

Monos and Daimonos

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

I am English by birth, and my early years were passed in— I had neither brothers nor sisters; my mother died when I was in the cradle; and I found my sole companion, tutor, and playmate in my father. He was a younger brother of a noble and ancient house: what induced him to forsake his country and his friends, to abjure all society, and to live in a rock, is a story in itself, which has nothing to do with mine.

As the Lord liveth, I believe the tale that I shall tell you will have sufficient claim on your attention, without calling in the history of another to preface its most exquisite details, or to give interest to its most amusing events. I said my father lived on a rock—the whole country round seemed nothing but rock!—wastes, bleak, blank, dreary; trees stunted, herbage blasted; caverns, through which some black and wild stream (that never knew star or sunlight, but through rare and hideous chasms of the huge stones above it) went dashing and howling on its *blessed* course; vast cliffs, covered with eternal snows, where the birds of prey lived, and sent, in screams and discordance, a grateful and meet music to the heavens, which seemed too cold and barren to wear even clouds upon their wan, grey, comfortless expanse: these made the characters of that country where the spring of my life sickened itself away. The climate which, in the milder parts of —relieves the nine months of winter with three months of an abrupt and autumn-less summer, never seemed to vary in the gentle and sweet region in which *my* home was placed. Perhaps, for a brief interval, the snow in the valleys melted, and the streams swelled, and a blue, ghastly, unnatural kind of vegetation, seemed here and there to mix with the rude lichen, or scatter a grim smile over minute particles of the universal rock; but to these witnesses of the changing season were the summers of my boyhood confined. My father was addicted to the sciences—the physical sciences—and possessed but a moderate share of learning in any thing else; he taught me all he knew; and the rest of my education, Nature, in a savage and stern guise, instilled in my heart by silent but deep lessons. She taught my feet to bound, and my arm to smite; she breathed life into my passions, and shed darkness over my temper; she taught me to cling to her, even in her most rugged and unalluring form, and to shrink from all else—from the companionship of man, and the soft smiles of woman, and the shrill voice of childhood; and the ties, and hopes, and socialities, and objects of human existence, as from a torture and a curse. Even in that sullen rock, and beneath that ungenial sky, I had luxuries unknown to the palled tastes of cities, or to those who woo delight in an air of odours and in a land of roses! What were those luxuries? They had a myriad varieties and shades of enjoyment—they had but a common name. What were those luxuries? *Solitude!*

My father died when I was eighteen; I was transferred to my uncle's protection, and I repaired to London. I arrived there, gaunt and stern, a giant in limbs and strength, and to the tastes of those about me, a savage in bearing and in mood. They would have laughed, but I awed them; they would have altered *me*, but I changed *them*; I threw a damp over their enjoyment and a cloud over their meetings. Though I said little, though I sat with them, estranged and silent, and passive, they seemed to wither beneath my presence. Nobody could live with me and be happy, or at ease! I felt it, and I hated them that they could love not me. Three years passed—I was of age—I demanded my fortune—and scorning social life, and pining once more for loneliness, I resolved to journey into those unpeopled and far lands, which if any have pierced, none have

returned to describe. So I took my leave of them all, cousin and aunt—and when I came to my old uncle, who had liked me less than any, I grasped his hand with so friendly a gripe, that, well I ween, the dainty and nice member was but little inclined to its ordinary functions in future.

