

Alfred Tennyson (1809-92)

6 *The Lady of Shalott*

PART I

On either side the river lie  
Long fields of barley and of rye,  
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;  
And thro' the field the road runs by  
    To many-tower'd Camelot; 5  
And up and down the people go,  
Gazing where the lilies blow  
Round an island there below,  
    The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver, 10  
Little breezes dusk and shiver  
Thro' the wave that runs for ever  
By the island in the river  
    Flowing down to Camelot.  
Four gray walls, and four gray towers, 15  
Overlook a space of flowers,  
And the silent isle imbowers  
    The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow-veil'd,  
Slide the heavy barges trail'd 20  
By slow horses; and unhail'd  
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd  
    Skimming down to Camelot:  
But who hath seen her wave her hand?  
Or at the casement seen her stand? 25  
Or is she known in all the land,  
    The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early  
In among the bearded barley,  
Hear a song that echoes cheerly 30  
From the river winding clearly,

Down to tower'd Camelot:  
And by the moon the reaper weary,  
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,  
Listening, whispers "Tis the fairy  
Lady of Shalott." 35

PART II

There she weaves by night and day  
A magic web with colours gay.  
She has heard a whisper say,  
A curse is on her if she stay  
To look down to Camelot. 40

She knows not what the curse may be,  
And so she weaveth steadily,  
And little other care hath she,  
The Lady of Shalott. 45

And moving thro' a mirror clear  
That hangs before her all the year,  
Shadows of the world appear.  
There she sees the highway near  
Winding down to Camelot: 50  
There the river eddy whirls,  
And there the surly village-churls,  
And the red cloaks of market girls,  
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad, 55  
An abbot on an ambling pad,  
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,  
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,  
Goes by to tower'd Camelot;  
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue 60  
The knights come riding two and two:  
She hath no loyal knight and true,  
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights  
To weave the mirror's magic sights, 65  
For often thro' the silent nights  
A funeral, with plumes and lights

And music, went to Camelot:  
Or when the moon was overhead,  
Came two young lovers lately wed; 70  
'I am half sick of shadows,' said  
The Lady of Shalott.

PART III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,  
He rode between the barley-sheaves,  
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves, 75  
And flamed upon the brazen greaves  
Of bold Sir Lancelot.

A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd  
To a lady in his shield,  
That sparkled on the yellow field, 80  
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,  
Like to some branch of stars we see  
Hung in the golden Galaxy.  
The bridle bells rang merrily 85

As he rode down to Camelot:  
And from his blazon'd baldric slung  
A mighty silver bugle hung,  
And as he rode his armour rung,  
Beside remote Shalott. 90

All in the blue unclouded weather  
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,  
The helmet and the helmet-feather  
Burn'd like one burning flame together,  
As he rode down to Camelot. 95

As often thro' the purple night,  
Below the starry clusters bright,  
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,  
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd; 100  
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;  
From underneath his helmet flow'd  
His coal-black curls as on he rode,

As he rode down to Camelot.  
From the bank and from the river 105  
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,  
'Tirra lirra,' by the river  
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,  
She made three paces thro' the room, 110  
She saw the water-lily bloom,  
She saw the helmet and the plume,  
She look'd down to Camelot.  
Out flew the web and floated wide;  
The mirror crack'd from side to side; 115  
'The curse is come upon me,' cried  
The Lady of Shalott.

#### PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,  
The pale yellow woods were waning,  
The broad stream in his banks complaining, 120  
Heavily the low sky raining  
Over tower'd Camelot;  
Down she came and found a boat  
Beneath a willow left afloat,  
And round about the prow she wrote 125  
*The Lady of Shalott.*

And down the river's dim expanse  
Like some bold seër in a trance,  
Seeing all his own mischance —  
With a glassy countenance 130  
Did she look to Camelot.  
And at the closing of the day  
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;  
The broad stream bore her far away,  
The Lady of Shalott. 135

Lying, robed in snowy white  
That loosely flew to left and right —  
The leaves upon her falling light —  
Thro' the noises of the night

She floated down to Camelot: 140  
And as the boat-head wound along  
The willowy hills and fields among,  
They heard her singing her last song,  
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy, 145  
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,  
Till her blood was frozen slowly,  
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,  
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.

For ere she reach'd upon the tide 150  
The first house by the water-side,  
Singing in her song she died,  
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,  
By garden-wall and gallery, 155  
A gleaming shape she floated by,  
Dead-pale between the houses high,  
Silent into Camelot.

Out upon the wharfs they came,  
Knight and burgher, lord and dame, 160  
And round the prow they read her name,  
*The Lady of Shalott.*

Who is this? and what is here?  
And in the lighted palace near  
Died the sound of royal cheer; 165  
And they cross'd themselves for fear,  
All the knights at Camelot:  
But Lancelot mused a little space;  
He said, 'She has a lovely face;  
God in his mercy lend her grace, 170  
The Lady of Shalott.'

1832

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