

## Scary Poems for Hallowe'en

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# Little Orphant Annie

By James Whitcomb Riley

Little Orphant Annie's come to our house to stay,  
An' wash the cups an' saucers up, an' brush the crumbs away,  
An' shoo the chickens off the porch, an' dust the hearth, an' sweep,  
An' make the fire, an' bake the bread, an' earn her board-an'-keep;  
An' all us other childern, when the supper things is done,  
We set around the kitchen fire an' has the mostest fun  
A-list'nin' to the witch-tales 'at Annie tells about,  
An' the Gobble-uns 'at gits you

Ef you  
Don't  
Watch  
Out!

Onc't they was a little boy wouldn't say his prayers,—  
So when he went to bed at night, away up stairs,  
His Mammy heerd him holler, an' his Daddy heerd him bawl,  
An' when they turn't the kivvers down, he wasn't there at all!  
An' they seeked him in the rafter-room, an' cubby-hole, an' press,  
An' seeked him up the chimbly-flue, an' ever'wheres, I guess;  
But all they ever found was thist his pants an' roundabout--  
An' the Gobble-uns'll git you

Ef you  
Don't  
Watch  
Out!

An' one time a little girl 'ud allus laugh an' grin,  
An' make fun of ever'one, an' all her blood an' kin;  
An' onc't, when they was "company," an' ole folks was there,  
She mocked 'em an' shocked 'em, an' said she didn't care!  
An' thist as she kicked her heels, an' turn't to run an' hide,  
They was two great big Black Things a-standin' by her side,  
An' they snatched her through the ceilin' 'fore she knowed what she's about!  
An' the Gobble-uns'll git you

Ef you  
Don't  
Watch  
Out!

An' little Orphant Annie says when the blaze is blue,  
An' the lamp-wick sputters, an' the wind goes *woo-oo!*  
An' you hear the crickets quit, an' the moon is gray,  
An' the lightnin'-bugs in dew is all squenched away,--  
You better mind yer parents, an' yer teachers fond an' dear,  
An' churish them 'at loves you, an' dry the orphant's tear,  
An' he'p the pore an' needy ones 'at clusters all about,  
Er the Gobble-uns'll git you

Ef you

Don't

Watch

Out!

# The Little Ghost

By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I knew her for a little ghost  
That in my garden walked;  
The wall is high—higher than most—  
And the green gate was locked.

And yet I did not think of that  
Till after she was gone—  
I knew her by the broad white hat,  
All ruffled, she had on.

By the dear ruffles round her feet,  
By her small hands that hung  
In their lace mitts, austere and sweet,  
Her gown's white folds among.

I watched to see if she would stay,  
What she would do—and oh!  
She looked as if she liked the way  
I let my garden grow!

She bent above my favourite mint  
With conscious garden grace,  
She smiled and smiled—there was no hint  
Of sadness in her face.

She held her gown on either side  
To let her slippers show,  
And up the walk she went with pride,  
The way great ladies go.

And where the wall is built in new  
And is of ivy bare  
She paused—then opened and passed through  
A gate that once was there.

# The Night Wind

By Eugene Field

Have you ever heard the wind go "Yooooo"?  
'T is a pitiful sound to hear!  
It seems to chill you through and through  
With a strange and speechless fear.  
'T is the voice of the night that broods outside  
When folk should be asleep,  
And many and many's the time I've cried  
To the darkness brooding far and wide  
Over the land and the deep:  
Whom do you want, O lonely night,  
That you wail the long hours through?"  
And the night would say in its ghostly way:  
    "Yooooooooo!  
    Yooooooooo!  
    Yooooooooo!"

My mother told me long ago  
(When I was a little tad)  
That when the night went wailing so,  
Somebody had been bad;  
And then, when I was snug in bed,  
Whither I had been sent,  
With the blankets pulled up round my head,  
I'd think of what my mother'd said,  
And wonder what boy she meant!  
And "Who's been bad to-day?" I'd ask  
Of the wind that hoarsely blew,  
And the voice would say in its meaningful way:  
    "Yooooooooo!  
    Yooooooooo!  
    Yooooooooo!"

