

' Laddie.'



WHAT did you say, if you please, ma'am? Visitors asking for me?
Give them chairs by the fire, then. Dear, how flustered I be!
You see, ma'am, I've been in the workhouse five years come
next May,
'And no one to see me in all that time, and now to have two in a day!

Never a son nor a daughter? Ah! ma'am, that's where it be—
You should have seen my Laddie!—ah! it was God's decree!
Dead now? Yes, so they tell me. He only died last week,
Or I'd have torn out my tongue first before a word I'd speak.

Now I may talk of my firstborn—now he is mine again!
Dead while he lived, he lives now dead—ah! and I don't complain.
Laddie! my little Laddie! the curly prattling lad,
In the grave he is mine again, now; and I am glad, so glad.

See! I will tell you about it; I should like to before I die;
Never a word have I spoken to the simple folk hereby.
How should they know of Laddie? They are but common folk,
Who have led common lives like me, ma'am; so not a word I spoke.

But I will tell *you*. Ladies, you may have known my son;
Though you'd never have guessed his mother was such a poor simple one;
You'd never guess *I* was his mother. Ah! I will not tell you his name—
Let him rest in his grave—my Laddie!—free to the last from shame.

He and I, and his father—a clever carpenter he—
Lived in a Hampshire village—just we three, we three;
And Laddie, he was so quick-like, and such a scholar to read,
That the Squire made a doctor of him, ladies; he did, indeed!

So he went up to London, and we lived peaceably on,
Mightily proud to hear of, but never seeing, our son,
Until his poor father was took, ma'am—sudden it was at the end—
And I left a lonely widow, with never a shilling to spend.

Then, silly thing that I was, what did I do but say,
'I will go up to Laddie, though London is far away.'
So I packed up what little I had, and some pears from his own pear-tree,
And I went in the train to London—ignorant fool that I be!

It was a weary journey, and I was tired outright
When I stood in the front of my Laddie's house, a gentleman's mansion
quite;
And I knocked a low knock at the door, and tried to quiet my heart,
Picturing over and over my boy's delighted start.

Don't ask me to tell you the rest—it was not *his* fault. I mind
Not a single word that was rough, not a single look unkind;
While he showed me so plainly, so plainly, how it would spoil his life
If he showed such a poor old woman as his mother to his wife.