

The Testimony Of Patience Kershaw

The Unthanks

It's good of you to ask me sir
to tell you how I spend my day
Well in the coal black tunnel sir
I hurry coves to earn my pay
The coves are full of coal kind sir
I push them with my hands and head
It isn't ladylike but sir
you've got to earn you daily bread

I push them with my hands and head
and so my hair gets worn away
you see this baldy patch I've got
it shames me like I just can't say
A lady's hands are lily white
but mine are full of cuts and segs(?)
and since I'm pushing all the time
I've great big muscles on my legs

I try to be respectable
But sir, the shame, god save my soul
I work with naked sweating men
who curse and swear and chew the coal
The sight, the smell, the sound kind sir
not even god and sense me shame
I say my prayers but what's the use
tomorrow will be just the same

Now sometimes sir I don't feel well
my stomach's sick, my head it aches
I've got to hurry best I can
my knees feel weak, my back near breaks
and then I'm slow and then I'm scared
these naked men will batter me
they can't be blamed, for if I'm slow
their families will starve you see

All the lads they laugh at me
and so the mirror tells me why
pale and dirty, can't look nice
it doesn't matter how I try
Great big muscles on my legs
Baldy patch upon my head
Lady, sir, oh no not me
I should've been a boy instead

I praise you good intentions sir
I love you kind and gentle heart
but now it's 1842
and you and me we're miles apart
100 years or more will pass
before we're walking side by side
but please accept my grateful thanks
god bless you sir, at least you tried