

# ***Tamerlane***

**Edgar Allan Poe**

1827

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I have sent for thee, holy friar;  
But 'twas not with the drunken hope,  
Which is but agony of desire  
To shun the fate, with which to cope  
Is more than crime may dare to dream,  
That I have call'd thee at this hour:  
Such, father, is not my theme -  
Nor am I mad, to deem that power  
Of earth may shrive me of the sin  
Unearthly pride hath revelled in -  
I would not call thee fool, old man.  
But hope is not a gift of thine;  
If I can hope (O God! I can)  
It falls from an eternal shrine.

## II

The gay wall of this gaudy tower  
Grows dim around me - death is near.  
I had not thought, until this hour  
When passing from the earth, that ear  
Of any, were it not the shade  
Of one whom in life I made  
All mystery but a simple name,  
Might know the secret of a spirit  
Bow'd down in sorrow, and in shame. -  
Shame, said'st thou?

Ay, I did inherit  
That hated portion, with the fame,  
The worldly glory, which has shown  
A demon-light around my throne,  
Scorching my sear'd heart with a pain  
Not Hell shall make me fear again.

### III

I have not always been as now -  
The fever'd diadem on my brow  
I claim'd and won usurpingly -  
Ay - the same heritage hath given  
Rome to the Cæsar - this to me;  
The heirdom of a kingly mind -  
And a proud spirit, which hath striven  
Triumphantly with human kind.

In mountain air I first drew life;  
The mists of the Taglay have shed  
Nightly their dewes on my young head;  
And my brain drank their venom then,  
When after day of perilous strife  
With chamois, I would seize his den  
And slumber, in my pride of power,  
The infant monarch of the hour -  
For, with the mountain dew by night,  
My soul imbibed unhallow'd feeling;  
And I would feel its essence stealing  
In dreams upon me - while the light  
Flashing from cloud that hover'd o'er,  
Would seem to my half closing eye  
The pageantry of monarchy!  
And the deep thunder's echoing roar  
Came hurriedly upon me, telling  
Of war, and tumult, where my voice,  
My own voice, silly child! was swelling  
(O how would my wild heart rejoice  
And leap within me at the cry)  
The battle cry of victory!

## IV

The rain came down upon my head  
But barely shelter'd - and the wind  
Pass'd quickly o'er me - but my mind  
Was maddening - for 'twas man that shed  
Laurels upon me - and the rush,  
The torrent of the chilly air  
Gurgled in my pleased ear the crush  
Of empires, with the captive's prayer,  
The hum of suitors, the mix'd tone  
Of flattery round a sovereign's throne.

The storm had ceased - and I awoke -  
Its spirit cradled me to sleep,  
And as it pass'd me by, there broke  
Strange light upon me, tho' it were  
My soul in mystery to steep:  
For I was not as I had been;  
The child of Nature, without care,  
Or thought, save of the passing scene. -

## V

My passions, from that hapless hour,  
Usurp'd a tyranny, which men  
Have deem'd, since I have reach'd to power,  
My innate nature - be it so:  
But, father, there lived one who, then -  
Then, in my boyhood, when their fire  
Burn'd with a still intenser glow;  
(For passion must with youth expire)  
Even then, who deem'd this iron heart  
In woman's weakness had a part.

I have no words, alas! to tell  
The loveliness of loving well!  
Nor would I dare attempt to trace  
The breathing beauty of a face,  
Which even to my impassion'd mind,  
Leaves not its memory behind.  
In spring of life have ye ne'er dwelt  
Some object of delight upon,  
With steadfast eye, till ye have felt  
The earth reel - and the vision gone?  
And I have held to memory's eye  
One object - and but one - until  
Its very form hath pass'd me by,  
But left its influence with me still.

## VI

'Tis not to thee that I should name -  
Thou canst not - wouldst not dare to think  
The magic empire of a flame  
Which even upon this perilous brink  
Hath fix'd my soul, tho' unforgiven,  
By what it lost for passion - Heaven.  
I loved - and O, how tenderly!  
Yes! she was worthy of all love!  
Such as in infancy was mine,  
Tho' then its passion could not be:  
'Twas such as angel minds above  
Might envy - her young heart the shrine  
On which my every hope and thought  
Were incense - then a goodly gift -  
For they were childish, without sin,  
Pure as her young example taught;  
Why did I leave it and adrift,  
Trust to the fickle star within?

## VII

We grew in age and love together,  
Roaming the forest and the wild;  
My breast her shield in wintry weather,  
And when the friendly sunshine smiled  
And she would mark the opening skies,  
I saw no Heaven but in her eyes -  
Even childhood knows the human heart;  
For when, in sunshine and in smiles,  
From all our little cares apart,  
Laughing at her half silly wiles,  
I'd throw me on her throbbing breast,  
And pour my spirit out in tears,  
She'd look up in my wilder'd eye -  
There was no need to speak the rest -  
No need to quiet her kind fears -  
She did not ask the reason why.

