

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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A Woman's Work is Never Done

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Here is a song for maids to sing,
Both in the winter and in the spring;
It is such a pretty, conceited thing,
Which will much pleasure to them bring:
Maids may sit still, go, or run,
But a woman's work is never done.

As I was wandering on the way,
I heard a married woman say
That she had lived a solid life [grave, serious]
Ever since the time that she was made a wife.
"For why," quoth she, "my labor is hard,
And all my pleasures are debarred:
Both morning, evening, night and noon,
I'm sure a woman's work is never done.

"And now," quoth she, "I will relate
The manner of my woeful fate;
And how my self I do bestow,
As all my neighbours well do know:
And therein all, that will hear,
Unto my song I pray awhile give ear;
I'll make it plainly to appear, right soon,
How that a woman's work is never done.

"For when that I will rise early in the morn,
Before that I my head with dressings adorn,
I sweep and cleanse the house, as need doth require,
Or, if that it be cold, I make a fire:
Then my husband's breakfast I must dress,
To fill his belly with some wholesome mess;
Perhaps thereof I eat a little, or none,
But I'm sure a woman's work is never done.

"Next thing that I in order do,
My children must be looked unto;
Then I take them from their naked beds,
To put on their clothes and comb their heads:
And then, what hap soever betide,
Their breakfast straight I must provide.
'Bread!' cries my daughter; and 'Drink!' my son,
And thus a woman's work is never done.

"And when that I have filled their bellies full,
Some of them I pack away to school,
All save one sucking child, that at my breast
Doth gnaw and bite, and sorely me molest:
But when I have laid him down to sleep,
I am constrained the house to keep,
For then the pottage-pot I must hang on,
And thus a woman's work is never done.

And when my pottage-pot is ready to hoil, [boil over]
I must be careful all the while;
And for to cum the pot is my desire,
Or else all the fat will run i' th' fire.
But when th'leven o'clock bell it doth chime,
Then I know 'tis near upon dinner time:
To lay the tablecloth I then do run,
And thus a woman's work is never done.

"When dinner time is gone and over-past,
My husband he runs out o' th' doors in haste;
He scarce gives me a kiss for all that I
Have dealt and done to him so lovingly;
Which sometimes grieves me to the heart,
To see him so clownishly depart:
But to my first discourse let me go on,
To show a woman's work is never done.

"There's never a day, from morn to night,
But I with work am tired quite;
For when the game with me is at the best,
I hardly in a day take one hour's rest;
Sometimes I knit, and sometimes I spin,
Sometimes I wash, and sometimes I do wring.
Sometimes I sit, and sew by myself alone,
And thus a woman's work is never done.

"In making of the beds such pains I take,
Until my back, and sides, and arms, do ache;
And yet my husband deals so cruelly,
That he but seldom comes to comfort me.
And then at night, when the clock strike nine,
My husband he will say, 'tis supper time;
Then presently he must be waited upon,
And thus a woman's work is never done.

"When supper's ended to bed we must go--
You all do know 'tis fitting it should be so--
Then do I think to settle all things right,

In hope that I shall take some rest by night.
The biggest of my children together I lay,
And place them by degrees so well as I may:
But yet there is a thing to be thought upon,
For why, a woman's work is never done.

"Then if my husband turns me to the wall,
Then my sucking child will cry and brawl;
Six of seven times for the breast 'twill cry,
And then, I pray you judge, what rest take I.
And if at any time asleep I be,
Perchance my husband wakes, and then wakes me;
Then he does that to me which cannot shun,
Yet I could wish that work were oftener done.

"All you merry girls that hear this ditty,
Both in country, and in the city;
Take good notice of my lines I pray,
And make the use of the time you may:
You see that maids live more merrier lives,
Then do the best of married wives:
And thus to end my song as I begun,
You know a woman's work is never done.

English broadside, 1629

These words can be made to fit the tune "Women's Work Will Never Be Done"
in the Leyden MS of 1692.

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