

Aubrey De Vere (1814-1902)

3 *The Ballad of "Bonny Portmore"; or, the Night Surprise*

I.

Shall I breathe it? Hush! 'twas dark!  
Silence! — few could understand: —  
Needful deeds are done — not told.  
In your ear a whisper! Hark!  
'Twas a sworn, unwavering band 5  
Marching through the midnight cold;  
Rang the frost plain, stiff and stark:  
By us, blind, the river rolled.

II.

Silence! we were silent then:  
Shall we boast and brag to day? 10  
Just deeds, blabbed, have found their price!  
Snow made dumb the trusty glen;  
Now and then a starry ray  
Shewed the floating rafts of ice:  
Worked our oath in heart and brain: 15  
Twice we halted: — only twice.

III.

When we reached the city wall  
On their posts the Warders slept:  
By the moat the rushes plained:  
Hush! I tell you part, not all! 20  
Through the water-weeds we crept;  
Soon the sleepers' tower was gained.  
My sister's son a tear let fall —  
Righteous deeds by tears are stained.

IV.

Round us lay a sleeping city: 25  
Had they wakened we had died:  
Innocence sleeps well, they say.  
Pirates, traitors, base banditti,  
Blood upon their hands undried,

'Mid their spoils asleep they lay! 30  
Murderers! Justice murders pity!  
Night had brought their Judgment Day!

V.

In the castle, here and there,  
'Twixt us and the dawning East  
Flashed a light, or sank by fits: 35  
"Patience, brothers! sin it were  
"Lords to startle at their feast,  
"Or to scare the dancers' wits!"  
Patient long in forest lair  
The listening, fire-eyed Tiger sits! 40

VI.

Oh, the loud flames upward springing!  
Oh, that first fierce yell within,  
And, without, that stormy laughter!  
Like rooks across a sunset winging  
Dark they dashed through glare and din 45  
Under rain of beam and rafter!  
Oh, that death-shriek heavenward ringing;  
Oh, that wondrous silence after!

The fire-glare shewed, 'mid glaze and blister,  
A boy's cheek wet with tears. 'Twas base! 50  
That boy was first-born of my sister;  
Yet I smote him on the face!

Ah, but when the poplars quiver  
In the hot noon, cold o'er head,  
Sometimes with a spasm I shiver; 55  
Sometimes round me gaze with dread.

Ah! and when the silver willow  
Whitens in the moonlight gale,  
From my hectic, grassy pillow  
I hear, sometimes, that infant's wail! 60

(From *Inisfail; a Lyrical Chronicle of Ireland*. Dublin, 1863)