That this was true I must allow -  
You'll not believe it, though!  
Yes, though I'm quite a model now,  
I was not always so.  
And if you doubt what things I say,  
Suppose you make the test;  
Suppose, when you've been bad some day  
And up to bed are sent away  
From mother and the rest -  
Suppose you ask, "Who has been bad?"  
And then you'll hear what's true;  
For the wind will moan in its ruefulest tone:

"Yooooooooo!  
Yooooooooo!  
Yooooooooo!"

# The Witch

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

I have walked a great while over the snow,  
And I am not tall nor strong.  
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,  
And the way was hard and long.  
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,  
But I never came here before.  
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.  
I dare not stand in the blast.  
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,  
And the worst of death is past.  
I am but a little maiden still,  
My little white feet are sore.  
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,  
Who plead for their heart's desire.  
She came—she came—and the quivering flame  
Sunk and died in the fire.  
It never was lit again on my hearth  
Since I hurried across the floor,  
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

# Antigonish [I met a man who wasn't there]

By Hughes Mearns

Yesterday, upon the stair,  
I met a man who wasn't there  
He wasn't there again today  
I wish, I wish he'd go away...

When I came home last night at three  
The man was waiting there for me  
But when I looked around the hall  
I couldn't see him there at all!  
Go away, go away, don't you come back any more!  
Go away, go away, and please don't slam the door... (slam!)

Last night I saw upon the stair  
A little man who wasn't there  
He wasn't there again today  
Oh, how I wish he'd go away...



# The Raven

By Edgar Allan Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.  
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—  
Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.  
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—  
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
"Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
This it is and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,  
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;  
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,  
That I scarce was sure I heard you"—here I opened wide the door;—  
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;  
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,  
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore?"  
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!"—  
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.  
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;  
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—  
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—  
'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;

Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,  
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as “Nevermore.”

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only  
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.  
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—  
Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other friends have flown before—  
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before.”  
Then the bird said “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store  
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—  
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
Of ‘Never—nevermore’.”

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,  
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;  
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking  
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—  
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore  
Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing  
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;  
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining  
On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o’er,  
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o’er,  
*She* shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer

Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.

“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee  
Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;  
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—  
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked, upstarting—  
“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!  
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!  
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

# The Stolen Child

By W. B. Yeats

Where dips the rocky highland  
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,  
There lies a leafy island  
Where flapping herons wake  
The drowsy water rats;  
There we've hid our faery vats,  
Full of berrys  
And of reddest stolen cherries.  
Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses  
The dim gray sands with light,  
Far off by furthest Rosses  
We foot it all the night,  
Weaving olden dances  
Mingling hands and mingling glances  
Till the moon has taken flight;  
To and fro we leap  
And chase the frothy bubbles,  
While the world is full of troubles  
And anxious in its sleep.  
Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes  
From the hills above Glen-Car,  
In pools among the rushes  
That scarce could bathe a star,  
We seek for slumbering trout  
And whispering in their ears  
Give them unquiet dreams;  
Leaning softly out  
From ferns that drop their tears  
Over the young streams.  
Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Away with us he's going,  
The solemn-eyed:  
He'll hear no more the lowing  
Of the calves on the warm hillside  
Or the kettle on the hob  
Sing peace into his breast,  
Or see the brown mice bob  
Round and round the oatmeal chest.  
For he comes, the human child,  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than he can understand.

# The Wreck of the Hesperus

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

It was the schooner Hesperus,  
That sailed the wintry sea;  
And the skipper had taken his little daughter,  
To bear him company.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,  
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,  
And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds,  
That ope in the month of May.

The skipper he stood beside the helm,  
His pipe was in his mouth,  
And he watched how the veering flaw did blow  
The smoke now West, now South.

Then up and spake an old Sailòr,  
Had sailed to the Spanish Main,  
"I pray thee, put into yonder port,  
For I fear a hurricane.

"Last night, the moon had a golden ring,  
And to-night no moon we see!"  
The skipper, he blew a whiff from his pipe,  
And a scornful laugh laughed he.

Colder and louder blew the wind,  
A gale from the Northeast,  
The snow fell hissing in the brine,  
And the billows frothed like yeast.

Down came the storm, and smote amain  
The vessel in its strength;  
She shuddered and paused, like a frightened steed,  
Then leaped her cable's length.

