

# Ring Around the Rosie

“Ring around the rosie, pockets full of posies, ashes to ashes, Annie’s falling down.”

The milky-white figure giggles. She reached up with blackend fingernails and twirled a blonde-white plait between her bony fingers. She swung her feet around and continued to hum the song.

“Ring around the rosie, pockets full of posies, ashes to ashes, we all fall down.”

Shouted a little girl hopping back up to her feet, little red ringlets of her hair bounced in the sun, her cheeks rosy from the cold.

“Again, again, Annie!” Shouted a smaller girl with the same red ringlets, and a ribbon in her hair. Annie dusted off her little blue plaid dress and flattened her collar. She grabbed hands with her little sister and a boy around her age. The little girl swung her arms and began to sing,

“Ring around the rosie, pockets full of posies, ashes to ashes, we all fall down.”

The children giggled and clamoured back to their feet. The boy paused,

“Annie, what’s that on your fingers?”

Annie and Lilah paused and inspected as Annie held up her hand.

“I’m not sure. Could it be frostbite?”

Lilah clasped the tips of her fingers around the tip of her nose.

“Oh dear, I should hope not, Annie,” She continued to rub at her nose as if the frostbite from the winter before remained on her nose, “I had frostbite last winter! Right here!” She pointed with large green eyes, “It’s no fun, it turns all black and pink.” She and Annie wrinkled their noses, Tom just stood with interest.

“Annie, Lilah, supper!” A voice called from houses behind them.

“Yes mother!” Lilah called and took off in a run.

“Bye Tom! I’m off then, have a nice dinner!” Annie called over her shoulder, she suddenly seemed more drowsy and out of breath as she tromped through the snow.

Tom threw his hand up in a wave, holding eye contact with Annie for merely a second, before darting his eyes down to the glistening snow, continuing his walk towards his home. He pondered the events of playtime with his neighbors in the clearing for only a few seconds longer before returning his mind to the warm dinner and crackling fire awaiting him in the dining room. He hoped that his brothers weren’t already home, as they were prone to pelting him with icy snowballs as soon as he passed the little black mailbox that adorned his driveway.

As he approached the end of the clearing and the beginning of the thick pine tree woods, he noticed an icy oak tree, as it was so deep in the winter it was missing its leaves, but it was furnished with a small swing accompanied with a dainty little girl. Tom hadn’t noticed this before. It was tied to an extremely skinny branch, Tom wasn’t sure how the swing was able to hold the girl up, as he was unsure if even a robin would be able to stand on the branch without it snapping, it was as if she could float. Tom realized that all this while, he had just been standing there and staring at the swing. The girl seemed to notice as well. She held up her bony, pale, fingers, that faded to a charred black towards her knuckles,

motioning him over. Out of nerves, Tom looked around for other blokes the eerie figure could be referring to. He knew he was the only person in the clearing, but these few seconds of blissful ignorance offered him a getaway. Something was off.

The figure vanished with the wind. Tom took this as a moment of escape. He sprinted through the woods, tufts of wool from his coat sticking to the branches and twig of the woods. He tripped on a stump of a black, rotting, oak. As he stood up, wiping his cut lip, Tom felt a haunting, bone chilling sensation. He slowly turned his head towards the right, the girl was standing on the hollow shell of the stump. She stood there with two white-blond plaits cascading down her back. Her face was that of a porcelain doll, with piercing blue eyes and a button nose. Although, she had large red blisters along her cheeks and forehead. She was wearing a white 12th century dress, with spattered blood on the neck, as well as blood wiped on the skirt in various places. He now was sprinting through the forest, he stumbled, once, twice, but it didn't stop him. He avoided his brothers attempt at injury, sprinted through the front door, and promptly closed it behind him.

Over in the other home, Annie and Lilah scraped their bowls of pumpkin soup, placing their dishes in the sink. Annie looked down at her hand, noticing that the supposed frostbite had spread past the knuckles in the middle of her finger.

"Annie, darling, did you get frostbite?" Her mother asked.

"I can't imagine I have, I was outside for but an hour, I didn't pick up any snow at all, and I've never been frostbitten like this." Annie responded, not looking away from her hand. Her mother placed the back of her hand on Annie's forehead.

"Well dear, you are a bit warm.." She trailed off, she was now looking towards a blistering red spot near Annie's chin. She ran her thumb over the bump.

"Mother... I don't..." Annie's eyes rolled back in her head as she crumbled to the floor.

Annie blinked back into consciousness, above her a pasty-white little girl with two white-blond plaits dangling near Annie's shoulders. The blood on her chin was dried and flaked.

"The only place I've seen symptoms like these is the," The doctor chuckled, "Black plague."

"But Doctor, the plague?" She began to tear up, she wasn't sure if it was out of confusion, or fear.

"Can't be. It's been what? Six-hundred something years?" The doctor looked away almost to consider it for a moment but...no. It can't be. Annie coughed up blood, more blood she assumed as she noticed the blood on her chin and the blood on her shirt. She looked at her hands, and her arms and saw the little blisters all over her hands and arms, towards the end of the bed she saw them all over her hands and feet. Her fingers were no longer blackened at the ends, but also on her feet. Her whole body ached. She was dying. She blinked again, the girl was back. She walked to the end of the bed and began to sing:

"Ring around the rosie.." Annie blinked back tears, the pain was too much to bear.

"Pockets full of posies.."

"Dear are you.." she grabbed her daughters blackend hands, "Al-alright?"

"Can you... hear her..?" Annie croaked."

“Ashes to ashes..”

“Hear who..?” Her mother looked around, “Annie, WHO?”

“Annie’s falling..”

Annie closed her eyes, and breathed her last breath.

“Down.”

Annie’s mother squeezed her hands tight. She let out an unearthly screech of mourning and dispare.