

# Asleep At The Switch - song lyrics

American Old-time song lyrics from [www.traditionalmusic.co.uk](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)

ASLEEP AT THE SWITCH.  
A recitation.-By George Hoey.

The first thing that I remember  
Was Carlo tugging away,  
With the sleeve of my coat fast in his teeth,  
Pulling as much as to say:  
"Come, master, awake, and tend to the switch,  
Lives now depend upon you,  
Thik of the souls in the coming train  
And the graves you're sending them to-  
Thik of the mother and babe at her breast.  
Think of the father and son,  
Think of the lover, and loved-one, too,  
Think of them doomed every one  
To all, as it were, by your very hand,  
Into yon fathomless ditch,  
Murdered by one who should guard them from harm,  
Who now lies asleep at the switch."

I sprang up amazed, scarce knew where I stood,  
SLleep had o'ermastered me so;  
I could hear the wind hollowly howling  
And the deep river dashing below,  
I could hear the forest leaves rustling  
As the trees by the tempest were fanned,  
But what was that noise at a distance?  
That-I could not understand!  
I heard it at first indistinctly.  
Like the rolling of some muffled drum,  
Then nearer and nearer it came to me.  
And made my very ears hum;  
Whit is this light that surrounds me  
And seems to set fire to my brain?  
Whit whistle's that yelling so shrilly!  
Oh, God! I know now-it's the train.

We often stand facing some danger,  
And seem to take root to the place;  
So I stood with this demon before me.  
Its heated breath scorching my face,  
Its headlight made day of the darkness,  
And glared like the eyes of some witch;  
The train was almost upon me,  
Before I remembered the switch.  
I sprang to it, seizing it wildly.  
The train dashing fast down the track,  
The switch resisted my efforts,  
Some devil seemed holding it back;  
On, on, came the fiery eyed monster  
And shot by my face like a flash;  
I swooned to the earth the next moment,  
And knew nothing after the crash.

How long I laid there unconscious,  
Were impossible for me to tell,  
My stupor was almost a heaven,  
My waking almost a hell-

For I then heard the piteous moaning  
And shrieking of husbands and wives,  
And I thought of the day we all shrink from,  
When I must account for their lives;  
Mothers rushed by me like maniacs,  
Their eyes staring madly and wild;  
Fathers, losing their courage,  
Gave way to their grief like a child;  
Children searching for parents,  
I noticed, as by me they sped,  
And lips that could form naught but "Mamma,"  
"Were calling for one perhaps dead.

My mind was made up in a second,  
The river should hide me away;  
When, under the still burning rafters,  
I suddenly noticed there lay  
A little white hand, she who owned it  
Was doubtless an object of love  
To one whom her loss would drive frantic,  
Tho' she guarded him now from above;  
I tenderly lifted the rafters  
And quietly laid them one side;  
How little she thought of her journey,  
When she left for this last fatal ride;  
I lifted the last log from off her,  
And while searching for some spark of life,  
Turned her little face up in the starlight.  
And recognized-Maggie, my wife !

Oh, Lord! Thy courage is a hard one,  
At a blow Thou hast shattered my pride;  
My life will be one endless night-time,  
With Maggie away from my side;  
How often we've sat down and pictured  
The scenes in our long happy life;  
How I'd strive through all my life-time  
To build up a home for my wife.  
How people would envy us always  
In our cosy and neat little nest,  
When I would do all of the labor,  
And Maggie should all the day rest;  
How one of God's blessings might cheer us,  
When some day I p'r'aps should be rich,  
But all of my dreams have been shattered,  
While I lay there asleep at the switch.

I fancied I stood on my trial,  
The jury and judge I could see,  
And every eye in the court room  
Was steadfastly fixed upon me;  
And fingers were pointed in scorn,  
Till I felt my face blushing blood-red,  
And the next thing I heard were the words,  
"Hung by the neck until dead."  
Then I felt myself pulled once again,  
And my hand caught tight hold of a dress,  
And I heard, " What's the matter, dear Jim?  
You've had a bad night-mare I guess."  
And there stood Maggie my wife  
With never a scar from the ditch,  
I'd been taking a nap in my bed

And had not been asleep at the switch.