

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight

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 th
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."