

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

3 *The Bleeding Nun*

I am not at liberty to publish the name of the author of this Ballad: it is founded on the fourth chapter of the Romance of "Ambrosio, or the Monk."

Where yon proud turrets crown the rock,
Seest thou a warrior stand?
He sighs to hear the castle clock
Say midnight is at hand.

It strikes, and now his lady fair 5
Comes tripping from her hall,
Her heart is rent by deep despair,
And tears in torrents fall.

— "Ah! woe is me," my love, she cried,
"What anguish wrings my heart: 10
"Ah! woe is me," she said, and sigh'd,
"We must for ever part.

"Know, ere three days are past and flown,
"(Tears choak the piteous tale!)
"A parents vow, till now unknown, 15
"Devotes me to the veil." —

— "Not so, my Agnes!" Raymond cried,
"For leave thee will I never;
"Thou art mine, and I am thine,
"Body and soul for ever! 20

"Then quit thy cruel father's bower,
"And fly, my love, with me." —
— "Ah! how can I escape his power,
"Or who can set me free.

“I cannot leap yon wall so high, 25
“Nor swim the fosse with thee;
“I can but wring my hands, and sigh
“That none can set me free.” —

— “Now list, my lady, list, my love,
“I pray thee list to me, 30
“For I can all your fears remove,
“And I can set you free.

“Oft have you heard old Ellinore,
“Your nurse, with horror tell,
“How, robed in white, and stain’d with gore, 35
“Appears a spectre fell,

“And each fifth year, at dead of night,
“Stalks through the castle gate,
“Which, by an ancient solemn rite,
“For her must open wait. 40

“Soon as to some far distant land,
“Retires to-morrow’s sun,
“With torch and dagger in her hand,
“Appears the Bleeding Nun.

“Now you shall play the bleeding Nun, 45
“Array’d in robes so white,
“And at the solemn hour of one,
“Stalk forth to meet your knight.

“Our steeds shall bear us far away,
“Beyond your father’s power, 50
“And Agnes, long ere break of day,
“Shall rest in Raymond’s bower.” —

— “My heart consents, it must be done,

— “Father, ’tis your decree, —
“And I will play the Bleeding Nun, 55
“And fly, my love, with thee.

“For I am thine,” fair Agnes cried,
“And leave thee will I never;
“I am thine, and thou art mine,
“Body and soul for ever!” — 60

Fair Agnes sat within her bower,
Array’d in robes so white,
And waited the long wish’d-for hour,
When she should meet her knight.

And Raymond, as the clock struck one, 65
Before the castle stood;
And soon came forth his lovely Nun,
Her white robes stain’d in blood.

He bore her in his arms away,
And placed her on her steed; 70
And to the maid he thus did say,
As on they rode with speed:

— “Oh Agnes! Agnes! thou art mine,
“And leave thee will I never;
“Thou art mine, and I am thine, 75
“Body and soul for ever!” —

— “Oh Raymond! Raymond, I am thine,
“And leave thee will I never;
“I am thine, and thou art mine,
“Body and soul for ever!” — 80

At length, — “We’re safe!” — the warrior cried;
“Sweet love abate thy speed;” —
But madly still she onwards hied

Nor seem'd his call to heed.

Through wood and wild, they speed their way, 85
Then sweep along the plain,
And almost at the break of day,
The Danube's banks they gain.

— “Now stop ye, Raymond, stop ye here,
“And view the farther side; 90
“Dismount, and say Sir Knight, do'st fear,
“With me to stem the tide.” —

Now on the utmost brink they stand,
And gaze upon the flood,
She seized Don Raymond by the hand, 95
Her grasp it froze his blood.

A whirling blast from off the stream
Threw back the maiden's veil;
Don Raymond gave a hideous scream,
And felt his spirits fail. 100

Then down his limbs, in strange affright,
Cold dews to pour begun;
No Agnes met his shudd'ring sight,
— “God! 'Tis the Bleeding Nun!” —

A form of more than mortal size, 105
All ghastly, pale, and dead,
Fix'd on the Knight her livid eyes,
And thus the Spectre said.

— “Oh Raymond! Raymond! I am thine,
“And leave thee will I never; 110
“I am thine, and thou art mine,
“Body and soul for ever!” —

Don Raymond shrieks, he faints; the blood
Ran cold in every vein,
He sank into the roaring flood, 115
And never rose again!

1801

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