I commenced my pilgrimage—I pierced the burning sands—I traversed the vast deserts—I came into the enormous woods of Africa, where human step never trod, nor human voice ever started the thrilling and intense solemnity that broods over the great solitudes, as it brooded over chaos before the world was! There the primeval nature springs and perishes; undisturbed and unvaried by the convulsions of the surrounding world; the leaf becomes the tree, lives through its uncounted ages, falls and moulders, and rots and vanishes, unwitnessed in its mighty and mute changes, save by the wandering lion, or the wild ostrich, or that huge serpent—a hundred times more vast than the puny boa that the cold limners of Europe have painted, and whose bones the vain student has preserved, as a miracle and marvel. There, too, as beneath the heavy and dense shade I couched in the scorching noon, I heard the trampling as of an army, and the crush and fall of the strong trees, and beheld through the matted boughs the behemoth pass on its terrible way, with its eyes burning as a sun, and its white teeth arched and glistening in the rabid jaw, as pillars of spar glitter in a cavern; the monster, to whom only those wastes are a home, and who never, since the waters rolled from the Dædal¹ earth, has been given to human gaze and wonder but my own! Seasons glided on, but I counted them not; they were not doled to me by the tokens of man, nor made sick to me by the changes of his base life, and the evidence of his sordid labour. Seasons glided on, and my youth ripened into manhood, and manhood grew grey with the first frost of age; and then a vague and restless spirit fell upon me, and I said in my foolish heart, ‘I will look upon the countenances of my race once more!’ I retraced my steps—I recrossed the wastes—I re-entered the cities—I took again the garb of man; for I had been hitherto naked in the wilderness, and hair had grown over me as a garment. I repaired to a sea-port, and took ship for England.

In the vessel there was one man, and only one, who neither avoided my companionship nor recoiled at my frown. He was an idle and curious being, full of the frivolities, and egotisms, and importance of them to whom towns are homes, and talk has become a mental aliment. He was one pervading, irritating, offensive tissue of little and low thoughts. The only meanness he had not was fear. It was impossible to awe, to silence, or to shun him. He sought me for ever; he was as a blister to me, which no force could tear away; my soul grew faint when my eyes met him. He was to my sight as those creatures which from their very loathsomeness are fearful as well as despicable to us. I longed and yearned to strangle him when he addressed me! Often I would have laid my hand on him, and hurled him into the sea to the sharks, which, lynx-eyed and eager-jawed, swam night and day around our ship; but the gaze of many was on us, and I curbed myself, and turned away, and shut my eyes in very sickness; and when I opened them again, lo! he was by my side, and his sharp quick voice grated, in its prying, and asking, and torturing accents, on my loathing and repugnant ear! One night I was roused from my sleep by the screams and oaths of men, and I hastened on deck: we had struck upon a rock. It was a ghastly, but, oh Christ! how glorious a sight! Moonlight still and calm—the sea sleeping in sapphires; and in the midst of the silent and soft repose of all things, three hundred and fifty souls were to perish from the world! I sat apart, and looked on, and aided not. A voice crept like an adder’s hiss upon my ear; I turned, and saw my tormentor; the moonlight fell on his face, and it grinned with the maudlin grin of intoxication, and his pale blue eye glistened, and he said, ‘We will not part even here!’ My blood ran coldly through my veins, and I would have thrown him into the sea, which

¹ Variouslly adorned.

now came fast and fast upon us; *but the moonlight was on him, and I did not dare to kill him.* But I would not stay to perish with the herd, and I threw myself alone from the vessel and swam towards a rock. I saw a shark dart after me, but I shunned him, and the moment after he had plenty to sate his maw. I heard a crash, and a mingled and wild burst of anguish, the anguish of three hundred and fifty hearts that a minute afterwards were stilled, and I said in my *own* heart, with a deep joy, '*His voice is with the rest, and we have parted!*' I gained the shore, and lay down to sleep.

