

Thomas Moore (1779-1852)

1 *A Ballad: the Lake of the Dismal Swamp*

Written at Norfolk, in Virginia.

“They tell of a young man who lost his mind upon the death of a girl he loved, and who, suddenly disappearing from his friends, was never afterwards heard of. As he had frequently said in his ravings, that the girl was not dead, but gone to the Dismal Swamp, it is supposed he had wandered into that dreary wilderness, and had died of hunger, or been lost in some of its dreadful morasses.” — *Anon.*

“La poesie a ses monstres comme la nature.” — *D’Alembert.*

“They made her a grave too cold and damp  
For a soul so warm and true;  
And she’s gone to the Lake of the Dismal Swamp,  
Where, all night long, by a fire-fly lamp,  
She paddles her white canoe. 5

“And her fire-fly lamp I soon shall see,  
And her paddle I soon shall hear;  
Long and loving our life shall be,  
And I’ll hide the maid in a cypress-tree,  
When the footstep of death is near!” 10

Away to the Dismal Swamp he speeds —  
His path was rugged and sore,  
Through tangled juniper, beds of reeds,  
Through many a fen where the serpent feeds,  
And man never trod before! 15

And when on the earth he sunk to sleep,  
If slumber his eyelids knew,  
He lay where the deadly vine doth weep  
Its venomous tear and nightly steep

The flesh with blistering dew! 20

And near him the she-wolf stirr'd the brake,  
 And the copper-snake breathed in his ear,  
 Till he starting cried, from his dream awake,  
 "Oh! when shall I see the dusky Lake,  
 And the white canoe of my dear?" 25

He saw the Lake, and a meteor bright  
 Quick over its surface play'd —  
 "Welcome," he said, "my dear one's light!"  
 And the dim shore echoed for many a night  
 The name of the death-cold maid! 30

Till he hollow'd a boat of the birchen bark,  
 Which carried him off from shore;  
 Far he follow'd the meteor spark,  
 The wind was high and the clouds were dark,  
 And the boat return'd no more. 35

But oft, from the Indian hunter's camp,  
 This lover and maid so true  
 Are seen at the hour of midnight damp,  
 To cross the Lake by a fire-fly lamp,  
 And paddle their white canoe! 40

1806

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