



Terrifying Tales

The Devil's Bargain

Retold By Nicola Baxter



In Weimar, Germany, a boy named Johann Faustus grew up in a decent, God-fearing household. He was clever and avidly studied whatever was put before him.



Before long, theology, medicine and mathematics were not enough. He delved into sorcery, prophecy and astrology. Soon, Faustus' pride filled him with ambition and a desire for power. He was determined to challenge the Devil himself.



One night, Dr Faustus, as he now was, journeyed secretly to a forest near Wittenberg, where, drawing circles on the ground, he summoned the Devil.



A great storm blew up. Mighty winds whipped the branches and lightning flashed through the sky.



In the midst of the whirling wind, the Devil appeared, apparently furious at being called by a mere mortal.



The storm subsided, and so did the Devil's rage. He asked with chilling quietness what Dr Faustus desired. "I am willing to make a bargain with you," said the scholar. There was no limit to his outrageous pride.



“It has three parts. First, you will serve me as long as I live. Second, you will tell me whatever I wish to know, third, you must never lie to me.”



“This bargain is a little one-sided,” hissed the DEVIL. “I too have three conditions. First, after twenty-four years, you will surrender your body and soul to me. Second, you will sign a written version of our agreement in your own blood. Third, you will renounce your Christian faith.”



Dr Faustus agreed. Who knows if he hesitated as he took this fearful step, and dipping a pen into his own blood by the light of the moon, sealed his fare.



It was very different life that Faustus enjoyed thereafter. He could have anything he liked. His life was filled with comfort and luxury. The most exquisite foods, the most delicious wines, the most beautiful women graced his table and his bed. Yet nothing was ever enough.



Faustus gained fame, too, as the most renowned astrologer of his day. His predictions always came true, for the Devil showed him whatever he wished to know.



Nor was he bound by the earth itself. With his satanic master, he went from the depths of hell to the farthest reaches of space. The universe itself was his playground.



But at the back of Faustus' mind, a small, insistent voice began to speak. It reminded him that time was passing, and as the years went by, the voice became louder and louder. Twenty-four years seem forever to a young man. To one in his middle years, it is no longer so.

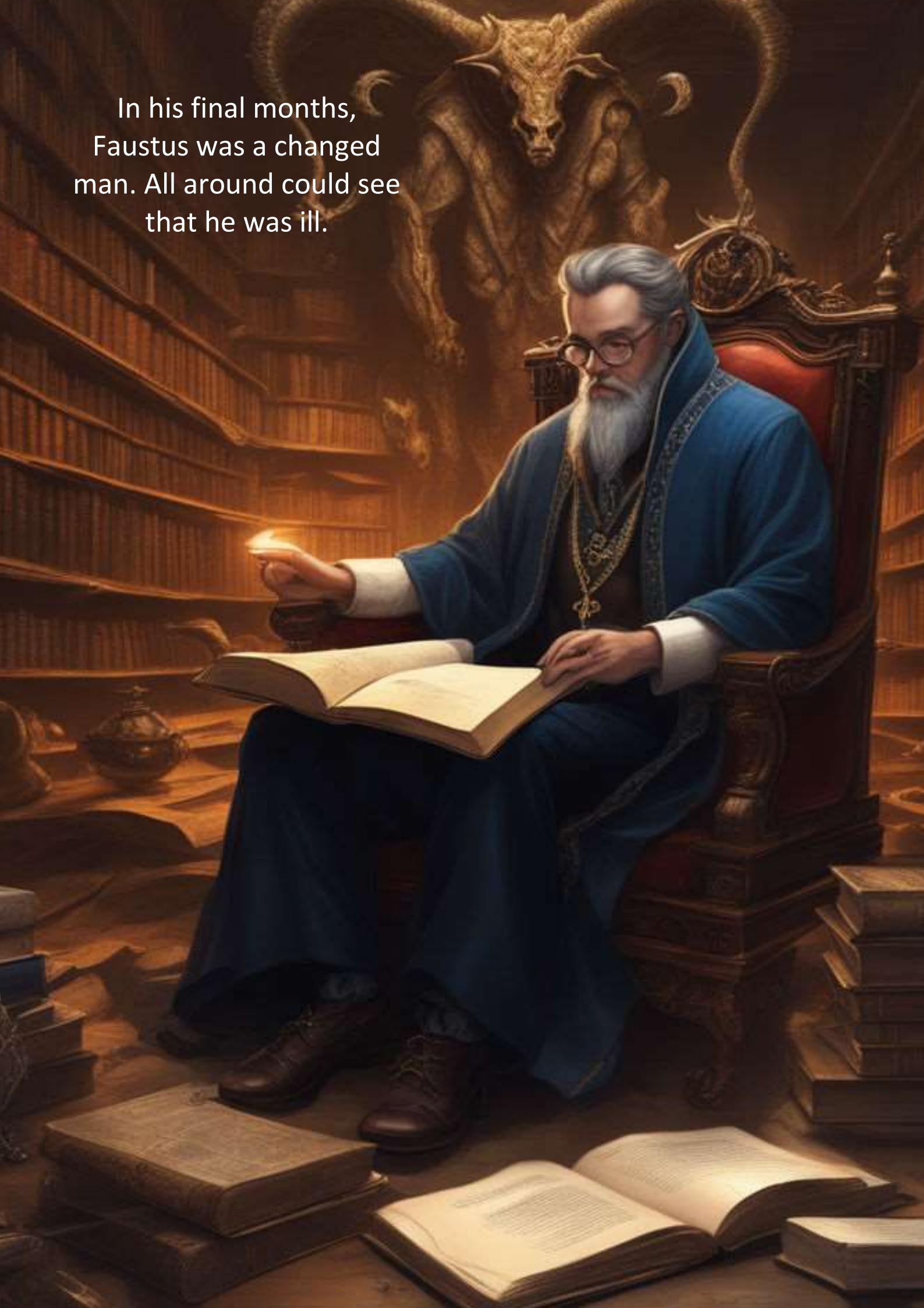


Faustus grew more and more melancholy as the date of his doom approached. Even his enjoyment of everything that his bargain had brought him seemed to leave him. none of it mattered, when there was so little time to live.

