

William Maginn (1793-1842)

1 *The English Sailor and the King of Achen's Daughter*

A Tale of Terror.

Come, listen gentles all,  
And ladies unto me,  
And you shall be told of a sailor bold  
As ever sailed on sea.

'Twas in the month of May, 5  
Sixteen hundred sixty and four,  
We sallied out, both fresh and stout,  
In the good ship *Swiftsure*.

With wind and weather fair 10  
We sailed from Plymouth Sound;  
And the Line we crossed, and the Cape we passed,  
Being to China bound.

And we sailed by Sunda Isles, 15  
And Ternate and Tydore,  
Till the wind it lagged, and our sails they flagged,  
In sight of Achen's shore.

Becalmed, days three times three, 20  
We lay in the burning sun;  
Our water we drank, and our meat it stank,  
And our biscuits were well nigh done.

Oh! then 'twas an awful sight  
Our seamen for to behold,  
Who t'other day were so fresh and gay,  
And their hearts as stout as gold.

But now our hands they shook, 25  
And our cheeks were yellow and lean,  
Our faces all long, and our nerves unstrung,  
And loose and squalid our skin.

And we walked up and down the deck  
As long as our legs could bear us; 30  
And we thirsted all, but no rain would fall,  
And no dews arise to cheer us.

But the red red sun from the sky  
Lent his scorching beams all day,  
Till our tongues, through drought, hung out of our mouth, 35  
And we had no voice to pray.

And the hot hot air from the South  
Did lie on our lungs all night,  
As if the grim Devil, with his mouth full of evi  
Had blown on our troubled sprite. 40

At last, so it happed one night,  
When we all in our hammocks lay,  
Bereft of breath, and expecting death  
To come ere break of day,

On a sudden a cooling breeze 45  
Shook the hammock where I was lain;  
And then, by Heaven's grace, I felt on my face  
A drop of blessed rain.

I opened my half-closed eyes,  
And my mouth I opened it wide; 50  
And I started with joy from my hammock so high,  
And "A breeze, a breeze!" I cried.

But no man heard me cry,  
And the breeze again fell down;  
And a clap of thunder, with fear and wonder 55  
Nigh cast me in a swoond.

I dared not look around,  
Till, by degrees grown bolder,  
I saw a grim sprite, by the moon's pale light,  
Dim glimmering at my shoulder. 60

He was drest in a seaman's jacket,  
Wet trousers, and dripping hose,  
And an unfelt wind I heard behind,  
That whistled among his clothes.

I looked at him by the light of the stars, 65  
I looked by the light of the moon;  
And I saw, though his face was covered with scars,  
John Jewkes, my sister's son.

"Alas! John Jewkes," I cried,  
"Poor boy, what brings thee here?" 70  
But nothing he said, but hung down his head,  
And made his bare skull appear.

Then I, by my grief grown bold,  
To take his hand endeavoured;  
But his head he turned round, which a gaping wound 75  
Had nigh from his shoulders severed.

He opened his mouth to speak,  
Like a man with his last breath struggling,  
And, before every word, in his throat was heard  
A horrible misgugling. 80

At last, with a broken groan,  
He gurgled, "Approach not me!  
For the fish have my head, and the Indians my blood,  
'Tis only my ghost you see.

"And dost thou not remember 85  
Three years ago to-day,  
How at aunt's we tarried, when sister was married  
To Farmer Robin, pray?

"Oh! then we were blythe and jolly,  
But none of us all had seen, 90  
While we sung and we laughed, and the stout ale quaffed,  
That our number was thirteen.

"And none of all the party,

At the head of the table, saw,  
While our cares we drowned, and the flagon went round, 95  
Old Goody Martha Daw.

“But Martha she was there,  
Though she never spake a word;  
And by her sat her old black cat,  
Though it never cried or purred. 100

“And she leaned on her oaken crutch,  
And a bundle of sticks she broke,  
And her prayers backward muttered, and the Devil’s words uttered  
Though she never a word out spoke.

“Twas on a Thursday morn, 105  
That very day was se’nnight,  
I ran to sweet Sue, to bid her adieu,  
For I could not stay a minute.

“Then crying with words so tender,  
She gave me a true lover’s locket, 110  
That I still might love her, forgetting her never –  
So I put it in my pocket.

“And then we kissed and parted,  
And knew not, all the while,  
That Martha was nigh on her broomstick so high, 115  
Looking down with a devilish smile.

“So I went to sea again,  
With my heart brimfull of Sue;  
Though my mind misgave me, the salt waters would have me,  
And I’d take my last adieu. 120

“We made a prosperous voyage  
Till we came to this fatal coast,  
When a storm it did rise, in seas and in skies,  
That we gave ourselves up for lost.

“Our vessel it was stranded 125  
All on the shoals of Achen;

And all then did die, save only I,  
 And I hardly saved my bacon.

“It happed that very hour,  
 The Black King, walking by, 130  
 Did see me sprawling, on my hands and knees crawling,  
 And took to his palace hard by.

