

Unknown

"Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight"

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Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight
(Rose Hartwick Thorpe)

Note: To be declaimed. In a heartfelt manner.

"Sexton," Bessie's white lips faltered, pointing to the
prison old,
With its turrets tall and gloomy, with its walls dark,
damp and cold,
"I've a lover in that prison, doomed this very night to
die
At the ringing of the Curfew, and no earthly help is
nigh;
Cromwell will not come till sunset," and her lips grew
strangely white
As she breathed the husky whisper: "Curfew must not
ring tonight."

"Bessie," calmly spoke the sexton --- every word
pierced her young heart
Like the piercing of an arrow, like a deadly poisoned
dart---
"Long, long years I've rung the Curfew from that
gloomy, shadowed tower;
Every evening, just at sunset, it has told the twilight
hour.
I have done my duty ever, tried to do it just and right
Now I'm old, I will not falter. Curfew, it must ring
tonight."

With quick step she bounded forward, sprang within
the old church door
Left the old man threading slowly paths so oft he'd trod
before.
Not one moment paused the maiden, but with eye and
cheek aglow
Mounted up the gloomy tower, where the bell swung to
and fro.
As she climbed the dusty ladder, on which fell no ray of
light,
Up and up, her white lips saying: "Curfew must not ring

tonight."

She has reached the topmost ladder. O'er her hangs
the great dark bell.
Awful is the gloom beneath her, like the pathway down
to Hell.
Lo, the ponderous tongue is swinging --- 'tis the hour of
Curfew
now,
And the sight has chilled her bosom, stopped her
breath and paled her brow.
Shall she let it ring? No, never! flash her eyes with
sudden light
As she springs and grasps it firmly: "Curfew shall not
ring tonight!"

Out she swung --- far out; the city seemed a speck of
light below
There 'twixt heaven and earth suspended as the bell
swung to and fro,
And the sexton, at the bell rope, old and deaf, heard
not the bell
Sadly thought, "That twilight Curfew rang young Basil's
funeral
knell."
Still the maiden clung more firmly, and with trembling
lips so white
Said to hush her heart's wild throbbing: "Curfew shall
not ring tonight!"

O'er the distant hills came Cromwell; Bessie sees him,
and her brow,
Lately white with fear and anguish, has no anxious
traces now.
At his feet she tells her story, shows her hands all
bruised and torn;
And her face so sweet and pleading, yet with sorrow
pale and worn,
Touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his eyes with
misty light;
"Go! Your lover lives," said Cromwell, "Curfew shall not
ring tonight."

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