

SCENE FROM FAUST

by Alexander Pushkin

translated by Alan Shaw

AT THE SEASIDE. FAUST AND MEPHISTOPHELES

FAUST

Demon, I'm bored.

MEPHISTOPHELES

What's to be done,
Faust? Man's not without limits, is he?
And to be bored, like it or not,
Is every rational being's lot:
Some are too idle, some too busy,
Have too much or too little faith;
Some find no joy, while some are dizzy
With it, enjoying themselves to death.
You yawn your lives out, till you fall
Into the grave that yawns for all.
Why shouldn't you yawn too?

FAUST

The joke
Is stale. Distraction's what I want,
So find me some.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Just be content
With reason's proof. Write in your book
This little album verse that goes:
Fastidium est quies — boredom
Is nothing but the soul's repose.
I ask you, psychologist that I am,
(Ah, there's a science!) when indeed
Were you *not* bored? Think. Was it when
You dozed to Virgil, and would need
Birch on your backside to rouse again?
Or when with roses you would feed
Those oh-so-willing girls' delights,
Whose raucous orgies you would lead
Through ardors of hung-over nights?
Or was it when you were engrossed

In lofty dreaming, and got lost
In murky depths of knowledge? Lord,
Don't you recall, you were so bored,
That like a harlequin from the fire
You finally conjured me up entire?
A petty demon, I wriggled free,
Endeavored to cheer you, let you see
Witches and spirits. And what for?
It only served to bore you more.
You yearned for fame, and now you've won it;
You wanted to fall in love — you've done it.
You've had from life what life can offer.
Have you been happy?

FAUST

Enough, you scoff.
Don't make my secret sore spot fester.
In that deep knowledge nothing lives;
I curse the false light that it gives,
And as for fame, its random lustre
Soon fades away. Senseless as dreams
Are wordly honors. There is, it seems,
But one real blessing: the mingling of
Two souls.

MEPHISTOPHELES

And the first tryst of love.
Right? Might I know — not to be rude —
To whom it is that you allude?
Not Gretchen?

FAUST

O vision of pure wonder!
O purest flame of love! There, there,
Deep in the rustling shadows, under
The leaves, by waters' sweet rush, where,
With my head resting on that tender
Breast, my weariness took flight.
There I was happy . . .

MEPHISTOPHELES

Holy thunder,
You're dreaming, Faust, in broad daylight!
And a compliant recollection
Flatters you in your self-deceit.
Was it not I whose diligent action

Laid that beauty at your feet,
Who, in the darkest midnight hour,
Brought her to you? My labors done,
I was as tickled as anyone,
And revelled alone to see their flower:
You two together. I won't forget!
While your poor beauty, rapturous, let
Her wits fall prey to her elation,
You, restless as ever, — nay, more so —
Were buried deep in cogitation
(And you and I proved long ago
That boredom has its seed in thought).
My fine philosopher, you do know
What you were thinking then, do you not,
At a time when no one thinks at all?
Shall I tell you?

FAUST

Well, then, what? Do tell.

MEPHISTOPHELES

You thought: sweet angel of devotion!
I longed for you so avidly!
How cunningly I set in motion
A pure heart's girlish fantasy!
Her love's spontaneous, self-forgetful;
She gives herself in innocence . . .
Why does my heart, in recompense
Feel its old tedium grow more hateful?
I look upon her now, poor thing,
A victim of my whim's compulsion,
With insurmountable revulsion.
So does a fool, unreckoning,
But bent on doing something evil,
For a trifle slit some beggar's throat,
Then curses the poor ragged devil.
So on the beauty he has bought
The rake, enjoying her in haste,
Now looks timidly shame-faced.
So, adding it all up, you might
See one conclusion to be drawn . . .

FAUST

You hellish creature, away, begone!
Don't let me catch you in my sight!

MEPHISTOPHELES

Please. Give me some little task:
You know I cannot part from you
Unless I'm given work to do —
Not to be idle is all I ask.

FAUST

What's that white spot on the water?

MEPHISTOPHELES

A Spanish three-master, clearing the sound,
Fully laden, Holland-bound;
Three hundred sordid souls aboard her,
Two monkeys, chests of gold, a lot
Of fine expensive chocolate,
And a fashionable malady
Bestowed on your kind recently.

FAUST

Sink it.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Right away.