

Anonymous, “Scattered Thoughts, by a Lady”

**Description**

ANONYMOUS

**“Scattered Thoughts, by a Lady”**

*Written in a long and painful illness, after a disturbed and restless night.*

While, child of sorrow, on my couch I lie,  
And court sweet Sleep to seal my wakeful eye,  
Still keenest anguish rankles at my heart,  
And pains unceasing pierce each vital part.  
I hear the joyless bird of omen sing, 5  
And at my casement flap his blacken'd wing;  
While nightly spirits hover round my head,  
Haunting with horrid thoughts my widow'd bed.  
Oh, come, thou kindest nurse! come, gentle Sleep!  
Seal with thy wings *those eyes* which wake *to weep*. 10  
Distill thy poppies on my unclos'd lid,  
And on my pillow thy mild opiates shed.  
Through night's dark gloom I count the measur'd time,  
And hear the knell of Death incessant chime:  
The spider, spinning in some lonely notch, 15  
Echoes the knell, and keeps th' ill-omen'd watch.  
My pensive pillow views my early life,  
When in *youth's bloom* I took the name of wife;  
*Scarce sixteen* suns had dawn'd upon my years,  
When I awoke to all a *mother's* cares; 20  
While, at my breast, the tender blossom hung,  
Ere the soft accent loos'd the lisping tongue,  
Grief's sharpest arrows pierc'd my gentle heart,  
And wounded Nature felt her festering dart;  
No love congenial to *my own* I found, 25  
But joyless pass'd night's solitary round.  
If lost in momentary sleep I lie,  
What hideous forms appear to fancy's eye!  
With phantoms of a woe-worn feverish brain  
I trembling start,—and wake to keener pain; 30  
The spectres of delusion still in view,  
And the *night bag*, my waking sense pursue.  
My shorten'd sighs quick breathe around my room,  
Where horrid darkness sheds a total gloom ;  
Save one *pale taper* of a glimmering light, 35  
Which dimly twinkles through the shades of night,

Like a *true friend*, such silent sorrow shows,  
 And “waxeth pale”—through sympathy of woes.  
 Sweet Sympathy! in whate’er form you dwell,  
 Welcome! thrice welcome! to my tear-wash’d cell. 40  
 Ev’n when I hear the nightly shrill owl scream,  
 Some *friend* I think is near—some *hope* unseen.  
*Hope!* did I say? thou joyful, blessed sound!  
 Where beams thy ray? where art thou to be found?  
 Long have I sought thy visionary hand; 45  
*Lead me*, dear phantom! to that *blissful* land!  
 That heaven of *sure* rest! that promis’d shore!  
 Where Peace shall dwell—and *I* shall weep no more!  
 Then strike, grim spectre! strike this *yielding heart!*  
 Strike down my sorrows with thy *welcome dart.* 50  
 And, when this “mortal coil” is laid in earth,  
 Then may my soul awake to Heaven’s new birth!  
 Then, like a pilgrim, view this rocky shore,  
 And *rest*—where *thorns* shall *pierce my soul* NO MORE!

**NOTES:**

**14** *knell* “To ring (a bell); to ring slowly and solemnly, as for a death or at a funeral, to toll” (*OED*)  
 ; *chime* “Living near the church” [Author’s note].

**32** *night bag* “A travelling bag used to carry things needed for the night” (*OED*).

**35** *pale taper* “A wax candle, in early times used chiefly for devotional or penitential purposes” (*OED*).

**51** *mortal coil* “The bustle or turmoil of this mortal life” (*OED*).

**Source:** *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (October 1787), pp. 914-15.

*Edited by Arianna Ordonez*