Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82)

7 Sister Helen

"Why did you melt your waxen man,	
Sister Helen?	
To-day is the third since you began."	
"The time was long, yet the time ran,	
Little brother	5
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Three days to-day, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"But if you have done your work aright,	
Sister Helen,	
You'll let me play, for you said I might."	10
"Be very still in your play to-night,	
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Third night, to-night, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"You said it must melt ere vesper-bell,	15
Sister Helen;	
If now it be molten, all is well."	
"Even so,—nay, peace! you cannot tell,	
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	20
O what is this, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"Oh the waxen knave was plump to-day,	
Sister Helen;	
How like dead folk he has dropped away!"	
"Nay now, of the dead what can you say,	25
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
What of the dead, between Hell and Heaven?)	

"See, see, the sunken pile of wood,	
Sister Helen,	30
Shines through the thinned wax red as blood!"	
"Nay now, when looked you yet on blood,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
How pale she is, between Hell and Heaven!)	35
"Now close your eyes, for they're sick and sore,	
Sister Helen,	
And I'll play without the gallery door."	
"Aye, let me rest,—I'll lie on the floor,	
Little brother."	40
$(O\ Mother,\ Mary\ Mother,$	
What rest to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"Here high up in the balcony,	
Sister Helen,	
The moon flies face to face with me."	45
"Aye, look and say whatever you see,	
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
What sight to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"Outside it's merry in the wind's wake,	50
Sister Helen;	
In the shaken trees the chill stars shake."	
"Hush, heard you a horse-tread as you spake,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	55
What sound to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"I hear a horse-tread, and I see,	
Sister Helen,	
Three horsemen that ride terribly."	
"Little brother, whence come the three,	60

Little brother?"

(O Mother, Mary Mother,

Whence should they come, between Hell and Heaven?)

"They come by the hill-verge from Boyne Bar,	
Sister Helen,	65
And one draws nigh, but two are afar."	
"Look, look, do you know them who they are,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Who should they be, between Hell and Heaven?)	70
"Oh, it's Keith of Eastholm rides so fast,	
Sister Helen,	
For I know the white mane on the blast."	
"The hour has come, has come at last,	
Little brother!"	75
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	10
Her hour at last, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"He has made a sign and called Halloo!	
Sister Helen,	
And he says that he would speak with you."	80
"Oh tell him I fear the frozen dew,	
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Why laughs she thus, between Hell and Heaven?	
"The wind is loud, but I hear him cry,	85
Sister Helen,	
That Keith of Ewern's like to die."	
"And he and thou, and thou and I,	
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	90
And they and we, between Hell and Heaven!)	50
and they and we, between from and freaven;	

[&]quot;Three days ago, on his marriage-morn,

Sister Helen,	
He sickened, and lies since then forlorn."	
"For bridegroom's side is the bride a thorn,	95
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Cold bridal cheer, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"Three days and nights he has lain abed,	
Sister Helen,	100
And he prays in torment to be dead."	
"The thing may chance, if he have prayed,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
If he have prayed, between Hell and Heaven!)	105
"But he has not ceased to cry to-day,	
Sister Helen,	
That you should take your curse away."	
"My prayer was heard,—he need but pray,	
Little brother!"	110
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Shall God not hear, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"But he says, till you take back your ban,	
Sister Helen,	
His soul would pass, yet never can."	115
"Nay then, shall I slay a living man,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
A living soul, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"But he calls for ever on your name,	120
Sister Helen,	
And says that he melts before a flame."	
"My heart for his pleasure fared the same,	
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	125

Fire at the heart,	between Hell and	Heaven!)

"Here's Keith of Westholm riding fast, Sister Helen,	
·	
For I know the white plume on the blast."	190
"The hour, the sweet hour I forecast,	130
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Is the hour sweet, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"He stops to speak, and he stills his horse,	
Sister Helen;	135
But his words are drowned in the wind's course."	
"Nay hear, nay hear, you must hear perforce,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
What word now heard, between Hell and Heaven?)	140
"Oh he says that Keith of Ewern's cry,	
Sister Helen,	
Is ever to see you ere he die."	
"In all that his soul sees, there am I,	
Little brother!"	145
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
The soul's one sight, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"He sends a ring and a broken coin,	
Sister Helen,	
And bids you mind the banks of Boyne."	150
"What else he broke will he ever join,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
No, never joined, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"He yields you these and craves full fain,	155
Sister Helen,	
You pardon him in his mortal pain."	

