

William Blake (1757-1827)

## **FAIR ELEANOR.**

THE bell struck one and shook the silent tower;  
The graves give up their dead: fair Eleanor  
Walk'd by the. castle-gate, and looked in:  
A hollow groan ran thro' the dreary vaults.

5 She shriek'd aloud, and sunk upon the steps,  
On the cold stone her pale cheek. Sickly smells  
Of death, issue as from a sepulchre,  
And all is silent but the sighing vaults.

Chill death withdraws his hand, and she revives;  
10 Amazed she finds herself upon her feet,  
And, like a ghost, thro' narrow passages  
Walking, feeling the cold walls with her hands.

Fancy returns, and now she thinks of bones  
And grinning skulls, and corruptible death  
15 Wrapt in his shroud; and now fancies she hears  
Deep sighs, and sees pale sickly ghosts gliding.

At length, no fancy, but reality  
Distracts her. A rushing sound, and the feet  
Of one that fled, approaches. — Ellen stood.  
20 Like a dumb statue, froze to stone with fear.

The wretch approaches, crying, "The deed is done;  
"Take this, and send it by whom thou wilt send;  
"It is my life — send it to Eleanor: —  
"He's dead, and howling after me for blood!

25 "Take this," he cried; and thrust into her arms  
A wet napkin, wrapt about; then rush'd  
Past, howling: she received into her arms  
Pale death, and follow'd on the wings of fear.

They pass'd swift thro' the outer gate; the wretch,  
30 Howling, leap'd o'er the wall into the moat,  
Stifling in mud. Fair Ellen pass'd the bridge,  
And heard a gloomy voice cry, "Is it done?"

As the deer wounded Ellen new over  
The pathless plain; as the arrows that fly  
35 By night; destruction flies, and strikes in darkness.  
She fled from fear, till at her house arrived.

Her maids await her; on her bed she falls,  
That bed of joy where erst her lord hath press'd:  
"Ah, woman's fear!" she cried, "Ah, cursed duke!  
40 "Ah, my dear lord! ah, wretched Eleanor!  
"My lord was like a flower upon the brows  
"Of lusty May! Ah, life as frail as flower!  
"O ghastly death! withdraw thy cruel hand,  
"Seek'st thou that flower to deck thy horrid temples?

45 "My lord was like a star in highest heaven  
"Drawn down to earth by spells and wickedness;  
"My lord was like the opening eyes of day,  
"When western winds creep softly o'er the flowers.

"But he is darken'd; like the summer's noon  
50 "Clouded; fall'n like the stately tree, cut down;  
"The breath of heaven dwelt among his leaves,  
"O Eleanor, weak woman, fill'd with woe!"

Thus having spoke, she raised up her head,  
And saw the bloody napkin by her side,  
55 Which in her arms she brought; and now, tenfold  
More terrified, saw it unfold itself.

Her eyes were fix'd; the bloody cloth unfolds,  
Disclosing to her sight the murder'd head  
Of her dear lord, all ghastly pale, clotted  
60 With gory blood; it groan'd, and thus it spake:

"O Eleanor, behold thy husband's head  
"Who, sleeping on the stones of yonder tower,  
"Was 'reft of life by the accursed duke!  
"A hired villain turn'd my sleep to death!

65 "O Eleanor, beware the cursed duke,  
"O give not him thy hand, now I am dead;  
"He seeks thy love; who, coward, in the night,  
"Hired a villain to bereave my life."

She sat with dead cold limbs, stiffen'd to stone;  
70 She took the gory head up in her arms;  
She kiss'd the pale lips; she had no tears to shed;  
She hugg'd it to her breast, and groan'd her last.  
(588 words)

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