

Robert W. Buchanan (1841-1901)

5 *The Ballad of the Wayfarer*

(Old Style)

O'er the cheerless common,  
    Where the bleak winds blow,  
Wanders the wan Woman;  
Waysore and weary,  
Through the dark and dreary 5  
    Drift-bed of the Snow.

On her pale pinch'd features snowing 'tis and sleeting,  
By her side her little Son runs with warm heart beating,  
Clinging to her wet robe, while she wails repeating:  
    'Further, my child, further—further let us go!' 10

Fleet the Boy doth follow,  
    Wondering at her woe;  
On, with footfall hollow,  
O'er the pathway jagged  
Crawls she wet and ragged, 15  
    Restless and slow.

'Mother!' now he murmurs, mid the tempest's crying,  
'Mother, rest a little—I am faint with flying—  
Mother, rest a little!' Still she answers sighing,  
    'Further, child, and faster—further let us go!' 20

But now she is sitting  
    On a stone, and lo!  
Dark her brows are knitting,  
While the Child, close clinging  
To her raiment wringing, 25

Shivers at the snow.

'Tell me of my *father!* for I never knew him

Is he dead or living, are we flying to him?'

'Peace, my child!' she answers, and the voice thrills through him;

'When we wander further—further!—thou shalt know.' 30

(Wild wind of December,

Blow, wind, blow!—)

'Oh, but I remember!

In my mind I gather

Pictures of my father, 35

And a gallant show.

Tell me, mother, tell me—did we always wander?

Was the world once brighter? In some town out yonder

Dwelt we not contented? Sad she seems to ponder,

Sighing 'I will tell thee—when we further go.' 40

'Oh, but Mother, listen!

We were rich, I know!

(How his bright eyes glisten!)

We were merry people,

In a town with a steeple, 45

Long, long ago;

In a gay room dwelling, where your face shone brightly,

And a brave man brought us food and presents nightly.

Tell me, 'twas my father?' Now her face looms whitely,

While she shivers moaning, 'Peace, let us go!' 50

How the clouds gather!

How the winds blow!

'*Who* was my father?

Was he Prince or Lord there,

With a train and a sword there? 55

Mother, I *will* know!—

I have dreamt so often of those gallant places;  
There were banners waving—I could see the faces—  
Take me to my father!’ cries he with embraces,  
While she shivers moaning, ‘No, child, no!’ 60

While the child is speaking,  
Forth the moon steals slow,  
From the black cloud breaking,  
Shining white and eerie  
On the wayside weary, 65  
Shrouded white in snow.

On the heath behind them, ’gainst the dim sky lying,  
Looms the Gallows blackly, in the wild wind sighing.  
To her feet the woman springs! with fierce shriek crying—  
‘See! Oh, God in heaven! . . . Woe, child, woe!’ 70

(Blow, wind of December,  
Blow, wind, blow!—)  
‘*Thou* canst not remember—  
Thou wert but a blossom  
Suckled on my bosom, 75  
Years, years ago!

Thy father stole to feed us; our starving faces stung him;  
In yonder town behind us, they seized him and they hung him!  
They murdered him on Gallows-Tree, and to the ravens flung  
him!  
Faster, my child, faster—faster let us go!’ 80

1882

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