

# Ghosts

*from the anonymously edited  
and written anthology Ghost Stories and Presentiments, 1887*

Creatures of mist, half credited;  
Our faint form flings  
No shadow in moonlight on the bed  
We visit; noiseless is our tread,  
Who come from deserts of the dead,  
Where no bird sings.

For ever, in dark and cold forlorn,  
We wander there;  
Pale spectres, wondrous pale and worn,  
As privet flowers at even shorn  
Are pale when Phosphor fails with morn,  
We who once were.

Who now nor see the sunny day,  
Nor waving wheat  
Hear whisper in its autumn play;  
The sweet world's face is never gay  
For us, who see no flowers of May;  
But night is sweet.

Night brings us back to earth again,  
Again we fill  
Our old familiar homes, a train  
Of dead men out of mind, who fain  
To be remembered, long, in vain,  
To linger still.

In vain. Dawn's dated herald shows  
Dawn comes apace.  
On the orient heaven ere Morning throws  
Broadcast her buds of white and rose,  
Each sad unwilling phantom goes  
To its own place.

Ah, why are these, when we appear,  
Our children, frayed?  
Could they once feel how very dear  
We find their faces, none would fear  
Us, so far distant, yet so near,  
Dim folk of shade.

Do these not know their children's toys,  
Long years ago,  
Were ours; their lovers' woes and joys,  
Their prayers, their faith, their fame, their noise,  
Know they not this, these girls and boys,  
Nor care to know?

As sights, which memory endears,  
Seen once more, please;  
As sounds, unheard for many years,  
Heard once more waken joys and tears –  
So are we moved by hopes and fears  
And cares of these.

Oft at their births we intervene;  
The stray ears strown  
In their loves' harvest-home we glean

And garner; in their deaths we lean  
Over them, kindred shadows seen  
By them alone.

Would we might help them, though abhorred,  
From harm and wrong!  
From plague and famine, fire and sword,  
In weal and woe, at bed and board,  
Would our weak hands might work to ward  
Their whole life long!

Would we might say the things we know,  
A little say  
Of all the gods conceal! But, lo,  
Our very dumb lips bid men go  
Eat bread, and let the wine's blood flow  
While it is day.

Bid them, while yet they see the light,  
Ere the black pall  
Cover them, let their robes be white,  
Perfumed their heads in death's despite;  
We know what wisdom is in night,  
What end for all.

We watch the moon's far choral band  
Fade in the blue;  
We watch the sinking grains of sand,  
And yearn for voices to command,  
"Do with your might what deed your hand  
May find to do."

We watch the unheeded hours, which yet  
Return no more;  
We watch them wane with long regret.  
Ye fools! what meed have faces met  
With fasting gaunt, with weeping wet,  
Sealed up in store?

Warm tender hands with last touch close  
The dead's dull eyes;  
For ever from you to us he goes,  
To our waste land where no wind blows.  
Whither beyond? What wise man knows,  
However wise?

Tossed for a while in life's mad foam,  
A bubble at best,  
His body lies long wrapped in loam;  
With us his weary ghost must roam  
Always: men call it going home  
To perfect rest.

Home! rest! words laughed by us to scorn.  
Is, then, rest there  
Indeed? But we away are torn:  
We see the glow-worm's glimmer born,  
We smell the mild sweet breath of morn,  
And mix with air.