

ether An anaesthetic gas used in the 19th and early 20th century.

Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—
 He must have given the hand. However it was,
 Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
 The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
 As he swung toward them holding up the hand, 20
 Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
 The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
 Since he was old enough to know, big boy
 Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—
 He saw all spoiled. "Don't let him cut my hand off— 25
 The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!"
 So. But the hand was gone already.
 The doctor put him in the dark of **ether**.
 He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
 And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright. 30
 No one believed. They listened at his heart.
 Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.
 No more to build on there. And they, since they
 Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

The title of the poem is from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act V Scene IV, where Macbeth learns of the death of Lady Macbeth, his wife.

▼ FROM *MACBETH* BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

She should have died hereafter;
 There would have been a time for such a word.
 To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, 5
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, 10
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.