Instead, not only life but his immortal soul was soon to be sacrificed.



In his final months,
Faustus was a changed
man. All around could see
that he was ill.



On the evening of the last day of the twenty-fourth year, seeing that his spirits had reached unparalleled depths, they gathered at his house.



Soon after midnight, an unearthly noise came from Dr Faustus' room. No one dared to tempest roared inside. Then there was shouting – terrifying screams that shook the house, then grew fainter and fainter, until there was no sound at all.



It was daybreak before the students dared to enter their teacher's room. The sight that met their eyes in the dim light of dawn was horrifying beyond belief. The room was splattered with blood. Fragments of brain and teeth clung to the walls and hangings. Outside, what remained of Faustus' body, warm and still convulsively twitching, was stretched over a manure heap.



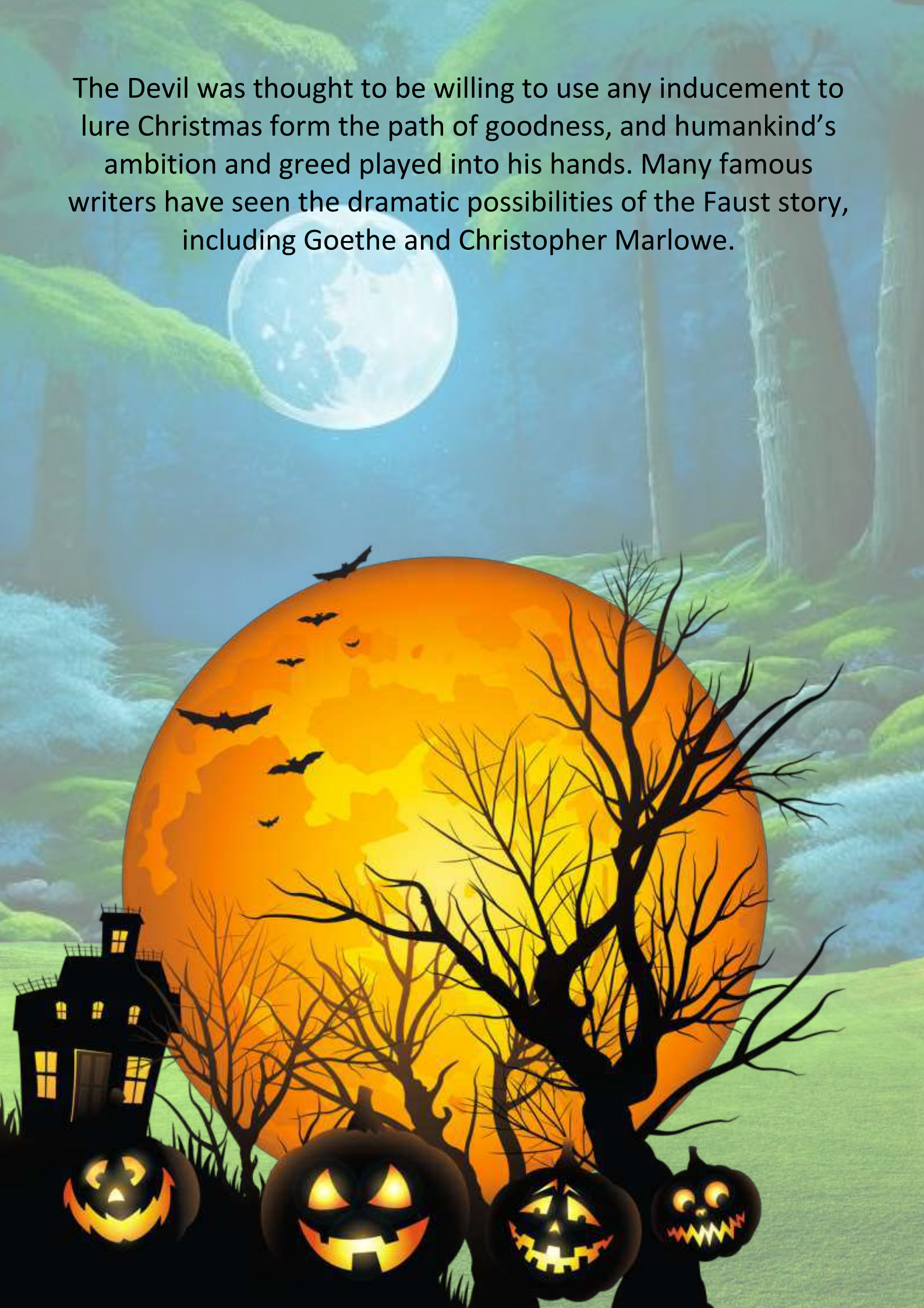
No one who was there that day ever recovered from the horrors they had seen, but many took it as a sign to hold fast to the ways of God, for the ways of the Devil are terrible indeed.



This version of the Faust legend was published in Germany in 1587, but the idea of men and women making pacts with the devil has a long tradition.



The Devil was thought to be willing to use any inducement to lure Christmas from the path of goodness, and humankind's ambition and greed played into his hands. Many famous writers have seen the dramatic possibilities of the Faust story, including Goethe and Christopher Marlowe.





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