

The following poem was written by a woman who died in the long-term care ward of Ashludie Hospital near Dundee, Scotland. It was found among her possessions and so impressed the staff that copies were widely distributed throughout the hospital and beyond.

“Look at Me”

What do you see, nurses, what do you see?
What are you thinking when you look at me?
A crabbed old woman, not very wise;
Uncertain of habit with faraway eyes.
Who dribbles her food and makes no reply;
When you say in a loud voice, "I do wish you'd try."

Who seems not to notice the things that you do;
And forever is losing a stocking or shoe.
Who resisting or not, lets you do as you will;
With bathing and feeding, the long day to fill.
Is that what you're thinking, is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse, you're looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am as I sit here so still;
As I move at your bidding, eat at your will.
I am a small child of ten with a father and mother;
Brothers and sisters who love one another.
A young girl of sixteen with wings on her feet;
Dreaming that soon a love she'll meet.
A bride at twenty my heart gives a leap;
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep.

At twenty-five now I have young of my own;
Who need me to build a secure happy home.
A woman of thirty, my young now grow fast;
Bound together with ties that should last.
At forty, my sons have grown up and gone;
But my man's beside me to see I don't mourn.
At fifty, once more babies play round my knee;
Again we know children my loved ones and me.

Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead;
I look at the future, I shudder with dread.
For my young are rearing young of their own;
And I think of the years and the love that I've known.

I'm an old woman now and nature is cruel;
Tis her jest to make old age look like a fool.
The body crumbles, grace and vigour depart;
There is a stone where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells;
And now, again, my embittered heart swells.
I remember the joys, I remember the pain;
And I'm loving and living life over again.
I think of the years, all too few, gone too fast;
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, nurse, open and see;
Not a crabbed old woman, look closer—See me!

Words to “Look at Me” Video

What do you see, people, what do you see?
What are you thinking when you're looking at me?
A crabby old man, not very wise;
Uncertain of habit with faraway eyes.
Who dribbles his food and makes no reply;
When you say in a loud voice, "I do wish you'd try."

Who seems not to notice the things that you do;
And forever is losing a stocking or shoe.
Who resisting or not, lets you do as you will;
With bathing and feeding, the long day to fill.
Is that what you're thinking, is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, you're not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am as I sit here so still;
As I move at your bidding, as I eat at your will.
I am a small child of ten with a father and mother;
Brothers and sisters who love one another.
A young boy of sixteen with wings on his feet;
Dreaming that soon now a lover he'll meet.
A husband at twenty my heart gives a leap;
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep.

At twenty-five now I have young of my own;
Who need me to build a secure happy home.
A man now of thirty, my young they grow fast;
Bound to each other with ties that should last.
At forty, my young sons have grown and are gone;
But my woman's beside me to see I don't mourn.
At fifty, once more babies play round my knee;
Again we know children my loved one and me.

Dark days are upon me, my woman is dead;
I look at the future, I shudder with dread.
For my young are all rearing young of their own;
And I think of the years and the love that I've known.

I'm an old man now and nature is cruel;
Tis her jest to make old age look like a fool.
The body crumbles, grace and vigor depart;
And now there is a stone where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass a young man still dwells;
And now, again, my embittered heart swells.
I remember the joys, I remember the pain;
And I'm loving and living life over again.
I think of the years, all too few, gone too fast;
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, people, open and see;
Not a crabby old man, look closer—See me!