"Come hither! come hither! my little daughter,  
And do not tremble so;  
For I can weather the roughest gale  
That ever wind did blow."

He wrapped her warm in his seaman's coat  
Against the stinging blast;  
He cut a rope from a broken spar,  
And bound her to the mast.

"O father! I hear the church-bells ring,  
Oh say, what may it be?"  
"T is a fog-bell on a rock-bound coast!" —  
And he steered for the open sea.

"O father! I hear the sound of guns,  
Oh say, what may it be?"  
"Some ship in distress, that cannot live  
In such an angry sea!"

"O father! I see a gleaming light,  
Oh say, what may it be?"  
But the father answered never a word,  
A frozen corpse was he.

Lashed to the helm, all stiff and stark,  
With his face turned to the skies,  
The lantern gleamed through the gleaming snow  
On his fixed and glassy eyes.

Then the maiden clasped her hands and prayed  
That savèd she might be;  
And she thought of Christ, who stilled the wave  
On the Lake of Galilee.

And fast through the midnight dark and drear,  
Through the whistling sleet and snow,  
Like a sheeted ghost, the vessel swept  
Tow'rds the reef of Norman's Woe.

And ever the fitful gusts between  
A sound came from the land;  
It was the sound of the trampling surf  
On the rocks and the hard sea-sand.

The breakers were right beneath her bows,  
She drifted a dreary wreck,  
And a whooping billow swept the crew  
Like icicles from her deck.

She struck where the white and fleecy waves  
Looked soft as carded wool,  
But the cruel rocks, they gored her side  
Like the horns of an angry bull.

Her rattling shrouds, all sheathed in ice,  
With the masts went by the board;

Like a vessel of glass, she stove and sank,  
Ho! ho! the breakers roared!

At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,  
A fisherman stood aghast,  
To see the form of a maiden fair,  
Lashed close to a drifting mast.

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,  
The salt tears in her eyes;  
And he saw her hair, like the brown sea-weed,  
On the billows fall and rise.

Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,  
In the midnight and the snow!  
Christ save us all from a death like this,  
On the reef of Norman's Woe!



# The Highwayman

By Alfred Noyes

## PART ONE

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees.  
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas.  
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,  
And the highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,  
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin.  
They fitted with never a wrinkle. His boots were up to the thigh.

And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,

His pistol butts a-twinkle,

His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard.  
He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred.  
He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,

Bess, the landlord's daughter,

Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked  
Where Tim the ostler listened. His face was white and peaked.

His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,

But he loved the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's red-lipped daughter.

Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

“One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,  
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;  
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,

Then look for me by moonlight,

Watch for me by moonlight,

I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way.”

He rose upright in the stirrups. He scarce could reach her hand,  
But she loosened her hair in the casement. His face burnt like a brand  
As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;

And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,

(O, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)

Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the west.

## PART TWO

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come at noon;  
And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,  
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,  
A red-coat troop came marching—  
    Marching—marching—  
King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

They said no word to the landlord. They drank his ale instead.  
But they gagged his daughter, and bound her, to the foot of her narrow bed.  
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!  
There was death at every window;  
    And hell at one dark window;  
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that *he* would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest.  
They had bound a musket beside her, with the muzzle beneath her breast!  
"Now, keep good watch!" and they kissed her. She heard the doomed man say—  
*Look for me by moonlight;*  
    *Watch for me by moonlight;*  
*I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!*

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!  
She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!  
They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years  
Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,  
    Cold, on the stroke of midnight,  
The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it. She strove no more for the rest.  
Up, she stood up to attention, with the muzzle beneath her breast.  
She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;  
For the road lay bare in the moonlight;  
    Blank and bare in the moonlight;  
And the blood of her veins, in the moonlight, throbbed to her love's refrain.

*Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot!* Had they heard it? The horsehoofs ringing clear;  
*Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot,* in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?  
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,  
The highwayman came riding—  
    Riding—riding—  
The red coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight and still.

*Tlot-tlot,* in the frosty silence! *Tlot-tlot,* in the echoing night!  
Nearer he came and nearer. Her face was like a light.  
Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,  
Then her finger moved in the moonlight,

Her musket shattered the moonlight,  
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him—with her death.

