

Robert Southey (1774-1843)

9 *Mary, the Maid of the Inn*

1.

Who is yonder poor Maniac, whose wildly-fix'd eyes
Seem a heart overcharged to express?
She weeps not, yet often and deeply she sighs;
She never complains, but her silence implies
The composure of settled distress. 5

2.

No pity she looks for, no alms doth she seek;
Nor for raiment nor food doth she care:
Through her tatters the winds of the winter blow bleak
On that wither'd breast, and her weather-worn cheek
Hath the hue of a mortal despair. 10

3.

Yet cheerful and happy, nor distant the day,
Poor Mary the Maniac hath been;
The Traveller remembers who journey'd this way
No damsel so lovely, no damsel so gay,
As Mary, the Maid of the Inn. 15

4.

Her cheerful address fill'd the guests with delight
As she welcomed them in with a smile;
Her heart was a stranger to childish affright,
And Mary would walk by the Abbey at night
When the wind whistled down the dark aisle. 20

5.

She loved, and young Richard had settled the day,
And she hoped to be happy for life:
But Richard was idle and worthless, and they
Who knew him would pity poor Mary, and say
That she was too good for his wife. 25

6.

'T was in autumn, and stormy and dark was the night,
And fast were the windows and door;
Two guests sat enjoying the fire that burnt bright,
And smoking in silence with tranquil delight
They listen'd to hear the wind roar. 30

7.

"'T is pleasant," cried one, "seated by the fire-side,
To hear the wind whistle without."
"What a night for the Abbey!" his comrade replied,
"Methinks a man's courage would now be well tried
Who should wander the ruins about. 35

8.

"I myself, like a school-boy, should tremble to hear
The hoarse ivy shake over my head;
And could fancy I saw, half persuaded by fear,
Some ugly old Abbot's grim spirit appear,
For this wind might awaken the dead!" 40

9.

"I'll wager a dinner," the other one cried,
"That Mary would venture there now."
"Then wager and lose!" with a sneer he replied,
"I'll warrant she'd fancy a ghost by her side,
And faint if she saw a white cow." 45

10.

"Will Mary this charge on her courage allow?"
His companion exclaim'd with a smile;
"I shall win, . . for I know she will venture there now,
And earn a new bonnet by bringing a bough
From the elder that grows in the aisle." 50

11.

With fearless good-humour did Mary comply,
And her way to the Abbey she bent;
The night was dark, and the wind was high,
And as hollowly howling it swept through the sky,
She shiver'd with cold as she went. 55

12.

O'er the path so well known still proceeded the Maid
Where the Abbey rose dim on the sight;
Through the gateway she enter'd, she felt not afraid,
Yet the ruins were lonely and wild, and their shade
Seem'd to deepen the gloom of the night. 60

13.

All around her was silent, save when the rude blast
Howl'd dismally round the old pile;
Over weed-cover'd fragments she fearlessly pass'd,
And arrived at the innermost ruin at last
Where the elder-tree grew in the aisle. 65

14.

Well pleased did she reach it, and quickly drew near,
And hastily gather'd the bough;
When the sound of a voice seem'd to rise on her ear,
She paused, and she listen'd intently, in fear,
And her heart panted painfully now. 70

15.

The wind blew, the hoarse ivy shook over her head,
She listen'd . . nought else could she hear;
The wind fell; her heart sunk in her bosom with dread,
For she heard in the ruins distinctly the tread
Of footsteps approaching her near. 75

16.

Behind a wide column half breathless with fear
She crept to conceal herself there:
That instant the moon o'er a dark cloud shone clear,
And she saw in the moonlight two ruffians appear,
And between them a corpse did they bear. 80

17.

Then Mary could feel her heart-blood curdle cold;
Again the rough wind hurried by, . .
It blew off the hat of the one, and behold
Even close to the feet of poor Mary it roll'd, . .

She felt, and expected to die. 85

18.

“Curse the hat!” he exclaims; “Nay, come on till we hide
“The dead body,” his comrade replies.
She beholds them in safety pass on by her side,
She seizes the hat, fear her courage supplied,
And fast through the Abbey she flies. 90

19.

She ran with wild speed, she rush'd in at the door,
She gaz'd in her terror around,
Then her limbs could support their faint burthen no more,
And exhausted and breathless she sank on the floor,
Unable to utter a sound. 95

20.

Ere yet her pale lips could the story impart,
For a moment the hat met her view; . .
Her eyes from that object convulsively start,
For . . what a cold horror then thrilled through her heart
When the name of her Richard she knew! 100

21.

Where the old Abbey stands, on the common hard by,
His gibbet is now to be seen;
His irons you still from the road may espy;
The traveller beholds them, and thinks with a sigh
Of poor Mary, the Maid of the Inn. 105

1796

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