

THE LADY AND HER DREAM

A lady sat in her drawing room,
 Before a blazing fire,
Surrounded with life's luxuries,
 All that one could desire,
Such riches had she, one would think,
 Of life she'd never tire.

'Twas a dreary day, in November chill,
 In torrents fell the rain,
The winds blew hollow from the south,
 And shook the window pane;
The lady look'd and saw the storm,
 Sweeping o'er all the plain.

She rang a bell, her maid appeared,
 She said, "what shall I do,
'Tis a wretched day, and much I wished
 To make a call or two;
But 'tis impossible to-day,
 A journey to go through.

Go tell my groom I shall not want
 My carriage out today."
Then the maiden turned and left
 Her mistress to obey,
And the lady looked out on the storm
 With feelings of dismay.

"What shall I do?" she did exclaim,
 This dreary, dreary day,
And what shall occupy my thoughts,
 To pass the time away?
Then cast her eyes around the room
 Her riches to survey.

Her eyes fell on a table where
 A novel lay unread,
"Ah! yes I'll read an hour or so,"
 At last the lady said,
And by the fire she read until
 Her eyes swam in her head.

Then she refreshed herself with wine,
 Out of her wine cup deep,
Then back she fell in her soft chair,
 And snugly fell to sleep,
And then her maids about the house
 So quietly did creep.

And undisturbed there she lay
Bound in a dreamy spell,
Until the sound broke on her ear
Of her own dinner bell;
Then up she rose to change her dress,
Thus fashion did compel.

And to her dining room, in state,
This lady did repair,
And everything the heart could wish
To feast upon was there,
And down she sat alone to eat,
Of her rich savoury fare.,

Behind her stood a footman tall,
To wait upon her there,
So that she may no trouble have,
Nor once rise from her chair
Until two hours near was spent,
Eating and drinking there.

Then to her drawing room once more
The lady came again,
And played on her piano grand,
An operatic strain;
And thus two hours with music's charms
Herself did entertain.

Then tired out, she in her chair
Some fancy knitting tried,
But slow her taper fingers did
The silver needles guide,
And soon a change came o'er her then,
And work was thrown aside.

In came her little favourite dog,
And jumped into her lap,
The lady smoothed his silvery coat
With many a gentle tap,
Till, weary of caressing, he
Soon took his usual nap.

And there they lay, mistress and pet,
Passing the hours away,
So cosily in that snug chair,
No ills or cares had they.
Eating, sleeping, drinking, reading,
All through the live long day.

Then she took her evening draught,
Another page she read,
Then wearied out, she called her maid,

And thus unto her said,
“Mary, I'm worn out with fatigue.
Prepare at once my bed.”

At once the maid departed
The bedroom to prepare,
And being done the lady did
To her chamber repair,
And the maiden did support
Her mistress up the stair.

And she doffed her dress, and leant
Upon the maiden's arm,
While she crept into her bed,
So rich, so soft, and warm,
While outside she just could hear,
The faint sounds of the storm.

And there she lay, this lady rich,
On couch of down so light,
And there she sought balmy repose
That drear and stormy night,
And there she dreamt and thought she saw
The following piteous sight.

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She dreamt she saw a wretched cot,
Alone upon the plain,
Against whose door and windows old
The storm beat in amain,
Whose rotten thatch roof full of holes,
Let in the wind and rain.

The scanty furniture inside,
This lady did deplore,
For never had this lady seen
Such wretchedness before,
In truth she ne'er had visited,
The lone homes of the poor.

A being in her dream she saw,
A woman pale and wan,
Standing and stirring by the fire,
Some thin soup in a pan,
And as she stirred, she sobbed aloud,
Her tears down freely ran.

And then she saw her take the soup
All up a creaky stair,
And here she saw upon a bed,
A wretched figure there,

She felt a shudder as she saw
That picture of despair.

As the flickering rushlight shone
Upon that wretched bed,
A poor thin figure raised himself,
And slightly turned his head,
“Where have you been dear wife, so long,”
Faintly the sick man said.

“Sit up, my dear,” the wife replied,
“This little soup pray take,
Which I have made to ease your pain,
Now take it for my sake;
Though weak it p'raps may do you good,
'Tis the best I could make.”

He raised himself, and sat upright,
He gazed wildly around,
His sunken cheeks, his vacant eyes,
His feelings did expound,
And as he gazed upon his wife,
Anguish he felt profound.

She placed the basin to his lips,
But soon he turned away,
He said, “I'm past all eating now,
Take it yourself I pray,”
And suddenly upon the bed
He sank but lifeless clay.

The woman shrieked and cried, “O God!”
In her agony of fright,
“O my fond husband, he is dead,”
And then she fainted quite,
And there beside him on the bed
She lay a ghastly white.

An hour passed before she came
Unto herself again,
And then she called her husband dear,
But calling was in vain,
For there he lay a lifeless form
Free from all care and pain.

Then falling lowly on her knees
Loudly she did implore
Almighty God, to be her stay,
In this, her trouble sore,
And then she went to tell her grief
Unto her children four.

There in one corner of that room,
Together they all lay,
And the poor widow looked on them
With feelings of dismay;
"I will not wake ye now," she said,
"O sleep ye on till day."

Then overcome with weariness,
She sank back in a chair,
She closed her eyes, but sleep had fled,
She was too full of care;
And there she sat till morning's light,
A picture of despair.

The lady shuddered much to see,
It filled her with such dread,
That through the night incessantly,
She heavily turned her head,
She could not bear to gaze upon
The sight upon the bed.

And then a narrow coffin there
Her dreamy eyes did meet,
So mean, so plain, no ornament,
Save one at head and feet,
And the top was covered o'er
With a narrow sheet.

The widow and her children came
To take a last fond look,
And fervent tears ran out their eyes,
With tremblings they shook,
And then the undertaker's men
Away the body took.

She saw them walk behind the corpse,
She heard the passing bell,
She saw them in the churchyard stand,
Beside his narrow cell.
Ah! yes she heard the children's cries,
The widow's groans as well.

She saw again their wretched home
Upon that burial day,
Ah! yes she saw the workhouse van
Take that family away.
Then she awoke from that dread dream,
With feelings of dismay.

And to her maid, while dressing her,
"A dream," she said, "I've had,
A piteous and a woeful dream,

Which makes me very sad,
The scenes I never shall forget,”
She mournfully did add.

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But from that day, this lady then
Her riches did bestow,
And to the poor, necessities
Most bountiful did flow;
From morn till eve this lady strived
To soothe their care and woe.

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To you, ye wealthy of the land,
I do appeal sincere,
Go, seeks the haunts of misery,
And poverty so drear,
Thousands there are who need your aid,
About you very near.