He turned. He spurred to the west; he did not know who stood  
Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own blood!  
Not till the dawn he heard it, and his face grew grey to hear  
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
    The landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,  
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high.  
Blood red were his spurs in the golden noon; wine-red was his velvet coat;  
When they shot him down on the highway,  
    Down like a dog on the highway,  
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch of lace at his throat.

. . . .

And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,  
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,  
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,  
A highwayman comes riding—  
    Riding—riding—  
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard.  
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred.  
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
    Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

# The Pied Piper of Hamelin

By Robert Browning

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,  
By famous Hanover city;  
The river Weser, deep and wide,  
Washes its wall on the southern side;  
A pleasanter spot you never spied;  
But, when begins my ditty,  
Almost five hundred years ago,  
To see the townsfolk suffer so  
From vermin, was a pity.

Rats!  
They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,  
And bit the babies in the cradles,  
And eat the cheeses out of the vats,  
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,  
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,  
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,  
And even spoiled the women's chats  
By drowning their speaking  
With shrieking and squeaking  
In fifty different sharps and flats.

At last the people in a body  
To the Town Hall came flocking:  
'Tis clear, cried they, our Mayor's a noddy;  
And as for our Corporation — shocking  
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine  
For dolts that can't or won't determine  
What's like to rid us of our vermin!  
Rouse up, Sirs! Give your brains a racking  
To find the remedy we're lacking,  
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!  
At this the Mayor and Corporation  
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

An hour they sate in council,  
At length the Mayor broke silence:  
For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell;  
I wish I were a mile hence!  
It's easy to bid one rack one's brain —  
I'm sure my poor head aches again  
I've scratched it so, and all in vain.  
Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!  
Just as he said this, what should hap

At the chamber door but a gentle tap?  
Bless us, cried the Mayor, what's that?  
(With the Corporation as he sate,  
Looking little though wondrous fat);  
Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?  
Anything like the sound of a rat  
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!

Come in! — the Mayor cried, looking bigger:  
And in did come the strangest figure!  
His queer long coat from heel to head  
Was half of yellow and half of red;  
And he himself was tall and thin,  
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,  
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,  
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,  
But lips where smiles went out and in —  
There was no guessing his kith and kin!  
And nobody could enough admire  
The tall man and his quaint attire:  
Quoth one: It's as my great-grandsire,  
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,  
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!

He advanced to the council-table:  
And, Please your honours, said he, I'm able,  
By means of a secret charm, to draw  
All creatures living beneath the sun,  
That creep, or swim, or fly, or run,  
After me so as you never saw!  
And I chiefly use my charm  
On creatures that do people harm,  
The mole, and toad, and newt, and viper;  
And people call me the Pied Piper.  
(And here they noticed round his neck  
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,  
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;  
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;  
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying  
As if impatient to be playing  
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled  
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)  
Yet, said he, poor piper as I am,  
In Tartary I freed the Cham,  
Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;  
I eased in Asia the Nizam  
Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats:  
And, as for what your brain bewilders,

If I can rid your town of rats  
Will you give me a thousand guilders?  
One? fifty thousand! — was the exclamation  
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

Into the street the Piper stept,  
Smiling first a little smile,  
As if he knew what magic slept  
In his quiet pipe the while;  
Then, like a musical adept,  
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,  
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,  
Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;  
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,  
You heard as if an army muttered;  
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;  
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;  
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.  
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,  
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,  
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,  
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,  
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,  
Families by tens and dozens,  
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives —  
Followed the Piper for their lives.  
From street to street he piped advancing,  
And step for step they followed dancing,  
Until they came to the river Weser  
Wherein all plunged and perished  
— Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,  
Swam across and lived to carry  
(As he the manuscript he cherished)  
To Rat-land home his commentary,  
Which was, At the first shrill notes of the pipe,  
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,  
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,  
Into a cider-press's gripe:  
And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,  
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,  
And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,  
And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks;  
And it seemed as if a voice  
(Sweeter than by harp or by psaltery  
Is breathed) called out, Oh rats, rejoice!  
The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!  
'So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,  
'Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!

