

THE MOON

By Jean Paul Friedrich Richter

When, Oh Eugenius and Rosamond,--you, whom I may no longer designate by your right names,--I was first about to tell your short history, my friends and I walked into an English garden.[1] We went by a new-painted coffin, on the foot-board of which was written: "I pass away." Above the verdant garden rose a white obelisk, with which two sister-princesses had marked the spot where they now met and embraced, and the inscription on which was: "Here we have found each other again." The point of the obelisk was glittering in the full moon, and here I told my simple story. But do thou, gentle reader, draw--which is as much as coffin and obelisk--draw, I say, the inscription on the coffin into the ashes of oblivion, and write the letters of the obelisk with pure human heart's blood in thy inmost self.

Many souls drop from heaven like flowers; but, with their white buds, they are trodden down into the mud, and lie soiled and crushed in the print of a hoof. You also were crushed, Eugenius and Rosamond. Tender souls like yours are attacked by three robbers of their joys--the mob, whose rough gripe gives to such soft hearts nothing but scars; destiny, which does not wipe away the tear from a fair soul full of brilliancy, but the lustre should perish also, as we do not wipe a wet diamond, lest it should grow dim; your own hearts which rejoice too much, and enjoy too little, have too much hope, and too little power of endurance. Rosamond was a bright pearl, pierced by anguish--parted from all that belonged to her, she only quivered in her sorrows like a detached twig of the sensitive plant at the approach of night--her life was a quiet warm rain and that of her husband was a bright lost sunshine. In his presence she averted her eyes, when they had just been fixed on her sick child, that was only two years old, and was in this life a wavering thin-winged butterfly, beneath a pelting shower. The imagination of Eugenius, with its too large wings shattered his slight, delicate frame; the lily bell of his tender body could not contain

his mighty soul; the place whence sighs originate, his breast, was destroyed like his happiness. He had nothing left in the world but his affectionate heart, and for that heart there were but two human beings.

These persons wished, in the spring-time, to quit the whirlpool of mankind, which beat so hardly and so coldly against their hearts. They had a quiet cottage prepared for them on one of the high Alps opposite to the silver chain of the Staubbach. On the first fine spring morning they went the long road to the high mountain. There is a holiness which sorrow alone can give in its purity; the stream of life becomes white as snow when it is dashed against rocks. There is an elevation where little thoughts no more intrude between sublime ones, as when upon a mountain one sees the summits close to each other without their connection in the depth below. Thou hadst that holiness, Rosamond, and thou that elevation, Eugenius.

A morning mist was gathered round the foot of the mountain, and in that three fluttering forms were suspended. These were the reflections of the three travellers, and the timid Rosamond started, thinking she saw herself. Eugenius thought, "That which the immortal spirit hath around it is, after all, but a denser mist." And the child snatched at the cloud, and wished to play with its little misty brother. One single invisible angel of the future accompanied them through life and up this mountain. They were so good and like each other that one angel was all they needed.

As they ascended the angel opened the book of fate, one leaf of which contained the sketch of a three-fold life--every line was a day--and when the angel had read the line that belonged to this day, he wept and closed the book for ever.

The travellers, in their delicate condition, required nearly a day to arrive at the desired spot. The earth crept back into the valleys, the sky rested itself on the mountains. The waving, glimmering sun seemed to our Eugenius a mirror of the moon, and he said to his beloved, when

the icy summits had already cast their flames upon the earth: "I feel so weary, and yet so well. Will it not be as if we left two dreams--the dream of life and the dream of death--if we enter the cloudless moon as the first shore beyond the hurricanes of life?"

"It will be still better," replied Rosamond, "for in the moon, as thou hast taught me, dwell the little children of this earth, and their parents remain with them till they themselves become as mild and tranquil as children." Then they proceed further.

"Ay, from heaven to heaven--from world to world!" said Eugenius, ecstatically.

They ascended as the sun declined; when they climbed more slowly, the mountain summits like rising, loosened branches, concealed them from the luminary. They hastened on into the evening glimmer, which was already advancing, but when they had reached the mountain where their cottage stood, the eternal mountains stepped before the sun;--the earth then veiled her graces and her cities, adoring heaven, before it looked upon her with all its star-eyes, while the waterfalls laid aside their rainbows,--and the earth spread higher for heaven, which was bending over her with out-stretched cloud-arms, a gauze of golden exhalations, and hung it from one mountain to another, and the icebergs were set on fire, so that they glared even to midnight, while opposite to them on the grave of the sun was raised a towering funeral pile of clouds, forming the evening glow and the evening ashes. But through the glimmering veil kind heaven let its evening tears fall deep into the earth, even upon the humblest grass and the smallest flower.

