

Lewis Carroll (1832-98)

5 *The Lang Coortin'*

The ladye she stood at her lattice high,  
Wi' her doggie at her feet;  
Thorough the lattice she can spy  
The passers in the street,

“There's one that standeth at the door, 5  
And tirlleth at the pin:  
Now speak and say, my popinjay,  
If I sall let him in.”

Then up and spake the popinjay 10  
That flew abune her head:  
“Gae let him in that tirls the pin:  
He cometh thee to wed.”

O when he cam' the parlour in,  
A woeful man was he!  
“And dinna ye ken your lover agen, 15  
Sae well that loveth thee?”

“And how wad I ken ye loved me, Sir,  
That have been sae lang away?  
And how wad I ken ye loved me, Sir?  
Ye never telled me sae.” 20

Said — “Ladye dear,” and the salt, salt tear  
Cam' rinnin' doon his cheek,  
“I have sent the tokens of my love  
This many and many a week.

“O didna ye get the rings, Ladye, 25  
The rings o' the gowd sae fine?  
I wot that I have sent to thee  
Four score, four score and nine.”

“They cam’ to me,” said that fair ladye.  
“Wow, they were flimsie things!” 30  
Said — “that chain o’ gowd, my doggie to howd,  
It is made o’ thae self-same rings.”

“And didna ye get the locks, the locks,  
The locks o’ my ain black hair,  
Whilk I sent by post, whilk I sent by box, 35  
Whilk I sent by the carrier?”

“They cam’ to me,” said that fair ladye;  
“And I prithee send nae mair!”  
Said — “that cushion sae red, for my doggie’s head,  
It is stuffed wi’ thae locks o’ hair.” 40

“And didna ye get the letter, Ladye,  
Tied wi’ a silken string,  
Whilk I sent to thee frae the far countrie,  
A message of love to bring?”

“It cam’ to me frae the far countrie 45  
Wi’ its silken string and a’;  
But it wasna prepaid,” said that high-born maid,  
“Sae I gar’d them tak’ it awa’.”

“O ever alack that ye sent it back,  
It was written sae clerkly and well! 50  
Now the massage it brought, and the boon that it sought,  
I must even say it mysel’.”

Then up and spake the popinjay,  
Sae wisely counselled he.  
“Now say it in the proper way: 55  
Gae doon upon thy knee!”

The lover he turned baith red and pale,  
Went doon upon his knee:  
“O Ladye, hear the waesome tale  
That must be told to thee! 60

“For five lang years, and five lang years,

I coorted thee by looks;  
By nods and winks, by smiles and tears,  
As I had read in books.

“For ten lang years, O weary hours! 65  
I coorted thee by signs;  
By sending game, by sending flowers,  
By sending Valentines.

“For five lang years, and five lang years, 70  
I have dwelt in the far countrie,  
Till that thy mind should be inclined  
Mair tenderly to me.

“Now thirty years are gane and past,  
I am come frae a foreign land:  
I am come to tell thee my love at last — 75  
O Ladye, gie me thy hand!”

The ladye she turned not pale nor red,  
But she smiled a pitiful smile:  
“Sic’ a coortin’ as yours, my man,” she said,  
“Takes a lang and a weary while!” 80

And out and laughed the popinjay,  
A laugh of bitter scorn:  
“A coortin’ done in sic’ a way,  
It ought not to be borne!”

Wi’ that the doggie barked aloud, 85  
And up and doon he ran,  
And tugged and strained his chain o’ gowd,  
All for to bite the man.

“O hush thee, gentle popinjay!  
O hush thee, doggie dear! 90  
There is a word I fain wad say,  
It needeth he should hear!”

Aye louder screamed that ladye fair  
To drown her doggie’s bark:

Ever the lover shouted mair  
To make that ladye hark: 95

Shrill and more shrill the popinjay  
Upraised his angry squall:  
I trow the doggie's voice that day  
Was louder than them all! 100

The serving-men and serving-maids  
Sat by the kitchen fire:  
They heard sic' a din the parlour within  
As made them much admire.

Out spake the boy in buttons 105  
(I ween he wasna thin),  
“Now wha will tae the parlour gae,  
And stay this deadlie din?”

And they have taen a kerchief,  
Casted their keivils in, 110  
For wha will tae the parlour gae,  
And stay that deadlie din.

When on that boy the kevil fell  
To stay the fearsome noise,  
“Gae in,” they cried, “whate'er betide,  
Thou prince of button-boys!” 115

Syne, he has taen a supple cane  
To swinge that dog sae fat:  
The doggie yowled, the doggie howled  
The louder aye for that. 120

Syne, he has taen a mutton-bane —  
The doggie ceased his noise,  
And followed doon the kitchen stair  
That prince of button-boys!

Then sadly spake that ladye fair, 125  
Wi' a frown upon her brow:  
“O dearer to me is my sma' doggie

Than a dozen sic' as thou!

“Nae use, nae use for sighs and tears:  
Nae use at all to fret: 130  
Sin' ye've bided sae well for thirty years,  
Ye may bide a wee langer yet!”

Sadly, sadly he crossed the floor  
And tirlëd at the pin:  
Sadly went he through the door 135  
Where sadly he cam' in.

“O gin I had a popinjay  
To fly abune my head,  
To tell me what I ought to say,  
I had by this been wed. 140

“O gin I find anither ladye,”  
He said wi' sighs and tears,  
“I wot my coortin' sall not be  
Anither thirty years[.]

“For gin I find a ladye gay, 145  
Exactly to my taste,  
I'll pop the question, aye or nay,  
In twenty years at maist.”

1863

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