

# Dream Children a Reverie

## Introduction

The essay is one of the 'Essays of Elia'. The essay expresses the feelings of loss and regret faced by the narrator. It is based on the description of a place, the relationships and the feelings that have been part of the narrator's past.

## Summary

Just like all children do, Lamb's children also wanted to hear their parents' childhood stories. One day, he was telling them about 'their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk'. The house she lived was 'a hundred times bigger' than the house they lived in presently. The children had also heard ('from the ballad of the Children in the Wood') about the tragic incidents that had supposedly taken place at that house. The tragic story of the children and their cruel uncle had been carved out in wood upon a chimney piece. However, a rich man replaced the wooden one with a marble one and the story was lost. Lamb mentions that Alice displayed her displeasure when she heard that.

Lamb tells the children that Grandmother Field had been given the charge of the house since the owner liked to live in a more fashionable mansion. He tells that she was religious and very good lady, and was respected by everyone. She took care of the house very carefully. After her, the old ornaments of the house were stripped and set up in the owner's house. When Lamb mentioned that the old ornaments could not fit decently in new mansion, John smiled to express his agreement that it was a foolish act.

She was such 'a good and religious woman' that huge number of people attended her funeral. That 'she knew all Psalter by heart' and also 'a great part of the Testament' also suggest that she was a good and religious woman.

She also used to be considered the best dancer till a disease called cancer forced her to stoop. However, her spirits still remained upright. Lamb mentions that she slept 'in a lone chamber of the great lone house' on her own despite that the ghosts of two infants glided up and down the stairs near which she slept. During those days, Lamb himself would sleep with the maid being afraid. He mentions that he was far less religious but he never noticed the ghosts. John was trying to look courageous at this moment.

Lamb also mentions that she was very good to her grand children. When he would visit 'the great house' in the holidays, he liked gazing upon 'busts of Twelve Cæsars'. Lamb also mentions various things that used to attract him while being at the mansion. He enjoyed spending time among various things there, even more than 'sweet flavors of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children'. Both children showed the influence of his description by ignoring the bunch of grapes they had otherwise wanted to have.

Lamb tells that the children's uncle John L—— was liked particularly by grandmother Field from amongst all her grandchildren. He was more handsome and spirited than the rest. He was so spirited that when the rest would spend time at the mansion, he would ride a horse for long distance and would even join hunters. Lamb mentions how he had missed their uncle when he died, although he did not show it that much. He missed the uncle's kindness as well as crossness. Lamb also mentions the uncle's lameness repeatedly which shows that he had been very concerned for him. The children felt uncomfortable with the description of the uncle and urged Lamb to tell about 'their pretty, dead mother'.

Then, Lamb told that he courted their mother 'the fair Alice W——n' for seven years. He also tried to clarify to the children how he faced problems due to her 'coyness' and 'denial'. At this point, he

noticed the strong similarity between the appearance of his wife and that of Alice. He feels as if his wife was communicating with him through Alice. Finally, he woke up and found himself in his armchair where he had fallen asleep. He states that James Elia was no more there and everything that has been mentioned in the essay so far was being described by Elia.

## Analysis

The response of children makes the essay dramatic and explains the effect of the essay on their mind. On the one hand their actions make their characteristic features clear. For instance, Alice seemed to feel discomfort when the grandmother's ability to learn things by heart was mentioned. This shows that she was a typical child who won't like the mention of qualities of others that she found lacking in herself. When Lamb told them that he preferred to see things at mansion rather than eating fruits, John put the grapes back. This shows his innocence as well as his ability to control his senses.

These actions on the part of children also show that the children were feeling constantly influenced by their father's description.

The essay does not end before an unexpected turn is given to the events. The way it is mentioned that all the description through the essay was based merely on a dream adds to a suspense element to the essay and also makes it open ended. The ending makes the essay even more psychological than the mention of the narrator's feelings and the response of the children had made it.

The surprise ending also points towards the inability of Lamb to get his love responded positively by Alice. The children that have been so close to him in his dream represent the 'dream' or aspirations that he had had while trying to woo his beloved.

The relationships of the narrator with the grandmother and his brother have been described very clearly. This description has served to clarify his characteristic features; develop the theme of family relationships as well as the theme of loss; and, to make the essay dramatic.