Oh, Eugenius, how great then did thy soul become! The life of earth lay at a distance and far below thee, free from all the distortions which we see in it, because we stand too near it, as the decorations of shorter scenes change from landscapes to mis-shapen strokes when we look at them closely.

The two living ones embraced each other with a long and gentle embrace, as they stood before the cottage, and Eugenius said: "Oh, thou quiet, eternal heaven, take nothing more from us!" But his pale child with its snapped lily-head was before him; he looked at the mother, and she lay with her moistened eye reaching into heaven, and said softly: "O take us all at once!"

The angel of futurity, whom I will call the angel of rest, wept as he smiled, and his wings swept away the sighs of the parents with an evening breeze, that they might not sadden each other.

The transparent evening flowed round the red mountain like a bright lake, and washed it with the circles of cool evening waves. The more the evening and earth grew, still the more did the two souls feel that they were in the right place. They had no tears too many, none too few, and their bliss needed no other increase than its repetition. Eugenius sent the first harmonious tones floating like swans through the pure Alpine sky. The weary child, twined in a flowery wreath, leaned against a sun-dial, and played with the flowers which it drew around it, to entwine them in its circle. The mother at last awoke from her harmonious transport; her eye fell on the large eyes of her child, which opened wide upon her; singing and smiling, and, with overflowing motherly love, she stepped to the little angel, which was cold and dead. For its life, which had descended from heaven, had, like other tones, been dissipated in the atmosphere of earth; death had breathed upon the butterfly, and it had ascended from the rushing streams of air to the ever-refining ether; from the flowers of earth to the flowers of paradise.

Oh, ever flutter away, ye blessed children! The angel of rest wakes you in the morning-hour of life with cradle songs, two arms bear you and your little coffin, and your body, with the two red cheeks, the forehead free from the print of grief, and the white hands, glide down by a chain of flowers to the second cradle, and you have only exchanged one paradise for another. But we--oh, we are crushed by

the storm-winds of life; our heart is weary, our face is deeply marked with earthly care, and our soul stiffened, still clings to the earthy clod.

Turn away thine eye from Rosamond's piercing shriek, fixed glance, and petrifying features, if thou art a mother, and hast already felt this pain! look not upon the mother, who, with senseless hand, squeezes against her the corpse which she now cannot stifle; but look at the father, who, with his breast, silently covers his struggling heart, although black grief has twined around it with an adder's folds, and poisoned it with an adder's teeth. Ah, when he at last had conquered the pain, his heart was envenomed and riven. A man bears the pain of the wound, but sinks under the scar: a woman seldom combats her grief, but yet she survives it. "Remain here," he said, with a suppressed voice, "I will lay it to rest before the moon rises." She said nothing, kissed the child in silence, broke up its wreath of flowers, sunk down upon the sun-dial, and laid her cold face upon her arm, that she might not see it carried away.

On the way the dawning light of the moon shone upon the shaking body of the infant, and the father said: "Burst forth, oh moon! that I may see the land wherein He dwells. Rise, oh Elysium! that I may think the soul of the corse is within thee. Oh child, child, dost thou know me--dost thou hear me? Hast thou above so fair a face as this one, so sweet a mouth? Oh thou heavenly mouth, thou heavenly eye, no more spirit visits thee!" He laid the child beneath flowers which supplied the place of all that we are generally laid upon for the last time; but his heart was breaking when he covered the pale lips, the open eyes, with flowers and earth, and streams of tears fell first into the grave. When with the verdant coating of the clods he had built a little mound, he felt that he was weary of his journey and of life; that his weakly chest could not endure the thin mountain air, and that the ice of death had settled in his heart. He cast a longing glance at the bereaved mother, who had long stood trembling behind him, and they fell silent into each other's arms, and their eyes could scarcely weep more.

