

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

20 *The Sailor's Tale*

Landlord, another bowl of punch, and comrades fill your glasses!
First in another bumper toast our pretty absent lasses,
Then hear how sad and strange a sight my chance it was to see,
While lately, in the 'Lovely Nan,' returning from Goree!

As all alone at dead of night along the deck I wander'd, 5
And now I whistled, now on home and Polly Parsons ponder'd,
Sudden a ghastly form appear'd, in dripping trowsers rigg'd,
And soon, with strange surprise and fear, Jack Tackle's ghost I twigg'd.

— "Dear Tom," quoth he, "I hither come a doleful tale to tell ye!
"A monstrous fish has safely stow'd your comrade in his belly; 10
"Groggy last night, my luck was such, that overboard I slid,
"When a shark snapp'd and chew'd me, just as now you chew that quid.

"Old Nick, who seem'd confounded glad to catch my soul a napping,
"Straight tax'd me with that buxom dame, the tailor's wife at Wapping;
"In vain I begg'd, and swore, and jaw'd; Nick no excuse would hear; 15
"Quoth he, — 'You lubber, make your will, and dam'me, downwards steer.' —

"Tom, to the 'foresaid tailor's wife I leave my worldly riches,
"But keep yourself, my faithful friend, my bran-new linen breeches;
"Then, when you wear them, sometimes give one thought to Jack that's dead,
"Nor leave those galligaskins off while there remains one thread." — 20

At hearing Jack's sad tale, my heart, you well may think, was bleeding;
The spirit well perceived my grief, and seem'd to be proceeding,
But here, it so fell out, he sneezed: — Says I — "God bless you, Jack!" —
And poor Jack Tackle's grimly ghost was vanish'd in a crack!

Now comrades, timely warning take, and landlord fill the bowl; 25

Jack Tackle, for the tailor's wife, has damn'd his precious soul;
Old Nick's a devilish dab, it seems, at snapping up a sailor's,
So if you kiss your neighbour's wife, be sure she's not a tailor's.

1801

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