And just as one bulky sugar-puncheon,  
Ready staved, like a great sun shone  
Glorious scarce an inch before me,  
Just as methought it said, Come, bore me!  
— I found the Weser rolling o'er me.

You should have heard the Hamelin people  
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple;  
Go, cried the Mayor, and get long poles!  
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!  
Consult with carpenters and builders,  
And leave in our town not even a trace  
Of the rats! — when suddenly up the face  
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,  
With a, First, if you please, my thousand guilders!

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;  
So did the Corporation too.  
For council dinners made rare havock  
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;  
And half the money would replenish  
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.  
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow  
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow!  
Beside, quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,  
Our business was done at the river's brink;  
We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,  
And what's dead can't come to life, I think.  
So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink  
From the duty of giving you something for drink,  
And a matter of money to put in your poke;  
But, as for the guilders, what we spoke  
Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.  
Beside, our losses have made us thrifty;  
A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!

The Piper's face fell, and he cried,  
No trifling! I can't wait, beside!  
I've promised to visit by dinner time  
Bagdat, and accept the prime  
Of the Head Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,  
For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,  
Of a nest of scorpions no survivor —  
With him I proved no bargain-driver,  
With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!  
And folks who put me in a passion  
May find me pipe after another fashion.

How? cried the Mayor, d'ye think I'll brook  
Being worse treated than a Cook?  
Insulted by a lazy ribald  
With idle pipe and vesture piebald?  
You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,  
Blow your pipe there till you burst!

Once more he stept into the street;  
And to his lips again  
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;  
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet  
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning  
Never gave th'enraptured air)  
There was a rustling, that seem'd like a bustling  
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,  
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,  
Little hands clapping, and little tongues chattering,  
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,  
Out came the children running.  
All the little boys and girls,  
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,  
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,  
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after  
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood  
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,  
Unable to move a step, or cry  
To the children merrily skipping by —  
Could only follow with the eye  
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.  
But how the Mayor was on the rack,  
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,  
As the Piper turned from the High Street  
To where the Weser rolled its waters  
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!  
However he turned from South to West,  
And to Coppelburg Hill his steps addressed,  
And after him the children pressed;  
Great was the joy in every breast.  
He never can cross that mighty top!  
He's forced to let the piping drop,  
And we shall see our children stop!  
When, lo, as they reached the mountain's side,  
A wondrous portal opened wide,  
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;  
And the Piper advanced and the children follow'd,  
And when all were in to the very last,



The door in the mountain side shut fast.  
Did I say, all? No! One was lame,  
And could not dance the whole of the way;  
And in after years, if you would blame  
His sadness, he was used to say, —  
It's dull in our town since my playmates left!  
I can't forget that I'm bereft  
Of all the pleasant sights they see,  
Which the Piper also promised me;  
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,  
Joining the town and just at hand,  
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,  
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,  
And every thing was strange and new;  
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,  
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,  
And honey-bees had lost their stings,  
And horses were born with eagles' wings:  
And just as I felt assured  
My lame foot would be speedily cured,  
The music stopped and I stood still,  
And found myself outside the Hill,  
Left alone against my will,  
To go now limping as before,  
And never hear of that country more!

Alas, alas for Hamelin!

There came into many a burgher's pate  
A text which says, that Heaven's Gate  
Opes to the Rich at as easy a rate  
As the needle's eye takes a camel in!  
The Mayor sent East, West, North, and South,  
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,  
Wherever it was men's lot to find him,  
Silver and gold to his heart's content,  
If he'd only return the way he went,  
And bring the children behind him.  
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,  
And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,  
They made a decree that lawyers never  
Should think their records dated duly  
If, after the day of the month and year,  
These words did not as well appear,  
"And so long after what happened here  
"On the Twenty-second of July,  
"Thirteen hundred and Seventy-six:"  
And the better in memory to fix  
The place of the Children's last retreat,

They called it, The Pied Piper's Street —  
Where any one playing on pipe or tabor  
Was sure for the future to lose his labour.  
Nor suffered they Hostelry or Tavern  
To shock with mirth a street so solemn;  
But opposite the place of the cavern  
They wrote the story on a column,  
And on the Great Church Window painted  
The same, to make the world acquainted  
How their children were stolen away;  
And there it stands to this very day.  
And I must not omit to say  
That in Transylvania there's a tribe  
Of alien people who ascribe  
The outlandish ways and dress  
On which their neighbours lay such stress  
To their fathers and mothers having risen  
Out of some subterraneous prison  
Into which they were trepanned  
Long time ago in a mighty band  
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,  
But how or why, they don't understand.

