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All Quiet Along the Potomac

All Quiet Along the Potomac
(Ethel Lynn Beers and W.H. Goodwin)

"All quiet along the Potomac," they say,
Except now and then a stray picket
Is shot as he walks on his beat to and fro
By a rifleman hid in the thicket.
'Tis nothing. A private or two now and then
Will not count in the news of the battle;
Not an officer lost. Only one of the men
Moaning out all alone the death rattle.

All quiet along the Potomac tonight,
Where the soldiers lie peacefully dreaming,
Their tents in the rays of the clear autumn moon,
O'er the light of the watch fires, are gleaming;
There's only the sound of the lone sentry's tread
As he tramps from the rock to the fountain,
And thinks of the two in the low trundle bed,
Far away in the cot on the mountain.

His musket falls slack, and his face, dark and grim,
Grows gentle with memories tender,
As he mutters a prayer for the children asleep,
For their mother, may Heaven defend her.
The moon seems to shine just as brightly as then
That night when the love yet unspoken
Leaped up to his lips when low-murmured vows
Were pledged to be ever unbroken.

Then drawing his sleeve roughly over his eyes,
He dashes off tears that are welling,
And gathers his gun closer up to its place
As if to keep down the heart-swelling.
He passes the fountain, the blasted pine tree,
The footstep is lagging and weary;
Yet onward he goes, through the broad belt of light,
Toward the shades of the forest so dreary-Hark!

Was it the night wind that rustled the leaves?
Was it moonlight so wondrously flashing?
It looks like a rifle---"Ah! Mary, good-bye!"

And the lifeblood is ebbing and splashing.
All quiet along the Potomac tonight,
No sound save the rush of the river;
While soft falls the dew on the face of the dead-
The picket's off duty forever.