

Thomas Campbell (1777-1844)

9 *The Spectre Boat*

A Ballad.

Light rued false Ferdinand to leave a lovely maid forlorn,  
Who broke her heart and died to hide her blushing cheek from scorn.  
One night he dreamt he wooed her in their wonted bower of love,  
Where the flowers sprang thick around them, and the birds sang sweet above.

But the scene was swiftly changed into a church-yard's dismal view,                   5  
And her lips grew black beneath his kiss, from love's delicious hue.  
What more he dreamt, he told to none; but shuddering, pale and dumb,  
Looked out upon the waves, like one that knew his hour was come.

'T was now the dead watch of the night — the helm was lashed a-lee,  
And the ship rode where Mount Ætna lights the deep Levantine sea;                   10  
When beneath its glare a boat came, rowed by a woman in her shroud,  
Who, with eyes that made our blood run cold, stood up and spoke aloud: —

“Come, Traitor, down, for whom my ghost still wanders unforgiven!  
Come down, false Ferdinand, for whom I broke my peace with heaven!”  
It was vain to hold the victim, for he plunged to meet her call,                   15  
Like the bird that shrieks and flutters in the gazing serpent's thrall.

You may guess the boldest mariner shrunk daunted from the sight,  
For the Spectre and her winding-sheet shone blue with hideous light;  
Like a fiery wheel the boat spun with the waving of her hand,  
And round they went, and down they went, as the cock crew from the land.   20

1822

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