So, Willy, let you and me be wipers  
Of scores out with all men — especially pipers:  
And, whether they pipe us from rats or from mice,  
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise.

# The Listeners

By Walter De La Mare

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door;  
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses  
Of the forest's ferny floor:  
And a bird flew up out of the turret,  
Above the Traveller's head:  
And he smote upon the door again a second time;  
'Is there anybody there?' he said.  
But no one descended to the Traveller;  
No head from the leaf-fringed sill  
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,  
Where he stood perplexed and still.  
But only a host of phantom listeners  
That dwelt in the lone house then  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men:  
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,  
That goes down to the empty hall,  
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken  
By the lonely Traveller's call.  
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,  
Their stillness answering his cry,  
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,  
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;  
For he suddenly smote on the door, even  
Louder, and lifted his head:—  
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,  
That I kept my word,' he said.  
Never the least stir made the listeners,  
Though every word he spake  
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house  
From the one man left awake:  
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,  
And the sound of iron on stone,  
And how the silence surged softly backward,  
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

# "This living hand, now warm and capable"

By John Keats

This living hand, now warm and capable  
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold  
And in the icy silence of the tomb,  
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights  
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood  
So in my veins red life might stream again,  
And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—  
I hold it towards you.

# The Drowned Man

By Alexandar Pushkin

Children running into izba,  
Calling father, dripping sweat:  
"Daddy, daddy! come -- there is a  
Deadman caught inside our net."  
"Fancy, fancy fabrication..."  
Grumbled off their weary Pa,  
"Have these imps imagination!  
Deadman, really! ya-ha-ha..."

"Well... the court may come to bother -  
What'll I say before the judge?  
Hey you brats, go have your mother  
Bring my coat; I better trudge...  
Show me, where?" -- "Right there, Dad, farther!"  
On the sand where netting ropes  
Lay spread out, the peasant father  
Saw the veritable corpse.

Badly mangled, ugly, frightening,  
Blue and swollen on each side...  
Has he fished in storm and lightning,  
Or committed suicide?  
Could this be a careless drunkard,  
Or a mermaid-seeking monk,  
Or a merchandizer, conquered  
By some bandits, robbed and sunk?

To the peasant, what's it matter!  
Quick: he grabs the dead man's hair,  
Drags his body to the water,  
Looks around: nobody's there:  
Good... relieved of the concern he  
Shoves his paddle at a loss,  
While the stiff resumes his journey  
Down the stream for grave and cross.

Long the dead man as one living  
Rocked on waves amid the foam...  
Surly as he watched him leaving,  
Soon our peasant headed home.  
"Come you pups! let's go, don't scatter.  
Each of you will get his bun.  
But remember: just you chatter --  
And I'll whip you, every one."

Dark and stormy it was turning.  
High the river ran in gloom.  
Now the torch has finished burning  
In the peasant's smoky room.  
Kids asleep, the wife aslumber,  
He lies listening to the rain...  
Bang! he hears a sudden comer  
Knocking on the window-pane.

"What the..." -- "Let me in there, master!"  
"Damn, you found the time to roam!  
Well, what is it, your disaster?  
Let you in? It's dark at home,  
Dark and crowded... What a pest you are!  
Where'd I put you in my cot..."  
Slowly, with a lazy gesture,  
He lifts up the pane and - what?

Through the clouds, the moon was showing...  
Well? the naked man was there,  
Down his hair the water flowing,  
Wide his eyes, unmoved the stare;  
Numb the dreadful-looking body,  
Arms were hanging feeble, thin;  
Crabs and cancers, black and bloody,  
Sucked into the swollen skin.

As the peasant slammed the shutter  
(Recognized his visitant)  
Horror-struck he could but mutter  
"Blast you!" and began to pant.  
He was shuddering, awful chaos  
All night through stirred in his brain,  
While the knocking shook the house  
By the gates and at the pane.