At last, from behind a glacier that was glimmering out, the glorious moon flowed forth in loveliness on the two silent unhappy ones, and showed them its white peaceful meadows, and the gentle light with which it softens man. "Mother, look up," said Eugenius; "yonder is thy son! See there, the white flowery groves, in which our child will play, are passing over the moon." Now a burning fire filled his inmost self with consuming power,--the moon made his eye blind to all that was not light; sublime forms rolled before him in the light stream, and he heard in his soul, new thoughts which are not indigenous in man, and are too great for memory; just as in a dream small melodies may come to the man who can make none when awake. Death and pleasure press upon his heavy tongue. "Rosamond, why sayest thou nothing? Dost thou see thy child? I look beyond the long earth, even to where the moon begins. There is my son flying between angels. Full flowers cradle him,--the spring of earth waves over him--children lead him--angels instruct him--God loves him. Oh! thou dear one, thou art smiling; the silver light of paradise flows with heavenly radiance about thy little mouth, and thou hearest me, and callest thy parents. Rosamond, give me thy hand; we will go and die!"

The slight corporeal chains grew longer. His advancing spirit fluttered higher on the borders of life. With convulsive power he seized the paralysed Rosamond, and blind and sinking, stammered forth, "Rosamond, where art thou? I fly! I die! We remain together!"

His heart burst,--his spirit fled; but Rosamond did not remain with him, for fate snatched her from his dying hand, and cast her back upon earth, living. She felt if his hand had the coldness of death, and since it had, she placed it softly against her heart, sunk slowly upon her failing knees, and raised her face, which had become inexpressibly serene, towards the starry power. Her eyes, from their tearless sockets, pressed forth dry, large, and happy, into the sky, and therein calmly sought a supernatural form, which should descend and bear her up. She almost fancied she was dying then, and prayed thus: "Come, thou

angel of rest, come and take my heart, and bear it to my beloved. Angel of rest! leave me not so long alone among the corpses. Oh, God! is there then nought invisible about me? Angel of death! thou must be here, thou hast already snatched away two souls close by me, and hast made them ascend. I, too, am dead, draw forth my glowing soul from its cold kneeling corse."

With mad disquiet, she looked about in the vacant sky. Suddenly, in that still desert, a star shone forth, and wound its way towards the earth. She spread her arms in transport, and thought the angel of rest was rushing towards her. Alas! the star passed away, but she did not. "Not yet? Do I not die yet, All-merciful One?" sighed poor Rosamond.

In the east a cloud arose,--it passed over the moon, sailed in loneliness across the clear sky, and stood over the most agonised heart upon earth. She threw back her head, so as to face the cloud, and said to the lightning, "Strike this head, and release my heart!" But the cloud passed darkly over the head that was thrown back for it, and flying down the sky, sunk behind the mountains. Then, with a thousand tears, she cried, "Can I not die? Can I not die?"

Poor Rosamond! How did pain roll itself together, give an angry serpent-spring at thy heart, and fix in it all its poisonous teeth. But a weeping spirit poured the opium of insensibility into thine heart, and the bursts of agony flowed away in a soft convulsion.

She awoke in the morning, but her mind was unsettled. She saw the sun and the dead man, but her eye had lost all tears, and her burst heart had, like a broken bell, lost all tone; she merely murmured, "Why can I not die?" She went back cold into her hut, and said nothing but these words. Every night she went half an hour later to the corpse, and every time she met the rising moon, which was now broken, and said, while she turned her mourning, tearless eye towards its gleaming meadows, "Why cannot I die?"

Ay, why canst thou not, good soul? for the cold earth would have sucked out of all thy wounds the last venom with which the human heart is laid beneath its surface, just as the hand when buried in earth recovers from the sting of a bee. But I turn mine eye away from thy pain, and look up at the glimmering moon, where Eugenius opens his eyes among smiling children, and his own child, now with wings, falls upon his heart. How quiet is every thing in the dimly lit portico of the second world, a misty rain of light silvers o'er the bright fields of the first heaven, and beads of light instead of sparkling dew hang upon flowers and summits,--the blue of heaven is darker over the lily plains, all the melodies in the thinner air are but a dispersed echo,--only night-flowers exhale their scents, and dazzle waving around calmer glances--here the waving plains rock as in a cradle the crushed souls, and the lofty billows of life fall gliding apart--then the heart sleeps, the eye becomes dry, the wish becomes silent. Children flutter like the hum of bees around the heart which is sunk in earth, and is still palpitating, and the dream after death represents the earthly life, as a dream here represents childhood here, magically, soothingly, softly, and free from care.