The hallow'd memory of those years  
Comes o'er me in these lonely hours,  
And, with sweet loveliness, appears  
As perfume of strange summer flowers;  
Of flowers which we have known before  
In infancy, which seen, recall  
To mind - not flowers alone - but more,  
Our earthly life, and love - and all.



## VIII

Yes! she was worthy of all love!  
Even such as from the accursed time  
My spirit with the tempest strove,  
When on the mountain peak alone,  
Ambition lent it a new tone,  
And bade it first to dream of crime,  
My frenzy to her bosom taught:  
We still were young: no purer thought  
Dwelt in a seraph's breast than thine;  
For passionate love is still divine:  
I loved her as an angel might  
With ray of the all living light  
Which blazes upon Edis' shrine.  
It is not surely sin to name,  
With such as mine - that mystic flame,  
I had no being but in thee!  
The world with all its train of bright  
And happy beauty (for to me  
All was an undefined delight),  
The world - its joy - its share of pain  
Which I felt not - its bodied forms  
Of varied being, which contain  
The bodiless spirits of the storms,  
The sunshine, and the calm - the ideal  
And fleeting vanities of dreams,  
Fearfully beautiful! the real  
Nothings of mid-day waking life -  
Of an enchanted life, which seems,  
Now as I look back, the strife  
Of some ill demon, with a power  
Which left me in an evil hour,  
All that I felt, or saw, or thought,  
Crowding, confused became  
(With thine unearthly beauty fraught)  
Thou - and the nothing of a name.

## IX

The passionate spirit which hath known,  
And deeply felt the silent tone  
Of its own self supremacy, -  
(I speak thus openly to thee,  
'Twere folly now to veil a thought  
With which this aching breast is fraught)  
The soul which feels its innate right -  
The mystic empire and high power  
Given by the energetic might  
Of Genius, at its natal hour;  
Which knows (believe me at this time,  
When falsehood were a tenfold crime,  
There is a power in the high spirit  
To know the fate it will inherit)  
The soul, which knows such power, will still  
Find Pride the ruler of its will.

Yes! I was proud - and ye who know  
The magic of that meaning word,  
So oft perverted, will bestow  
Your scorn, perhaps, when ye have heard  
That the proud spirit had been broken,  
The proud heart burst in agony  
At one upbraiding word or token  
Of her that heart's idolatry -  
I was ambitious - have ye known  
Its fiery passion? - ye have not -  
A cottager, I mark'd a throne  
Of half the world, as all my own,  
And murmur'd at such lowly lot!  
But it had pass'd me as a dream  
Which, of light step, flies with the dew,  
That kindling thought - did not the beam  
Of Beauty, which did guide it through  
The livelong summer day, oppress  
My mind with double loveliness -

## X

We walk'd together on the crown  
Of a high mountain, which look'd down  
Afar from its proud natural towers  
Of rock and forest, on the hills -  
The dwindled hills, whence amid bowers  
Her own fair hand had rear'd around,  
Gush'd shoutingly a thousand rills,  
Which as it were, in fairy bound  
Embraced two hamlets - those our own -  
Peacefully happy - yet alone -

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I spoke to her of power and pride -  
But mystically, in such guise,  
That she might deem it nought beside  
The moment's converse; in her eyes  
I read (perhaps too carelessly)  
A mingled feeling with my own;  
The flush on her bright cheek, to me,  
Seem'd to become a queenly throne  
Too well, that I should let it be  
A light in the dark wild, alone.

## XI

There - in that hour - a thought came o'er  
My mind, it had not known before -  
To leave her while we both were young, -  
To follow my high fate among  
The strife of nations, and redeem  
The idle words, which, as a dream  
Now sounded to her heedless ear -  
I held no doubt - I knew no fear  
Of peril in my wild career;  
To gain an empire, and throw down  
As nuptial dowry - a queen's crown,  
The only feeling which possest,  
With her own image, my fond breast -  
Who, that had known the secret thought  
Of a young peasant's bosom then,  
Had deem'd him, in compassion, aught  
But one, whom fantasy had led  
Astray from reason - Among men  
Ambition is chain'd down - nor fed  
(As in the desert, where the grand,  
The wild, the beautiful, conspire  
With their own breath to fan its fire)  
With thoughts such feeling can command;  
Uncheck'd by sarcasm, and scorn  
Of those, who hardly will conceive  
That any should become "great," born  
In their own sphere - will not believe  
That they shall stoop in life to one  
Whom daily they are wont to see  
Familiarly - whom Fortune's sun  
Hath ne'er shone dazzlingly upon,  
Lowly - and of their own degree -

