

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

3 *The Ballad of Fisher's Boarding-House*

*That night, when through the mooring-chains
The wide-eyed corpse rolled free,
To blunder down by Garden Reach
And rot at Kedgerree,
The tale the Hughli told the shoal
The lean shoal told to me.*

'Twas Fultah Fisher's boarding-house,
Where sailor-men reside,
And there were men of all the ports
From Mississip to Clyde,
And regally they spat and smoked, 5
And fearsomely they lied.

They lied about the purple Sea
That gave them scanty bread,
They lied about the Earth beneath,
The Heavens overhead, 10
For they had looked too often on
Black rum when that was red.

They told their tales of wreck and wrong,
Of shame and lust and fraud,
They backed their toughest statements with 15
The Brimstone of the Lord,
And crackling oaths went to and fro
Across the fist-banged board.

And there was Hans the blue-eyed Dane,
Bull-throated, bare of arm, 20
Who carried on his hairy chest

The maid Ultruda's charm —
The little silver crucifix
That keeps a man from harm.

And there was Jake Without-the-Ears, 25
And Pamba the Malay,
And Carboy Gin the Guinea cook,
And Luz from Vigo Bay,
And Honest Jack who sold them slops
And harvested their pay. 30

And there was Salem Hardieker,
A lean Bostonian he —
Russ, German, English, Halfbreed, Finn,
Yank, Dane, and Portugee,
At Fultah Fisher's boarding-house 35
They rested from the sea.

Now Anne of Austria shared their drinks,
Collinga knew her fame,
From Tarnau in Galicia
To Jaun Bazar she came, 40
To eat the bread of infamy
And take the wage of shame.

She held a dozen men to heel —
Rich spoil of war was hers,
In hose and gown and ring and chain, 45
From twenty mariners,
And, by Port Law, that week, men called
Her Salem Hardieker's.

But seamen learnt — what landmen know —
That neither gifts nor gain 50
Can hold a winking Light o' Love
Or Fancy's flight restrain,
When Anne of Austria rolled her eyes

On Hans the blue-eyed Dane.

Since Life is strife, and strife means knife, 55
From Howrah to the Bay,
And he may die before the dawn
Who liquored out the day,
In Fultah Fisher's boarding-house
We woo while yet we may. 60

But cold was Hans the blue-eyed Dane,
Bull-throated, bare of arm,
And laughter shook the chest beneath
The maid Ultruda's charm —
The little silver crucifix 65
That keeps a man from harm.

"You speak to Salem Hardieker;
"You was his girl, I know.
"I ship mineselfs to-morrow, see,
"Und round the Skaw we go, 70
"South, down the Cattegat, by Hjelm,
"To Besser in Saro."

When love rejected turns to hate,
All ill betide the man.
"You speak to Salem Hardieker" — 75
She spoke as woman can.
A scream — a sob — "He called me — names!"
And then the fray began.

An oath from Salem Hardieker,
A shriek upon the stairs, 80
A dance of shadows on the wall,
A knife-thrust unawares —
And Hans came down, as cattle drop,
Across the broken chairs.

In Anne of Austria's trembling hands 85
 The weary head fell low: —
 "I ship mineselfs to-morrow, straight
 "For Besser in Saro;
 "Und there Ultruda comes to me
 "At Easter, und I go 90

"South, down the Cattegat. — What's here?
 "There — are — no — lights — to — guide!"
 The mutter ceased, the spirit passed.
 And Anne of Austria cried
 In Fultah Fisher's boarding-house 95
 When Hans the mighty died.

Thus slew they Hans the blue-eyed Dane,
 Bull-throated, bare of arm,
 But Anne of Austria looted first
 The maid Ultruda's charm — 100
 The little silver crucifix
 That keeps a man from harm.

1886

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