People tell a dreadful rumor:  
Every year the peasant, say,  
Waiting in the worst of humor  
For his visitor that day;  
As the rainstorm is increasing,  
Nightfall brings a hurricane -  
And the drowned man knocks, unceasing,  
By the gates and at the pane.

# The Haunted Oak

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Pray why are you so bare, so bare,  
Oh, bough of the old oak-tree;  
And why, when I go through the shade you throw,  
Runs a shudder over me?

My leaves were green as the best, I trow,  
And sap ran free in my veins,  
But I saw in the moonlight dim and weird  
A guiltless victim's pains.

I bent me down to hear his sigh;  
I shook with his gurgling moan,  
And I trembled sore when they rode away,  
And left him here alone.

They'd charged him with the old, old crime,  
And set him fast in jail:  
Oh, why does the dog howl all night long,  
And why does the night wind wail?

He prayed his prayer and he swore his oath,  
And he raised his hand to the sky;  
But the beat of hoofs smote on his ear,  
And the steady tread drew nigh.

Who is it rides by night, by night,  
Over the moonlit road?  
And what is the spur that keeps the pace,  
What is the galling goad?

And now they beat at the prison door,  
"Ho, keeper, do not stay!  
We are friends of him whom you hold within,  
And we fain would take him away

"From those who ride fast on our heels  
With mind to do him wrong;  
They have no care for his innocence,  
And the rope they bear is long."

They have fooled the jailer with lying words,  
They have fooled the man with lies;  
The bolts unbar, the locks are drawn,  
And the great door open flies.

Now they have taken him from the jail,  
And hard and fast they ride,  
And the leader laughs low down in his throat,  
As they halt my trunk beside.

Oh, the judge, he wore a mask of black,  
And the doctor one of white,  
And the minister, with his oldest son,  
Was curiously bedight.

Oh, foolish man, why weep you now?  
'Tis but a little space,  
And the time will come when these shall dread  
The mem'ry of your face.

I feel the rope against my bark,  
And the weight of him in my grain,  
I feel in the throe of his final woe  
The touch of my own last pain.

And never more shall leaves come forth  
On the bough that bears the ban;  
I am burned with dread, I am dried and dead,  
From the curse of a guiltless man.

And ever the judge rides by, rides by,  
And goes to hunt the deer,  
And ever another rides his soul  
In the guise of a mortal fear.

And ever the man he rides me hard,  
And never a night stays he;  
For I feel his curse as a haunted bough,  
On the trunk of a haunted tree.



# The Dance of Death

By Charles Baudelaire

Carrying bouquet, and handkerchief, and gloves,  
Proud of her height as when she lived, she moves  
With all the careless and high-stepping grace,  
And the extravagant courtesan's thin face.

Was slimmer waist e'er in a ball-room wooed?  
Her floating robe, in royal amplitude,  
Falls in deep folds around a dry foot, shod  
With a bright flower-like shoe that gems the sod.

The swarms that hum about her collar-bones  
As the lascivious streams caress the stones,  
Conceal from every scornful jest that flies,  
Her gloomy beauty; and her fathomless eyes

Are made of shade and void; with flowery sprays  
Her skull is wreathed artistically, and sways,  
Feeble and weak, on her frail vertebrae.  
O charm of nothing decked in folly! they

Who laugh and name you a Caricature,  
They see not, they whom flesh and blood allure,  
The nameless grace of every bleached, bare bone,  
That is most dear to me, tall skeleton!

Come you to trouble with your potent sneer  
The feast of Life! or are you driven here,  
To Pleasure's Sabbath, by dead lusts that stir  
And goad your moving corpse on with a spur?

Or do you hope, when sing the violins,  
And the pale candle-flame lights up our sins,  
To drive some mocking nightmare far apart,  
And cool the flame hell lighted in your heart?

Fathomless well of fault and foolishness!  
Eternal alembic of antique distress!  
Still o'er the curved, white trellis of your sides  
The sateless, wandering serpent curls and glides.

And truth to tell, I fear lest you should find,  
Among us here, no lover to your mind;  
Which of these hearts beat for the smile you gave?  
The charms of horror please none but the brave.

