

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Nobody Knew She Was There

Nobody Knew She Was There
(Ewan MacColl)

She walks in the cold dark hour before the morning
The hour when wounded night begins to bleed
Stands at the back of the patient queue
The silent almost sweeping queue
Seen' no-one and not being seen

Working shoes are wrapped in working apron
Rolled in an oilcloth bag across her knees
The swaying tremor soaks the morning
Blue grey steely day is dawning
Draining the last few dregs of sleep away

Over the bridge and the writhing foul black water
Down through empty corridors of stone
Each of the blind glass walls she passes
Shows her twin in sudden flashes
Which is the mirror image, which is real?

Crouching hooded gods of word and number?
Accept her bent-backed homage as their due
The buckets steam like incense coils
Around the endless floor she toils
Cleaning the same white sweep each day anew

Glistening sheen of new-washed floors is fading
There where office clocks are marking time
Night's black tide has ebbed away
By cliffs of glass awash with day
She hurries from her labours still unseen

He who lies besides her does not see her
Nor does the child who once lay at her breast
The shroud of self-denial covers
Eager girl and tender lover
Only the faded servant now is left

How could it be that no-one saw her drowning
How did we come to be so unaware
At what point did she cease to be her
When did we cease to look and see her
How is it no-one knew she was there

recorded by Ewan MacColl on "Black And White" (1980)

Ewan MacColl Ltd. 1977

"Ewan's mother, Betsy Hendry Miller, inspired this song with her lifetime of toil as a woman who cleaned offices and other people's houses, who took in laundry and mending to keep her son and her asthmatic husband. She died at the age of 96, a tough, wiry but wornout little woman."

MJ