

# **A Night Piece**

James Macpherson



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# A Night Piece

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'Tis night: and storms the forest shake;  
Dark roll the billows on the lake;  
The whirlwind sweeps; descends the rain,  
The torrents echo to the plain:  
Through desert paths forlorn I stray,  
And not a moon to light my way;  
No friendly star with golden eye  
Looks from the ceiling of the sky.

Here sounds an oak; — there spreads a plane;  
Above, the rock defends the rain;  
The murm'ring rill o'er pebbles flies,  
The wind along the bramble sighs:  
A fox is howling on the rock,  
A screech-owl on a blasted oak:  
The passing meteor lights the vale;  
A spirit whispers on the gale,  
Or beck'ning longs to breathe its care;  
And ghastly horror rides the air.

A ruin! 'Twas of old the seat  
Of heroes now resigned to fate;  
Where often mirth relaxed the soul,  
And midnight crowned the rosy bowl;  
Where sprightly music swelled the sound,  
While blooming beauty tript around.  
They vanished, as they ne'er had been,  
No lyre is heard, no maid is seen,  
No more the tuneful lyrist warms,  
Death long since rifled beauty's charms;  
No warrior's martial size is shown,  
Time moulders down the very stone;  
With every blast the fragments fall,  
And winds are blust'ring in the hall.

Unhappy man! how short his date,

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He springs to light, and sinks in fate;  
Ev'n from the womb, the tomb is seen;  
And sorrow fills the space between.  
Bid paltry riches glut his eye,  
Or empty glory raise him high;  
Bid him in wrangling senates glow,  
Or turn the batt'ry on the foe;  
Yet, high or low, 'tis mankind's lot,  
To live in grief, and die forgot.

Go, on the stone inscribe thy name,  
And to the marble trust thy fame;  
Bid half the mountain form thy tomb,  
The wonder of the times to come;  
The mound shall sink, the stone decay,  
The sculptured figure wear away;  
The bust that proudly speaks thy praise,  
Some shepherd's future cot may raise;  
While, smiling round, his infant son  
Admires the figures on the stone.

A tomb its dreary honour shows!  
Three stones exalt their heads of moss;  
A bust, half-sunk in earth, appears,  
The rude remains of former years;  
Dry tufts of grass around it rise,  
The wind along the brushwood sighs,  
Now peeping from the cloudy pole,  
The moon has silvered o'er the whole.  
Here, hoar tradition tells, repose  
Two youths the dread of Albion's foes,  
Of other times the grace and pride,  
Who saved their country when they died;  
But rolling time has lost their name,  
So faithless is the breath of fame.  
That light! it issues from the cot,  
Be grief suspended, — care forgot:  
There Nisa for her lover sighs,  
And rolls on night her wishful eyes:  
Why has my ling'ring rover stayed?  
I come, I come, my lovely maid,  
To feast my eyes on all your charms,  
And lose my sorrow in your arms.