

## Halloween Poetry

### The Ghost's Petition

By Christina 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.

“Tender hand hath made our nest; Our fear  
is ended, our hope is blended With present  
pleasure, and we have rest.”—

“Oh, but Robin, I’m fain to come,  
If your present days are so pleasant;  
For my days are so wearisome.

“Yet I’ll dry my tears for your sake:  
Why should I tease you, who cannot please  
you Any more with the pains I take?”

### **The Witch**

By William Butler Yeats

Toil and grow rich,  
What's that but to lie  
With a foul witch  
And after, drained dry,  
To be brought  
To the chamber where  
Lies one long sought  
With despair?



### **The Haunted House**

By Madison Cawein

The shadows sit and stand about its door  
Like uninvited guests and poor;  
And all the long, hot summer day  
The grating locust dins its roundelay  
In one old sycamore.  
The squirrel leaves upon its rotting roof,  
In empty hulls, its tracks;  
And in its clapboard cracks  
The spider weaves a windy woof;  
Its cells the mud-wasp packs.  
The she-fox whelps upon its floor;  
The owlet roosts above its door;  
And where the musty mosses run,  
The freckled snake basks in the sun.

The children of what fathers sleep  
Beneath these melancholy pines?  
The slow slugs crawl among their graves where  
creep The doddered poison-vines.  
The orchard, near the meadow deep,  
Lifts up decrepit arms,  
Gray-lichened in a withering heap.  
No sap swells up to make it leap  
As once in calms and storms;  
No blossom lulls its age asleep;  
Each breeze brings sad alarms.  
Big, bell-round pears and apples, russet-  
red, No maiden gathers now;  
The worm- bored trunks weep gum, like tears,  
instead, From each decaying bough.

The woodlands around it are solitary  
And fold it like gaunt hands;  
The sunlight is sad and the moonlight is dreary,  
And the hum of the country is weary, so weary!  
And the bees go by in bands  
To other lovelier lands.  
The grasses are rotting in walk and in  
bower; The lonesomeness,—dank and rank  
As a chamber where lies for a lonely hour  
An old-man's corpse with many a flower,—  
Is hushed and blank.  
And even the birds have passed it by,  
To sing their songs to a happier sky,  
A happier sky and bank.

In its desolate halls are lying,  
Gold, blood-red and browned,  
Drifted leaves of summer dying;  
And the winds, above them sighing,  
Turn them round and round,

Make a ghostly sound  
As of footsteps failing, flying,  
Voices through the chambers crying,  
Of the haunted house.

Gazing down in her white shroud,  
Shroud of windy cloud,  
Comes at night the phantom moon;  
Comes and all the shadows soon,  
Crowding in the rooms, arouse;  
Shadows, ghosts, her rays lead on,  
Till beneath the cloud  
Like a ghost she's gone,  
In her gusty shroud,  
O'er the haunted house.

### **Deserted**

By Madison Cawein

THE old house leans upon a tree  
Like some old man upon a staff:  
The night wind in its ancient porch  
Sounds like a hollow laugh.

The heaven is wrapped in flying clouds,  
As grandeur cloaks itself in gray:  
The starlight flitting in and out,  
Glints like a lanthorn ray.

The dark is full of whispers. Now  
A fox-hound howls: and through the night,  
Like some old ghost from out its grave,  
The moon comes, misty white.

## The Scarecrow

By Walter de la Mare

All winter through I bow my  
head beneath the driving rain;  
the North Wind powders me with snow  
and blows me black again;  
at midnight 'neath a maze of  
stars I flame with glittering rime,  
and stand above the stubble,  
stiff as mail at morning-prime.  
But when that child called Spring, and  
all his host of children come, scattering  
their buds and dew upon  
these acres of my home,  
some rapture in my rags awakes;  
I lift void eyes and scan  
the sky for crows, those ravening foes,  
of my strange master, Man.  
I watch him striding lank behind  
his clashing team, and know  
soon will the wheat swish body high  
where once lay a sterile snow;  
soon I shall gaze across a sea  
of sun-begotten grain,  
which my unflinching watch hath sealed  
for harvest once again.



## Halloween

By Virna Sheard

Hark! Hark to the wind! 'Tis the night, they say,  
When all souls come back from the far away--

The dead, forgotten this many a day!

And the dead remembered--ay! long and well--  
And the little children whose spirits dwell  
In God's green garden of asphodel.

Have you reached the country of all  
content, O souls we know, since the day  
you went  
From this time-worn world, where your years were spent?

Would you come back to the sun and the  
rain, The sweetness, the strife, the thing we  
call pain, And then unravel life's tangle again?

I lean to the dark--Hush!--was it a sigh?  
Or the painted vine-leaves that rustled by?  
Or only a night-bird's echoing cry?



### **The Ghost's Story**

By Duncan Campbell Scott

All my life long I heard the step Of someone I would  
know, Break softly in upon my days And lightly come and  
go.

A foot so brisk I said must bear A heart that's clean  
and clear;

If that companion blithe would come, I should be  
happy here.

But though I waited long and well, He never came at  
all, I grew weary of the void, Even of the light foot-fall.



From loneliness to loneliness I felt my spirit grope--  
At last I knew the uttermost, The loneliness of hope.

And just upon the border land, Where flesh and  
spirit part,

I knew the secret foot-fall  
was The beating of my heart.

### **The Ghosts of Night**

By Jean Blewett

When we were children, long ago,  
And crept to bed at close of day,  
With backward glance and footstep slow,  
Though all weary with our play,  
Do you remember how the room-  
The little room with window deep-  
Would fill with shadows and with gloom, And  
fright us so we could not sleep?

For O! the things we see at night-  
The dragons grim, the goblins tall,  
And, worst of all, the ghosts in white  
That range themselves along the wall!

We could but cover up our head,  
And listen to our heart's wild beat-  
Such dreadful things about our bed,  
And no protection save a sheet! Then  
slept, and woke quite unafraid. The  
sun was shining, and we found Our  
shadows and our ghosts all laid, Our  
world a glorious playing-ground.



For O! the things we see at night- The  
dragons grim, the goblins tall, And,  
worst of all, the ghosts in white  
That range themselves along the wall!

We are but children still, the years  
Have never taught us to be bold, For  
mark our trembling and our fears  
When sometimes, as in days of old,  
We in the darkness lie awake,  
And see come stealing to our side

A ghostly throng-the grave Mistake,  
The Failure big, the broken Pride.

For O! the things we see at night- The  
dragons grim, the goblins tall, And,  
worst of all, the ghosts in white  
That range themselves along the wall!

How close they creep! How big they loom!  
The Task which waits, the Cares which creep;  
A child, affrighted in the gloom,  
We fain would hide our head and weep.  
When, lo! the coward fear is gone-  
The golden sunshine fills the air, And  
God has sent us with the dawn  
The strength and will to do and dare.

For O! the things we see at night- The  
dragons grim, the goblins tall, And,  
worst of all, the ghosts in white  
That range themselves along the wall!

