

1857

THE SAILOR'S WIFE

Lewis Carroll

Carroll, Lewis (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898) - English novelist, poet, photographer, and mathematician, best known for his fantastical childrens' classics. He was a mathematical lecturer at Oxford. *The Sailor's Wife* (1857) - One of Lewis Carroll's poems. Opening lines: See! There are tears upon her face- / Tears newly shed, and scarcely dried:...

SAILORS WIFE

SEE! There are tears upon her face
Tears newly shed, and scarcely
dried: Close, in an agonized embrace,
She clasps the infant at her
side.

Peace dwells in those soft-lidded eyes,
Those parted lips that faintly smile
Peace, the foretaste of Paradise,
In heart too young for care or guile.

No peace that mother's features wear;
But quivering lip, and knotted brow,
And broken mutterings, all declare
The fearful dream that haunts her now,
The storm-wind, rushing through the
sky, Wails from the depths of cloudy space;
Shrill, piercing as the seaman's cry
When death and he are face to face.

Familiar tones are in the gale:
They ring upon her startled ear:

And quick and low she pants the tale
That tells of agony and fear:

"Still that phantom-ship is nigh
With a vexed and life-like motion,
All beneath an angry sky,
Rocking on an angry ocean.

"Round the straining mast and shrouds
Throng the spirits of the storm:
Darkly seen through driving clouds,
Bends each gaunt and ghastly form.

"See! The good ship yields at last!

Dumbly yields, and fights no more;
Driving, in the frantic blast,
Headlong on the fatal shore.

"Hark! I hear her battered side,

With a low and sullen shock, Dashed, amid the foaming tide, Full upon a sunken rock.

“His face shines out against the sky, Like a ghost, so cold and white; With a dead despairing eye Gazing through the gathered night.

“Is he watching, through the dark, Where a mocking ghostly hand Points a faint and feeble spark Glimmering from the distant land?

“Sees he, in this hour of dread, Hearth and home and wife and child? Loved ones who, in summers fled, Clung to him and wept and smiled?

“Reeling sinks the fated bark To her tomb beneath the wave: Must he perish in the dark- Not a hand stretched out to save?

“See the spirits, how they crowd!
Watching death with eyes that burn!
Waves rush in-“ she shrieks aloud, Ere her waking sense return.
The storm is gone: the skies are clear:

Hush'd is that bitter cry of pain: The only sound, that meets her ear, The heaving of the sullen main.

Though heaviness endure the night, Yet joy shall come with break of day: She shudders with a strange delight The fearful dream is pass'd away.

She wakes: the gray dawn streaks the dark:

With early song the copses ring: Far off she hears the watch-dog bark A joyful bark of welcoming!

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THE END