"What else he took will he give again,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	160
Not twice to give, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"He calls your name in an agony,	
Sister Helen,	
That even dead Love must weep to see."	
"Hate, born of Love, is blind as he,	165
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Love turned to hate, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"Oh it's Keith of Keith now that rides fast,	
Sister Helen,	170
For I know the white hair on the blast."	
"The short short hour will soon be past,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Will soon be past, between Hell and Heaven!)	175
"He looks at me and he tries to speak,	
Sister Helen,	
But oh! his voice is sad and weak!"	
"What here should the mighty Baron seek,	
Little brother?"	180
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Is this the end, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"Oh his son still cries, if you forgive,	
Sister Helen,	
The body dies but the soul shall live."	185
"Fire shall forgive me as I forgive,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
As she forgives, between Hell and Heaven!)	

"Oh he prays you, as his heart would rive,	190
Sister Helen,	
To save his dear son's soul alive."	
"Fire cannot slay it, it shall thrive,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	195
Alas, alas, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"He cries to you, kneeling in the road,	
Sister Helen,	
To go with him for the love of God!"	
"The way is long to his son's abode,	200
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
The way is long, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"A lady's here, by a dark steed brought,	
Sister Helen,	205
So darkly clad, I saw her not."	
"See her now or never see aught,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
What more to see, between Hell and Heaven?)	210
"Her hood falls back, and the moon shines fair,	
Sister Helen,	
On the Lady of Ewern's golden hair."	
"Blest hour of my power and her despair,	
Little brother!"	215
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Hour blest and bann'd, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"Pale, pale her cheeks, that in pride did glow,	
Sister Helen,	
'Neath the bridal-wreath three days ago."	220
"One morn for pride and three days for woe,	
Little brother!"	

(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Three days, three nights, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"Her clasped hands stretch from her bending head,	225
Sister Helen;	
With the loud wind's wail her sobs are wed."	
"What wedding-strains hath her bridal-bed,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	230
What strain but death's, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"She may not speak, she sinks in a swoon,	
Sister Helen,—	
She lifts her lips and gasps on the moon."	
"Oh! might I but hear her soul's blithe tune,	235
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Her woe's dumb cry, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"They've caught her to Westholm's saddle-bow,	
Sister Helen,	240
And her moonlit hair gleams white in its flow."	
"Let it turn whiter than winter snow,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Woe-withered gold, between Hell and Heaven!)	245
"O Sister Helen, you heard the bell.	
Sister Helen!	
More loud than the vesper-chime it fell."	
"No vesper-chime, but a dying knell,	
Little brother!"	250
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
His dying knell, between Hell and Heaven!)	

Sister Helen;

"Alas! but I fear the heavy sound,

Is it in the sky or in the ground?"	255
"Say, have they turned their horses round,	
Little brother?"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
What would she more, between Hell and Heaven?)	
"They have raised the old man from his knee,	260
Sister Helen,	
And they ride in silence hastily."	
"More fast the naked soul doth flee,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	265
The naked soul, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"Flank to flank are the three steeds gone,	
Sister Helen,	
But the lady's dark steed goes alone."	
"And lonely her bridegroom's soul hath flown,	270
Little brother."	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
The lonely ghost, between Hell and Heaven!)	
"Oh the wind is sad in the iron chill,	
Sister Helen,	275
And weary sad they look by the hill."	
"But he and I are sadder still,	
Little brother!"	
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Most sad of all, between Hell and Heaven!)	280
"See, see, the wax has dropped from its place,	
Sister Helen,	
And the flames are winning up apace!"	
"Yet here they burn but for a space,	
Little brother!"	285
(O Mother, Mary Mother,	
Here for a space, between Hell and Heaven!)	

"Ah! what white thing at the door has cross'd Sister Helen?

Ah! what is this that sighs in the frost?"

290

"A soul that's lost as mine is lost,

Little brother!" (O Mother, Mary Mother,

Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven!)

?1853-80

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