## XII

I pictured to my fancy's eye  
Her silent, deep astonishment,  
When, a few fleeting years gone by,  
(For short the time my high hope lent  
To its most desperate intent,)  
She might recall in him, whom Fame  
Had gilded with a conqueror's name,  
(With glory - such as might inspire  
Perforce, a passing thought of one,  
Whom she had deemed in his own fire  
Withered and blasted; who had gone  
A traitor, violate of the truth  
So plighted in his early youth,)  
Her own Alexis, who should plight  
The love he plighted then - again.  
And raise his infancy's delight.  
The bride and queen of Tamerlane. -

### XIII

One noon of a bright summer's day  
I pass'd from out the matted bower  
Where in a deep, still slumber lay  
My Ada. In that peaceful hour,  
A silent gaze was my farewell.  
I had no other solace - then  
To awake her, and a falsehood tell  
Of a feign'd journey, were again  
To trust the weakness of my heart  
To her soft thrilling voice: To part  
Thus, haply, while in sleep she dream'd  
Of long delight, nor yet had deem'd  
Awake, that I had held a thought  
Of parting, were with madness fraught;  
I knew not woman's heart, alas!  
Tho' loved, and loving - let it pass. -

## XIV

I went from out the matted bower,  
And hurried madly on my way:  
And felt, with every flying hour,  
That bore me from my home, more gay;  
There is of earth an agony  
Which, ideal, still may be  
The worst ill of mortality.  
'Tis bliss, in its own reality,  
Too real, to his breast who lives  
Not within himself but gives  
A portion of his willing soul  
To God, and to the great whole -  
To him, whose loving spirit will dwell  
With Nature, in her wild paths; tell  
Of her wondrous ways, and telling bless  
Her overpowering loveliness!  
A more than agony to him  
Whose failing sight will grow dim  
With its own living gaze upon  
That loveliness around: the sun -  
The blue sky - the misty light  
Of the pale cloud therein, whose hue  
Is grace to its heavenly bed of blue;  
Dim! tho' looking on all bright!  
O God! when the thoughts that may not pass  
Will burst upon him, and alas!  
For the flight on Earth to Fancy given,  
There are no words - unless of Heaven.

## XV

Look round thee now on Samarcand,  
Is she not queen of earth? her pride  
Above all cities? in her hand  
Their destinies? with all beside  
Of glory, which the world hath known?  
Stands she not proudly and alone?  
And who her sovereign? Timur, he  
Whom the astonish'd earth hath seen,  
With victory, on victory,  
Redoubling age! and more, I ween,  
The Zinghis' yet re-echoing fame.  
And now what has he? what! a name.  
The sound of revelry by night  
Comes o'er me, with the mingled voice  
Of many with a breast as light,  
As if 'twere not the dying hour  
Of one, in whom they did rejoice -  
As in a leader, haply - Power  
Its venom secretly imparts;  
Nothing have I with human hearts.



## XVI

When Fortune mark'd me for her own,  
And my proud hopes had reach'd a throne  
(It boots me not, good friar, to tell  
A tale the world but knows too well,  
How by what hidden deeds of might,  
I clamber'd to the tottering height,)  
I still was young; and well I ween  
My spirit what it e'er had been.  
My eyes were still on pomp and power,  
My wilder'd heart was far away  
In valleys of the wild Taglay,  
In mine own Ada's matted bower.  
I dwelt not long in Samarcand  
Ere, in a peasant's lowly guise,  
I sought my long-abandon'd land;  
By sunset did its mountains rise  
In dusky grandeur to my eyes:  
But as I wander'd on the way  
My heart sunk with the sun's ray.  
To him, who still would gaze upon  
The glory of the summer sun,  
There comes, when that sun will from him part,  
A sullen hopelessness of heart.  
That soul will hate the evening mist  
So often lovely, and will list  
To the sound of the coming darkness (known  
To those whose spirits hearken) as one  
Who in a dream of night would fly,  
But cannot, from a danger nigh.  
What though the moon - the silvery moon -  
Shine on his path, in her high noon;  
Her smile is chilly, and her beam  
In that time of dreariness will seem  
As the portrait of one after death;  
A likeness taken when the breath  
Of young life, and the fire o' the eye,  
Had lately been, but had pass'd by.  
'Tis thus when the lovely summer sun  
Of our boyhood, his course hath run:  
For all we live to know - is known;  
And all we seek to keep - hath flown;  
With the noon-day beauty, which is all.  
Let life, then, as the day-flower, fall -

The transient, passionate day-flower,  
Withering at the evening hour.

## XVII

I reach'd my home - my home no more -  
For all was flown that made it so -  
I pass'd from out its mossy door,  
In vacant idleness of woe.  
There met me on its threshold stone  
A mountain hunter, I had known  
In childhood, but he knew me not.  
Something he spoke of the old cot:  
It had seen better days, he said;  
There rose a fountain once, and there  
Full many a fair flower raised its head:  
But she who rear'd them was long dead,  
And in such follies had no part,  
What was there left me now? despair -  
A kingdom for a broken - heart.

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