The next morning my eyes opened upon a land more beautiful than a Grecian's dreams. The sun had just risen, and laughed over streams of silver, and trees bending with golden and purple fruits, and the diamond dew sparkled from a sod covered with flowers, whose faintest breath was a delight. Ten thousand birds, with all the hues of a northern rainbow blended in their glorious and glowing wings, rose from turf and tree, and loaded the air with melody and gladness; the sea, without a vestige of the past destruction upon its glassy brow, murmured at my feet; the heavens without a cloud, and bathed in a liquid and radiant light, sent their breezes as a blessing to my cheek. I rose with a refreshed and light heart; I traversed the new home I had found; I climbed upon a high mountain, and saw that I was in a small island—it had no trace of man—and my heart swelled as I gazed around and cried aloud in my exultation, 'I shall be alone again!' I descended the hill: I had not yet reached its foot, when I saw the figure of a man approaching towards me. I looked at him, and my heart misgave me. He drew nearer, and I saw that my despicable persecutor had escaped the waters, and now stood before me. He came up with his hideous grin, and his twinkling eye; and he flung his arms round me,—I would sooner have felt the slimy folds of the serpent—and said, with his grating and harsh voice, 'Ha! ha! my friend, we shall be together still!' I looked at him with a grim brow, but I said not a word. There was a great cave by the shore, and I walked down and entered it, and the man followed me. 'We shall live so happily here,' said he; 'we will never separate!' And my lip trembled, and my hand clenched of its own accord. It was now noon, and hunger came upon me; I went forth and killed a deer, and I brought it home and broiled part of it on a fire of fragrant wood; and the man eat, and crunched, and laughed, and I wished that the bones had choked him; and he said, when we had done, 'We shall have rare cheer here!' But I still held my peace. At last he stretched himself in a corner of the cave and slept. I looked at him, and saw that the slumber was heavy, and I went out and rolled a huge stone to the mouth of the cavern, and took my way to the opposite part of the island; it was my turn to laugh then! I found out another cavern; and I made a bed of moss and of leaves, and I wrought a table of wood, and I looked out from the mouth of the cavern and saw the wide seas before me, and I said, 'Now I shall be alone!'

When the next day came, I again went out and caught a kid, and brought it in, and prepared it as before, but I was not hungered, and I could not eat, so I roamed forth and wandered over the island: the sun had nearly set when I returned. I entered the cavern, and sitting on my bed and by my table was that man whom I thought I had left buried alive in the other cave. He laughed when he saw me, and laid down the bone he was gnawing.

'Ha, ha!' said he, 'you would have served me a rare trick, but there was a hole in the cave which you did not see, and I got out to seek you. It was not a difficult matter, for the island is so small; and now we *have* met, and we will part no more!'

I said to the man, 'Rise, and follow me!' So he rose, and I saw that of all my food he had left only the bones. 'Shall this thing reap and I sow?' thought I, and my heart felt to me like iron.

I ascended a tall cliff: 'Look round,' said I; 'you see that stream which divides the island; you shall dwell on one side, and I on the other; but the same spot shall not hold us, nor the same feast supply!'

'That may never be!' quoth the man; 'for I cannot catch the deer, not spring upon the mountain kid; and if you feed me not, I shall starve!'

'Are there not fruits,' said I, 'and birds that you may snare, and fishes which the sea throws up?'

'But I like them not,' quoth the man, and laughed, 'so well as the flesh of kids and deer!'

'Look, then,' said I, 'look: by that grey stone, upon the opposite side of the stream, I will lay a deer or a kid daily, so that you may have the food you covet; but if ever you cross the stream and come into my kingdom, so sure as the sea murmurs, and the bird flies, I will kill you!'

I descended the cliff, and led the man to the side of the stream. 'I cannot swim,' said he; so I took him on my shoulders and crossed the brook, and I found him out a cave, and I made him a bed and a table like my own, and left him. When I was on my own side of the stream again, I bounded with joy, and lifted up my voice; 'I shall be alone *now!*' said I.

So two days passed, and I *was* alone. On the third I went after my prey; the noon was hot, and I was wearied when I returned. I entered my cavern, and behold the man lay stretched upon my bed. 'Ha, ha!' said he, 'here I am; I was so lonely at home that I have come to live with you again!'

I frowned on the man with a dark brow, and I said, 'So sure as the sea murmurs, and the bird flies, I will kill you!' I seized him in my arms; I plucked him from my bed; I took him out into the open air, and we stood together on the smooth sand, and by the great sea. A fear came suddenly upon me; I was struck with the awe of the still Spirit which reigns over solitude. Had a thousand been round us, I would have slain him before them all. I feared now because we were alone in the desert, with silence and GOD! I relaxed my hold. 'Swear' I said, 'never to molest me again: swear to preserve unpassed the boundary of our several homes, and I will *not* kill you!' 'I cannot swear,' answered the man; 'I would sooner die than forswear the blessed human face—even though that face be my enemy's!'

