

# At the Party

By Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Half a dozen children  
At our house!  
Half a dozen children  
Quiet as a mouse,  
Quiet as a moonbeam,  
You could hear a pin—  
Waiting for the party  
To begin.

Such a flood of flounces!  
(Oh dear me!)  
Such a surge of sashes  
Like a silken sea.  
Little eyes demurely  
Cast upon the ground,  
Little airs and graces  
All around.

High time for that party  
To begin!  
To sit so any longer  
Were a sort of sin;  
As if you were n't acquainted  
With society.  
What a thing to tell of  
That would be!

Up spoke a little lady  
Aged five;  
"I've tumbled up my over-dress,  
Sure as I'm alive!  
*My* dress came from Paris  
We sent to Worth for it;  
Mother says she calls it  
Such a fit!"

Quick there piped another  
Little voice —  
“*I* did n’t send for dresses,  
Though I had my choice;  
*I* have got a doll that  
Came from Paris too;  
It can walk and talk as  
Well as you!”

Still, till now, there sat one  
Little girl  
Simple as a snow-drop,  
Without flounce or curl.  
Modest as a primrose,  
Soft, plain hair brushed back,  
But the color of her dress was  
Black—all black.

Swift she glanced around with  
Sweet surprise;  
Bright and grave the look that  
Widened in her eyes.  
To entertain the party  
She must do her share,  
As if God had sent her  
Stood she there;

Stood a minute, thinking,  
With crossed hands  
How she best might meet the  
Company’s demands.  
Grave and sweet the purpose  
To the child’s voice given: —  
“*I* have a little brother  
Gone to Heaven!”

On the little party  
Dropped a spell;  
All the little flounces  
Rustled where they fell;  
But the modest maiden  
In her mourning gown,  
Unconscious as a flower,  
Looketh down.

Quick my heart besought her,  
Silently.  
“Happy little maiden,  
Give, O give to me  
The highness of your courage,  
The sweetness of your grace,  
To speak a large word, in a  
Little place.”