Your eyes' black gulf, where awful broodings stir,  
Brings giddiness; the prudent reveller  
Sees, while a horror grips him from beneath,  
The eternal smile of thirty-two white teeth.

For he who has not folded in his arms  
A skeleton, nor fed on graveyard charms,  
Recks not of furbelow, or paint, or scent,  
When Horror comes the way that Beauty went.

O irresistible, with fleshless face,  
Say to these dancers in their dazzled race:  
"Proud lovers with the paint above your bones,  
Ye shall taste death, musk scented skeletons!

Withered Antinoüs, dandies with plump faces,  
Ye varnished cadavers, and grey Lovelaces,  
Ye go to lands unknown and void of breath,  
Drawn by the rumour of the Dance of Death.

From Seine's cold quays to Ganges' burning stream,  
The mortal troupes dance onward in a dream;  
They do not see, within the opened sky,  
The Angel's sinister trumpet raised on high.

In every clime and under every sun,  
Death laughs at ye, mad mortals, as ye run;  
And oft perfumes herself with myrrh, like ye  
And mingles with your madness, irony!"

# Darkness

By Lord Byron

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.  
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars  
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,  
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth  
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;  
Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day,  
And men forgot their passions in the dread  
Of this their desolation; and all hearts  
Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light:  
And they did live by watchfires—and the thrones,  
The palaces of crowned kings—the huts,  
The habitations of all things which dwell,  
Were burnt for beacons; cities were consum'd,  
And men were gather'd round their blazing homes  
To look once more into each other's face;  
Happy were those who dwelt within the eye  
Of the volcanos, and their mountain-torch:  
A fearful hope was all the world contain'd;  
Forests were set on fire—but hour by hour  
They fell and faded—and the crackling trunks  
Extinguish'd with a crash—and all was black.  
The brows of men by the despairing light  
Wore an unearthly aspect, as by fits  
The flashes fell upon them; some lay down  
And hid their eyes and wept; and some did rest  
Their chins upon their clenched hands, and smil'd;  
And others hurried to and fro, and fed  
Their funeral piles with fuel, and look'd up  
With mad disquietude on the dull sky,  
The pall of a past world; and then again  
With curses cast them down upon the dust,  
And gnash'd their teeth and howl'd: the wild birds shriek'd  
And, terrified, did flutter on the ground,  
And flap their useless wings; the wildest brutes  
Came tame and tremulous; and vipers crawl'd  
And twin'd themselves among the multitude,  
Hissing, but stingless—they were slain for food.  
And War, which for a moment was no more,  
Did glut himself again: a meal was bought  
With blood, and each sate sullenly apart  
Gorging himself in gloom: no love was left;  
All earth was but one thought—and that was death  
Immediate and inglorious; and the pang  
Of famine fed upon all entrails—men

Died, and their bones were tombless as their flesh;  
The meagre by the meagre were devour'd,  
Even dogs assail'd their masters, all save one,  
And he was faithful to a corse, and kept  
The birds and beasts and famish'd men at bay,  
Till hunger clung them, or the dropping dead  
Lur'd their lank jaws; himself sought out no food,  
But with a piteous and perpetual moan,  
And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand  
Which answer'd not with a caress—he died.  
The crowd was famish'd by degrees; but two  
Of an enormous city did survive,  
And they were enemies: they met beside  
The dying embers of an altar-place  
Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things  
For an unholy usage; they rak'd up,  
And shivering scrap'd with their cold skeleton hands  
The feeble ashes, and their feeble breath  
Blew for a little life, and made a flame  
Which was a mockery; then they lifted up  
Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld  
Each other's aspects—saw, and shriek'd, and died—  
Even of their mutual hideousness they died,  
Unknowing who he was upon whose brow  
Famine had written Fiend. The world was void,  
The populous and the powerful was a lump,  
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless—  
A lump of death—a chaos of hard clay.  
The rivers, lakes and ocean all stood still,  
And nothing stirr'd within their silent depths;  
Ships sailorless lay rotting on the sea,  
And their masts fell down piecemeal: as they dropp'd  
They slept on the abyss without a surge—  
The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,  
The moon, their mistress, had expir'd before;  
The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air,  
And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need  
Of aid from them—She was the Universe.