Eugenius looked from the moon towards the earth, which for a long moon-day--equal to two earth-weeks--floated like a thin white cloud across the blue sky; but he did not recognise his old motherland. At last the sun set to the moon, and our earth rested, large, glimmering, and immoveable, on the pure horizon of Elysium, scattering, like a water-wheel upon a meadow, the flowing beams upon the waving Elysian garden. He then recognised the earth, upon which he had left a heart so troubled, in a breast so beloved; and his soul, which reposed in pleasure, became full of melancholy, and of an infinite longing after the beloved of his former life, who was suffering below. "Oh, my Rosamond! why dost thou not leave a sphere, where nothing more loves thee?" And he cast a supplicating look at the angel of rest, and said: "Beloved one, take me down from the land of quiet, and lead me

to the faithful soul, that I may see her, and again feel pain, so that she may not pine alone."

Then his heart began suddenly, as it were, to float without any bounds; breezes fluttered around him, as though they raised him flying, wafted him away as they swelled, and veiled him in floods; he sank through the red evening twilights as through roses, and through the night as through bowers, and through a damp atmosphere which filled his eye with drops. Then it seemed as though old dreams of childhood had returned--then there arose a complaint from the distance, which re-opened all his closed wounds; the complaint, as it drew nearer, became Rosamond's voice--at last she herself was before him, unrecognisable, alone, without solace, without a tear, without colour.

And Rosamond dreamed upon the earth, and it was to her as though the sun took wings, and became an angel. This angel, she dreamed, drew down towards her the moon, which became a gentle face. Beneath this face, as it approached her, a heart at last formed itself. It was Eugenius, and his beloved arose to meet him. But as she exclaimed, with transport, "Now I am dead!" the two dreams, both hers and his, vanished, and the two were again severed.

Eugenius waked above, the glimmering earth still stood in the sky, his heart was oppressed, and his eye beamed with a tear which had not fallen on the moon. Rosamond waked below, and a large warm dew-drop hung in one of the flowers of her bosom. Then did the last mist of her soul shower down in a light rain of tears, her soul became light and sun-clear, and her eye hung gently on the dawning sky; the earth was indeed strange to her, but no longer hateful; and her hands moved as though they were leading those who had died.

The angel of rest looked upon the moon, and looked upon the earth, and he was softened by the sighs from both. On the morning-earth he perceived an eclipse of the sun, and a bereft one; he saw Rosamond

during this transient night sink upon the flowers that slept in the darkness, and into the cold evening-dew which fell upon the morning-dew, and stretching forth her hands towards the shaded heaven, which was full of night-birds, look up towards the moon with inexpressible longing, as it floated trembling in the sun. The angel looked upon the moon, and near him wept the departed one, who saw the earth swimming deep below,--a flood of shade, fitted into a ring of fire, and from whom the mourning form that dwelt upon it, took all the happiness of heaven. Then was the heavenly heart of the angel of peace broken--he seized the hand of Eugenius and that of his child--drew both through the second world, and bore them down to the dark earth. Rosamond saw three forms wandering through the obscurity, the gleam from whom reached the starry heaven, and went along hovering over them. Her beloved and her child flew like spring-days to her heart, and said, "Oh, thou dear one, come with us!" Her maternal heart broke with maternal love, the circulation of earth-blood was stopped, her life was ended; and happily, happily, did she stammer forth to the two beloved hearts, "Can I not then die?" "Thou hast died already," said the angel of the three fond ones, weeping with joy, "Yonder thou seest the sphere of earth, whence thou comest, still in shade." And the waves of joy closed on high over the blessed world, and all the happy and all children looked upon our sphere which still trembled in the shade.

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Yea, indeed, is it in shade! But man is higher than his place. He looks up and spreads the wings of his soul, and when the sixty minutes, which we call sixty years, have finished striking, he then lifts himself up, and kindles himself as he rises, and the ashes of his plumage fall back, and the unveiled soul rises alone, free from earth, and pure as a musical tone. But here, in the midst of dark life, he sees the mountains of the future world standing in the morning gold of a sun that does not arise here. Thus, the inhabitant of the North Pole in the long night, when the sun has ceased to rise, discerns at twelve o'clock, a dawn

gilding the highest mountains, and he thinks of his long summer,
when it will set no more.

J. O.

[1] Or, perhaps, "angelic garden," meaning a church-yard. The reading
given above is most probably correct.