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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Ghost's Petition

Christina Georgina Rossetti

'There's a footstep coming: look out and see,'
'The leaves are falling, the wind is calling;
No one cometh across the lea.'—

'There's a footstep coming: O sister, look.'—
'The ripple flashes, the white foam dashes;
No one cometh across the brook.'—

'But he promised that he would come:
To-night, to-morrow, in joy or sorrow,
He must keep his word, and must come home.

'For he promised that he would come:
His word was given; from earth or heaven,
He must keep his word, and must come home.

'Go to sleep, my sweet sister Jane;
You can slumber, who need not number
Hour after hour, in doubt and pain.

'I shall sit here awhile, and watch;
Listening, hoping, for one hand groping
In deep shadow to find the latch.'

After the dark, and before the light,
One lay sleeping; and one sat weeping,
Who had watched and wept the weary night.

After the night, and before the day,
One lay sleeping; and one sat weeping—
Watching, weeping for one away.

There came a footstep climbing the stair;
Some one standing out on the landing
Shook the door like a puff of air—



Shook the door, and in he passed.
Did he enter? In the room centre
Stood her husband: the door shut fast.

‘O Robin, but you are cold—
Chilled with the night-dew: so lily-white you
Look like a stray lamb from our fold.

‘O Robin, but you are late:
Come and sit near me—sit here and cheer me.’—
(Blue the flame burnt in the grate.)

‘Lay not down your head on my breast:
I cannot hold you, kind wife, nor fold you
In the shelter that you love best.

‘Feel not after my clasping hand:
I am but a shadow, come from the meadow
Where many lie, but no tree can stand.

‘We are trees which have shed their leaves:
Our heads lie low there, but no tears flow there;
Only I grieve for my wife who grieves.

‘I could rest if you would not moan
Hour after hour; I have no power
To shut my ears where I lie alone.

‘I could rest if you would not cry;
But there’s no sleeping while you sit weeping—
Watching, weeping so bitterly.’—

‘Woe’s me! woe’s me! for this I have heard.

Oh, night of sorrow!—oh, black to-morrow!
Is it thus that you keep your word?

‘O you who used so to shelter me
Warm from the least wind—why, now the east wind
Is warmer than you, whom I quake to see.

‘O my husband of flesh and blood,
For whom my mother I left, and brother,
And all I had, accounting it good,

‘What do you do there, underground,
In the dark hollow? I’m fain to follow.
What do you do there?—what have you found?’—

‘What I do there I must not tell:
But I have plenty: kind wife, content ye:
It is well with us—it is well.

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