“And finding that I was  
 A likely lad for to see,  
 My bones well knit, and my joints well set, 135  
 And not above twenty-three,

“He made me his gardener boy,  
 To sow pease and potatoes,  
 To water his flowers, when there were no showers,  
 And cut his parsley and lettuce. 140

“Now it so fell out on a Sunday  
 (Which these pagans never keep holy),  
 I was gathering rue, and thinking on Sue,  
 With a heart full of melancholy,

“When the King of Achen’s daughter 145  
 Did open her casement to see;  
 And, as she looked round on the gooseberry ground,  
 Her eyes they lit upon me;

“And seeing me tall and slim,  
 And of shape right personable; 150  
 My skin so white, and so very unlike  
 The blacks at her father’s table,

“She took it into her head  
 (For so the Devil did move her),  
 That I, in good sooth, was a comely youth, 155  
 And would make a gallant lover.

“So she tripped from her chamber so high,  
 All in silks and satins clad,  
 And her gown it rustled, as down she bustled,

With steps like a princess sad. 160

“Her shoes they were decked with pearls,  
And her hair with diamonds glistened,  
And her gimcracks and toys, they made such a noise,  
My mouth watered the while I listened.

“Then she tempted me with glances, 165  
And with sugared words so tender,  
(And though she was black, she was straight in the back,  
And young and tall and slender).

“But I my love remembered,  
And the locket she did give me, 170  
And resolved to be true to my darling Sue,  
As she did ever believe me.

“Whereat the princess waxed  
Both furious and angry,  
And said, she was sure I had some paramour 175  
In kitchen or in laundry.

“And then, with a devilish grin,  
She said, ‘Give me your locket’ –  
But I damned her for a witch, and a conjuring bitch,  
And kept it in my pocket. 180

“Howbeit, both day and night  
She did torture and torment,  
And said she, ‘If you’ll yield to me the field,  
I’ll give thee thy heart’s content.

““But give me up the locket, 185  
‘And stay three months with me,  
‘And then, if the will remains with you still,  
‘I’ll ship you off to sea.’

“So I thought it the only way  
To behold my lovely Sue; 190  
And the thoughts of Old England, they made my heart tingle, and  
I gave up the locket so true.

“Thereon she laughed outright  
With a hellish grin, and I saw  
That the princess was gone, and in her room 195  
There stood old Martha Daw.

“She was all astride a broomstick,  
And bid me get up behind;  
So my wits being lost, the broomstick I crossed,  
And away we flew, swift as the wind. 200

“But my head it soon turned giddy,  
I reeled and lost my balance,  
So I tumbled over, like a perjured lover,  
A warning to all gallants.

“And there where I tumbled down 205  
The Indians found me lying;  
My head they cut off, and my blood did quaff,  
And set my flesh a-frying.

“Hence, all ye English gallants  
A warning take by me, 210  
Your true love’s locket to keep in your pocket  
Whenever you go to sea.

“And, O dear uncle Thomas,  
I come to give you warning,  
As then ’twas my chance with Davy to dance, 215  
’Twill be yours to-morrow morning.

“’Twas three years agoe this night,  
Three years gone clear and clean,  
Since we sat down at Aunt’s at the wedding to dance,  
And our number was thirteen. 220

“Now I and sister Nan  
(Two of that fatal party)  
Have both gone from Aunt’s with Davy to dance,  
Though then we were hale and hearty.

“And, as we both have died 225  
(I speak it with grief and sorrow)  
At the end of each year, it now is clear  
That you should die to-morrow.

“But if, good uncle Thomas, 230  
You’ll promise, and promise truly,  
To plough the main for England again,  
And perform my orders duly,

“Old Davy will allow you 235  
Another year to live,  
To visit your friends, and make up your odd ends,  
And your enemies forgive.

“But, friend, when you reach Old England, 240  
To Laure’s-ton town you’ll go,  
And then to the Mayor, in open fair,  
Impeach old Martha Daw.

“And next you’ll see her hanged  
With the halter around her throat;  
And, when void of life, with your clasp-knife  
The string of her apron cut.

“Then, if that you determine 245  
My last desires to do,  
In her left-hand pocket you’ll find the locket,  
And carry it to Sue.”

The grisly spectre thus 250  
In mournful accents spoke,  
By which time, being morning, he gave me no warning,  
But vanished in sulphur and smoke.

Next day there sprang up a breeze, 255  
And our ship began to tack,  
And for fear of the ghost, we left the coast,  
And sailed for England back.

And I, being come home,

Did all his words pursue;  
Old Martha likewise was hung at the 'size,  
And I carried the locket to Sue. 260

And now, being tired of life,  
I make up my mind to die;  
But I thought this story I'd lay before ye,  
For the good of posterity.

Oh never then sit at table 265  
When the number is thirteen;  
And, lest witches be there, put salt in your beer,  
And scrape your platters clean.

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