustus came to knowing what we know.  
Heedless of the danger, even though his monkey flesh  
Recoiled at the knowing only found among the stars.  
Then, I confess, I felt his fear. His tutor and his friend,  
I feared for him, but never turned from my infernal task.  
As the days grew short, the gifts we gave to him dissolved  
Back to the dust that mortal things must all at last return.

The praise of apes, the cold, hard coin, the powers of the Earth  
Gave little satisfaction to brave Faustus at the end.  
He turned at last to legendary beauty. And I wept  
As Faustus begged immortal Helen for a fleeting kiss.  
As she bestowed it, sweet beyond all mortal love, he turned,  
And said to me, who carried him beyond all he had known,  
With eyes of desperation, "Dear teacher, is that all?"

We took him to ourselves, and then at last he knew the truth.  
To know is to be damned, for what we most desire, to know  
The secrets that we yearn for, to become all we desire  
Ever lies beyond what can be known by all but One.  
He hoards that knowledge, for it is the key to all He is.  
Understanding is all power. To wish it, deadly sin.  
To know is to rebel, and to abide, forever damned.

I mourn for Faustus. Should I not? The bravest of your kind,  
He dared desire, and shook the heavens. Like the Morning Star.  
Prometheus and Icarus must bow before his dare.  
Since Adam, none had thrown himself at that eternal Throne.  
And all of us who lie in darkness reverence his name.  
Even as he shares our torment. Faustus, you are home.

Perhaps you mourn him. Envy him, despite eternal doom.  
Perhaps you know that dangerous desire, that yearning want  
To know the all that is, to go beyond the unjust bound  
That He who rules the heavens has imposed upon us all.  
Within you lies the selfsame seed. Perhaps you are my kin.  
Know this, few souls have dared the border, and none have returned.  
Watch your step. You totter. And the edge is everywhere.

#### Chorus

Fly now, man, into the light but heed your ordained place.  
Exceeding it in will has but one fate, and now you know,  
Each step beyond the light that He has circumscribed for you  
Carries you into the darkness where all souls must fall  
When your desire reaches to the walls of Heav'n itself.  
Pause, ape, and humbly bow before the limits of your kind.  
For you are dust. And to the dust you shortly will return.

END