

George MacDonald (1824-1905)

2 *Ballad of the Thulian Nurse*

“Sweep up the flure, Janet,
Put on anither peat.
It’s a lown and starry nicht, Janet,
And neither cauld nor weet.

And it’s open hoose we keep the nicht 5
For ony that may be oot.
It’s the nicht atween the Sancts and Souls,
Whan the bodiless gang about.

Set the chairs back to the wa’, Janet;
Mak’ ready for quaiet fowk. 10
Hae a’ thing as clean as a win’in’ sheet:
They comena ilka ook.

There’s a spale upo’ the flure, Janet;
And there’s a rowan-berry:
Sweep them into the fire, Janet. — 15
They’ll be welcomer than merry.

Syne set open the door, Janet —
Wide open for wha kens wha;
As ye come benn to yer bed, Janet,
Set it open to the wa’.” 20

She set the chairs back to the wa’,
But ane made o’ the birk;
She sweepit the flure, — left that ae spale,
A lang spale o’ the aik.

The nicht was lowne, and the stars sat still, 25
Aglintin’ doon the sky;
And the souls crap oot o’ their mooly graves,
A’ dank wi’ lyin’ by.

She had set the door wide to the wa',
And blawn the peats rosy reid; 30
They war shoonless feet gaed oot and in,
Nor clampit as they gaed.

Whan midnight cam', the mither rase —
She wad gae see and hear.
Back she cam' wi' a glowerin' face, 35
And sloomin' wi' verra fear.

“There's ane o' them sittin' afore the fire!
Janet, gang na to see:
Ye left a chair afore the fire,
Whaur I tauld ye nae chair sud be.” 40

Janet she smiled in her mother's face:
She had brunt the roddin reid;
And she left aneath the birken chair
The spale frae a coffin-lid.

She rase and she gaed butt the hoose, 45
Aye steekin' door and door.
Three hours gaed by or her mother heard
Her fit upo' the floor.

But whan the grey cock crew, she heard
The sound o' shoeless feet; 50
Whan the red cock crew, she heard the door,
And a sough o' wind and weet.

And Janet cam' back wi' a wan face,
But never a word said she;
No man ever heard her voice lood oot, 55
It cam' like frae ower the sea.

And no man ever heard her lauch,
Nor yet say alas or wae;
But a smile aye glimmert on her wan face,
Like the moonlight on the sea. 60

And ilka nicht 'ween the Sancts and the Souls,

Wide open she set the door;
And she mendit the fire, and she left ae chair,
And that spale upo' the floor.

And at midnicht she gaed butt the hoose, 65
Aye steekin' door and door.
Whan the reid cock crew, she cam' benn the hoose,
Aye wanner than afore —

Wanner her face, and sweeter her smile;
Till the seventh All Souls' eve. 70
Her mother she heard the shoeless feet,
Said "she's comin', I believe."

But she camna benn, and her mother lay;
For fear she cudna stan'.
But up she rase and benn she gaed, 75
Whan the gowden cock had crawn.

And Janet sat upo' the chair,
White as the day did daw;
Her smile was a sunglint left on the sea,
Whan the sun has gane awa'. 80

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