

Thomas Hood (1799-1845)

14 *Pompey's Ghost*

A Pathetic Ballad

'Skins may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.' — *Cowper.*

'Twas twelve o'clock, not twelve at night,
But twelve o'clock at noon;
Because the sun was shining bright,
And not the silver moon.
A proper time for friends to call, 5
Or Pots, or Penny Post;
When, lo! as Phœbe sat at work,
She saw her Pompey's Ghost!

Now when a female has a call 10
From people, that are dead;
Like Paris ladies, she receives
Her visitors in bed.
But Pompey's Spirit could not come
Like spirits that are white,
Because he was a Blackamoor, 15
And wouldn't show at night!

But of all unexpected things
That happen to us here,
The most unpleasant is a rise
In what is very dear. 20
So Phœbe screamed an awful scream,
To prove the seaman's text:
That after black appearances,
White squalls will follow next.

'Oh, Phœbe, dear! oh, Phœbe, dear! 25
Don't go to scream or faint;
You think because I'm black I am
The Devil, but I ain't!
Behind the heels of Lady Lambe

I walked whilst I had breath; 30
But that is past, and I am now
A-walking after Death!

‘No, murder, though, I come to tell
By base and bloody crime;
So Phœbe, dear, put off your fits 35
Till some more fitting time:
No Crowner, like a boatswain’s mate,
My body need attack,
With his round dozen to find out
Why I have died so black. 40

‘One Sunday, shortly after tea,
My skin began to burn
As if I had in my inside
A heater, like the urn.
Delirious in the night I grew, 45
And as I lay in bed,
They say I gather’d all the wool
You see upon my head.

‘His Lordship for his doctor sent,
My treatment to begin — 50
I wish that he had call’d him out,
Before he call’d him in!
For though to physic he was bred,
And pass’d at Surgeons’ Hall,
To make his post a sinecure, 55
He never cured at all!

‘The Doctor look’d about my breast,
And then about my back,
And then he shook his head and said,
“Your case looks very black.” 60
And first he sent me hot cayenne,
And then gamboge to swallow, —
But still my Fever would not turn
To Scarlet or to Yellow!

‘With madder and with turmeric 65

Nor, for a ghost of colour, turn
The colour of a ghost!

‘Again farewell, my Phœbe dear! 105

Once more a last adieu!

For I must make myself as scarce

As swans of sable hue.’

From black to gray, from gray to nought,

The Shape began to fade, — 110

And, like an egg, though not so white,

The Ghost was newly laid!

1840

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