At these words my rage returned; I dashed the man to the ground, and I put my foot upon his breast, and my hand upon his neck, and he struggled for a moment—and was dead! I was startled; and as I looked upon his face I thought it seemed to revive; I thought the cold blue eye fixed upon me, and the vile grin returned to the livid mouth, and the hands which in the death-pang had grasped the sand, stretched themselves out to me. So I stamped on the breast again, and I dug a hole in the shore, and I buried the body. 'And now,' said I, 'I am alone at last!' And then *the sense of loneliness*, the vague, vast, comfortless, objectless sense of desolation passed into me. And I shook—shook in every limb of my giant frame, as if I had been a child that trembles in the dark; and my hair rose, and my blood crept, and I would not have stayed in that spot a moment more if I had been made young again for it. I turned away and fled—fled round the whole island; and gnashed my teeth when I came to the sea, and longed to be cast into some illimitable desert, that I might flee on for ever. At sunset I returned to my cave—I sat myself down on one corner of the bed, and covered my face with my hands—I thought I heard a noise; I raised my eyes, and, as I live, I saw on the other end of the bed the man whom I had slain and buried. There he sat, six feet from me, and nodded to me, and looked at me with his wan eyes, and laughed. I rushed from the cave—I entered a wood—I threw myself down—there opposite to me, six feet from my face, was the face of that man again! And my courage rose, and I spoke, but he answered not. I attempted to seize him, he glided from my grasp, and was still opposite,

six feet from me as before. I flung myself on the ground, and pressed my face to the sod, and would not look up till the night came on and darkness was over the earth. I then rose and returned to the cave; I laid down on my bed, and the man lay down by me; and I frowned and tried to seize him as before, but I could not, and I closed my eyes, *and the man lay by me*. Day passed on day and it was the same. At board, at bed, at home and abroad, in my uprising and my down-sitting, by day and at night, there, by my bed-side, six feet from me, and no more, was that ghastly and dead thing. And I said, as I looked upon the beautiful land and the still heavens, and then turned to that fearful comrade, 'I shall never be alone again!' And the man laughed.

At last a ship came, and I hailed it—it took me up, and I thought, as I put my foot on the deck, 'I shall escape from my tormentor!' As I thought so, I saw him climb the deck too, and I strove to push him down into the sea, but in vain; he was by my side, *and he fed and slept with me as before!* I came home to my native land! I forced myself into crowds—I went to the feast, and I heard music—and I made thirty men sit with me, and watch by day and by night. So I had thirty-one companions, and one was more social than all the rest.

At last I said to myself, 'This is a delusion, and a cheat of the external senses, and the thing is *not*, save in my mind. I will consult those skilled in such disorders, and I will be—*alone again!*'

I summoned one celebrated in purging from the mind's eye its films and deceits—I bound him by an oath to secrecy—and I told him my tale. He was a bold man and a learned, and he promised me relief and release.

'Where is the figure now?' said he, smiling; 'I see it not.

And I answered, 'It is six feet from us!'

'I see it not,' said he again; 'and if it were real, my senses would not receive the image less palpably than yours.' And he spoke to me as schoolmen speak. I did not argue nor reply, but I ordered the servants to prepare a room, and to cover the floor with a thick layer of sand. When it was done, I had the Leech follow me into the room, and I barred the door. 'Where is the figure now?' repeated he; and I said, 'Six feet from us as before!' And the Leech smiled. 'Look on the floor,' said I, and I pointed to the spot; 'what see you?' And the Leech shuddered, and clung to me that he might not fall. 'The sand,' said he, 'was smooth when we entered, and now I see on that spot the print of human feet!'

And I laughed, and dragged my *living* companion on; 'See,' said I, 'where we move what follows us!'

The Leech gasped for breath; 'The print,' said he, 'of those human feet!'

'Can you not minister to me then?' cried I, in a sudden and fierce agony, 'and must I *never* be alone again?'

And I saw the feet of the dead thing trace one word upon the sand; and the word was—
NEVER.