

*"But it's such a very special occasion," mourned Anne, on the verge of tears. "Diana has only one birthday in a year. It isn't as if birthdays were common things, Marilla. Prissy Andrews is going to recite 'Curfew Must Not Ring To-night.' That is such a good moral piece, Marilla, I'm sure it would do me lots of good to hear it."*

*Anne of Green Gables, Chapter XIX.*

## Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight

by Rose Hartwick Thorpe

(1850-1939)

Slowly England's sun was setting o'er the hilltops far away,  
Filling all the land with beauty at the close of one sad day;  
And the last rays kissed the forehead of a man and maiden fair,  
He with footsteps slow and weary, she with sunny floating hair;  
He with bowed head, sad and thoughtful, she with lips all cold and white,  
Struggling to keep back the murmur, "Curfew must not ring tonight!"

"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 the 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 face grew strangely white  
As she breathed the husky whisper, "Curfew must not ring tonight!"

"Bessie," calmly spoke the sexton—and his accents pierced her 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 still must do it: Curfew, girl, must ring tonight!"

Wild her eyes and pale her features, stern and white her thoughtful brow,  
And within her secret bosom Bessie made a solemn vow.  
She had listened while the judges read, without a tear or sigh,  
"At the ringing of the curfew, Basil Underwood must die."  
And her breath came fast and faster, and her eyes grew large and bright,  
As in undertone she murmured, "Curfew must not ring tonight!"

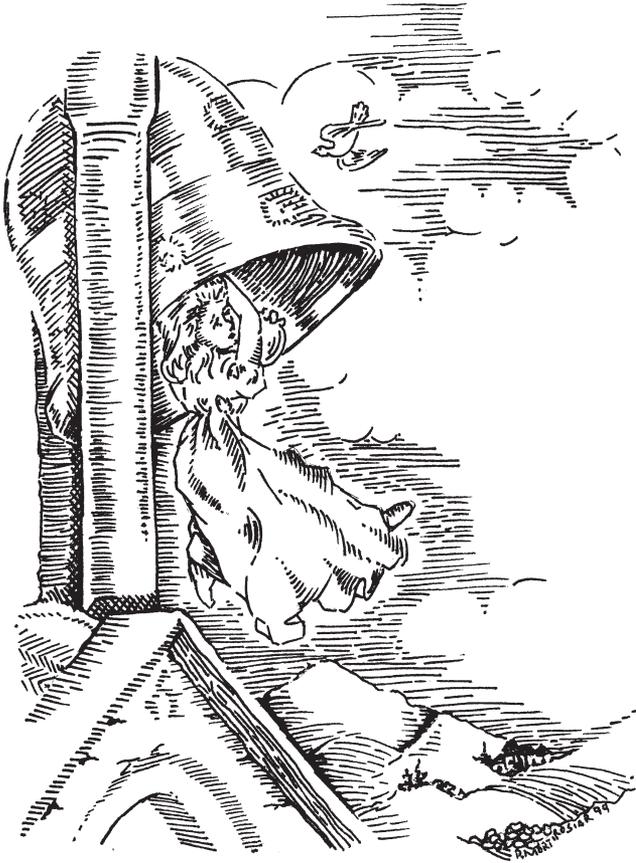
With quick step she bounded forward, sprang within the old church door,  
Left the old man threading slowly paths he'd often trod before;  
Not one moment paused the maiden, but with eye and cheek aglow  
Mounted up the gloomy tower, where the bell swung to and fro  
As she climbed the dusty ladder, on which fell no ray of light,<sup>1</sup>  
Up and up, her white lips saying, "Curfew shall not ring tonight!"



<sup>1</sup> Compare with *Anne of Green Gables*, Chapter XIX:

When Prissy Andrews, attired in a new pink silk waist with a string of pearls about her smooth white throat and real carnations in her hair—rumor whispered that the master had sent all the way to town for them for her—“climbed the slimy ladder, dark without one ray of light,” Anne shivered in luxurious sympathy;...

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,  
And she springs and grasps it firmly: "Curfew shall not ring tonight!"



Out she swung, far out; the city seemed a speck of light below;  
 She '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,  
 But he thought it still was ringing fair young Basil's funeral knell.  
 Still the maiden clung more firmly, and with trembling lips and white,  
 Said, to hush her heart's wild beating, "Curfew shall not ring tonight!"

It was o'er; the bell ceased swaying, and the maiden stepped once more  
 Firmly on the dark old ladder, where for hundred years before  
 Human foot had not been planted; but the brave deed she had done  
 Should be told long ages after—often as the setting sun  
 Should illumine the sky with beauty, aged sires with heads of white,  
 Long should tell the little children, "Curfew did not ring that night."

O'er the distant hills came Cromwell; Bessie sees him, and her brow,  
 Full of hope and full of gladness, 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 eye with misty light;  
 "Go, your lover lives!" said Cromwell; "Curfew shall not ring tonight!"

Wide they flung the massive portal: led the prisoners forth to die,  
 All his bright young life before him. 'Neath the darkening English sky  
 Bessie comes with flying footsteps, eyes aglow with lovelight sweet;  
 Kneeling on the turf beside him, lays his pardon at his feet.  
 In his brave, strong arms he clasped her, kissed the face upturned and white,  
 Whispered, "Darling, you have saved me, Curfew did not ring tonight!"

1867.

