

# **THE ROSSETTI LIE**

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**A Stage Play**

**by**

**Norman King Lloyd**

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**TIME: 1850**

**CAST**

**(All the characters are in their early twenties apart from the Mother)**

**CHRISTINA ROSSETTI**

**DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI**

**WILLAM ROSSETTI**

**COLLINSON (Nottingham accent)**

**THE MOTHER**

## **SCENE 1 – An Attic Room**

**(CHRISTINA is seen writing at her desk. Her brother, WILLIAM calls up to her from the floor below. She takes no notice and reads aloud from her manuscript)**

CHRISTINA      “Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away to the distant land.”

Distant? Silent is better, I think. “Gone far away into the silent land.”

WILLIAM      Christina?

CHRISTINA      *(Moving to the door)* What is it, Will?

WILLIAM      *(Calling up)* Come and warm yourself. There’s a roaring fire down here.

CHRISTINA      *(Still reading)* “Gone far away... gone far away...to the distant...  
*(Becoming irritated)* ...silent...distant...silent...distant!

**(WILLIAM appears)**

WILLIAM      You’re impossible. I’ve told you many times that there is no need to freeze to death up here. I’ll call Maisie and get her to light the fire.

CHRISTINA      No! Having a fire is wasteful and expensive. In this household, paints and models cost money. And Gabriel’s work is important.

WILLIAM      More than yours, Christina?

CHRISTINA I don't think in terms of whether I am more important or not than Gabriel - or you, come to that.

WILLIAM But you are both equally talented?

CHRISTINA I am happy doing my work up here even *with* your interruptions, dear brother. Besides, I think better in the cold.

WILLIAM Well, Christina, I do not!

**(A door bangs)**

Gabriel told me at breakfast that he will visit you this morning.

CHRISTINA (*Alarmed*) About marrying Mr Collinson. So am I to suffer the inquisition again?

WILLIAM Do not excite yourself so. There is no cause for alarm at all.

CHRISTINA There is considerable cause for alarm if he covers the same old ground.

WILLIAM (*Shouts*) Gabriel? Christina is willing for you to visit.

CHRISTINA Will! How could you! Is there no-one in this household who respects my privacy.

WILLIAM He wants to see you settled. You are an attractive and presentable woman, Christina.

CHRISTINA Is that all?

WILLIAM Intelligent, creative, original.

CHRISTINA        So why treat me this way?

**(GABRIEL ENTERS)**

GABRIEL        *(Pretending to shiver)* Remind me to put on my overcoat when next I visit these Arctic wastes. My dearest, you are becoming quite the ice maiden.

WILLIAM        *(Interrupting)* I'm sorry but I have to put it plainly. I've told Christina many times that I earn more than enough to keep us all in coals, claret and mutton. And what's more a reasonable sum is deposited at my bankers for your convenience.

GABRIEL        Do we not have a good and saintly brother, Christina? Are we not eternally grateful to the Income Revenue for employing him? What would we do without you, Will?

WILLIAM        Much as you do now but less comfortably.

**(WILLIAM EXITS)**

GABRIEL        What a family we are. A saint and a soul who believes in affliction.

CHRISTINA       *(Amused)* And yourself? How would you describe yourself?

GABRIEL        I have great facility with pen and ink which sometimes...sometimes turns into a work of picturesque and supreme beauty which reminds me that I need you to sit for me again, Christina. *(He picks up Christina's poem)* Mm...

CHRISTINA       Mm...?

GABRIEL        Mm...

- CHRISTINA Does it have merit?
- GABRIEL *(Smiles)* Everything you do has merit, Christina. Anyhow, I must not be swayed from my purpose.
- CHRISTINA That I feared. I don't object to the cold. I don't object to household duties but I do resent interruptions whilst I work.
- GABRIEL Work? *(He holds up the poem)* I'd call this a spot of indulgence. A masterful and talented indulgence to be sure. A supremely publishable indulgence, I don't doubt. And what's more...
- CHRISTINA *(Interrupting)* And what of your spot of indulgence? Your 'Painting in Progress?' Is that a spot of indulgence? Is your...
- GABRIEL *(Interrupts angrily)* You are much too spinsterish this morning!
- CHRISTINA You are chastising me again, Gabriel. *(Pause)* And I must say you look very handsome today but even your pleasing appearance will not sway me. I can guess what you are going to ask. You are going to ask whether I shall marry Mr Collinson?
- GABRIEL Of course, the man is *plain*. His countenance *is* unromantic. His small talent will probably, as he gets older, become even smaller. Collinson will never paint anything other than pleasant forays into the humdrum. He has a tradesman's eye in an artist's smock! But the fellow clearly adores you, dearest.
- CHRISTINA I cannot marry him.
- GABRIEL Why?
- CHRISTINA He vacillates.

- GABRIEL           Agreed. What man does not?
- CHRISTINA        He is always falling asleep!
- GABRIEL           Definitely a defect of character. But rather restful. Sometimes I wish that my companions, dear as they are to me, would occasionally take a short nap.
- CHRISTINA        I shall relate again dear Gabriel his incredible imperfection. Like ourselves he was Anglican then for no good reason suddenly turned Roman. Then when our betrothal was published, *renounced* Rome...
- GABRIEL           (*Interrupting*) At your insistence!
- CHRISTINA        Yes, at my insistence! The world may think it odd that I attach such importance to a man's religious convictions that *I should* persuade him to change religion... But I would not want my children brought up in the Roman faith. And again as a husband he has a duty to consider my views. Dearest Gabriel, it is in small things... the domestic rather than the metaphysic that a wife looks to in a husband.
- GABRIEL           But his *metaphysical* views decide you against him!
- CHRISTINA        No! It is the social and historic bigotry of the Roman Catholic tradition that I will not have! I also heartily dislike confessors. To confess is to abdicate personal responsibility.
- GABRIEL           But your High Church has the confessional, does it not? (*Languidly*) What does any of this really matter? Our art surely is proof against these tired old war-horses.
- CHRISTINA        To a man like you. But I require the man I marry to be consistent.