

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

8 *Colonel Martin*

I

The Colonel went out sailing,
He spoke with Turk and Jew,
With Christian and with Infidel,
For all tongues he knew.
'O what's a wifeless man?' said he, 5
And he came sailing home.
He rose the latch and went upstairs
And found an empty room.
The Colonel went out sailing.

II

'I kept her much in the country 10
And she was much alone,
And though she may be there,' he said,
'She may be in the town.
She may be all alone there,
For who can say?' he said. 15
'I think that I shall find her
In a young man's bed.'
The Colonel went out sailing.

III

The Colonel met a pedlar,
Agreed their clothes to swop, 20
And bought the grandest jewelry
In a Galway shop,
Instead of thread and needle
Put jewelry in the pack,
Bound a thong about his hand, 25
Hitched it on his back.
The Colonel went out sailing.

IV

The Colonel knocked on the rich man's door,

'I am sorry,' said the maid,
'My mistress cannot see these things, 30
But she is still abed,
And never have I looked upon
Jewelry so grand.'
'Take all to your mistress,'
And he laid them on her hand. 35
The Colonel went out sailing.

V

And he went in and she went on
And both climbed up the stair,
And O he was a clever man,
For he his slippers wore. 40
And when they came to the top stair
He ran on ahead,
His wife he found and the rich man
In the comfort of a bed.
The Colonel went out sailing. 45

VI

The Judge at the Assize Court,
When he heard that story told,
Awarded him for damages
Three kegs of gold.
The Colonel said to Tom his man, 50
'Harness an ass and cart,
Carry the gold about the town,
Throw it in every part.'
The Colonel went out sailing.

VII

And there at all street-corners 55
A man with a pistol stood,
And the rich man had paid them well
To shoot the Colonel dead;
But they threw down their pistols
And all men heard them swear 60
That they could never shoot a man
Did all that for the poor.
The Colonel went out sailing.

VIII

‘And did you keep no gold, Tom?
You had three kegs,’ said he. 65
‘I never thought of that, Sir.’
‘Then want before you die.’
And want he did; for my own grand-dad
Saw the story’s end,
And Tom make out a living 70
From the seaweed on the strand.
The Colonel went out sailing.

1937

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