

# The Phantom

By Walter de la Mare

“Upstairs in the large closet, child,  
This side the blue room door,  
Is an old Bible, bound in leather,  
Standing upon the floor;

“Go with this taper, bring it me;  
Carry it so, upon your arm;  
It is the book on many a sea  
Hath stilled the waves’ alarm.”

Late the hour, dark the night,  
The house is solitary;  
Feeble is a taper’s light  
To light poor Ann to see.

Her eyes are yet with visions bright  
Of sylph and river, flower and fay,  
Now through a narrow corridor  
She goes her lonely way.

Vast shadows on the heedless walls  
Gigantic loom, stoop low:  
Each little hasty footfall calls  
Hollowly to and fro.

In the cold solitude her heart  
Remembers sorrowfully  
White winters when her mother was  
Her loving company.

Now in the dark clear glass she sees  
A taper, mocking hers,—  
A phantom face of light blue eyes,  
Reflecting phantom fears.

Around her loom the vacant rooms,  
Wind the upward stairs,  
She climbs on into a loneliness  
Only her taper shares.

Out in the dark a cold wind stirs,

At every window sighs;  
A waning moon peers small and chill  
From out the cloudy skies,

Casting faint tracery on the walls;  
So stony still the house  
From cellar to attic rings the shrill  
Squeak of the hungry mouse.

Her grandmother is deaf with age;  
A garden of moonless trees  
Would answer not though she should cry  
In anguish on her knees.

So that she scarce can breathe—so fast  
Her pent up heart doth beat—  
When, faint along the corridor,  
Falleth the sound of feet:—

Sounds lighter than silk slippers make  
Upon a ballroom floor, when sweet  
Violin and 'cello wake  
Music for twirling feet.

O! 'neath an old unfriendly roof,  
What shapes may not conceal  
Their faces in the open day,  
At night abroad to steal?

Even her taper seems with fear  
To languish small and blue;  
Far in the woods the winter wind  
Runs whistling through.

A dreadful cold plucks at each hair,  
Her mouth is stretched to cry,  
But sudden, with a gush of joy,  
It narrows to a sigh.

It is a phantom child which comes  
Soft through the corridor,  
Singing an old forgotten song,  
This ancient burden bore:—

“Thorn, thorn, I wis,  
And roses twain,

A red rose and a white,  
Stoop in the blossom, bee, and kiss  
A lonely child good-night.

“Swim fish, sing bird,  
And sigh again,  
I that am lost am lone,  
Bee in the blossom never stirred  
Locks hid beneath a stone!”—

Her eye was of the azure fire  
That hovers in wintry flame;  
Her raiment wild and yellow as furze  
That spouteth out the same;

And in her hand she bore no flower,  
But on her head a wreath  
Of faded flowers that did yet  
Smell sweetly after death.

Gloomy with night the listening walls  
Are now that she is gone,  
Albeit this solitary child  
No longer seems alone.

Fast though her taper dwindles down,  
Heavy and thick the tome,  
A beauty beyond fear to dim  
Haunts now her alien home.

Ghosts in the world, malignant, grim,  
Vex many a wood and glen,  
And house and pool—the unquiet ghosts  
Of dead and restless men.

But in her grannie’s house this spirit—  
A child as lone as she—  
Pining for love not found on earth,  
Ann dreams again to see.

Seated upon her tapestry stool,  
Her fairy-book laid by,  
She gazes into the fire, knowing  
She has sweet company.